ELENA PACETTI, ALESSANDRO SORIANI,
DANIELE CASTELLANI

# FOSTERING INCLUSIVE CONTEXTS IN PALESTINE

## An Index for Inclusion and Empowerment

TRAIETTORIE INCLUSIVE

FrancoAngeli

# TRAIETTORIE INCLUSIVE

COLLANA DIRETTA DA
**CATIA GIACONI, NOEMI DEL BIANCO**
**SIMONE APARECIDA CAPELLINI**

La collana "Traiettorie Inclusive" vuole dare voce alle diverse proposte di ricerca che si articolano intorno ai paradigmi dell'inclusione e della personalizzazione, per approfondire i temi relativi alle disabilità, ai Bisogni Educativi Speciali, alle forme di disagio e di devianza. Si ritiene, infatti, che inclusione e personalizzazione reifichino una prospettiva efficace per affrontare la complessa situazione socio-culturale attuale, garantendo un dialogo tra le diversità.
I contesti in cui tale tematica è declinata sono quelli della scuola, dell'università e del mondo del lavoro. Contemporaneamente sono esplorati i vari domini della qualità della vita prendendo in esame anche le problematiche connesse con la vita familiare, con le dinamiche affettive e con il tempo libero. Una particolare attenzione inoltre sarà rivolta alle comunità educative e alle esperienze che stanno tracciando nuove piste nell'ottica dell'inclusione sociale e della qualità della vita.
La collana presenta due tipologie di testi. Gli *"Approfondimenti"* permetteranno di mettere a fuoco i nodi concettuali oggi al centro del dibattito della comunità scientifica sia nazionale, sia internazionale.
I *"Quaderni Operativi"*, invece, documenteranno esperienze, progetti e buone prassi e forniranno strumenti di lavoro per professionisti e operatori del settore.
La collana si rivolge a tutti i professionisti che, a diversi livelli, si occupano di processi inclusivi e formativi.

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# Indice

# Before starting: a necessary premise

This book comes to light right after a new series of tragic events that, again, mark the story of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While we deliver this text for its first print we are overwhelmed by the flow of information that, apparently, keeps us updated on the progress of the crisis. Figures are impressive and, of course, beyond our capacity to fully comprehend the real situation experienced by the people on site. Since 7 October 2023 OCHA, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (https://www.ochaopt.org/), is reporting, on a daily basis, the impact of the hostilities in Gaza Strip, Israel and the West Bank. Today, Monday, July 22nd, day 290 of the new crisis, at least 38295 Palestinians have been reported killed and 88,241 injured. On the Israeli side the dead are more than 1,200 and 5,432 are injured. So far more than 70,000 house units have been destroyed, in Gaza only, where it is estimated that 1,9 million people (more than 80% of its population) are displaced. According to UNICEF 87% of all the school buildings have been destroyed or damaged. All the universities have been destroyed together with the majority of the artistic and cultural world heritage sites.

In a time where voice has again been given to weapons, and violence seems to be the only answer, it might sound pointless to keep talking about education, inclusion, cooperation, peace, empowerment and intercultural dialogue.

On the contrary, from our awareness of being modest representatives of the International Community, we insist on the need to discuss such matters, to maintain our commitments in the education field and to raise our voices together with that majority of people who, also in Israel and Palestine, strive every day to give peace a chance.

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# Preface

by Arianna Taddei

This book emerges from a context of profound complexity, marked by the persistent tensions and violences afflicting the Palestinian territories. As we publish these pages, the Israeli-Palestinian crisis continues devastating the lives of millions, generating an endless flow of information and images that strike us and compel us to reflect on human understanding and compassion. Since October 7th, 2023, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has been documenting the impact of hostilities in the Gaza Strip, Israel, and the West Bank daily, reporting shocking figures that testify to the magnitude of the ongoing tragedy.

In a context where violence and death once again seem to dominate the discourse, it may seem futile to discuss themes like education, inclusion, cooperation, and intercultural dialogue. However, it is precisely in these moments of extreme crisis that the commitment to inclusion and education becomes more urgent than ever.

As Pappè (2011a) emphasises, the narrative of war is often polarised and distorted, feeding dangerous myths and oversimplifications. In this challenging context, inclusive education represents not only a fundamental right but also a tool of cultural resilience and peacebuilding. In emergency situations, the international scenario paints an alarming picture of the conditions of children who are victims of natural disasters, wars, and pandemics. The criticalities within emergency interventions are numerous and heterogeneous: in fact, they open up pedagogical reflections on the meaning of educational actions during a humanitarian crisis, on the possibility of identifying educational trajectories to be adopted based on the social, cultural, and political context, and, lastly, on the importance of ensuring an inclusive approach. In these situations, the right to education is often violated for indefinite periods of time, depriving children and

adolescents not only of the opportunity to learn but also of the chance to share and socialise their distress, fears, and loneliness.

For a long time, in the field of international cooperation, agencies provided interventions in humanitarian crisis contexts that were predominantly, if not exclusively, psychosocial and immediate assistance-based, through the distribution of goods and essential materials, excluding educational actions, which would be intended for development projects rather than emergency response. In the context of cooperation in humanitarian crisis situations, therefore, the dimensions of emergency, education, and inclusion appeared incompatible in terms of priorities, goals, and sustainability, until international cooperation policies began to adopt an approach that recognizes education and inclusion as essential tools and dimensions for safeguarding children's rights and their well-being (AICS & RIDS, 2015; EU, 2018). From this new perspective, education is acknowledged for its significant contribution in various aspects, including: the continuity of the school routine that aims to create a sense of "normal" life despite sudden and traumatic changes; socialisation and psychological support in safe spaces through educational experiences aimed at the future with an intentional and purposeful vision, which constitutes the heartbeat of educational action in any place and at any time (Taddei, 2021).

Pursuing the creation of an inclusive school implies the commitment to overcoming and reducing the physical and conceptual barriers that prevent students' full participation, embracing their diversity as a unique resource for the learning environment. Increasing the level of accessibility, ensuring individualization and personalization processes, and promoting empowerment (Adams, 2008) are goals that are both necessary and complex. As stated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), the right to education must be protected and guaranteed for all people through the creation of an inclusive educational system at all levels. Such a challenge becomes even more complex in emergency contexts. Indeed, in war-affected areas, there is a constant disruption of teaching and learning opportunities, often leading to systematic violence, transforming the oppressed into oppressors and amplifying processes of exclusion and discrimination (Shah et al., 2020; Taddei, 2010).

In these difficult scenarios, education represents a trajectory of hope – since education has always been entrusted with the future of young generations – to overcome physical and cultural boundaries, acting as a driver for change to promote equality, social participation, and democracy (Canevaro, 2006). In transformative processes towards inclusion, empowerment plays a fundamental role in developing emancipatory life paths, where even those living in vulnerable conditions can become

protagonists of their own choices and acquire the awareness and political tools necessary to combat complex forms of discrimination, which can be understood through an intersectional approach (Piccardo, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). Empowerment, as defined by Adams (2008), is essential in fostering personal and social change, providing individuals with the capacity to challenge structural inequalities and engage in participatory citizenship. Through an intersectional lens (Crenshaw, 1991), these complex forms of discrimination –intertwining factors such as race, gender, disability, and socio-economic status– become more visible and addressable, enhancing the effectiveness of inclusion processes.

Specifically, empowerment is a dynamic and daily process that has individual and social outcomes. Regarding the former, a person with disabilities and/or in a situation of socio-cultural and economic disadvantage discovers and strengthens their abilities, increasing their perception of personal potential and self-esteem (Piccardo, 1995). On a social level, empowerment involves individuals with the aim of promoting their social participation in the political, cultural, and community life that evolves within the communities and places of belonging (Zimmermann, 1999). It represents a path that allows the progressive abandonment of a paternalistic and welfare model to embark on a journey oriented towards social participation, awareness of one's limits, unexpressed potential, and possessed skills. Therefore, it is a path in which personal and social responsibilities matter when facing difficulties and defining one's own life project and that of the community to which they belong.

People experiencing a condition of vulnerability, by becoming the protagonists of empowerment processes, also become generators of social innovation and change, thanks to their participation, which invites society itself to question its own stereotypes.

The adoption of such an empowerment framework is evident in Barbuto's reflection, which specifically affirmed regarding people with disabilities that empowerment has a strong component of enhancement, not from a non-therapeutic-reparative, but rather from a political-emancipatory perspective, which can be translated into:

- power in, linked to the awareness that every person with a disability has of who they are, what they can do, and what rights they have. It is the power generated by individual attitudes, abilities, and knowledge;
- power with, meaning the power that every person with a disability has to organise and mobilise, and it derives from the fact that people are part of one or more social groups. This power grows or diminishes when one interacts with others and builds

networks. Therefore, it derives from social and support networks, from connections and collaboration with others;

- power over, that is, the form of power that every person with a disability has over institutions (from family to the state), organisations with precise, written or unwritten norms that regulate relationships between individuals. This form of power requires readiness to examine norms, policies, legislation, and accountability mechanisms;
- power to, or rather the power that comes from the resources a person with a disability has to do something or change something. It is generated when one can access resources and services (Barbuto, 2018, p.58).

For some social groups, the management of "power" – as expressed above – is marked by greater uncertainties, with grey areas where opportunities and resources are difficult to access, making empowerment fundamental for initiating paths of emancipation from situations of discrimination that harm the dignity of men and women, children and adults, depriving them of the full enjoyment of their rights. Overcoming conditions of exclusion and disadvantage requires a process of awareness that can only be triggered through deep reflection, finding potentially fertile ground in education (Taddei, 2020).

Empowerment, therefore, represents a strategic path to counteract the phenomenon of economic, educational, and professional "impoverishment" that often dramatically marks the lives of the most vulnerable populations.

The primary objective of this volume is to explore inclusive educational approaches in an extremely fragmented context like the Palestinian one, where geographical division, segregation, and territory occupation impact daily processes of educational, personal and social development. The analysis it presents examines Palestinian schools, where physical and psychological barriers combine with structural and cultural ones, imposing enormous challenges on students, teachers, and the entire educational community. Schools and educational structures in refugee camps have been facing for years a reality characterised by overcrowding, infrastructural destruction, and lack of resources, which profoundly affects the quality of education. This situation, particularly in the Gaza Strip, has deteriorated without precedent (UNRWA, 2024).

Through a series of international cooperation projects promoted by the Italian NGO EducAid, described in the following pages, the University of Bologna research group developed and implemented the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment (IIE). This tool, based on the inclusive education

approach proposed by Booth and Ainscow (2002), represents a concrete attempt to address educational challenges in Palestine, involving not only teachers but also local communities in a process of active participation and collective construction.

The research, conducted in collaboration with the Palestinian Ministry of Education, highlights how the promotion of scholastic inclusion can represent a concrete alternative to social disintegration. The study, carried out through field-based research and training, aimed to strengthen teachers' professional skills, promoting a culture of cooperation and continuous improvement of contextualised educational practices. The greatest challenge was, and continues to be, transforming an educational system characterised by multidimensional limitations into a space of resilience and empowerment, capable of adapting to the diversity and specific needs of each community.

"Fostering Inclusive Contexts in Palestine" thus represents a significant contribution to the field of international cooperation and inclusive education, offering an operational perspective for addressing educational challenges in highly vulnerable contexts.

Through a path that intertwines academic research, international cooperation, and field-based educational interventions, the volume aims to promote inclusion and empowerment in a highly challenging territory. Each chapter addresses a facet of this complex process, highlighting structural, social, and political difficulties, as well as possible solutions and strategies that can improve access to education and the quality of life in Palestinian communities.

Specifically, the first chapter offers a broad overview of the historical, geographical, and political complexity of the Palestinian context. The narration focuses on occupation, territorial divisions, and their impact on local communities. The distinction between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the Palestinian enclaves, and the isolation of the population are illustrated, highlighting how the continuous erosion of territory and "divide et impera" policies have created a mosaic of fragmented identities and vulnerabilities. The context analysis is essential for understanding the challenges faced in the field of inclusive education.

In the second chapter, the concept of inclusive education is presented as a necessary approach to promoting equality and participation in Palestine. In this context, the Palestinian education system is described, emphasising the difficulties faced by students and teachers, from physical barriers to mobility restrictions imposed by Israeli occupation. In this section, the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment (IIE) is introduced, an important tool developed to assess and improve inclusivity levels in Palestinian schools, inspired by the Index for Inclusion model by Booth and Ainscow (2002).

The third chapter delves into the core of the conducted research, divided into three summarised parts. In the first part, the project's methodological framework and main objectives are described, including the analysis of the school context and educational practices in various Palestinian schools. The perspectives of teachers and students are explored to understand the challenges and opportunities of inclusive education. The second part of the study concerns methodological adaptation to respond to emerging needs during the research. The involvement of teachers and families in the study is explored, with a focus on enhancing skills and resilience in communities. Finally, the third part is dedicated to the development of Guidelines for teachers and parents, aimed at promoting inclusion in Palestinian schools. The guidelines represent a set of useful indications for addressing the complex challenges characterising the local educational context from an inclusion perspective.

In the concluding section, critical reflections on the projects and research presented are unveiled. The difficulties encountered in carrying out educational initiatives in a context of conflict and occupation are analysed, while also highlighting the positive results achieved through the inclusive education approach.

The entire volume aims to emphasise the importance of continuing to invest in educational processes that resonate as actions of empowerment and peacebuilding realised together with Palestinian communities.

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# 1. The hard task of defining a Palestinian context

It is not easy to depict in a clear and comprehensive manner the Palestinian context where the study and the projects reported in this book have been carried out. Despite the simplicity of the story, a story of aggressors and aggressed, a story of colonialism and expropriations and forced displacements, according to Pappè (2011b), its narration has always been made paradoxical: constrained by the *orientalist* point of view and its simplifications (Said, 1978); polarized by the *biblical orientalist* demagogic statements of the different territory contenders (Kamel 2022). First of all, there is a great distance between the meaning of the term Palestine, given to the land possibly inhabited by Palestinians, and the public image of it, particularly among the Western Countries (Morin, 2006). It is not only a matter of superficiality or casual approximation in considering a context relatively alien to us. Instead, it is a result of a deliberately distorted picture of a very hard to understand situation, improved also with the complicity of the mainstream media systems' *information disorder* (Wardle, Derakhshan, 2017). In fact, it does not seem that semantic rules are working in the description of the so-called Israeli – Palestinian issue, otherwise known as the persistent Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that has been going on for decades (Said, 1979). Words, accurately used and chosen, are not aimed to communicate but to cancel, to transform, to tell alternative and antagonist stories, following the logic that nourishes myths based on *toxic narratives* (Cassirer, 2010; Calabrese, 2013; Ippolita, 2017; Drago, Scandurra, 2021). Indeed, all the internal critical voices that deviate from the mainstream information system are often put aside or made inaccessible (Frenquellucci, 2023). For this reason, Palestine and Palestinian territories are not synonymous, but two ways to misconstrue differing aspirations and continuously changing realities. The same thing happens when we come across terms such as: *occupied* or *claimed* territories; *displaced* or *refugee* citizens. Hence, generally speaking, when we talk about Palestine we simply assume it exists, and, of course, not as a hollow land (Weizman, 2007),

but we are not able to define its real entity. Taking for granted that in this particular context *geography is everything* (McCann, 2020), for the geographer Palestine is located in that portion of the Near East, between the Mediterranean and the Jordan Valley; or between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea, from the Syrian Golan heights down to the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula. It is, of course, a geographical region we are talking about, just like the Italian Po Plain, which is double its surface, or the Belgian Flemish Region, which is as big as only half of it.

## 1.1 Divide and rule

By pointing out that Jerusalem's chronicles need to be considered aside, for historians Palestinians have been known for ages as fishermen: the Philistines. And Palestine is the name of a Region with moving boundaries. Identified by the Greeks as the land between Phoenicia and Egypt, it became throughout the centuries: a Province which belonged to the Romans; then a Region of the Byzantine Empire and afterwards a part of the Ottoman Empire as Omaiadian and Abassidian Khilafat; until 1918 when the League of Nations assigned to Great Britain the protectorate of this area. In 1948 the British Mandate on Palestine came to an end. In preparation of this event, the 52 members of the newborn United Nations emanated a Resolution (No. 181, on November 29th 1947) stating that the territory of the former British Protectorate had to be partitioned, by law, into two new States: Israel and Palestine. This proposal was never implemented because the immediate consequence of the Resolution was the beginning of the not yet ended conflict, started after the self-proclamation of Israel as an independent State, on Palestine occupied land, in 1948 (Pappè, 2004; Vercelli, 2020). Since then, rivers of ink have flowed on this conflict and the International Community has repeatedly tried to promote peace processes which have never come to a positive and final solution. From this conflict a complicated situation has taken place, which still characterizes this land and affects the everyday life of the populations who have lived on it; some of whom are not yet allowed to move back. It is estimated that the first Arab-Israeli conflict, in 1948, resulted, as a direct consequence, in the displacement of at least 700,000 Palestinian refugees (Pappè, 2006). The International Community, after having condemned the war, reacted with the foundation, on December 1949, of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In 2015, UNRWA, unfortunately still on duty, recorded 5.6 million refugees on the 59 Palestinian refugee camps built in the meanwhile in: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, West Bank and in the Gaza Strip (UNRWA, 2015).


*Fig. 1 - 1947 UN Partition Plan.*

That is to say, Palestine exists for sure only as a geographical and historical entity still today. Whereas, when we talk about the State of Palestine (*Dawia Filastin*) we refer to a modern Nation, self-proclaimed only in 1988, that has been recognized only by 137 out of the 187 UN Member States. Without getting into the complex, abstract and outdated definition of State, which is still object of studies and interpretations among the specialists of historical and political issues, there are three main classical elements that are traditionally considered to define a State: territory, population and legal system. According to those elements Palestine is a State with no borders, at high risk of dissolution, whose territory is constantly eroded by the *land grabbing policy* wrought by Israel throughout a technique which the military doctrine calls, with an oxymoric expression: *low–intensity conflict* (Liberti, 2011; De Felice, Di Giacomo, 2019). Moreover, the State of Palestine has no army and no currency, as well as no infrastructures such as harbours or

airports (destroyed), just to mention some other essentials that characterize a modern State. Its land continues to be forcibly occupied, in clear violation of the International Law and the Human Rights (HNO, 2016). And its population is continuously displaced and forced to leave the shrinking areas once occupied by Palestinians only. In fact, from the Israeli point of view, Palestine has never been recognized as a State. All the International Accords concluded by the two antagonist Countries, such as Camp David (1978) or Oslo I (1993) and Oslo II (1995), on behalf of Palestine, were signed by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Only in 1994 the Palestinian Authority (PA, then PNA, Palestinian National Authority) was created and recognized. Obviously, the PNA is not considered a State by the counterpart. What makes the situation even more paradoxical is that, as a direct consequence of its politics, also Israel is, in fact, a State with a not defined territory, despite the work of the Israel Land Authority, with difficulties in defining its citizens, mainly due to the absence of a Constitution on which to base legislative proposals (Weizmann, 2023: 35-40). Nowadays the majority of the estimated 14.3 million of Palestinians live out of the Country. The minority part of them, residing inside the territories of the claimed State of Palestine, make up around four and a half million citizens. More than two million of them live inside the tiny Gaza Strip only, with an average population density of almost six thousand people per square kilometre (It is estimated 847 in the West Bank, when the European countries average is 109). While the number of refugees and the diaspora sum up more than six million people (PCBS, 2017; 2019). Even the Country government is not unitarian because of the existence of a political authority that rules the West Bank (*Fatah,* a paramilitary political organization) and another the Gaza Strip (*Hamas,* an Islamist Palestinian political organization Sunni and fundamentalist).

To better understand what has been said so far, cartography may be appropriate, even though we have to consider that inside the *Information Warfare* (Libicki, 1995; Floridi, 2017) that accompanies the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, misconceptions and falsehood affect also this discipline. On one hand, if we surf the net in search of the Israel and Palestine maps, we generally find much approximate representations, often uncritically used, that contribute to build the best known, recognizable picture of the two countries. On the other hand, we can also come across a jungle, made by countless verbal disputes, as complicated as the deep understanding of the features of the conflict itself. From a strictly geographical perspective, being Israel and Palestine not universally recognized as States, their representation in political or physical geographic maps must necessarily be connected to specific national, political and cultural localizations.

And this is not free of contradictions. In Italy, for instance, the use of the name Palestine can refer either to the geographical region, or to the State, but, in the second case, it can not be interpreted as the official recognition of the State of Palestine by the Italian government who voted the resolution 67/19 at the 29th November 2012 UN General Assembly to admit it as a *non-member observer state* only. At the same time there are no doubts about the existence and the needs of Palestinians. Of course, this kind of miscommunication is deliberate, it's a war issue, and makes it very difficult to distinguish real from unreal, since the narrative which has been used is nothing but *toxic* (Wu Ming, 2013).

## 1.2 Maps against reality

Considering some maps provided by the pages of one of the most popular websites (or *web-sides*), for instance Wikipedia, we can immediately realize how misleading is the idea of the real situation we are dealing with. Consequently, we can only have a faint and a not very detailed panoramic view of the areas occupied by the two Countries. These maps give us the wrong idea which leads us to consider them as homogeneous, stable, portions of land, one beside the other, with well-defined borders, while, on the contrary, Palestine is not a Country merely divided in two separate territories.

Indeed, Palestine is becoming day after day an incoherent mosaic of exclaves surrounded and slowly strangled by Israel Defence Forces - IDF, in evident and inexcusable violation of the International Law, and of the Human Rights (Pappè, 2004). A combination of these views maybe confirmed in maps (Fig. 2 – 4), where you can identify only the two main areas that constitute the present representation of Palestine, made up of the West Bank region and the Gaza Strip, on the East-West axis; and the territorial continuity of the State of Israel on the North-South axis, from the Lebanon border to the Aqaba Gulf. This is exactly the standardized picture of the two Countries we are accustomed to see and forced to accept. Naturally these maps do not represent the real territorial situation between the two Countries. Many specific studies, and also the net, help us to deepen the knowledge of the real situation. In particular, by consulting the reports of international agencies who work on it, first of all the UN agencies, and secondly the published works of many international cooperation subjects that act in that area (UNESCO, 2011; United Nations, 2014; OCHA 2017; 2018; 2021). If we follow the historical process of the ongoing changes of the Palestinian boundaries, the uninterrupted land grabbing activity can be easily observed.

An activity which has occurred not only in the Palestinian region, but also in other neighbouring nations such as Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

*Fig. 2 Map of Palestine.*

*Fig. 3 Map of Israel.*


*Fig. 4 - Near East map.*

As a consequence, the present-day State of Palestine only apparently consists in the West Bank area and the Gaza Strip. Instead the West Bank has lost its territorial unity and has been transformed into an increasing number of disconnected, sterilized, Palestinian enclaves, continuously shrunken by the growing islands that constitute the Israeli *archipelago* of the settlements*: gated communities* interconnected with each other throughout the relentless development of a segregated road system (Petti, 2007).

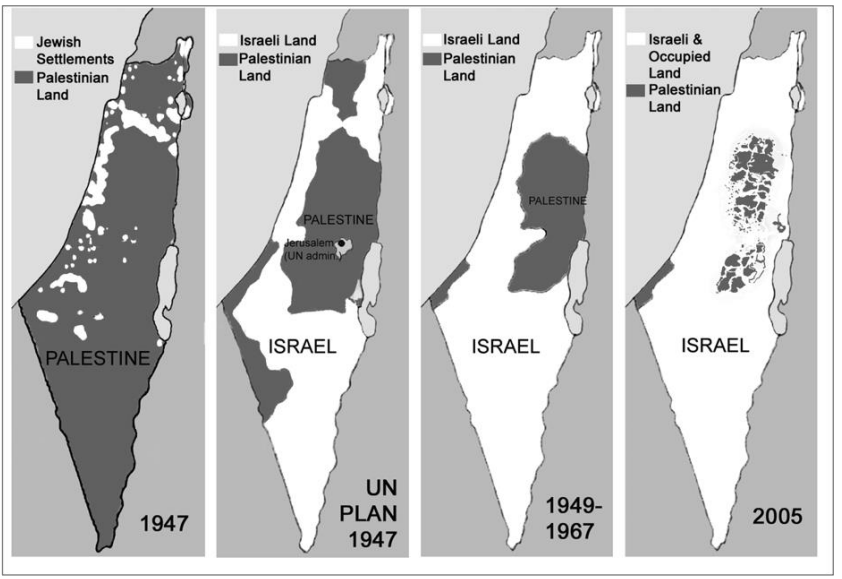



*Fig. 5 – Palestine loss of land changes between 1947 and 2005.*

Enclaves that are further and further away from the banks of the Jordan river waters, militarized by the IDF. In fact, the low intensity war strategy is not aimed to grab land only, but to secure vital natural resources, first of all fresh water, essential in a desert environment (Bompiani, Iannelli, 2018; Solombrino, 2018). This situation is worsened by the continuous territorial infringements and the frequent clashes between the two populations. Furthermore, the agreements concluded by the two Countries, under the aegis of the International Community, have failed to materialize (Beinin, 1999). The dividing up plan, other than fragmenting and shrinking Palestine territories, creating a sort of new *apartheid* in this area, is aimed to *bantustanize* it, making impossible to regain the previous territorial unity and hence the existence of the Country and the survival of its population (Hunter, 1986; Warschawski, 2003). As a result of this policy, we can today observe the State of Israel standing alongside with, at least, two *bantustan*: Gaza and West Bank. The latter being already fragmented in even smaller exclaves having dramatically lost its territorial continuity (Pappè, 2011). In the past thirty years Palestine has begun a set of overcrowded spots on the map. To get an idea of what is still going on you can look at it as if it was a black and white picture where in black are the dissolving *leopard spots* of the Palestinian exclaves, and in white the network of almost 300 Israeli settlements powerfully connected by the previously mentioned segregated road system (Hass, 2023). It must be added that at spatial forms correspond legal forms. The two superimposed pictures representing the archipelago and the

exclaves match indeed the existence of two separate legal systems: Israeli civil law, applied to Israeli citizens only, and the vague emergency legislation, practiced on a daily base under the military jurisdiction, used to rule and prosecute Palestinians, been al the *non-occupied territories* unilaterally declared CML, *Closed Military Zone* (B'Tselem, 2022), which is, again, another way to deny the existence of Palestine.

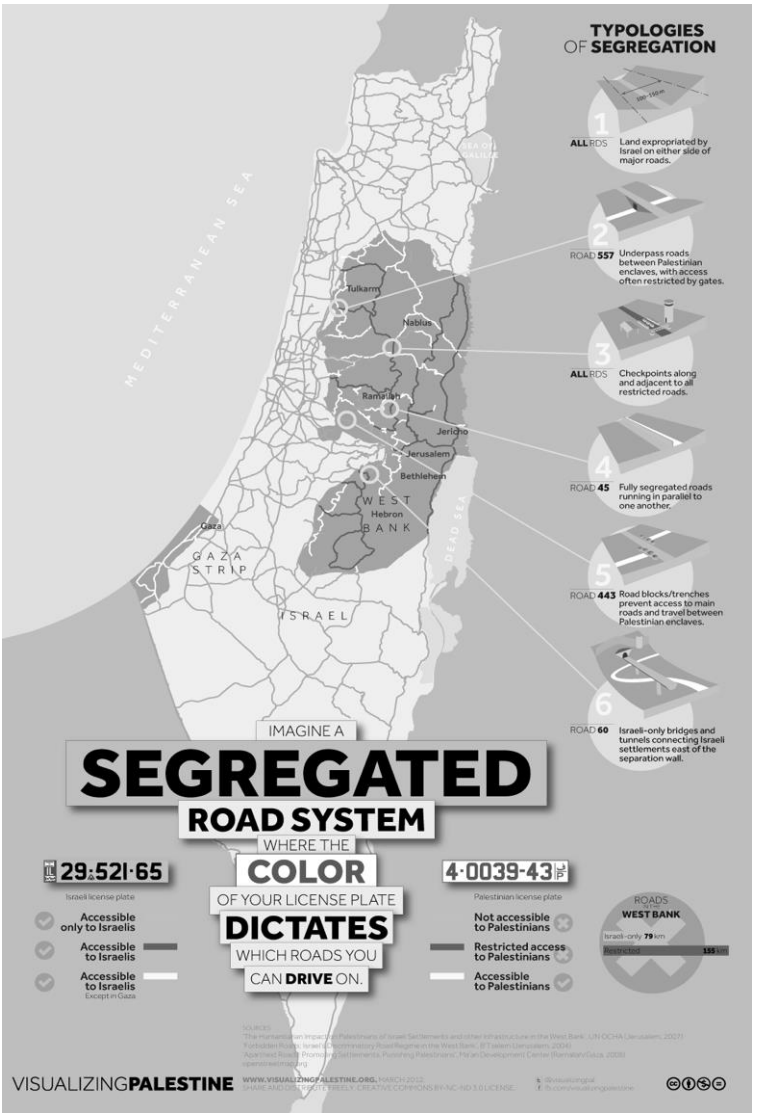



*Fig. 6 - Segregated road system map.*

## 1.3 Gaza Strip and the West Bank

As you can see from the maps, until the beginning of the current crisis, Gaza Strip could still be spotted as a compact coastline portion of besieged land, forty kilometres long and about three up to seven kilometres wide, located in the South-West area of Palestine, bordering Egypt, and facing the forbidden and patrolled Mediterranean Sea. A surface of 365 square kilometre. A bit smaller than the Italian Municipality of Olbia, just to give an idea; but with more than thirty times its population! The rest of the State of Palestine consists in the *incoherent mosaic* formed by the remains of the non-occupied portions of land on the West Bank of the Jordan valley. Despite the development of a modern road network built by the Israeli road authority, for a Palestinian citizen living in the West Bank it is indeed difficult to travel from one exclave to another due to the fact that Israeli roads are barriers and there are only some crossing ways admitted: the checkpoints set up by IDF (UN 2014). This is another evidence of the colonization process and constitutes the picture that shows the net trapping and tracing the occupied territories (Zoref, 2023: 141 – 146). The same situation concerns Gaza Strip, which is increasingly becoming an overcrowded open-air prison, where people are forced to live in desperate and inhuman conditions (Pappè, 2017). To make matters worse, the peace agreement, signed in Oslo in 1993, established the subdivision of the West Bank and Gaza territories in three different autonomous administration settings, still in force: Area A (17% of the territory), under full, civilian and security control of the PNA; Area B (23%), under Palestinian civilian jurisdiction and Israeli security control; Area C (60%), under full Israeli control, except on Palestinian citizens. The partition logic applied after the Oslo agreements, together with the persistence of the Israeli occupation policy, has reproduced the pre-war situation, on a smaller scale, but with the same disruptive effects. The case of Hebron city is emblematic. Its historical centre, where the tomb of Ibrahim, or Abraham, lies - a prophet revered by both Jewish and Muslim religion – is almost completely forbidden to Palestinians. In addition to all this, since 2002, Israel decided to start building a wall to separate Palestinians from Israelis. Nowadays the Israeli's *security fence*, a reinforced barrier, completely surrounds the Gaza Strip, whose sea shore is under a permanent naval blockade, and has almost circled the remains of the West Bank area. Compared with the 250 kilometres theoretical boundary that separates Israel from West Bank, (the so-called Green Line, traced in 1948), the wall twists and turns for more than 800 kilometres repeatedly crossing this border. As a result of this additional separation program, it is estimated that at least 80% of the wall has been built on Palestinian ground. In this way all the new

settlements have been incorporated in Israeli territory and further spots of land of any kind of economic or strategical interest were made unreachable for Palestinians. The new physical and psychological situation created by the building of the wall is well synthesized in a graffiti painted on the Palestinian side of it, next to the *Qualandiya* check point, which is the only gateway that links East Jerusalem to the West Bank. It says: *one wall, two jails*. Where definitely one is a glorified prison, built by the occupier itself, so to cancel the view of the neighbouring people and the other one is not. Anyway, this additional physical division represents a clear sign of a common shared emotional distress that affects both, invaders and invaded, at a different range of severity, whose ties must be probably sought in the *negative theologizing* that feeds the war of religion at the roots of the Arab – Israeli conflicts (Daniel, 2003; VV.AA., 2015). All in all, today it is not allowed for Palestine to exist as a State. Hence a unique Palestinian context clearly recognizable either in political, economic or social terms is, at present, made impossible.

## 1.4 Sealed identities

Indeed, the same difficulty occurs when trying to portray Palestinian identity. By visiting the museum set up inside the Walled Off Hotel - the Art Hotel created by the unknown artist named Banksy, in front of the separation wall in Bethlehem - the general strong impact of the low-intensity war and the land grabbing activities can be easily understood. Besides that, the aftermath of this constant work on social tissue fragmentation and gradual choking of Palestinian populations, throughout progressive vital space shrinking, can be clearly seen. All this deeply affects also their identity formation process. In the shocking museum, located inside the hotel, there is a showcase displaying all the different ID Cards issued by the Israeli authorities to the Palestinian citizens, according to their place of residence. Another legal form, forcibly imposed and justified by security reasons, to rule also the non-occupied territories and to hinder the freedom of movement. The kind of ID released determines the territorial limits within the owner can move. Accordingly, a Palestinian citizen residing in Hebron, or Jerusalem, can not move to other territories without specific authorization given by Israeli authorities. This *sealed identity* policy (Kamel, 2019) is coherent, on a psychological front, with the territorial infringements and the colonization processes. Politically it's a clear sign of the ethnic democracy that stands out Israel (Smooha, 1997; Yiftachel, 2006). Regarding this, it is important to note that part of Palestinians are Bedouin, therefore nomads,

culturally dedicated to seasonal displacements necessary to survive in their spread ownership territories.


*Fig. 7 - Palestinian ID Cards*

*Fig. 8 - The wall in Bethlehem*

Nevertheless, the most significant information given by the ID Cards displayed in the museum is the empty space left for the Palestinians born abroad, which is the majority of the population. According to the rules imposed by Israel they do not have any right to possess a Palestinian ID. In this way they can legally access to their home country only as foreigners. And, of course, you can access to Palestine only through the Israeli checkpoints, no matter if you are coming from the sea, the land or the sky. That is to highlight how the refugee status is constantly denied and challenged. A further violation of the International Law that recognizes the refugees' rights to maintain their nationality and to return to their country of origin. To force the issue, the few certain cultural traits that most of the Palestinians share are only two: the Arabic language and the Islamic religion. Otherwise every single community lives its own exclusive condition featuring elements of vulnerability that go from deprivation of basic material assets, such as land and water, or non-material assets, like security and freedom of movement. This status of profound inequality and segregation results in the presence of a permanent conflict, either outside the borders, i.e. the clashes with Israeli settlers and soldiers, or inside, where relationships are often based on violence and abuse, reinforced by poverty and overcrowding.

## 1.5 Al-Quds - The Holy

An even worse situation concerns the iconic city of Jerusalem, al-Quds in Arabic. Always considered the *holy city* by all the three main Abrahamic religions. Jerusalem has been for centuries at the centre of fights fuelled by ethnical, political or religious groups which compete for its control (Brizzi, 2015). This led to the historical partition of Old Jerusalem into four quarters, respectively inhabited by Armenians, Christians, Jewish and Muslims, that share the not always peaceful access to the holy commonly venerated places. With the aim of preserving this sacred city, during the second post-war period, it was first declared to be an *internationalized city* by UN (1947) and later proclaimed *heritage of humanity* by UNESCO (1981). However, this did not prevent to stop the dispute around the issue of which country had the right to have Jerusalem as its own capital city, being claimed by both, Israel and Palestine. Actually, Jerusalem is today occupied by IDF and stifled by the settlements that surround its eastern side with the clear purpose of permanently splitting it from the rest of the West Bank, annex it to Israel and become its capital city (VV.AA., 2010).

If we take a look inside the heart of the Old City of Jerusalem we can one more time observe, on a smaller scale, the same planned *grabbing* activity held by Israeli through the low intensity war strategy (Bompiani, Iannello, 2018; Abouzaid, 2023). After the 1967 Six Day War, al-Quds has been brought under complete control of the Israeli army and, in spite of all the warnings and resolutions issued by the international community, it is today interested by a settlement activity clearly aimed at expelling all the non-Israeli citizens from the town. This has led to the actual phase of fragmentation process of the urban tissue acted through the Israeli house by house persistent colonization practice, again supported by the IDF (Dusi, Pieraccini, 2010; 2018; Toaldo, 2015).

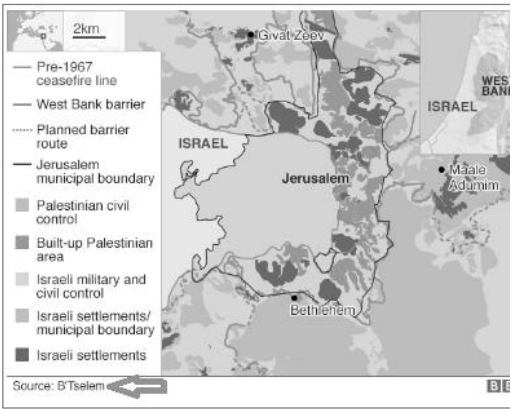



*Fig. 9 – Map of Great Jerusalem*

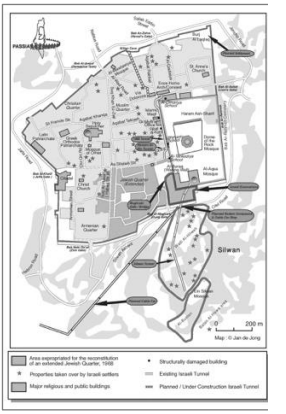



*Fig. 10 - Settlement activity in the Old City*

## 1.6 Uniqueness of the enclaves

As a consequence of this fragmented situation there are many, and differently localized, conditions of vulnerability, produced by the never-ending mentioned violations perpetrated in the past seventy years. This has produced a humanitarian crisis so severe that without the international aid it would have been impossible for Palestinian people to survive on their own territories. The communities live under a constant threat, carried out through the many deprivations of fundamental needs like: water, energy, food or medicines. And even throughout carefully planned actions of infrastructure and home destructions or continuous forced displacements (Pappè, 2006). For all these reasons it is impossible to identify a unique Palestinian context and every aid initiative, in order to be effective, needs to be negotiated at community level and linked to a flexible network strategy. Being a Palestinian citizen locked in a refugee camp is quite different from residing in a small village in West Bank. The daily problems faced by a Beduin in the Naqad desert are not comparable with the ones of who are living inside the jammed and polluted urban context of Gaza City or under the besieged neighbourhoods of Hebron. So, the situations of vulnerability, the kind of threats and also the material needs are different from place to place, and it is useless to consider them as a whole. This explains why also the social dynamics inside the communities could vary a lot and show different kinds of behaviours, often violent and aggressive. They are generated by the combination of internal inequalities, power-based relations, survival strategies, in situations that go, as previously mentioned, from the total

deprivation of the desert environments, to the overcrowded refugee camps inside and outside of the main urban areas. On this side of the complex problematic situation described above, also a culture strongly conditioned by religion weighs, together with the emergency survival policies necessarily based on the preservation of national unity (Sacco, 2001; Chomsky, Pappè, 2015).

For all these reasons, in such a fragmented and excluding environment, the development of inclusive education policies constitutes a priority in the international cooperation projects. Empowering new citizenship skills and competences appears to be essential and strategic on both sides. Useful to develop a different understanding of the complex Israeli - Palestinian situation. Necessary to find different ways of managing it, so as to go beyond decades of inconclusive peace talks and emergency actions.

# 2. Why and Index for Inclusion and Empowerment

All the circumstances expressed in the previous chapter also affect the scholastic sector and the educational processes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. In this situation, it is crucial to analyse the Palestinian school system without forgetting the extreme difficulties that students and teachers live in their everyday lives.

## 2.1 The Palestinian school context

In the Palestinian schools there are many critical issues that go from the guarantees of physical access to the facilities for teachers and students, due to the imposed limits to personal mobility, to the high dropout rates, whose main causes have a gender characterization and can be traced back to the premature access to the labour market for the boys and in early marriage for the girls (UNICEF, 2018). The present-day Palestinian school system is composed by a State public service, operated by the MoEHE (Ministry of Education and Higher Education), a private sector, run by profit or non-profit institutions (monitored by the MoEHE) and the UNRWA schools active in the refugee camps. It is a centralized system in regards of the curriculum of studies, the teachers' recruitment and training, as well as all the administrative staff management. Basic school is compulsory from first to ninth grade (6 – 15 years of age). Secondary school, that is from tenth to twelfth grade, could be academic, in preparation for University studies, or vocational, to access professional occupation, and it is either public or private (UNICEF, 2018). The students' population is made by one million and 300 thousand people, 700 thousand of them studying in the 3,200 West Bank schools, with an average 26 students per class, and a bit more than 56 thousand in the 737 schools in the Gaza Strip, where it has been recorded an average 39 students per class (PCBS, 2019). Schools and classes are divided

by gender. The three models of school have different characteristics, either at organizational or at structural level, together with the kind of support they receive. Anyway, all students and teachers, particularly the ones living in C Area, in East Jerusalem and in the Gaza Strip, live in stressful conditions, psychological discomfort and restrictions in accessing the school facilities. This is again due to: violations committed by the IDF; schools and roads demolitions; check-point closures; military exercises; clashes between Palestinians and Israeli settlers. All these events have a considerable impact on the quality of education mainly for the loss of school days and for the insecurities, to tackle on a daily base, to deal with an unsafe learning environment. This forces some families to drop their kids out of school (UNCT, 2019). If these conditions are considered *ordinary* for many Palestinian students and teachers, it is not to be forgotten that students with disabilities experience furthermore situations of exclusion due to the physical barriers which prevent their access to school facilities, the absence of accessible transport links and the culture itself. Indeed, schools are still scarcely equipped to welcome and host students with mobility disabilities and moderate or severe cognitive disabilities. Personalized or integrated educational programs, required for specific disabilities, are available only in a few public schools (one out of ten) and in special needs centres operated by NGO's.

In 2015, among the age group of 6 to 15 years old students, the net rate of school attenders (regardless of the school grade) was 94,6%. And the students with disabilities rate was 1,35%. In addition to these data, the school system presents quite a few problems. The first concerns teacher's training. The rate of qualified teachers employed in the basic school is 56,6%; while only 45,6% of them participate to continuous refresher and training courses. The prevailing educational model is lecture-based and for the students there are limited opportunities in cooperating/collaborating on critical and metacognitive thinking activities. It is also estimated that 70,4% of students are exposed to physical, verbal or sexual forms of abuse inside the schools themselves (MoEHE, 2017).

All these evidences draw a picture of the very complex educational situation in Palestine, necessarily focused on supplying a school service and, for this reason, inadequate to meet the needs and diversities of the students' population.

How can Palestinian schools deal with such complexity? What effective actions can be implemented to respond to the difficulties faced by teachers and students?

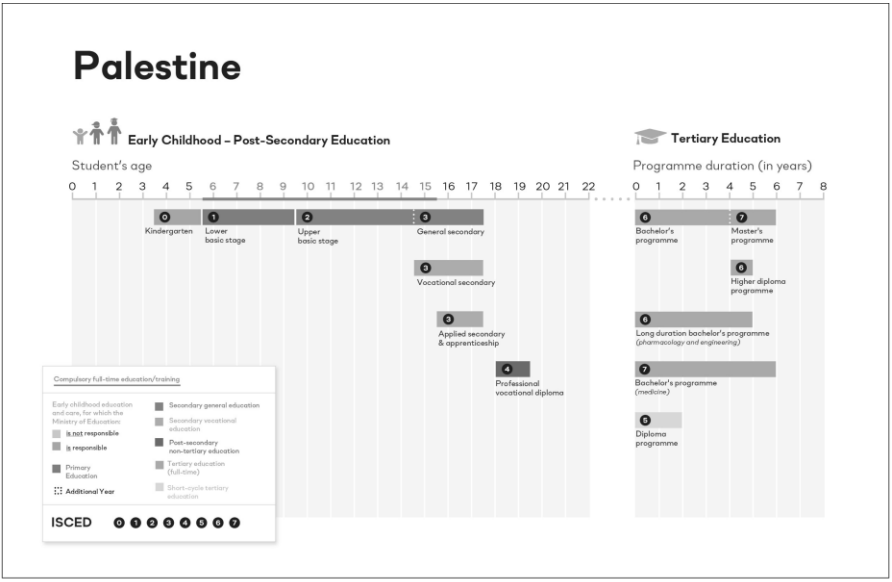



*Fig. 11 - Palestinian School System*

## 2.2 A possible approach: inclusive education

Talking about inclusion in the school context means retracing the long process that led from an idea of schooling intended for those who had the economic resources to cover the costs of a school preceptor to mass education that recognises the right to education for all. More specifically, the concept of inclusion aims to overcome both the segregationist model (separate school systems, with special schools or differential classes) and that of integration, or the assimilationist model, which interprets disability as the problem of a minority, who must be given equal (or at least as similar as possible) opportunities to those of other pupils (Farrell, 2000; Vislie, 2002). The closing of special schools and the inclusion of pupils with disabilities in regular schools, in fact, has often produced normalisation processes, emphasising, therefore, how normality was the reference model to which to conform (Ainscow, 1999), proposing strategies to bring disabled pupils to be as similar as possible to others.

Inclusion, on the contrary, is based on the recognition of the relevance of participation in school life by all individuals: this requires the removal of social, economic, and political barriers that hinder access to learning and the full participation of all in the spheres of their lives (Booth, Ainscow, 2002). In this sense, education, training, and lifelong learning assume an essential

value to develop a democratic, peaceful, sustainable society in which citizens are aware and active in maintaining a high level of development for the benefit of all and each one (Canevaro, 1999, 2006; Ianes, 2006; Cottini, 2017).

The concept of inclusion in education, and the policies developed around it, emerged in 1994 in the *Salamanca Conference* (UNESCO, 1994). In particular, it is stated that:

«regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system» (p. ix).

This is a very relevant statement that affirms the principle of equity and supports the inclusive approach as a guiding principle for organising the school environment and teaching, adding that governments should all

"give the highest policy and budgetary priority to improve their education systems to enable them to include all children regardless of individual differences or difficulties […] ensure that, in the context of a systemic change, teacher education programmes, both preservice and inservice, address the provision of special needs education in inclusive schools" (UNESCO, 1994, pp.ix-x).

This declaration was followed by the approval of the *Charter of Luxembourg* (EC, 1996), a summary of the main results of the Helios Community action programme. This European document is the first to use the term inclusive education (albeit together with the term integration) and defines Principles, Strategies and Proposals for all learners regardless of their individual characteristics, concluding that

«Any future legislation in member states concerning training and education should incorporate the principles, strategies and proposals outlined in this charter» (p.3).

This commitment was confirmed in 2000 by the World Education Forum in Dakar, which promoted the programme *Education for all: meeting our collective commitments*, which emphasised that

«Education is a fundamental human right. It is the key to sustainable development and peace and stability within and among countries, and thus an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century, which are affected by rapid globalization. […] The basic

learning needs of all can and must be met as a matter of urgency» (Peppler-Barry, & Fiske, 2000, p.43).

It was in 2001 that the World Health Organisation approved the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*, known as the ICF Model. This document redefines the concept of health by correlating it with that of the socio-environmental context: in this new vision, disability is no longer considered as an individual problem or the problem of a small circle of people, but as an experience that, albeit at different levels of intensity and frequency, is part of everyone's life. The ICF model uses a bio-psycho-social approach that aims to overcome the traditional opposition between the medical and social approaches. Health, in fact, is the result of the correlation between the biological and psychological components of each individual and elements from the environment in which he or she lives, and not as the absence of disease.

Health is a systemic interaction between different components (Physical Conditions, Body Functions and Structures, Activity and Social Participation, Environmental and Personal Factors).

ICF defines a language allowing to understand each other between different professionals and in different countries; this language is positive, giving attention not to disability but to health, and universal, it affects everyone (any health condition, in unfavourable contexts, can become a disability) describing real people in real contexts.

Another fundamental document is the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPD) that was adopted on December 13, 2006 in New York by the United Nations General Assembly and entered into force on May 3, 2008. This document defines a new policy for disabled people, based on the protection of human rights, intervening in all fields of life (birth, health, family, education, work). Through the elaboration of fifty articles, it indicates the path that all States in the world should activate to guarantee the rights of equality and social inclusion to all citizens with disabilities. The Convention does not establish "new rights" for people with disability, but rather implements and specifies the scope of fundamental rights of the various instruments of human rights protection, comparing them to the particular situation of people with disabilities. The aim is to allow people with disabilities to exercise their rights to the same extent of any other citizen. It therefore concerns civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to the inclusive dimension of the school system, highlighting that States must ensure an inclusive education system at all levels to realise the right to education of persons with disabilities without discrimination and on an equal opportunity basis. This Convection is

therefore one of the most important legislative instruments, which not only provides guidance in reading and analysing the concept of "person with a disability", but it is also a very significant theoretical frame of reference.

Similarly, in 2009 the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education published the *Key Principles for Promoting Quality in Inclusive Education. Recommendations for Policy Makers*. Based on the previous mentioned documents, these Guidelines highlight that

«- Inclusion and quality are reciprocal;
- Access and quality are linked and are mutually reinforcing;
- Quality and equity are central to ensuring inclusive education» (p.14).

The concept of school inclusion also expands to embrace not only disability but all those conditions that can generate exclusion and constitute obstacles to active school participation and quality education for all students:

«Inclusion concerns a wider range of learners than those identified as having special educational needs. It is concerned with any learners who are at risk of exclusion from educational opportunities, resulting in school failure» (p.15).

And this is possible through a different way of conceiving learning:

«An approach to learning that aims to meet the diverse needs of all learners without labelling/categorising is consistent with inclusive principles and requires the implementation of educational strategies and approaches that will be beneficial to all learners» (p.16).

The concept of inclusive education, therefore, refers to the context, imposing change to remove obstacles to learning and participation. This change must necessarily affect not only the school environment, but also the community, the territory. In the inclusive approach, the uniqueness and diversity of each individual pupil are the norm. And this requires a flexible and continuous reorganisation of the context: of spaces; of times; of activities... that is able to include everyone to the best of their ability in active participation in teaching-learning processes as well as in the general improvement of society. The inclusive perspective thus requires a systematic action, a good praxis understood as a political action, which can change the organisation of the context by strengthening the recognition of human rights, justice and equality, to be implemented in all contexts and guaranteeing change.

It is from these policy actions that the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education in Bristol, in collaboration with the University of Manchester,

conducts research in British schools and develops an Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2000). This is a tool that allows schools to analyse their own level of inclusiveness and plan actions considered useful for its progressive improvement. The Index proposes a series of guidelines to orient school choices, also involving the entire community, in a process of revision and development of educational practices to remove barriers and obstacles to the participation of every student.

«Inclusion involves change. It is an unending process of increasing learning and participation for all students. It is an ideal to which schools can aspire but which is never fully reached. But inclusion happens as soon as the process of increasing participation is started. An inclusive school is one that is on the move» (Booth & Ainscow, 2002, p.3).

Key-concepts of the Index, together with inclusion, are:

- barriers to learning and participation (a concept that is used instead of special educational needs);
- resources to support learning and participation (to reduce barriers and obstacles);
- support for diversity in planning by the school and local community.

It is important to underline that all students can face difficulties in education when they experience barriers to learning and participation, not only students with disabilities. School and communities can be "exclusive" when they limit participation, or prevent access, or when they create an environment where not all learners have the right to express themselves.

The characteristic of disability is not attributed to the person, but to situations, which are more suitable for some individuals and not for others, within an aprioristic and reassuring criterion of normality.

The Index was conceived from the beginning as a flexible tool that can be adapted to the different needs and cultural contexts in which it is used: even its numerous translations are, in reality, adaptations that reflect the inclusive processes, school systems, policies and cultures of that country. Moreover, it proposes an action-research approach in which all actors in the educational process are involved in analysing needs, understanding the context and educational practices, reflecting and designing activities to gradually change the context.

As a tool to support an inclusion process, the Index proposes a school development planning cycle as a process that accompanies the school and the community through a first phase consisting of a study of the Index, a second phase of research on the school, a third phase of preparing an

inclusive development plan, a fourth phase of implementing the priorities, and a fifth phase of reviewing the entire process. The intention is not to create a rigid structure, but to work iteratively to promote inclusion and reflection on educational planning in small steps and with the involvement of all stakeholders.

Finally, we would like to recall the United Nations' commitment to inclusive education through Goal IV of the 2030 Agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (2015): Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. A goal that, through various indicators, clearly articulates the right to quality education for all and at all ages of life.

Disadvantaged socio-economic conditions, architectural barriers, isolation, armed conflicts, geographical isolation, disability, poverty, inaccessibility to culture: these are just some of the forms of inequality that create an obstacle to the active participation of citizens in educational and social contexts. Schools must play a priority role in building a more equal society in which everyone feels they belong and can experience forms of active citizenship: inclusion allows each learner to develop his or her potential, respecting everyone's differences and diversities.

«To push kids into an unreconstructed regular school system is highly (as has been proven) problematic. We need to be asking what kind of education facilities are needed for all kids in this century who will build knowledge, skills and disposition to work in and reshape the world of the future? » (Slee, 2013, p.905).

## 2.3 Meaning and need of promoting inclusion processes in Palestine

The young Palestinian school system (the MoEHE has been established in 1994 only) embodies and reflects, in the struggle for a quality education, all the difficulties caused by the situation of permanent conflict and violence, of segregation and insecurity affecting population's life. As shown above, it operates in a fragmented environment, together with the private schools' experiences and the independent UNRWA school offer. These commonly shared problems of social shattering and territorial oppression are challenged by the MoEHE with great attention towards the issue of educating the new generations. Despite the strong restrictions on mobility, that also affect the daily journey teachers and students cover to go to school (UNCT, 2019), the literacy rate in the Country is one of the highest in the world: 91,21%. And the rate of students who access secondary education is 46,2% (World Bank,

2016; OECD, 2016; PCBS, 2017). A prescriptive curriculum, with a strong nationalist connotation, has been set up in order to ensure the development of a common culture so to tie all the communities isolated in the enclaves and to keep alive both, the memory and the pressure for the reunification of the Country. It is a process, not free from contradictions, depicted by strong political and ideological issues, as it appears, for instance, from the analysis of textbooks. International research, carried out also on the Israeli side, highlighted a considerable number of criticalities in handling historical events or in the geographical representation of the territories which show the mutual hostility and exclusion feelings (Peled-Elhanan, 2012; CRIHL, 2013). For instance, the main events of the last decades, when mentioned, have been assigned different names and meanings. *Yom Ha'Atzmaut*, Israeli Independence Day, celebrated on May the 14th, is remembered in Palestine, on May the 15th, as *al-Nakba*: the catastrophe, the beginning of the exodus. Moreover, only 4% of the maps used in the Palestinian textbooks show the Green Line. And six out of ten do not show Israeli borders at all. The same happens to the 76% of Israeli textbooks. In a nutshell, it is the representation on a drawing board of two desired States, only existing in the textbooks, that in the real world must deal with the uncertainty and precariousness imposed by the permanent conflict status. Not surprisingly in the 75% of Israeli textbooks and in the 81% of the Palestinian ones the term used to indicate the other population is enemy (Peled-Elhanan, 2012; Adwan et al., 2016), which, of course, is not an inclusive concept, not only under a educational point of view. In this deeply excluding geopolitical context, and in this historical and cultural climate, many international cooperation projects have been carried out, including those undertaken in the field of education described in this book. More than just projects they are contributory design actions, carried out inside a wider perspective to intervene on the resilience ability of the Palestinian communities: to improve their living conditions; get out of the survival situation in which they are forced to stay; strengthen the processes to overcome the situations of emergency so to build a stable, supportive, peaceful and inclusive society (OCHA, 2017). The vision, shared also with the MoEHE, is to enhance the national school system by fostering the improvement of the quality of education and socialization under an inclusive perspective. The conceptual and procedural lines, followed in the design and implementation of the projects described hereafter, refer to the Inclusive Education Approach developed by the international scientific community in the past three decades. They are based on the principles of: every individual's diversity; equal opportunities; active participation to personal growth and social life (UNESCO 1994; Booth & Ainscow, 2002, 2011; Cottini, 2018). In accordance with the MoEHE's Palestine Inclusive

Education Policy (MoEHE, 2015), the concept of *inclusion in education* is intended as the fully and equitably participation of all students in the process of learning in regular schools. It does not involve a specific group of students (i.e. disabled students), but it concerns all learners that in their lives might encounter obstacles and barriers. An inclusive school is a school for all, and it has to do with the right to education (UNRWA, 2019).

## 2.4 The involvement of the Department of Education Studies in the framework of development programmes and international cooperation

Through its disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches, the Department of Education Studies "Giovanni Maria Bertin" at the University of Bologna contributes to scientific research (at national and international level) and training activities in the following areas: education and training processes within school, outside school (extra-curricular) and in vocational training; lifelong learning and continuing education for individual and social development, with particular attention to issues of diversity; contexts and services to promote individual and social well-being, and to prevent and reduce disadvantage.

Italian Law No. 125 of 11 August 2014 - General regulations on international cooperation for development (*Disciplina generale sulla cooperazione internazionale per lo sviluppo*) - which came into force on 29 August 2014 - redefined the Italian development cooperation system. Article 23 lists universities among the subjects recognised as being part of the Italian development cooperation system. International development cooperation activities are among the fields of action of the so-called university Third Mission or Public engagement and together with the other two missions, Teaching and Research, are the pillars on which the universities themselves base their actions and are evaluated, integrating theory and practice.

The involvement of universities in international cooperation and in the educational sphere is relevant when they are able to converge towards the possibility of strengthening, from a regulatory and institutional point of view too, the development of countries in relation to the inclusion of all people. For instance, this could happen by integrating pedagogical knowledge and the needs of the contexts reached, through the construction of authentic links between the stakeholders involved in the inclusive actions envisaged. It is in this context that the Department of Education Studies has been engaged over the past thirty years in the field of development cooperation, with the aim of

sharing and disseminating expertise, co-constructing knowledge and supporting interventions in the direction of inclusion.

The approach that the Department has shared with partner countries has been based on effective cooperation with all the actors involved in order to jointly promote the unexpressed potential of the country by integrating intentions and project choices understood as opportunities for the whole of the cooperating community. From this point of view, the commitment must be to enhance and strengthen what is already an expression of local realities, by problematising existing projects from an inclusion perspective, rather than abusively importing inclusion models specific to the Italian context (in a colonialist drift). The Department has always acted to promote and support possible developments in the system by strengthening the potential already present, avoiding importing practices and projects.

The objective very often focuses on the essential demolition of conceptions and practices that prevent access to knowledge, which is the means of implementing the conditions for people's well-being. These conditions can lead to the possible and autonomous development of individual life projects through appropriate action to monitor and guarantee respect for the rights of all individuals.

Operating in the educational dimension of International Cooperation has meant, for the researchers involved, acting on two distinct but intertwined fronts: that of the development of an inclusive cultural context in a community background and that of the reduction of marginality and disadvantage. Since the 1990s, interventions have been promoted in Balkan Europe (Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia), the Middle East (Palestine), Africa (Mozambique, Cameroon), Central and Latin America (El Salvador, Mexico, Chile, Argentina), and the Asian continent (Philippines, Nepal), working directly with states, in particular with Ministries of Education, or together with national and/or local realities (e.g. universities, schools, etc.) in collaboration with various NGOs active in international cooperation.

The department's actions mainly consisted of:

- promoting the organic collaboration of university staff with the non-academic world of development cooperation (represented by governmental and non-governmental organisations, local ministries, territorial actors, associations of people with disabilities, etc.), and with other universities in countries around the world, by carrying out research (support, monitoring and evaluation), training and consultancy activities;
- supporting coordinated exchanges of university staff as part of cooperation projects.

The Department's approach was therefore bottom-up, involving all the parties to the project, with a role of support and mediation between the participants in the search for solutions and common understandings. The training courses always included an analysis of needs and agreement on objectives, skills and content, favouring the training of trainers using capacity-building approaches that would make the actions sustainable. It is essential to set up a cooperation action capable of bringing together the work of Italian local authorities (alone or in a network) with counterpart institutions in foreign countries, encouraging the active participation of the various representative components of civil society that are involved in the decision-making process aimed at promoting the development (cultural, institutional, political) of their communities and territories.

Thus, the objectives of the cooperation activities of the Department of Education Studies are part of the broader commitment that the University of Bologna has in contributing to the achievement of the UN Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, namely:

(3) Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages;
(4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all;
(5) Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
(8) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all;
(10) Reduce inequality within and among countries;
(11) Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

## 2.5 Towards the implementation of the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment

In the Palestinian enclaves, between 2016 and 2022, a research team, created at the Department of Education Sciences "G. M. Bertin" of the Alma Mater Studiorum, University of Bologna, in collaboration with the Italian NGO EducAid[1], took part in several international cooperation projects in the field of education:

- *Miglioramento dei meccanismi di protezione di rifugiati e sfollati in Area C* (Improving mechanisms for the protection of refugees and

[1] EducAid onlus is an Italian ngo based in Rimini. More information at https://www.educaid.it/.

displaced persons in Area C of the West Bank (Palestine), 2016-2017;
- CO.RE - COmmunities REsilience. Strengthening the resilience of Palestinian communities settled in the West Bank (Palestine), 2017-2018;
- READY - Resilience, Empowerment and Advocacy for a Deeper Inclusion in Shu' fat Refugee Camp – Jerusalem (Palestine), 2018-2019.

These projects - each of them could last for one year only or less, due to their condition of emergency operations - were all cantered on the previously mentioned Inclusive Education Approach. A model which is widely considered a strategic asset for the development of school-based interventions and able to offer effective tools to improve the management of the specific educational emergencies such as the ones spotted in the Palestinian territories. The inclusion paradigm is one of the main axes in the interventions carried out in the educational field promoted by leading international organizations operating also in Palestine: form UN agencies, such as UNRWA and UNESCO, to the international cooperation agencies included the Italian AICS - *Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione e lo Sviluppo* (MAECI_DGCS, 2012). As previously mentioned, these projects have also been supported and coordinated in connection with the MoEHE (2015) that is promoting its own inclusive education policy throughout the pursuit of the ten goals that summarize and distinguish it.

In these projects an *Index for Inclusion and Empowerment* (IIE) (Pacetti, Castellani, Soriani, 2020) was first developed with the aim of design more effective, inclusive and emancipatory educational interventions in schools. The methodology used was a research designed on the Professional Development Research (PDR) methodology (Asquini, 2018). This particular research links the teachers' professional development to action-research, involving teachers and researchers in a systematic confrontation and documentation of all phases: it is "a political and a methodological choice to do research together with teachers and caretakers in order to promote professional learning for all involved and produce an effective impact on and gain for schools and teacher education" (CRESPI, n.a.). The interventions realized were concentrated in the capacity building of teachers, head teachers and MoEHE's technical staff: it was mainly used the training of trainers' methodology with a cooperative work facilitated by University of Bologna. So, it was not a top-down training, but a process of discovering together meanings and reflecting on the use of different tools, collecting data, analysing needs, monitoring the process, defining new indicators. The main

challenge was to change usual attitude in teaching methodology and in creating a culture of collegiality between teachers, accompanying a process of planning activities together.

The first project, *Miglioramento dei meccanismi di protezione di rifugiati e sfollati in Area C*, was coordinated by GVC[2] and EducAid and the intervention aimed to contribute preventing and mitigating the negative effects deriving from coercive actions and violations of human rights perpetrated, albeit with different levels of intensity, in the Palestinian territories, especially in Area C (in this project in Hebron and Tubas). The action of the Department focused on schools, offering technical assistance to teachers and the representatives of the MoEHE on the issues of inclusive education and psychosocial support in emergency situations. A final event in April 2017 in Ramallah presented the first results of the experimentation.

The second project, CO.RE., also involved the two directorates of Hebron and Tubas. Teachers, school head teachers, inclusive advisors and other key stakeholders participated in the experimentation together to in-loco training events about inclusion, empowerment and about the design, the implementation and the practical use of the new Index for Inclusion and Empowerment. A conference in May 2018 in Ramallah saw the distribution of the final version of the Index (in English and Arabic).

The third project, READY, continued to implement the use of the IIE with the involvement of UNRWA schools within the East Jerusalem area. School leaders and teachers have been involved in a cooperative work process aimed at promoting a culture of sharing, co-planning of activities and mutual support to the writing of school policies and educational activities more inclusive and more attentive to the real needs of the pupils.

Why did the Department of Education Studies decided to develop an Index for Inclusion and Empowerment?

In a context where children are particularly vulnerable and exposed to exclusion and violence, the attempt is to offer a different perspective about the "power": the possibility to acquire and manage the power through positive experiences can have immediate effects on individual and social behaviours for students and teachers, but also the community.

For this reason, to the idea of inclusion it has been linked also the concept of *empowerment* (Rappaport, 1981; Piccardo, 1995; Putton, 1999; Canevaro, 2007, Adams, 2008). Empowerment refers both to a process of empowerment of the subject, individual or collective, and to the result of this process. For this reason, the construct of empowerment is strongly related to

[2] GVC (Gruppo di Volontariato Civile) is an ngo born in Bologna in 1971. Since December 2018 it has joined WeWorld onlus, creating a single ngo. For more information, see https://www.weworld.it/en/about-us/weworld-and-gvc.

processes of change, through the activation and promotion of cognitive, emotional, relational and behavioural resources in the subject involved. This choice met the convinced adherence of all the operators to the idea that improving individual abilities and collegial work capacities could enhance the acquisition of self-development skills. This asset has been considered strategic to activate new organizational and educational practices for the management of the operational tools built during the project activities, able to support, over time, the continuation and refinement of the sustainable changing processes just activated (Zimmerman, 2000). The idea of empowerment adopted refers to the process of growth of individual and group awareness so to increase self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-determination. These practices could bring out latent resources and get the individuals or the group to be aware of their potential, to understand the surrounding reality and to have control over events. The key point of this concept is that the subjects engaged in an empowerment process will overcome their initial situations by themselves, discovering their inner resources, or a new and more convenient use of contextual situations, assuming an active and responsible role in decision-making processes. And they can do it together, at a community level:

«Empowerment suggests that participation with others to achieve goals, efforts to gain access to resources, and some critical understandings of the socio-political environment are basic components of the construct» (Perkins, Zimmerman, 1995, p.571).

If the aim of the culture of inclusion is to change the school and the society, the culture of empowerment supports this change starting with the individual and the group to improve their living conditions even in difficult contexts: from vulnerability to resilience, from dependence to autonomy, from resignation to action, from exclusion to inclusion (Taddei, Pacetti, 2018).

In other words: if we want to include everyone, we need to give competences and experiences in individual and social awareness, in self and group development, in the emancipatory conception, consciousness.

«States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child» (United Nations, 1989, Art. 12, Para. 1):

Participating as fully citizens means being able to express our wishes and thoughts, not what others think is suitable for us. We should promote this awareness empowering vulnerable children in better understanding their

perspectives, desires, preferences and in communicating them, in building their self-confidence. Inclusion is possible when people become active participants in these processes, when they are supported in their social and identity development skills. Otherwise, the risk is that the inclusion is managed from the outside: by the school organization, by the teachers, by the parents, etc.

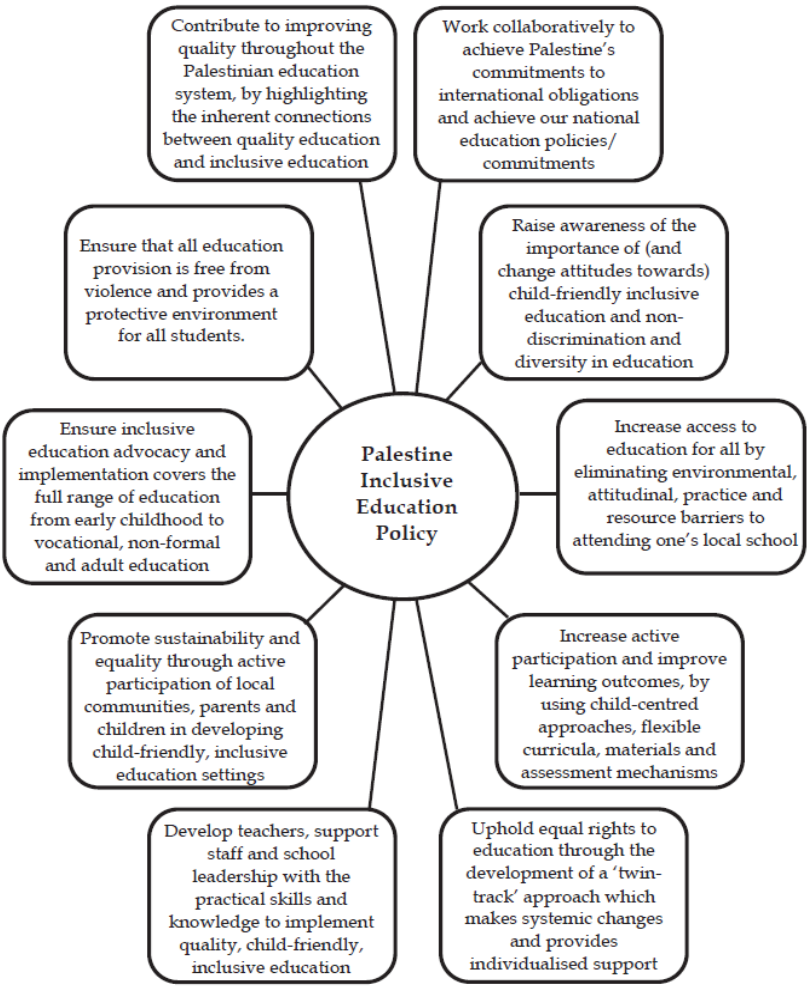



*Fig. 12 - Palestine inclusive education policy (MoEHE, 2015: 3)*

The added value of this approach is visible in the clear intention to link the inclusion paradigm with the quality of education, sustainability, equality and the universal design approach (Laurillard, 2012; Savia, 2016). For the research team who participated to these projects the school model based on inclusion has been developed and experienced through the organization of training sessions, with teams of local teachers and head teachers, finalized to allow the participants to build up the appropriate tools and competences needed to increase the schools and communities' ability to act and modify their own context. For this reason, it has been adopted a bottom–up approach. And this ability has been evaluated in terms of removal or reduction of the obstacles that deny access to learning and socialization. The principles that inspired these actions were: equality of opportunities and active participation by all the subjects involved.

In more pragmatic terms, the *Index for Inclusion and Empowerment* (IIE) is a reference document suitable to be used as a flexible tool for planning and monitoring the level of inclusion reached by a school in the peculiarity of each Palestinian context. In the research group there has been a general shared conviction that inclusion and empowerment can together constitute a new, stronger and wider, approach to the school and the community organization enhancement. The direct and participated involvement of the schools' staff and the communities in the building of the IIE has been considered strategic and coherent with the resilience policies, aimed to reduce the vulnerability, shared with the other international agencies working on the same territories (Zani, 2012). Gathering competences and experiences in building social and individual awareness has been considered a key issue in developing inclusive strategies and policies.

The IIE created during these projects has been designed, not to collect data or to evaluate schools, but with the aim of fostering a constant activity of self-reviewing. In fact, it has been considered strategic the building of the capacity to assess the level of inclusion and empowerment reached in a specific context and to evaluate the efficacy of the educational strategies and activities adopted. The IIE has also been built to facilitate the development of local policies, so to empower the school planning, the student's performance and the community quality of life (Pacetti, Soriani, Castellani, 2020). In this way it has been considered strategic to guarantee the possibility for users to focus on the different aspects of inclusion and empowerment and plan specific activities according to the evidence gathered by analysing the collected data. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the IIE is not at all an administrative requirement. On the opposite it has been conceived to be freely used by teachers and head teachers, not necessarily in its entirety, and also to be modified so to focus on the research of the main problems

observed in a specific context and on the planning of the best possible measures that could be taken to overcome or better cope with them. Once again, as the original version of the Index for Inclusion (Booth, Ainscow, 2002) the proposed approach is the one of action-research: from a first phase of collecting data about the school and the community, to a phase of collective reflection about these data, followed by a phase of designing innovative didactic practices in the school related to the IIE indicators, and a phase of experimentation of these practices and again from the beginning of the action-research. The use of IIE is then a process where all teachers are involved in analysing the context of the school, identifying the needs, setting up related goals, planning interventions, implementing them and assessing to verify how these interventions met the needs.

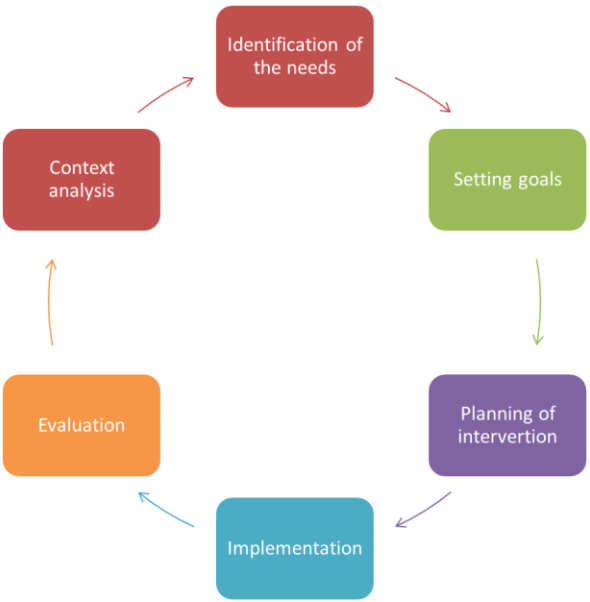



*Fig. 13 – The Index for Inclusion and Empowerment's application process in the schools*

IIE is a proposal that could be considered weak and rather toothless in such situation of serious and constant conflict like the one where, since decades, new Palestinian (but also Israeli) generations born and grow. However, it can only be shared the assumption taken by the many peace

operators that see in international cooperation and in investments for the cultural growth of any community, the key for the overcoming of inequalities chased through the difficult but extraordinary process of building increasingly inclusive societies. Moreover, according to the social and individual emancipatory perspective, that constitutes the base of the empowerment process, the practice of building, managing and improving the IIE could be considered a positive use of power in a particularly problematic environment, where it is not easy to reverse authoritarian attitudes into authoritative behaviours that positively affect the quality of life in and for the community (Francescato, 2018).

The IIE is composed by:

- a list of information about school's data collection: this list must be updated every year;
- information about organization of didactical and educational activities in the school: it should express the way a school functions, according to the specific local needs, resources and situations;
- information about school's space arrangement and use;
- the Index of inclusion and empowerment with a list of macro areas and their specific indicators.

These macro-areas are:

a) Guaranteeing personal and group empowerment
   - Supporting student's personal empowerment
   - Supporting social empowerment

b) Creating inclusive cultures
   - Building community
   - Enhancing inclusive values

c) Producing empowerment and inclusive policies
   - Developing the school for all and each
   - Organizing support for diversity

d) Evolving empowerment and inclusive practices
   - Orchestrating learning
   - Mobilising resources (Pacetti, Castellani, Soriani, 2020).

Teachers are asked to reflect about each indicator, providing a practical example to understand the reasons of the presence of the indicator, or, if the indicator is not present, explicating what could be the actions that can be practically done to improve that particular situation.

During a fourth project, I CAN -Independence, Capability, Autonomy, Inclusion. Independent Life Centre for Persons with Disabilities in the Gaza Strip (Palestine), it was possible to experiment the whole IIE for a longer

time. The project in fact lasted 4 years from 2018 to 2022, one year more of the original proposal due to Covid pandemic. The project aimed at promoting the full inclusion and empowerment of the people with disabilities, with a particular attention to the women with disabilities.

The specific objective of the project was the creation of a centre for independent life and inclusion of people with disabilities with a holistic psycho-social approach, with interventions to support self-esteem, social and economic empowerment, independence, and training. The centre had the aim to support teachers, educators, youth workers and families in the promotion of initiatives (scholastic and extra-scholastic) aimed to build inclusive communities and inclusive educational contexts. The Department of Education Studies was the scientific coordinator of the training actions - about inclusion and empowerment - targeted to the Centre's staff; and, as consultant in the research and monitoring actions regarding the use of the IIE as a tool to support co-planning of sensitive and contextualized educational actions.

The pandemic situation in Gaza forced to a remote training and to set up simplified objectives, mainly based on creating guidelines for teachers and parents.

Next chapter will analyse data collected during these projects, with the awareness that inclusion and empowerment are open processes that need time to evolve and that innovation in schools is possible when teachers and school leaders are supported by policies that put pupils at the centre of the learning process. Priority is about rights of all: non-discrimination means equal rights, not same treatment or same answer to specific personal and social situations. Because we have to treat in different ways diversities so to guarantee the same rightstrough a plurality of experiences with significant adults, working together, guaranteeing not only a care system but also a plural and rich system of peaceful coexistence.

All these reasons bring us back to that logic "*of boundaries and pathways*" (Canevaro, 2006) that keeps inspiring the participation of the Department of Education Studies "G. M. Bertin" of the Alma Mater Studiorum, University of Bologna in such international activities.

# 3. The research

This chapter's aim is to present the research actions that have been developed.

In the first part of these pages the reader can find a detailed report of the Ready project conducted in West Bank from 2018 till 2020, while in the second part, the focus will be on the outcomes of ICAN project run in Gaza Strip.

## 3.1 Part I: READY project

### *3.1.1 Methodological framework*

The context where the research described in this chapter was conducted, that is East-Jerusalem area in Palestine, is characterized – as seen previously in these pages – with a high level of complexity and specificities. Conducting research into schools belonging to such context is a task undermined by many difficulties: from the impossibility to communicate without a translator, to the obstacles that come from a concrete difference between the Italian and the Palestinian school system.

For these reasons, the research group of the Bologna University's Department of Education Studies decided not to adopt uniquely a quantitative research methodology, but rather, a mixed one. The concept of mixed research method – largely explored by researchers like Johnson (2014), Creswell (2015) or Trinchero and Robasto (2019) – it is used to identify, more specifically, those research methods who balance and take advantage from both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The research here described follows a perspective which Greene (2002) would categorize as "coordinated mixed method": the idea is that quantitative research methods are followed by qualitative ones as a mean of having, first, a general panoramic of the problematic (offered, in this case, by the data collected from the students and the teachers' surveys) and, secondly, a deeper qualitative insight to enrich and better explore the data collected (represented, in this study, by open questions and focus groups with the subjects involved).

### *3.1.2 Objectives and problem definition*

The presence of Israeli army and the consequences of the conflicts of the past decades forced the Palestinian (both in Gaza Strip and in West Bank, particularly in Area C and East Jerusalem) to live into an environment strongly connoted by violence and social inequality causing many problems on a very large scale: raise of vulnerability, forced displacement, lack of essential services and erosion of resilience (OCHA Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2018).

Such degree of violence has effects on every layer of the society and the school system is no exception. Students, teachers, school staff are literally soaked in a kind of culture where strength and violence are the driving values and where the educational practices – made of hierarchical relationships, non-democratic learning processes and non-inclusive environments – reflect the same trends.

The research presented in this chapter has two main objectives:

1. Detect teachers' perceptions of three specific aspects:
    - their school' level of inclusion
    - the use of the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment as a tool for self-evaluation and planning
    - the awareness of the meaning of inclusion and empowerment concepts.
2. Detect students' perception of their classes' level of inclusion.

### *3.1.3 Hypothesis and research questions*

Due to the characteristics of the inquiry, which can be framed in a phenomenological setting, the researchers could not focus on identifying a proper set of hypotheses to prove or disconfirm certainly and clinically.

Hence, they started from a hypothesis to investigate: the teachers' perceptions of schools' and classrooms' level inclusion is different from students' ones.

Due to the research facility, that can be framed in a phenomenological setting, the investigators could not focus on a proper set of hypotheses. They rather started exploring some assumptions such as: the teachers' and students' perceptions of school and classroom levels of inclusion.

To meet the research objectives listed above, it has been decided to focus on the following questions:

- What are the Palestinian teachers' representations of the concepts of inclusion and inclusive education?
- Which are the teachers' and students' perceptions about the level of inclusion in the Palestinian schools located in the area of East Jerusalem?
- Are there any differences between the two targets? Which kind of differences?
- Which are the priorities that teachers and cooperation projects should focus on?
- What impact had the use of the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment on the design praxis of teachers?

### *3.1.4 Phases*

The research was conducted within the framework of a 12 months international cooperation project financed by AICS, the Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development. It started at the end of 2018 and was articulated in the following steps:

- *October – November 2018*: Setting up of the data collection tools;
- *November 2018 – March 2019*: Piloting of the teachers' survey and data collection from teachers;
- *January – April 2019*: Piloting of the students' survey and data collection from the classes;
- *January – February 2019*: conduction of Teachers' interviews;
- *April – June 2019*: realization of Students' focus groups;
- *June – November 19*: Data analysis.

### *3.1.5 Tools*

All the surveys were anonymous and all the sensitive information which may disclose personal identities or places were amended to guarantee the safety and the privacy of teachers and students.

#### Teachers' survey

The teachers' survey was composed by 41 items divided into four main sections:

- the first one, aimed to collect general information about teachers;
- the second one, designed to collect their perceptions about the level of inclusion in their schools;
- the third one, focused on teachers' feedback about the use of the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment;
- the last one, composed only by open questions, with the aim to gather teachers' representations of the main key concepts of inclusion and empowerment.

The first three parts of the survey were composed mainly by closed questions except few semi-opened ones were conceived to get all the possible range of answers from the participants. Surveys were designed to be filled in 40-45 minutes and were distributed on paper to all the teachers of the schools involved.

*Tab. 1 – Group interviews with teachers and school headmasters.*

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Name of the school | | | | | |
| Educational background (please specify the subject) | | | | | |
| Numbers of years of experience | ☐ 1-3 years<br>☐ 4 - 6 years<br>☐ 6 + years | | | | |
| 1. Did you ever receive training in inclusive education? | ☐ Yes<br>☐ No | | | | |
| 2. If yes, by whom? | ☐ International NGO<br>☐ MoEHE<br>☐ University<br>☐ Others _____ | | | | |
| 3. Based on your knowledge and experience, the school where you are working is inclusive? | ☐ Strongly agree<br>☐ Agree<br>☐ Disagree<br>☐ Strongly disagree | | | | |
| 4. Can you specify why? | | | | | |
| *In your school... (0= minimum level, 4= maximum level)* | | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. I am free to implement and modify the curricula according to student's needs | | | | | |
| 6. There is support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilitie | | | | | |
| 7. The classes are accessible | | | | | |
| 8. I have a positive relationship with students. | | | | | |
| 9. I feel respected by my colleagues. | | | | | |
| 10.There is collaboration between teachers. | | | | | |
| 11.I have high expectations for my students. | | | | | |
| 12.The connections with local institutions are good. | | | | | |
| 13.The connections with local community are good. | | | | | |
| 14.The amount of workload for me is... | Too hard | Unbalanced | Honest | Exellent | |
| 15.Do you have regular meetings to discuss challenges and share experiences, with your colleagues? | ☐ Yes | | ☐ No | | |
| 15.1 If yes, which are the topics of discussion? | ☐ School's issues<br>☐ Students' issues<br>☐ Inclusive strategies<br>☐ Curricula<br>☐ Other... | | | | |
| 15.2 If yes, how often do you meet? | ☐ once per week<br>☐ once per month<br>☐ once per semester<br>☐ other ..... | | | | |
| 15.3 What kind of decisions are taken? | ☐ School policies<br>☐ School management<br>☐ Educational issue<br>☐ Specific projectss<br>☐ Disciplianry matters<br>☐ Community actions | | | | |
| 15.4 If yes, how would you define them? | ☐ Formal and compulsory<br>☐ Informal, on a voluntary base | | | | |
| 16.Do you have individual plan for each student? | ☐ Yes | ☐ No | ☐ Some | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 17.If yes, how do you develop it? | ☐ with the principal<br>☐ with relevant colleagues<br>☐ with parents<br>☐ with the councellor<br>☐ by yourself | | |
| 18.Do you have a resource room | ☐ Yes | ☐ No | |
| 19.How many students can fit inside? | ☐ less than 5<br>☐ 6 - 15<br>☐ 16 – 25<br>☐ more than 25 | | |
| 20.Which students use the resource room?<br>(more than one choice) | ☐ Physical impairment (ex visual, hearing, movement)<br>☐ Mental disability (e autism and down syndrome)<br>☐ Dyslexia or speaking impairments<br>☐ Slow learners<br>☐ Hyperactivity<br>☐ Gifted<br>☐ Unspecified learning difficulties<br>☐ All students<br>☐ Local community | | |
| 21.How do you use it?<br>(you can choose more than one answer) | ☐ One child per time with a specific plan<br>☐ A group of children with their individual plan<br>☐ A group of children with similar needs, but different ages<br>☐ A group of children from the same class (or same age) but different needs<br>☐ A group of children from different classes and different needs<br>☐ For extra curricular activities | | |
| 22.When do you use it?<br>(more than one choice) | ☐ school hours only<br>☐ remedial classes in extra school hours<br>☐ extra school hours (afternoon, evenings) | | |
| 23.When you work with difficult children:<br>(you can choose more than one answer) | ☐ you involve their peers<br>☐ you work with them individually<br>☐ you involve parents<br>☐ you involve other teachers or councillors | | |
| 24.Do you use any other facilities available in the local community? | ☐ Yes | ☐ No | ☐ Sometimes |
| 24.1 If yes, can you indicate which? | | | |

Regarding the INDEX foe empowerment and inclusion

| *(0= minimum level, 4= maximum level)* | *0* | *1* | *2* | *3* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 25. I feel confident about using it for identifying my class' needs | | | | |
| 26. I feel confident about using it with my colleagues for identifying my school's needs | | | | |
| 27. use it to plan my activities to meet the needs identified | | | | |
| 28. By using it I noticed that my school is more inclusive | | | | |
| 29. By using it noticed that my class is more inclusive | | | | |

Write what these terms mean to you:

30. Integration
31. Inclusion
32. Empowerment
33. According to your experience, between integration and inclusion, which one is the most important in your school? And why?

Designed to last around 1 hour, the group interviews were composed by semi structured questions and took place during teachers' serving hours with a group of volunteers willing to participate to the research.

The teacher interview's main aim was to dig deeper into their inclusive professional practices already explored by the survey. The questions were assembled with the objective to get more details about the educational practices and the changes that may be brought by the introduction of the Index.

The interview planned for the school head teachers aimed to better understand a series of elements: the improvements of the educational practices, the critical issues still present, the use of the Index for Inclusion and empowerment as a planning tool.

All the interviews were conducted directly by the researchers from the University of Bologna with the help of a local interpreter.

*Tab. 2 – Structure of teachers and head teachers' interviews*

| **Teachers' semi structured interview** | **Head teachers' semi structured interview** |
|---|---|
| - According to the IEE perspective, how do you evaluate your didactic activities?<br>- Did you register any improvement?<br>- Which are the main unsolved problems?<br>- How did it change the relation with your colleagues?<br>- With the students?<br>- With the parents?<br>- Did you notice any changes in the relationship with the context? | - According to an inclusive perspective, which are the most relevant improvements you registered throughout the school year?<br>- Which are the main unsolved problems?<br>- Which are the emerging problems?<br>- Using the Index, did you manage to establish priorities?<br>- Did the use of the Index help you and your staff in the analysis of the school/classroom situations?<br>- Have you noticed an improvement in the intervention capacities? |

## Students' survey

The survey targeted to students counted 73 items divided into six main parts: the first two to collect registry data (age, general information about the students) and setting information (school, classroom). The following four parts were composed by closed and semi-opened questions inspired from the

Index for Inclusion and Empowerment concepts of: Empowerment, Inclusive culture, Inclusive policies, Evolving practices.

The survey, whose compiling time was around 45 minutes, was distributed on paper, by the local NGO staff partner of the research, directly to the students of one selected class per year, starting from the 6th grade. Before the distribution to the students, the survey was piloted in 4 classes (2 from boys' schools and 2 from girls' schools). In the hereafter attached version of the students' survey, it is possible to see that each item is grouped based on IEE's contents. The survey was submitted in Arabic and then translated into English for data analysis.

*Tab. 3 – The students' survey*

School:_____ Class: _____ Age: _____

I have a work outside school: _____ Which one: _____

**Checklist**

1- Normally I arrive at school on time [_] Strongly disagree [_] disagree [_] agree [_] strongly agree

2- Are you part of a students' association? [_] Yes [_] No

3- Do you like being part / participate to extra school's projects? [_] Yes [_] No

4- Name some of your favorite projects: _____

5- I am happy with the position where I am sitting in the class. [_] Strongly disagree [_] disagree [_] agree [_] strongly agree

6- Why ?: _____

I like being in...

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7- Conversation area | | | | |
| 8- Library | | | | |
| 9- Canteen | | | | |
| 10- Gym | | | | |
| 11- School yard | | | | |
| 12- Science lab | | | | |
| 13- ICT lab | | | | |
| 14- Art / Music lab | | | | |
| 15- Multipurpose lab | | | | |
| 16- Medical room | | | | |

17- I have a smartphone [_] Yes [_] No

**Part 1 - Empowerment**

18- (item 1) Teachers encourage you, when you succeed. [_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

19- (item 2) Teachers give you the possibility to express yourself and discuss in class
[_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

20- (item 3) Teachers give you time to finish your activity [_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

21- (item 3) When I don't understand teachers re-explain in an easier way
[_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

22- (item 4) When I do a question, teachers are happy to answer
[_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

23- (item 4) When I do a question, teachers ask the class to discuss about it
[_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

(item 5-6) teachers let us work...

| | [_] Never | [_] Few | [_] Sometimes | [_] Often |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24- Individually | | | | |
| 25- In couples | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26- In small groups | | | | |
| 27- In plenary | | | | |

**Part 2 – Inclusive culture**

(item 7) I feel welcomed by...

| | [_] Strongly disagree | [_] disagree | [_] agree | [_] strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 28- The teachers | | | | |
| 29- The school's staff | | | | |
| 30- My class | | | | |
| 31- Other students in schools | | | | |

(item 8) I feel respected by...

| | [_] Strongly disagree | [_] disagree | [_] agree | [_] strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 32- The teachers | | | | |
| 33- The school's staff | | | | |
| 34- My class | | | | |
| 35- Other students in schools | | | | |

36- (item 10) My parents or relatives attends meeting with teachers.
[_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

37- (item 11) I use the school's spaces for other things (music or dance courses, sports activities...) rather than the school's activities
[_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

38- (item 12) I help other students [_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

39- (item 12) I receive help from other students [_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

40- (item 13) I feel engaged by my teachers [_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

(item 14)
41- All of the students in our class are considered equal [_] Strongly disagree [_] disagree [_] agree [_] strongly agree

42- The classroom climate is good [_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

43- The school climate is good [_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

44- It's easy to solve an in-class conflict [_] Strongly disagree [_] disagree [_] agree [_] strongly agree

45- We solve in-class conflicts by talking [_] Strongly disagree [_] disagree [_] agree [_] strongly agree

**Part 3 – inclusive policies**

46- (item 15) When one of the students is absent the teachers are concerned and try to encourage him/her to come back. [_] Yes [_] No

47- (item 16) We are involved in actions to make the school more comfortable. [_] Yes [_] No

48- provide some examples: _____

49- (item 17) have you ever heard the word inclusion? [_] Yes [_] No

50- (item 19) new students are welcomed properly [_] Strongly disagree [_] disagree [_] agree [_] strongly agree

(item 20)

51- I can stay in school after the lesson [_] Yes [_] No

52- I would stay in school after the lessons if there would be some interesting activities
[_] Strongly disagree [_] disagree [_] agree [_] strongly agree

53- provide some examples: _____

54- (item 22) I succeed in homework and in the school's tasks [_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

(item 29) I have witnessed:

| | [_] Strongly disagree | [_] disagree | [_] agree | [_] strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 55- arguments in class | | | | |
| 56- fights in class | | | | |
| 57- fights in the courtyard | | | | |
| 58- bullying | | | | |

**Part 4 – evolving**

(item 31)

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 59- We can decide the topic of the lessons | | | | |
| 60- We are encouraged by teachers to propose initiatives during lessons | | | | |
| 61- We are encouraged by teachers to propose initiatives outside lessons | | | | |
| 62- We are involved in the decision of the class rules | | | | |
| 63- We are involved in the decision of the school's rules | | | | |

64- (item 34) During classes, our teachers ask us to evaluate other classmates' work or homework
[_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

65- (item 35) we have occasions to do field trips [_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

66- (item 35) we have occasions to make activities outside the school [_] Never [_] Few [_] Sometimes [_] Often

(item 36)

67- I feel that my passions and things I know from outside are valorized and listened by teachers
[_] Strongly disagree [_] disagree [_] agree [_] strongly agree

68- After the school's years, I see myself: [_] working [_] continue studying (university…) [_] Moving abroad

## Students' focus group

The students' focus group construction is a composition of semi structured questions and it employs the same structure of the survey: a first introduction to gather the students' extra-scholastic practices, and four parts based on the Index.

The groups were composed by a range between 6 up to 10 volunteer students, who got the teacher's permission to get out of class and into another room with the interviewers during the normal school time. Each focus groups lasted around one hour.

In the following table it is possible to see the lineup followed during the conversation with the students.

*Tab. 4 – Structure of students' focus group*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Introduction part** | What do you do in the afternoons? |
| | Do you have work outside school? |
| **Part 1 – Empowerment** | Are there more teachers that you like or that you don't like?<br>Those you like, why do you like them? Those you don't like, why do you not like them? |
| | Do you prefer to work individually or in couples or in small groups or in plenary? Why? |
| **Part 2 – Inclusive culture** | Do you like your class? Do you think that there may be some students who don't like it? Why? |
| | Are you welcomed by school's staff? Who? Why? |
| **Part 3 – inclusive policies** | Do you often witness fights or bullying? Can you describe to us the last big conflict inside your class? |
| | Can you use your school in the afternoon do to things? Would you? |
| **Part 4 – evolving practices** | Do you feel listened by your teachers regarding decisions taken in class? |
| | After the school's years, how do you see yourselves? |

## Data analysis note

All the surveys' data were processed with SPSS and then exported into a spreadsheet to create all the graphs. Since the teachers' interviews saw the

presence of a translator from Arabic to English, they were recorded and transcribed only in their English parts, while the students' focus groups were audio recorded in Arabic, and then transcribed in English by the local NGO staff. All the audio recordings have been processed and coded with ATLAS.Ti by using an inductive approach (Christians & Carey, 1989).

In the following pages, many data from surveys and from interviews will be reported and discussed. To help the reader understand what kind of data the subject of the debate is, the authors chose to use the following nomenclature:

- "*Ts*" – number of teachers that provided a specific answer in the surveys;
- "*Ss*" – number of students that provided a specific answer in the surveys;
- "*Is*" – number of students that provided a specific answer in the interviews;
- "*Tm[bs-p]*" – quotation from the interviews of a male teacher belonging to the primary boy's school. The "*T*" stands for teachers, "*m*" stands for male. In the brackets, "bs" stands for boys' school and "p" stands for primary. Similarly, the notation "Tf[gs-s]" must be interpreted as: female teacher belonging to secondary girls' school;
- "*Sm[8]*" – quotation from the interviews. A student male from the eighth grade; similarly "*Sf[3]*" will represent a female students from the third grade;
- "*Int*" – stands for interviewer.

### Privacy disclaimer

Since the research involved minors living in a very delicate context, and since from the data collected emerge some very sensitive and specific details, the researchers chose not to mention anything that could possibly make recognizable neither the areas of the schools involved, nor the names of the schools and the names or surnames of the subjects involved in the research.

## *3.1.6 Research population*

The population of the research is composed by teachers and students coming from three schools in the area of East Jerusalem: one primary and one secondary girls' school, and one secondary boys' school.

Regarding the teachers, in tab. 5 are listed all the numbers of the surveys and of the focus groups involving them.

*Tab. 5 – Teachers population involved in the research*

| **SURVEYS** | **Boys' schools** | **Girls' schools** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 to 3 years of experience | 3 | 2 | |
| 4 to 6 years of experience | 0 | 2 | |
| More than 6 years of experience | 11 | 16 | **Total : 34** |
| **Total** | 14 | 20 | |
| **FOCUS GROUPS** | **Boys' schools** | **Girls' schools** | |
| Focus with head teachers | 1 | 2 | |
| First focus with teachers | 2 | 7 | |
| Second focus with teachers | 3 | 4 | **Total : 19** |
| **Total** | 6 | 13 | |

In tab. 6 are listed all the numbers of the surveys and of the focus groups involving the students. 16 focus groups were conducted gathering 109 students from 16 different classes, and 225 surveys were collected from students belonging to 9 different classes.

*Tab. 6 – Students population involved in the research*

| | | **Boys' schools** | | **Girls' schools** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Focus groups** | **Surveys** | **Focus groups** | **Surveys** |
| **Primary school** | 1st | Piloting | Piloting | 6 students | Piloting |
| | 2nd | / | Piloting | 7 students | Piloting |
| | 3rd | / | / | 6 students | / |
| | 4th | / | / | 6 students | / |
| **Middle school** | 5th | 12 students | / | 5 students | / |
| | 6th | 5 students | 9 | 6 students | 28 |
| | 7th | 11 students | 23 | 6 students | 31 |
| | 8th | 7 students | 28 | 6 students | 28 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 9th | 5 students | 21 | 6 students | 29 |
| | 10th | 8 students | / | 6 students | 28 |
| **Total** | | 49 | 81 | 60 | 144 |

With the purpose to have a better picture of the students involved in the research, hereby we present more information about their age and social conditions.

*Tab. 7 – Students' ages*

| **Age** | **11** | **12** | **13** | **14** | **15** | **16** | **17** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Girls' schools** | 9 | 31 | 32 | 26 | 24 | 17 | 1 |
| **Boys' schools** | 1 | 12 | 17 | 29 | 12 | 1 | 0 |
| **Total students** | 10 | 43 | 49 | 55 | 36 | 18 | 1 |

The majority of the students (89,3%) declared not to have any afternoon jobs, except the 22% of male students which stated to have an afternoon work occupation, although no one among them specified the kind of occupation.

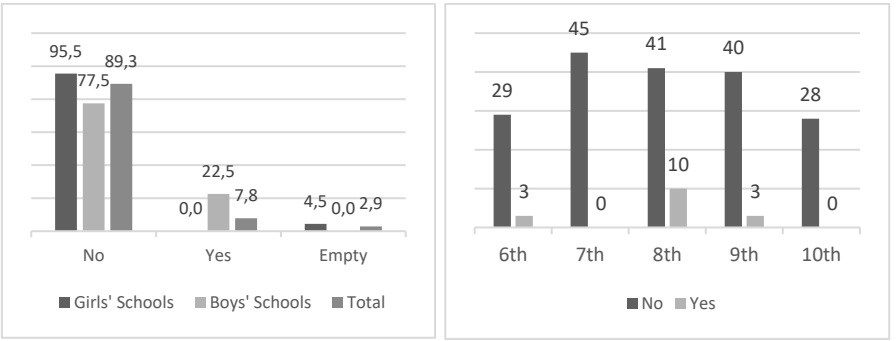



*Fig. 14 – Students' answers: "I have a work outside school" (%) / I have a work outside school (Ss per grade)*

A percentage of 67,6% of students declared to arrive at school on time with no significant differences between the answers of male and female students. The reason can be identified in the fact that most of the students live in the same neighbourhood of the school and they do not need to cross any checkpoint to reach it. This condition is quite relevant as in other parts of Palestine, closer to Area C borders, the problem is more visible: the

closing of a checkpoint can easily result in students being late or unable to enter the classroom because teachers are late.

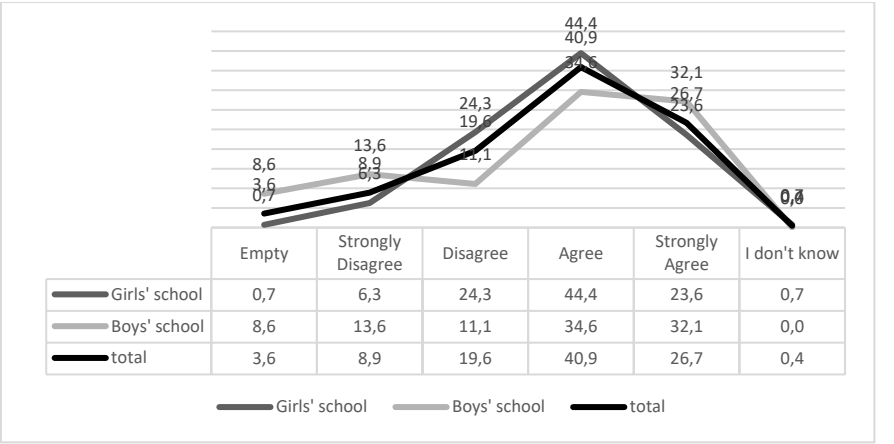



*Fig. 15 – Students' answers: "Normally I arrive at school on time" (%)*

Another useful information to better understand the status of the Palestinian students is their possession of a smartphone. Observing the graphs contained in Fig. 16 it is possible to see that most of the students own a device (66,5%) and the percentage of students owning a smartphone increases according with the age. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2023), in 2022 in West Bank 54% of children aged 10-17 years own a mobile phone. The trend is very much aligned with other national studies like the OFCOM report *Children and parents: Media use and attitudes report* (2019), Kimball & Cohen (2019) or Manca (2016). The difference is in term of 3G connection: the possibility to connect to the World Wide Web through mobile devices is a new phenomenon in Palestine (Israel unlocked it only in 2018[1]) and, especially in poor neighbourhoods, the number of families who can afford it is low.

[1] https://www.reuters.com/article/israel-palestinians-telecom/palestinians-get-3g-mobile-services-in-west-bank-idUSL8N1PJ3FW.

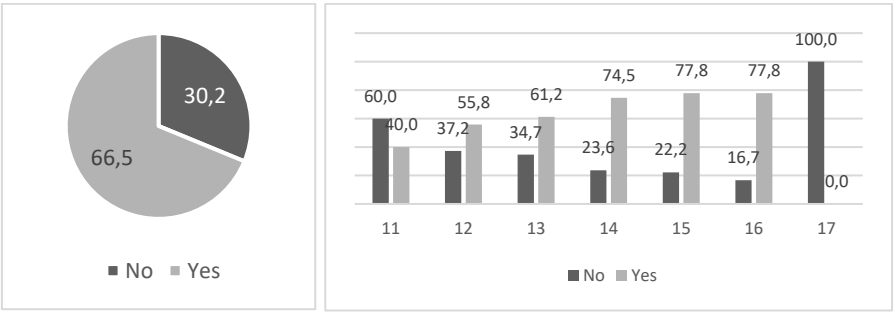



*Fig. 16 – Students' answers: "I have a smartphone" (%) / Students who own a smartphone per age (%)*

### *3.1.7 School setting and general information about the scholastic context*

This paragraph contains the answers of teachers and students to survey's questions specifically designed to get information about schools' settings and general level of inclusion in the classes.

The schools are experimenting the use of specifically designed classroom called "resource room" (RR): regular classrooms refurbished and equipped with one interactive blackboard connected to a laptop, cabled internet connection, movable desks and other useful furniture and stationary materials.

Every school has one RR that must be shared between all the teachers and classes. The 88% of teachers are aware of the existence of these RRs (Ts=30).

These rooms are spaces conceived to foster active learning methods, support inclusive education practical activities and, therefore, to be used by all the students indiscriminately. A good majority (82,4%) of the surveyed teachers stated to use these rooms with all the students of their classes but, especially among the boys' school teachers, the number of teachers who declared to use the RR specifically with students with disabilities or learning difficulties is much higher (see Fig. 17).

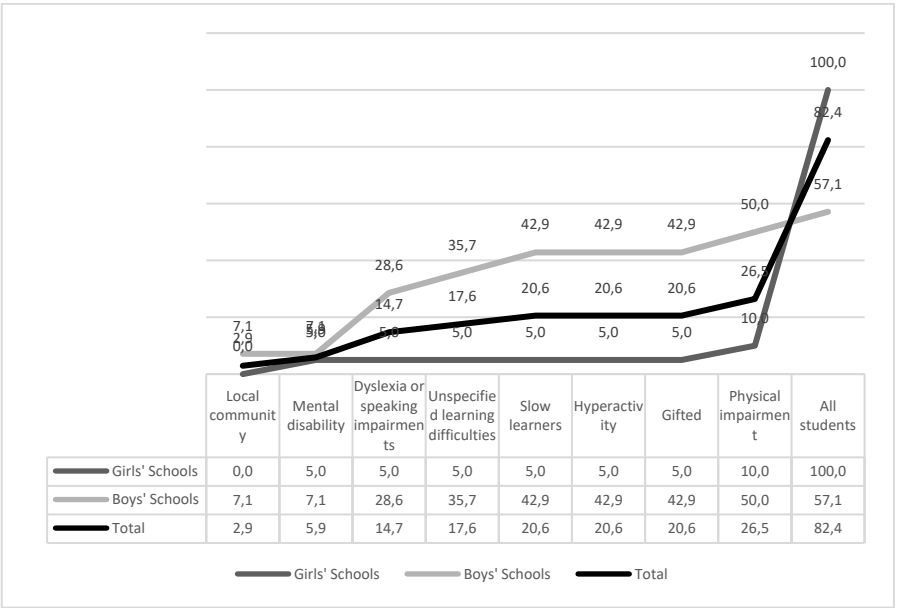



*Fig. 17 – Teachers' answers "Which students use the resource room?" (%)*

From the data, it is also observable a trend that shows the teachers considering the use of RRs preferably with students with physical disabilities (particularly in the boys' school where the percentage of answer is 50%) or with students with special needs (Fig. 18).

While 100% of girls' school's teachers reported to use the RRs only during morning's school time hours, 21% of boys' school's teachers claimed to use these spaces also in afternoon extra-school hours.

Another interesting use of these RRs, declared by 58,8% of teachers, is for extracurricular activities.

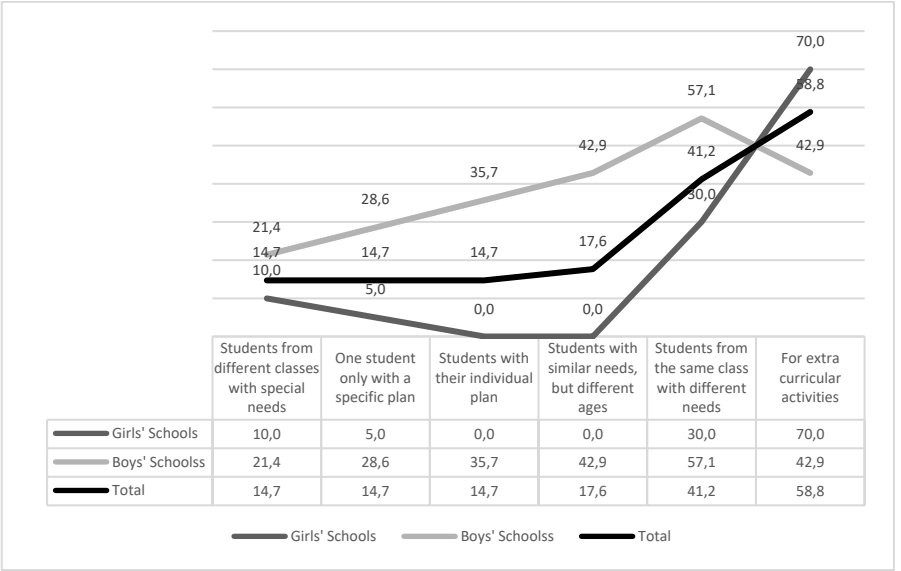



*Fig. 18 - Teachers' answers "How do you use the resource room?" (%)*

Thanks to the group interviews, researchers could get example of these extracurricular activities: remedial classes, teacher training initiatives or workshops organized by international NGOs. This alternative use of RR is more diffused in the boys' school rather than the girls' ones.

In particular, among the boys' school teachers is spread a use of the RR as a special class to send students with behavioral problems or to deal with problems like abscences:

> Tm[bs-s]: «yes. When a student acts bad and keep disturbing the class it's impossible to work. So we send him to the dean and if it doesn't work we ask the janitor to open the RR and keep him in it».

> Tf[bs-p]1: «sometimes we use the room for remedial classes. But it's rare. Only when many students are missing, maybe because there is a problem at the checkpoint, we go there and use it».

> Tf[bs-p]2: «yes, or even when one of us is late, we ask to open the room so the students can go there rather than play in the yard».

Another interesting element to explore is the degree of interchange between the school and the local community. While from the previous graphs and from the interview it is clear that the RRs are not put at the disposal to the rest of the community, in the surveys, only 20,6% of teachers stated to use regularly with their students the spaces and the services of the local community, and 55,9% sometimes only.

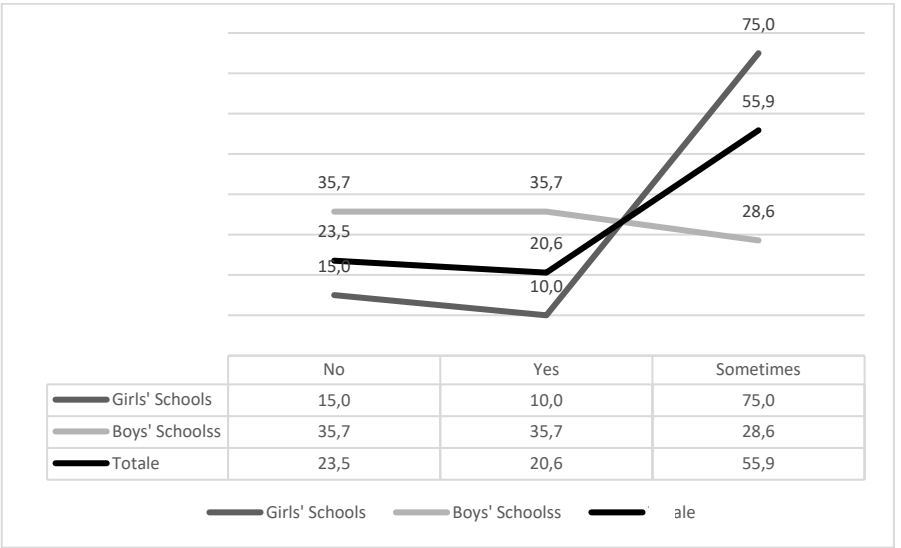



*Fig. 19 - Teachers' answers "Do you use any other facilities available in the local community?" (%)*

The kind of services/facilities declared to be used are the local child centre (Ts=13), the women centre (Ts=12) and the rehabilitation centre (Ts=7).

It may now be useful to consider some of the results collected from the students' surveys and group interviews that can contribute to shed light on the schools' context from the students' perspective.

First of all, at the question "Do you like taking part to extra school's projects or initiatives?" a wide majority of students expressed their appreciation to participate in afternoon activities.

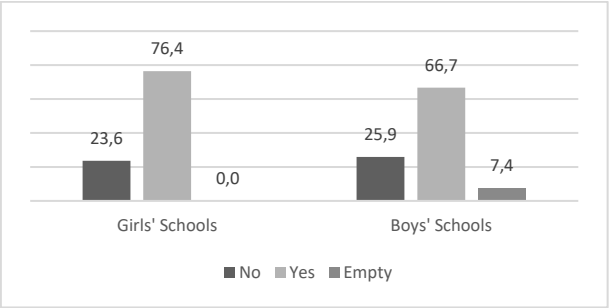



*Fig. 20 - Students' answers - Do you like being part / participate to extra school's projects? (%)*

Questioned about what kind of extra scholastic activity they like the most it emerged that the most popular activities are:

- Sports (mostly football, swimming and basketball) (Ss=142);
- Arts (painting and craftworks) (Ss=72);
- Dancing (traditional dance and modern hip-hop dance) (Ss=27);
- Playing music and drama (Ss=22).

The majority of students (62,6%) show different levels of agreement to the idea that they would stay at school after classes if there would be other kinds of interesting activities.

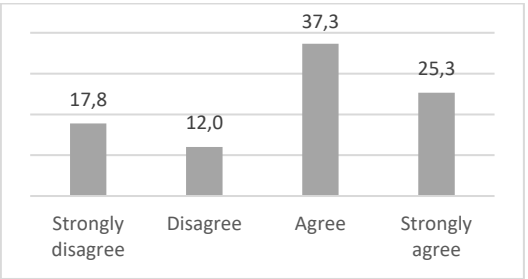



*Fig. 21 - Students' answers: "I would stay in school after the lessons if there would be some interesting activities" (%)*

Now, if compared to the answers provided by the students during the interviews, these data do not seem to match completely.

According to the interviews, it appears that students' main afternoon activities are: go outside and playing in the neighbourhood (Is=42); stay home and study (Is=35); help parents and family at home (Is=24); playing videogames or watch tv (Is=16); do activities at the child centre (Is=6).

Among the six students that reported to use the child centre, all of them came from girls' schools and the main activities described was playing music and attend dance lessons.

The survey contained an item to get the perceived level of interactions that the students' parents have with the school. More specifically the statement to whom the students had to answer was "My parents or relatives attend meetings with teachers".

Considering them together, males and females' answers are generally positive (35,1% "sometimes" and 21,3% "often") but the differences between the two categories are sensible. A neat majority (68,7%) of girls' schools' students answered "sometimes" (45,1%) and "often" (23,6%).

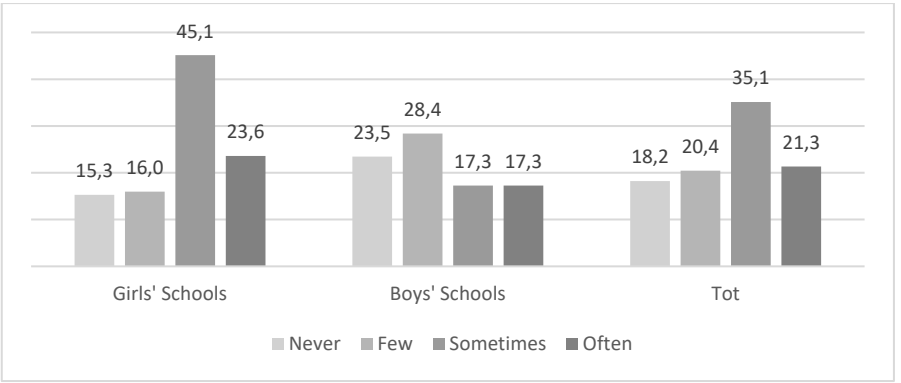



*Fig. 22 – Students' answers: "My parents or relatives attends meeting with teachers" (%)*

One possible reason of this divergence can be identified in the big social difference between women and men in the Palestinian society. The fracture is quite evident also if one considers the simple division of the social spaces which are marked and distinct (clothing stores, coffee shops, etc.…) (Bargawi et al., 2022; Cavazzoni et al., 2021).

The schools are no exception and the division between males and females' classrooms or institutes shows that (Bargawi et al., 2022; Sabbah-Karkabi, 2021). In the interviews with teachers emerged that the mothers are more often the ones responsible of the contacts with the school while the fathers are working or are elsewhere and that there is the strong idea that men are more independent than women. This may be the cause of the more attention that parents have on girls' education, but it is definitely an aspect

of the research that could have been explored better and could possibly open new research.

In conclusion, the school, as an institution, appears quite isolated from the rest of the community. The fact it remains open only in the morning, combined with the circumstance of not offering space and hospitality to the children and the students, remarks the distance between the school and its social context. As the reader will be able to understand, when the students' points of view will be presented, keeping the school's facilities open in the afternoon would represent a great opportunity to get together and play in a safe environment (and possibly supervised by adults).

Spaces like the child centre or the women centre offer a great virtuous example of caring about the children and the mothers in difficulty, but it targets only very young ages: students from the secondary schools remain an uncovered target.

### *3.1.8 From the teacher's point of view*

#### Educational and instructional design practices

This paragraph has the purpose to present Palestinian teachers' practices in terms of educational strategies and instructional design habits.

More than 79% of the total number of teachers stated, without major differences between girls' and boys' schools' teachers, that they have regular meetings with colleagues dedicated to discuss schools' challenges and to share experiences. The frequency of these meetings is generally on a weekly basis (47,1%) or monthly (23,5%). Anyway, there is a clear difference between girls' schools, where meetings are usually held weekly, and boys' schools, where they are carried out on a monthly basis.

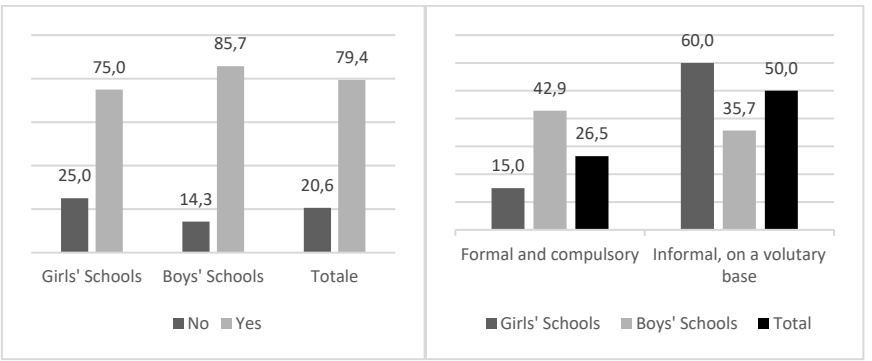



*Fig. 23 - Teachers' answers "Do you have regular meetings to discuss challenges and share experiences, with your colleagues?" (%) / "How these meetings are structured?"(%)*

Although the trend, as can be seen in Fig. 23, is reversed in girls' schools, such meetings are generally informal and do not require compulsory attendance (50%), rather than being formal and mandatory (26,5%).

The most discussed topics are school-related issues (70,6%) and student issues (61,8%), followed by school curricula (47,1%) and inclusive strategies (41,2%). From the data it emerges a clear difference in the discussion topics declared between boys' school teachers and girls' ones. If in the second group of teachers, the topics debated are rather balanced and the 70% declare to discuss inclusive strategies, in the first ones school-related issues are predominant (78,6%) while the analysis of the inclusive strategies topic is completely absent (0%).

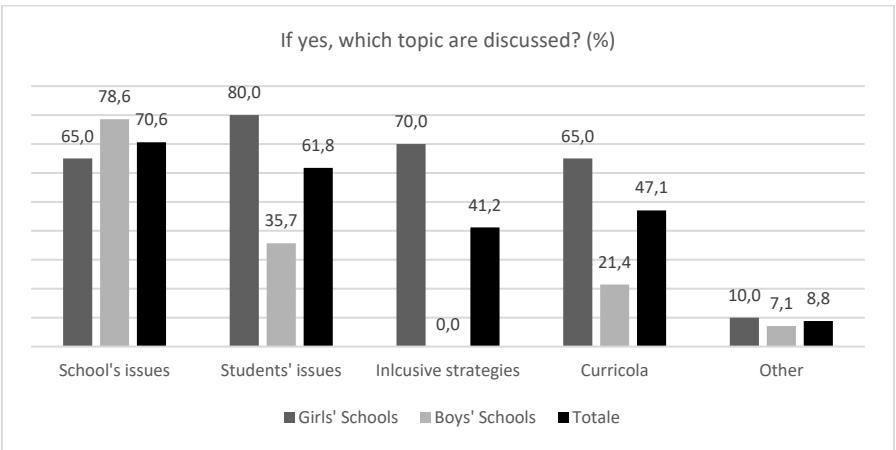
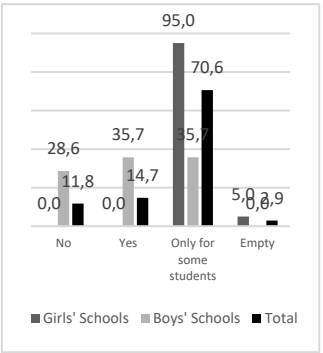



*Fig. 24 – Teachers' answers about the topic discussed during the meetings*

Going more into detail about inclusive strategies, the majority of teachers claim to reason in terms of individualized projects addressed only to some students (70,6%), the ones considered in greater difficulty. They declare to do it in concert with their school head teachers and other colleagues. In particular, it emerges a significant difference in the responses given by boys' schools and girls' schools teachers: while in male schools, this process seems to be shared mainly with the principal only (50%) and less with families (28,6%) or other teachers (21,4%) – denouncing a more pyramidal structure in the decision-making processes – in girls' schools the process seems widely shared among the stakeholders present – principal (80%), other teachers (75%), parents (75%), school counsellor (75%) – showing in a more participatory logic / approach.



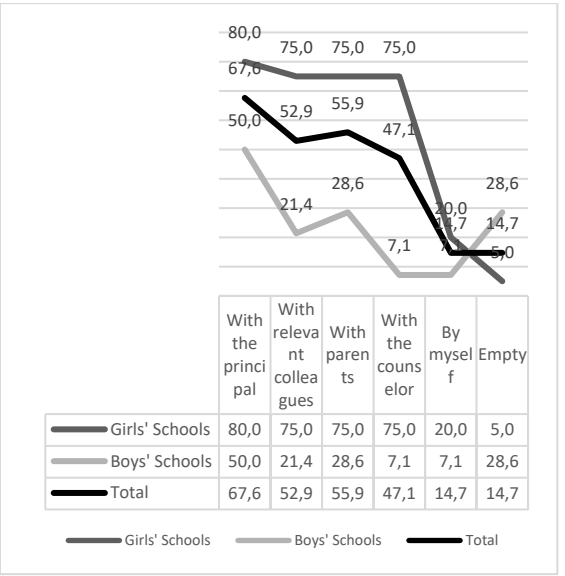




*Fig. 25 – Teachers' answers to "Do you have individual plan for each student?" (%) / "If Yes, how do you develop it?" (%)*

Questioned on the topic about instructional design, the interviewed highlighted some particularly interesting aspects that remark the difficulties present in the context of Palestinian schools not emerging so clearly from the questionnaires. If, in fact, according to the surveys, the scenario seems to be composed by almost daily meetings in terms of frequency for girls' school teachers (70%) and between daily (21.4%) and monthly (50%) meetings for

boys' school teachers, the situation painted by the interviews is quite different.

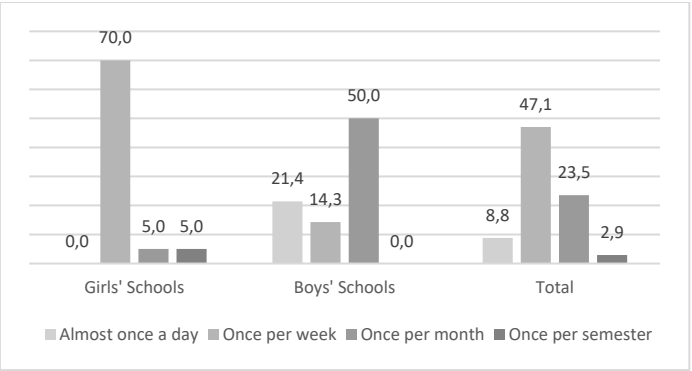



*Fig. 26 – Teachers' answers to "How often do you meet with your colleagues to plan educational strategies?" (%)*

From the group interviews emerged that boys' school staff meetings are normally not held at all or, in rare cases, less than once a month. Moreover, the teachers from girls' schools who, in the surveys, claimed to attend daily meetings, reported only brief informal moments of confrontation between two or three colleagues. The subjects of these confrontations were mainly feedback about the school day or the use of generic cooperative teaching strategies to promote inclusion. It is interesting to underline the example of 4 girls' primary school teachers who, on a weekly basis, meet in the time between the lessons, during breaks or immediately after school hours, to compare and bring themselves up to date on the situation of some students in difficulty and on ideas for inclusive teaching activities.

Tf[gs-p]: «[...] we started discussing during the break and other two colleagues got interested and we involved them.»

Other difficulties become apparent through the interviews are:

- the lack of knowledge in terms of how to conduct and facilitate inclusive activities in such overnumbered classes and general difficult conditions declared by many teachers:

Tf[gs-p]1: «What's hard for me is the managing the class. There are too many students to work properly. We are not trained.»
[...]

Tf[gs-p]2: «Yes. If we could have another person in our class to support us it would be much easier.»

Tf[bs-p]: «my problem is that I find hard to deal with the class while I let them work in group. A mess!»

- the tendency, on one hand, to blame the students for of all the difficulties and, on the other hand, to ease any sense of professional responsibility:
-

Tf[bs-s]1: «[...] our students are not enough motivate.»
[...]
Tm[bs-s]2: «It's true. We have very difficult cases. They just don't want to collaborate.»

Summing up, our focus groups, teachers admit that they spend very little time designing inclusive interventions due to a number of difficulties that can be grouped into four macro-areas:

- *Unrecognized and unpaid time for planning*: teachers are paid only for the actual teaching hours and there are no extra hours for the design or for the meeting with families. For this reason coordination meetings between teachers must be held during class hours, thus leaving the classes vacant;
- *Afternoon schools' closure*: school facilities are open only during antemeridian hours for the actual teaching hours and close in the afternoon. So, teachers have no place to use for meetings and planning activities;
- *Overnumbered classes*: respondents reported to teach groups from 35 up to 40 students per class. This causes, according to the teachers, an innumerable series of difficulties in class management;
- *Lack of knowledge of alternative teaching strategies*: the last element reported is the declared and conscious lack of knowledge related to the carrying out of cooperative learning activities or forms of teaching alternative to the traditional frontal lesson.

The reason for such evident discrepancy between questionnaires and interviews can be found in the mistrust that the interviewees have towards written questionnaires that are perceived as a tool to evaluate the quality of their teaching and school: an assessment that often determines the amount of funding or material and economic aid provided by international cooperation agencies.

## Use of the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment

As mentioned in before in this chapter, one of the aim of Project READY was to implement the use of the IIE with the involvement of UNRWA schools within the East Jerusalem area. In this line, one of the research's purpose was to explore the perceptions of the teachers regarding the use of the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment.

One premise must be made explicit: regarding the use of the IIE as a tool to improve inclusive education, the answers of the teachers do not really differ in terms of schools' provenance. This is why in the following graphs, the distinction between boys' schools and girls' schools is absent.

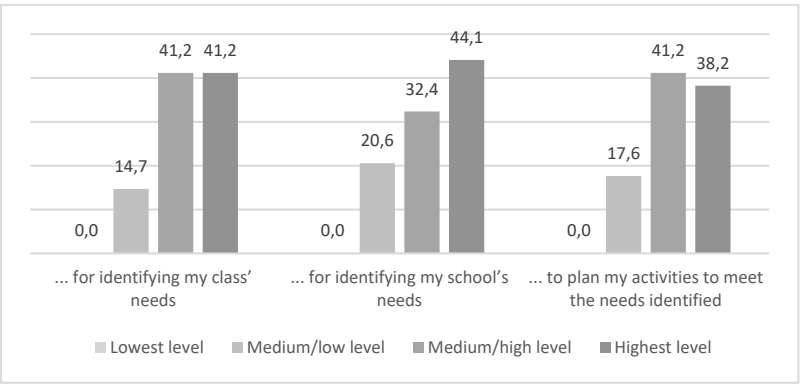



*Fig. 27 – Teachers' perceptions about the usefulness of the IIE: "I think the IIE is useful… (%)*

In general, as it is possible to observe from the graph at Fig. 27, the IIE is seen as a quite a useful tool for identifying one's own class' – and school's – needs in order to make plans meet and fulfil them.

This vision emerged also by the group interviews: the IIE is indeed perceived as a useful tool for better reading the classroom's and the school's context. The act of taking moments of reflection and common confrontation about students' needs is recognized by all the teachers: the only problem reported is the amount of time spent in these kind of group meetings. Time that is not included in the working timetable, hence is not covered by the salary.

The experimentation ensured teachers the use of the IIE in order to identify the students' main educational needs.

This allowed them to actually spend some time in planning and implementing teaching activities based on inclusive education.

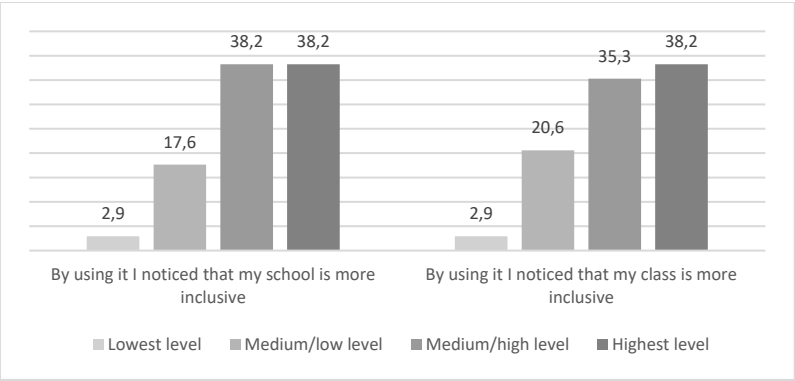



*Fig. 28 – Teachers' perceptions about the use of the IIE*

From the graph above it is observable that the result of this process is quite positive and encouraging: by combining the two positive categories (medium/high level and highest) a rate of 76,4% it has been reached. The majority of teachers have noticed that, after the experience of using the IIE, their school was more inclusive. The percentage drops a little when we consider the same question but focused on the class: 73,5% of teachers noticed that their classes were more inclusive. The difference in these answers, even if marginal, can be motivated by the fact that a group of teachers from boys' school decided to focus on a project which involved the whole school (painting the common spaces all together) and the teachers from girls' schools decided to plan and implement more class activities focused on inclusive education.

Going more into detail, the group interviews offer, in this sense, an aid to the interpretation of these data. The IIE tends to be perceived as a very useful tool both to identify the needs of the class and the school and to plan activities that can offer a response to them.

The critics regarding the use of the tool are mainly polarized into two categories: the first one concerns a certain generality of indicators that translates, for some teachers (especially those belonging to boys' schools), into a disorientation about the use of the IIE in a specific class context (made of different needs, contingent problems and not negligible contextual difficulties); the second category concerns the already mentioned difficulty to find time and space for a comparison between teachers and to plan together

activities with students or other educational initiatives due to the lack of remuneration for such hours (which also affects training hours in general).

## Teachers' representation of key concepts

In the surveys, teachers were asked to give definitions of the key concepts of "integration", "inclusion" and "empowerment".

The intention of this action was to get more details about two particularly significant aspects. *In primis*, the level of awareness of the terms' meanings reached after a training course that took place in the months prior to the distribution of the questionnaires and, secondly, what was, according to the research's participants, the most relevant concept for their way of understanding the school.

Before proceeding, it should be pointed out that during the above-mentioned training course, held by the researchers of the University of Bologna in presence with the teaching staff of the schools, there was a strong confusion about the terms "integration" and "inclusion" mainly due to a difficulty in translating these constructs into Arabic. However, we would like to mention that these terms are defined in detail – and fully aligned with the global scientific community's thinking – in the official inclusive policies' document by MoEHE (2015) made available to all Palestinian schools in both English and Arabic. In that document, the terms integration and inclusion are defined with two different and separated words. Integration is defined as the process of bringing excluded students (due to physical disabilities for example) into the regular education system without, however, making significant changes in the way education is taught or understood. In this case it is the student who has to adapt to the system.

The term inclusion is instead defined as an opposite paradigm to the one just presented: if a student cannot access or participate in an educational proposal, then the problem is within the system. A system that will have to adapt and change profoundly in order to guarantee to all students a fair and equal access both in terms of infrastructure and organization, and in terms of didactic and educational design.

In the following tables it is possible to observe a categorization of the definitions of the terms: integration (Tab. 8), inclusion (Tab. 9) and empowerment (Tab. 10) offered by teachers in the open questions from questionnaire.

*Tab. 8 – Categorization of the definitions of the term Integration (29 total answers)*

| **Integration** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Putting together students with different abilities/capacities. | 16 | 55,2% |
| Educational strategy which helps teachers dealing with students with special needs, and make them perform as normal students. | 7 | 24,1% |
| Put students with disabilities or with special needs in normal schools, together with normal students. | 4 | 13,8% |
| Approach who allows anyone to participate equally | 3 | 10,3% |

*Tab. 9 – Categorization of the definitions of the term Inclusion (30 total answers)*

| **Inclusion** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Adaptation of the school's physical environment to match the needs of the students with special needs or with disabilities | 12 | 40% |
| Co-presence of students with disabilities or with special needs in "normal" classes | 11 | 36,7% |
| Concept that connects all the students, indiscriminately. | 4 | 13,3% |
| Isolate the students with difficulties to better help them. | 3 | 10% |

*Tab. 10 – Categorization of the definitions of the term Empowerment (30 total answers)*

| **Empowerment** | | |
|---|---|---|
| Using the Index's indicators to identify the students' needs. | 13 | 43,3% |
| Tool to help students with special needs to develop their capacity | 9 | 30% |
| Way of helping people reaching their objectives and improve their quality life | 5 | 16,7% |
| Helping students to study independently | 4 | 13,3% |

By analysing the answers contained in the first two tables it can be observed that most teachers have a vision of the concepts "integration" and "inclusion" as strongly anchored to the theme of disability. It appears quite clearly (Tab. 9) that a significant number of teachers (Ts=11) maintain an idea of "normality" (the non-disabled student) as opposed to "non normality" (the student with disabilities or special needs). This dualism normal/not normal unveils, *per se*, a great misconception of the very meaning of inclusion. In addition to this, a small part of teachers (Ts=3) seems to completely misinterpret the terms by considering as "inclusive" an approach aimed at isolating students with difficulties in order to help them better.

In an attempt to give an answer to the research question about the representations of Palestinian teachers regarding the concept of inclusion, it can be concluded that a large part of the research sample tends to consider the terms “integration” and “inclusion” as synonyms or, in other words, as overlapping concepts.

Moreover, a certain degree of confusion is noticeable if one considers teachers’ answers regarding the concept of “empowerment”. Answers that seem to divide the participants’ representations: 60% of them (Ts=18) give a definition in line with a correct and conscious vision of the term, while the rest seems to confuse the concept of empowerment with the action of using the Index, when they do not consider it only as a tool.

This misunderstanding in the terms is particularly surprising since more than 85% of the teachers who answered the survey stated that they had previously received training on the topic of inclusive education, mainly carried out by international NGOs (Ts=15; 44%) and other local organizations (Ts=9; 26,5%).

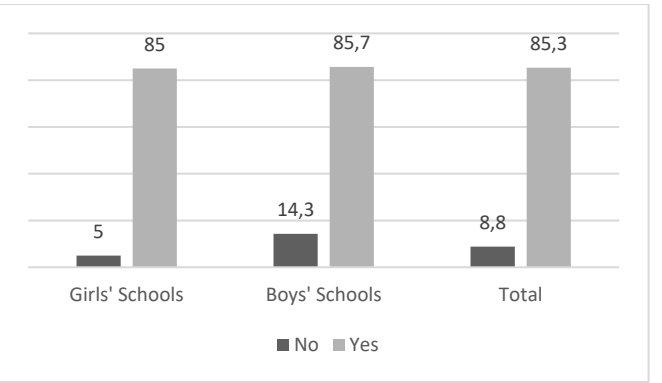



*Fig. 29 – Teachers’ answers: “Did you ever receive training about inclusive education?” (%)*

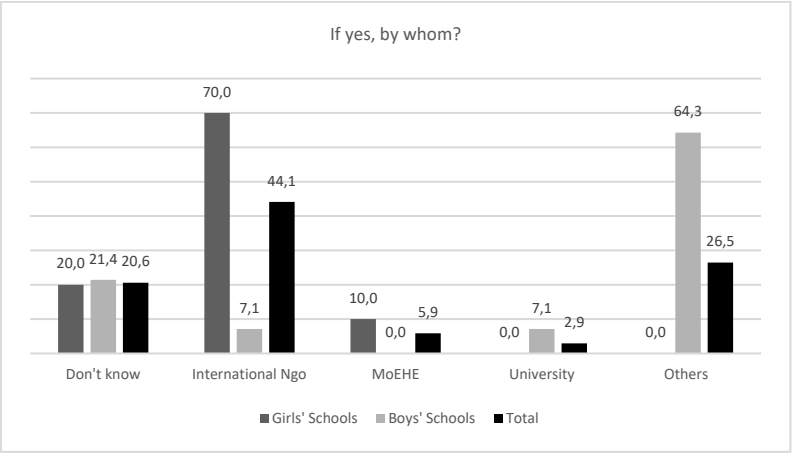



*Fig. 30 – Teachers' answers: "If yes, by whom?"*

### *3.1.9 From the student's point of view*

The survey was structured in accordance with the four areas of the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment: 1) empowerment; 2) inclusive culture; 3) inclusive policies; 4) evolving practices.

The rationale of such structure was to understand how students perceived their schools' level of inclusion.

Students' perspective is key to get a more complete picture of the schools' situations and, as it is possible to see, some very interesting data emerged.

#### Empowerment

The first section of the survey was intended to get students' perceptions about how their teachers work every day to empower them.

Something notable is immediately observable in the firsts two questions: "Teachers encourage you, when you succeed" and "Teachers give you the possibility to express yourself and discuss in class". What is interesting to observe is the neat difference between girls' and boys' answers.

While in the first question a good majority of female students answered "sometimes" (30,6%) and "often" (45,8), among the male students the positive trend is not so evident as the 44,5% of them answered "never" and "few" and only the 45,7% answered "sometimes" and "often".

In the second question, the divergency is even wider: the majority of girls answered positively (32,6% "sometimes", 30,6% "often"), while the

majority of male students answered negatively (33,3% "never", 23,5% "few").

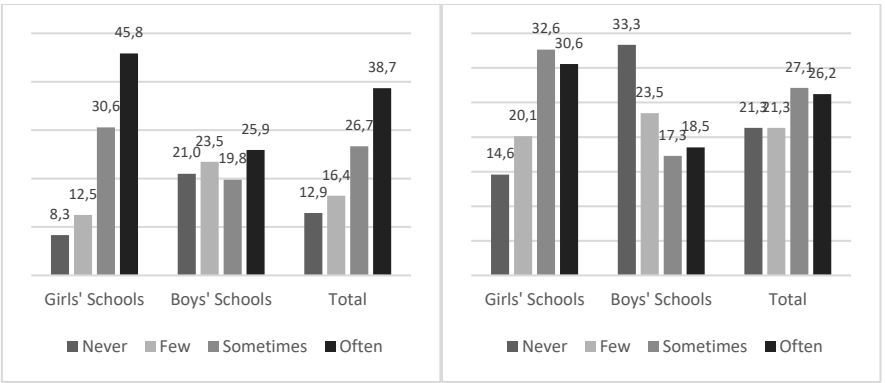



*Fig. 31 – Students' answers: "Teachers encourage you, when you succeed (%)" / "Teachers give you the possibility to express yourself and discuss in class (%)"*

By observing the following four graphs representing the students' answers to the questions "Teachers give you time to finish your activity", "When I don't understand, teachers re-explain in an easier way" (Fig. 32) and "When I ask a question, teachers are happy to answer", "When I ask a question, teachers ask the class to discuss about it" (Fig. 33) the same trend is present and reveals a worst perception, among male students, of the support that they can receive in terms of empowerment by teachers.

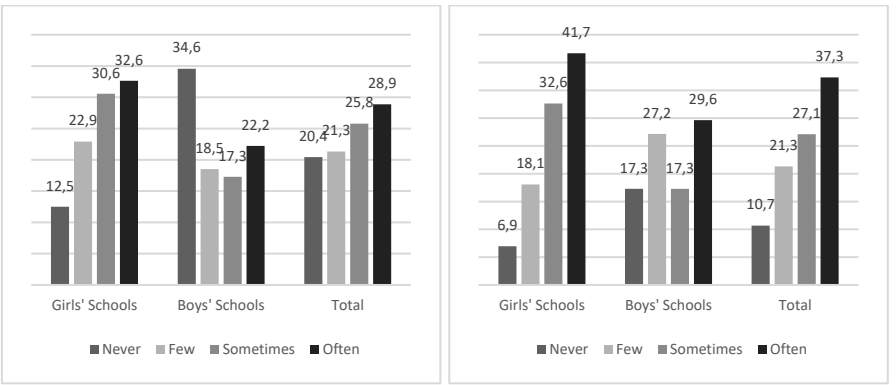



*Fig. 32 – Students' answers: "Teachers give you time to finish your activity" (%) / "When I don't understand teachers re-explain in an easier way" (%)*

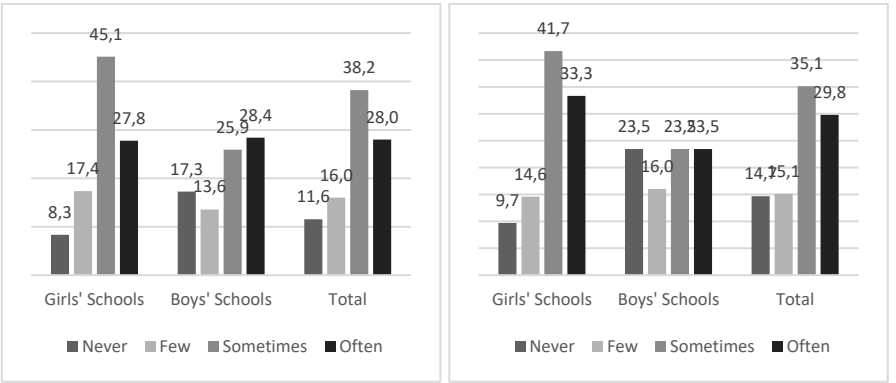



*Fig. 33 – Students' answers: "When I ask a question, teachers are happy to answer" (%) / "When I ask a question, teachers ask the class to discuss about it" (%)*

The researchers investigated better the relationship between the students and their teachers during the group interviews and something very interesting regarding the teachers' posture emerged.

There are good examples of careful teachers which stimulate students with kindness, attention and carefulness.

> Sb[7]1:"We like a teacher that treat us very kindly and teach us well"
> Sb[7]2:"I like those who would forgive me if I do mistakes"
> Sb[7]3:"There were teachers who we were very kind with us but unfortunately they left the school because their permission expired"
>
> Sg[6]: "I like Miss XXXXX because she is calm, doesn't shout at the girls, she make them stop talking and explains in a good way. She takes us to the laboratory and shows us stuff. She explains in good way.

According to the opinions expressed by a significant number of students, it appears that, in the boys' school, starting from sixth grade, a group of teachers are not acting in an inclusive way but, on the opposite, they perpetrate a teaching model based on threatening, bullying and violence.

Int: "Which kind of experience do you expect from your school?"
Sb[7]1:"[...]violence, sticks, broom sticks always is presented in our school especially on our back and legs."

Int: "Are there any particular teachers that you feel more welcomed?
Sb[7]2:"There is a teacher that I don't like because he keeps threatening us"

Sb[9]1:"[...]He enters the class with his stick and hitting us with it."
Sb[9]2:"If one of the student did not do his homework he hits him with a stick."
Sb[9]3:"[...]he keeps giving us bad nicknames. And all the school call us with the same nickname."

Sb[10]:"There is a teacher that always threaten us and always telling me that he will let me fail.

This trend is mostly spread in the boys' school, but there are episodes also in the girls' schools:

Sg[2]1:"We don't like teacher XXXXX because he hits us with the stick and beat us on our hands. Once he beat us with the wooden board eraser."
Sg[2]2:"[...]he used to insult us calling us ANIMALS."

Sg[4]: "I don't like teacher XXXXXX because he hits us and anything we do he curses us."

One last remark about the figure of the school counsellor which is seen as a strong and trustful person from students:
Sg[2]: "Miss xxxxxxx listen to us! I tell her everything. I can trust her".

Sg[7]: "The school counsellors listen to us".

Sg[9]: "Only the school counsellor".

*Tab. 11 – Do you feel listened by your teachers?*

| | |
|---|---|
| Boys' school 5th grade | "Generally yes". |
| Boys' school 6th grade | "Generally yes". |
| Boys' school 7th grade | "Some of them tell me 'SHUT UP!' when I am talking".<br><br>"That teacher comes to school with a knife because he is always making problems with the people of the neighbourhood. He expects problems. No one likes him in the school". |
| Boys' school 8th grade | "There is one of the teachers who acts like she didn't hear us even when we want to ask her a question". |
| Girls' school 2nd grade | "Miss xxxxxxx listen to us! I tell her everything. I can trust her". |
| Girls' school 4th grade | "The teachers only listen to the excellent students". |
| Girls' school 5th grade | "Yes they listen to us."<br><br>"The school counsellors listen to us". |
| Girls' school 6th grade | "They focus on the smart girls".<br><br>"A teacher stopped talking to a student after a problem and told her there is only greeting between us". |
| Girls' school 7th grade | "Only the school counsellor". |
| Girls' school 10th grade | "Yes, they listen to us and they accept our problems and solve it". |

Summing up, it appears that the most appreciated teachers' behaviours among students are:

- kindness;
- calmness;
- the fact that they explain clearly and exhaustively;
- the fact that they show and facilitate learning with practical examples;
- the willingness to help, support and give sincere advice to students;

- the fact that they put trust into the students.

Similarly, the most unappreciated teachers' behaviours among students are:

- the fact that they threat the class verbally;
- the fact that they mock certain students and make jokes about them;
- the fact that they yell and they send the students out of the classroom without discussions;
- the fact the they use physical violence on the students.

These data are not surprising and perfectly represent the state of health of Palestinian schools and the level of awareness of its young students: several studies (Akesson, 2015; Ghrayeb et al., 2016; Gren, 2017; Presler-Marshall, et al., 2021) have shown how violence is present in all levels of Palestinian society, including schools, triggering a spiral of violence between family, educational, social and peer contexts.

#### 3.1.9.2 Inclusive culture and policies

The two survey's sections "inclusive culture" and "inclusive policies" are here presented altogether. The reason of this choice is to present students' perspectives about general level of inclusion in their schools. The survey was designed to detect both the inclusive culture present in the schools (in terms of respect, openness, social climate) and the strategies put in place by the schools (teachers' and school staff' behaviour).

Considering the answers regarding how much students feel welcomed and feel respected by different categories of school's actors, it is interesting to observe that there are no meaningful differences between males' and females' replies.

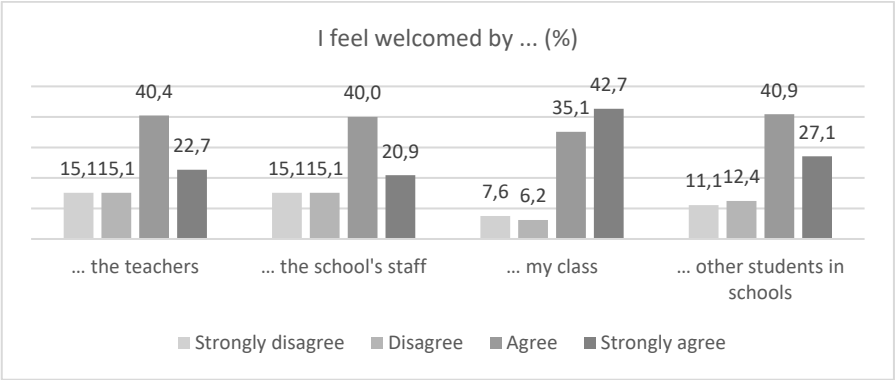



*Fig. 34 – Students' answers: "I feel welcomed by… " (%)*

By observing the graph in Fig. 34 it emerges that students perceive almost at the same level the sense of welcoming they receive from teachers, school's staff and from other students; sense of welcoming, which is higher from the students of the same class.

The same trend is observable also in the perceived levels of respect. Students' answers than can be seen in graph in Fig. 35 reveal that, a part for minor differences, the perceived level of respect that students receive from teachers, school's staff, classroom and students in the same school are more or less the same.

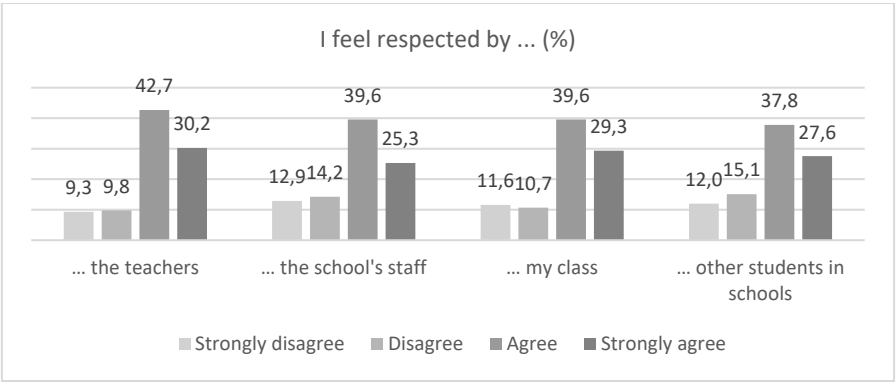



*Fig. 35 – Students' answers: "I feel respected by…" (%)*

The differences are more evident if one compares male's answers with female ones. What emerges is that in boys' schools there are lower levels of respect perceived than in girls' schools. The following two graphs show the

level of respect in the class and in the schools and in both it is possible to see the line of girls' answers (in the class: 46,5% "agree" and 32,6% "strongly agree"; in the school: 44,4% "agree" and 30,6% "strongly agree") that surpasses the one of the males (in the class: 27.2% "agree" and 23,5% "strongly agree"; in the school: 25,9% "agree" and 22,2% "strongly agree").

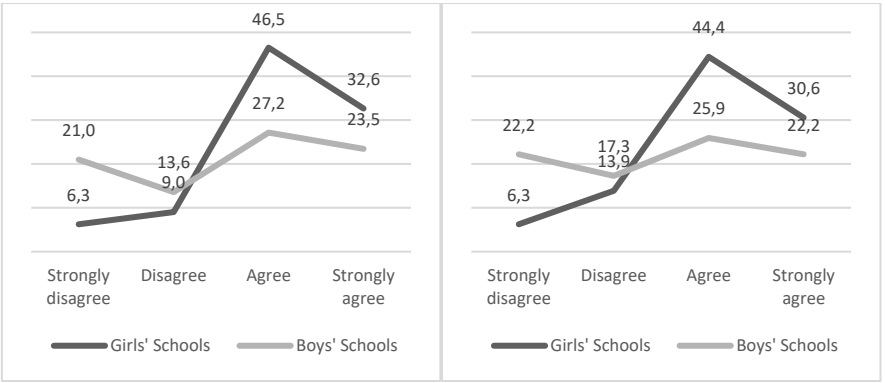



*Fig. 36 – Students' answers: "I feel respected by… my class" (%)/ "I feel respected by… other students in schools" (%)*

Following the same model, also girls' level of mutual respect is higher than the one of boys' schools. At the question "I help other students", the girls answered 34,7 % "sometimes" and 44,4% "often", while the boys' percentages were 27,2% for "sometimes" and only 23,5% chose "often". Regarding the help received from other students, the girls answered 41,7% "sometimes" and 29,2% "often", against the boys' percentages of 29,2% "sometimes" and only the 22,2% "often".

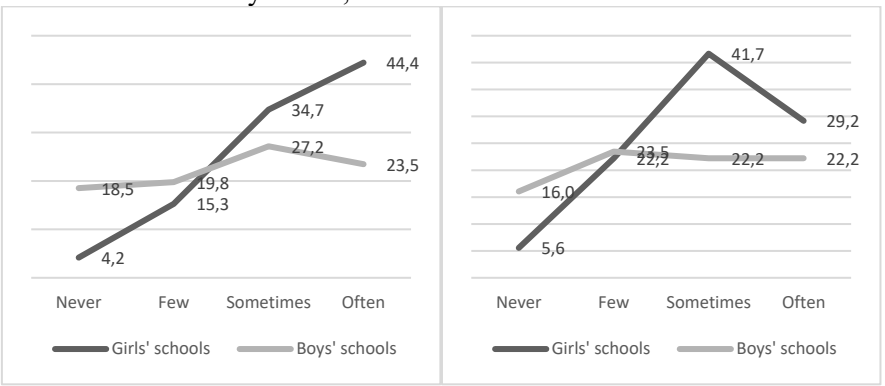



*Fig. 37 – Students' answers: "I help other students" (%)/ "I receive help from other students" (%)*

Girls' schools also present a better classroom social climate and a better school social climate if compared to the situation drew by the boys' answers.

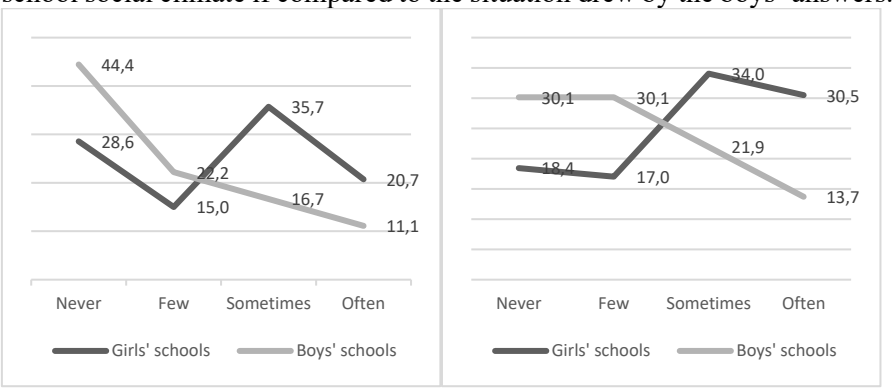



*Fig. 38 – Students' answers: "The classroom climate is good" (%)/ "The school climate is good" (%)*

This trend is corroborated also by the situation drawn by the students' answers about their perception of episodes of violence and bullying.

If boys' schools and girls' schools are compared, as it is possible to see in the graph below, it is clear that the boy's perception of such episodes is higher than the girls'.

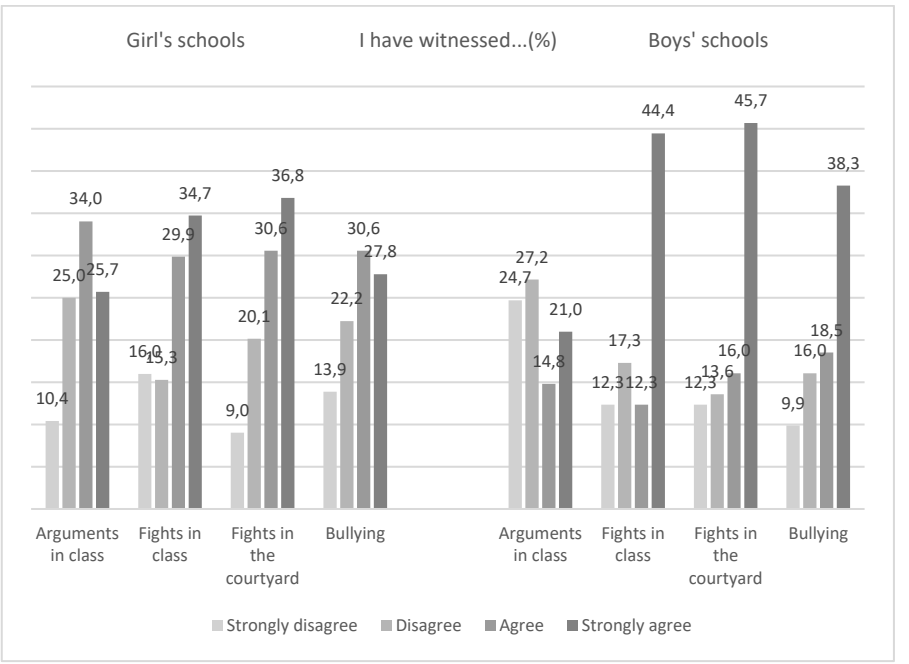



*Fig. 39 – Students' answers: "I have witnessed... " (%)*

The majority of the aggression and violence episodes take place in the classrooms and in the courtyard.

From the interviews it is possible to get a more detailed overview of the kinds of these episodes.

*Tab. 12 – Students' answers to the group interview: "Have you ever witnessed to episodes of fights/violence?"*

| | |
|---|---|
| Boys' school 5th grade | "Yes, just yesterday I witnessed a student from sixth grade attacking one of our classmates."<br><br>"[...]students from tenth grade attacks us with chairs. And while we are in the break they go to our class and steal our money and pencils." |
| Boys' school 6th grade | "There are people who bully students."<br><br>"[...]a student hit another one with a hard iron weapon." |
| Boys'school 7th grade | "Every day there are students who attack each other"<br><br>"[...]once a fight happened between two students in the courtyard. One of them was one the XXXXX teacher doesn't like. So he [the teacher] put his head out of the window from the second floor and started yelling and fomenting the other student: 'yeah yeah crush his head'"<br><br>"Once a teacher told me INSHALAH (If God Will) you will die." |
| Boys' school 8th grade | "Every day we witness fights and bullying." |
| Boys' school 9th grade | "Every day we witness fights."<br><br>"Once there was a big fight because some students tried to mediate among two groups. Then suddenly they were also involved in the fight." |
| Boys' school 10th grade | "Yes, a couple of weeks ago one of the students hit another one with a hard metal weapon on his head and |

| | |
|---|---|
| | the blood came out then a big fight started.” |
| Girls’school 1st grade | “We don’t see fights.”<br><br>“Once we saw a fight in the secondary school but here no.” |
| Girls’ school 2nd grade | “Once a girl hit us and pulled our hair.” |
| Girls’ school 3rd grade | “I saw a fight in my class. One of the classmates pushed her classmate.” |
| Girls’ school 4th grade | “There is a girl, her name is xxxx, she always having problems with all the class.” |
| Girls’ school 5th grade | “We saw a fight in front of the school and the Israel Army shot a rubber bullet in the leg of a girl.” |
| Girls’ school 6th grade | “Bigger girls push us away, hit us and take our money.” |
| Girls’ school 7th grade | “A lot of fights and hitting happen between the girls: the bigger girls on us.” |
| Girls’ school 8th grade | “Yesterday a fight happened between two students because they like the same guy.” |
| Girls’ school 9th grade | “Once there was a fight between a student and a teacher and the students hit the teacher and some other girls.” |
| Girls’ school 10th grade | “There is a girl in the 9th grade that is short. So, all the girls are bullying and mocking her.” |

What really catches the eye is that the situation described by the male students’ voices is harsher: the fights involve groups of students, also of different ages and are more violent.

The female students’ narrations are less violent: usually the fights resolve in little skirmishes between a circumstanced number of girls or even to isolated cases.

Bullying is also quite present in both schools’ type as students reported frequent cases of older males or female students who steal money and exercise bullying behaviours.

It is nevertheless interesting to remark that, even from these short interviews' excerpts it emerges a role of adults and society which does not help or offer too much of a good example: i.e. the teacher which instead of blocking the fight incites it or the even more heavy situation represented by the belligerent intervention of the Israeli Army over a fight between girls.

As previously mentioned, these behaviours are in line with what has already emerged from research dealing with the Palestinian context that remarks all the criticism of educating in such a difficult and violent environment (Affouneh, 2007; Akesson, 2015; Gross, 2013; Hargreaves and Affouneh, 2017; Qaimari, 2016). It should anyway be stressed that students at least talk about it, thus recognizing school as a protected place, in which they would possibly like to spend more time, where it is possible to experience and practice non-violent conflict management. For these reasons the overcoming of physically violent discipline methods in education, either mild or severe, should be considered a priority in the teachers' training towards practices of inclusion and empowerment.

### 3.1.9.3 Evolving practices

The last part of the survey was designed to get the students' point of view regarding the level of their involvement in schools' decisions.

The graphs below present the students' perceptions of the level of participation in class's rules and school's organisational decisions.

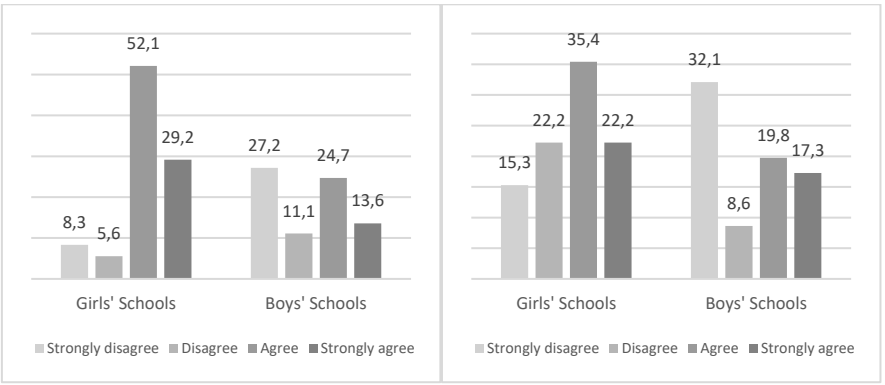



*Fig. 40 – Students' answers: "We are involved in the decision of the class rules" (%)/ "We are involved in the decision of the school's rules" (%)*

In girls' schools the perceived level of involvement in the negotiation of class's rules is higher if compared to the boy's schools. To the statement "We

are involved in the decision of the class rules", the majority of girls answered positively (52,1% "agree", 29,2% "strongly agree"), while the same percentage of male students (38,3%) answered negatively (27,2% "strongly disagree" and 11,1% "disagree") and positively (24,7% "agree", 13,6% "strongly agree").

Similarly, the level of involvement in school's decision is higher in girls' schools. To the statement "We are involved in the decision of the school rules", the majority of girls still answered positively (35,4% "agree", 22,2% "strongly agree"), but this time, among the male students, the majority answered negatively (32,1% "strongly disagree" and 8,6% "disagree").

Female students' involvement in the decision of the lessons' topics and workflow is higher than the one perceived in boys' schools. To the statement "We can decide the topic of the lessons", the majority of females answered positively (40,3% "agree", 13,9% "strongly agree"), and the majority of male students answered negatively (33,3% "strongly disagree" and 11,1% "disagree").

To the statement "We are encouraged by teachers to propose initiatives during lessons", the majority of female students answered positively (50% "agree", 23,6% "strongly agree"), and the majority of male students answered negatively (19,8% "strongly disagree" and 24,7% "disagree").

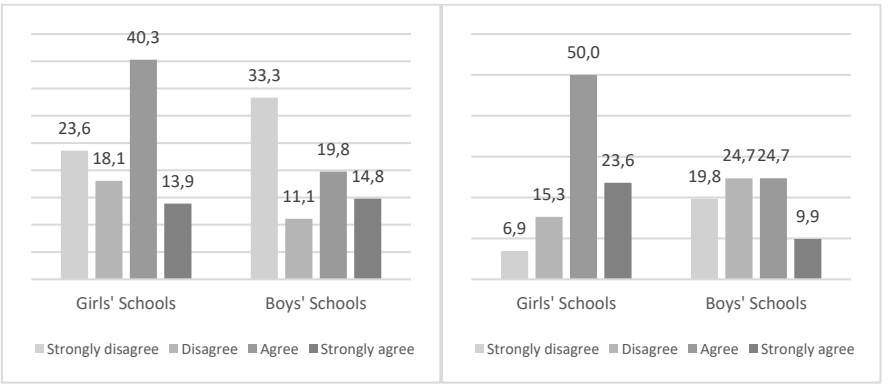



*Fig. 41 – Students' answers: "We can decide the topic of the lessons" (%)/ "We are encouraged by teachers to propose initiatives during lessons" (%)*

Positive climate in classroom and students' engagement is strongly related to self-determination, motivation, self-esteem and agency (Thapa et al., 2013): there are associations between climate and students' behaviours, socio-emotional skills and outcomes (Wang & Degol, 2016; Larson et al.,

2020). When the methods of involvement at school are superficial or are so different between males and females due to the evident use of a system of rewards and punishments linked to behaviour, it becomes clear how the school no longer even attempts to educate and promote the empowerment of its pupils, but only to control and homologate. School's environment and students' role are factors influencing also early school leaving. Promoting good relations between teachers and students through active and participative teaching can prevent it (Bzour, Zuki, & Mispan, 2022). Even if, in the early school years, the degree of students' involvement in the decision-making process is relatively good, in general it is very low.

The students are well aware of that and seem not to appreciate it.

*Tab. 13 – Students' answers to the group interview: "Can you take decisions in class?"*

| | |
|---|---|
| Boys' school 5th grade | The teachers tell us not to interfere their plans. |
| Boys' school 6th grade | No, we can't. We try to change seats but teachers never allow us. |
| Boys' school 7th grade | they don't accept the idea that we can decide, they start to insult us. |
| Boys' school 8th grade | One teacher let us sit the way we want. Sometime they let us do a group breakfast |
| Boys' school 9th grade | The teachers don't accept. |
| Boys' school 10th grade | No, we can't take decisions in the class |
| Girls' school 2nd grade | We can't change the subject of the class but we can ask the teacher to change the way that we are sitting in the class. |
| Girls' school 3rd grade | The teachers accept to change the topic of the lesson but sometimes not because she can't change more than once<br><br>They let us to decorate the class |
| Girls' school 6th grade | We can change the desks decoration with the main teacher approval. |
| Girls' school | Sometimes yes, sometimes no. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 7th grade | |
| Girls' school 9th grade | Never. |

Lastly, it seems appropriate to conclude this presentation of data with an insight about the passions and the future projects of the students: once again, the differences between females and males are quite relevant.

At the question: "I feel that my passions and things I know from outside are valorised and listened by teachers", the majority of the females answered positively (42,4% "agree" and 13,2% "strongly agree"), while the majority of male students answered negatively (31,2% "strongly disagree" and 12,3% "disagree").

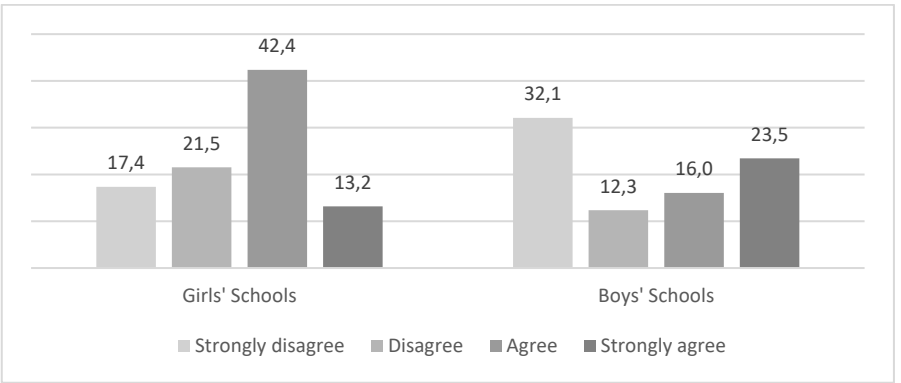



*Fig. 42 – Students' answers: "I feel that my passions and things I know from outside are valorised and listened by teachers" (%)*

At the question "After the school's years, where do you see yourself" the majority (51,1%) of the students answered "continue studying". This percentage is marked with a big presence of females (63,2%) and a lower percentage of males (29,6%). The 23,5% of males answered that they would like to find a job immediately after school, against the 8,3% of female students.

These data are essentially in line with what emerged from international research on the secondary school attendance and completion (i.e. Unicef, 2022). They highlight how strong is the role played by compulsory education in motivating and making the youngers aware of the importance to reach higher levels of study. Moreover, 86% of Palestinian children complete basic/compulsory education (94% females, 78% males), but just 62%

complete secondary education (51% males, 76% females). One of the reasons of this gap is related to the early entry into labour of young Palestinian males who must contribute to family maintenance. In fact, 10% of children from 5 to 17 years are already working and from the age of 12 years the percentage of those still attending school decreases (at 17 years old only 38% of children engaged in child labour are still going to school). On the other side it should be strategic to deeply investigate the reasons why in today's Palestinian society these expectations can not be fulfilled, in order to take proper and effective actions.

Only the 8% of the students answered that they would like to move abroad (with no significant differences between male and female students): this is extremely interesting because it shows the strong feeling of belonging and commitment that the students feel for their homeland.

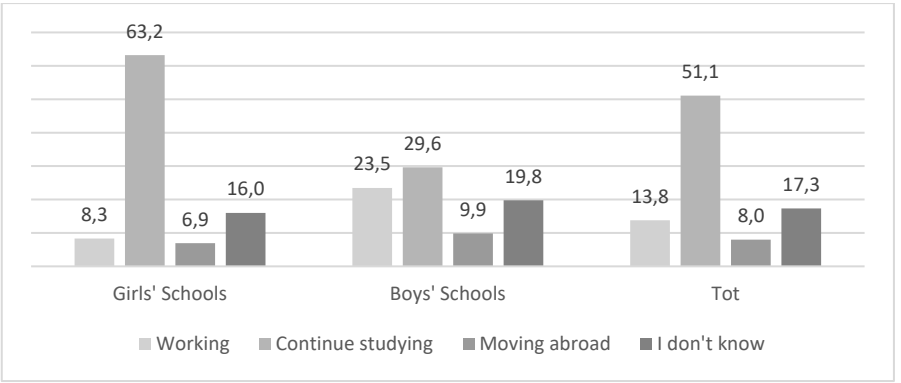



*Fig. 43 – Students' answers: "After the school's years, I see myself… " (%)*

### *3.1.10 A first overview*

The research was aimed to understand the following aspects:

- the Palestinian teachers' representations of the concepts of inclusion and inclusive education;
- the teachers' and students' perceptions – and the relative differences – about the level of inclusion in the Palestinian schools located in the area of East Jerusalem;
- the impact that the use of the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment has on the designing praxis of teachers.

The representations of Palestinian teachers regarding the concepts of "inclusion" and "inclusive education" are still strongly confused with the concept of "integration". In fact, these two concepts are often used as synonyms, thus limiting the possibilities of analysis and intervention on both the school and social context.

Moreover, there is also a vision of inclusion strongly anchored to the concept of disability and to the ideal of an "non-normality" which is opposed to an assumed normality that sounds strange in such a particular environment. It remains quite present the misconception that people with disabilities or other difficulties have to adapt (or need to be helped to reach) a certain standard of performance or, better, an acceptable level of presumed normality, instead of valuing diversity as a resource at the basis of any inclusion process.

This first consideration, seen in the light of the changes taking place in the Italian school system and on the basis of similar experiences of cooperation carried out in other international contexts, raises again the problem of the long time required to stabilize the processes of creation of inclusive cultures, policies and practices.

In line with this vision, the perception that teachers have of the level of inclusion of Palestinian schools in the East Jerusalem area is high, although this does not reflect the reality of the facts.

The reasons for these considerations are mainly due to two factors: the first is represented by the "distorted" idea of inclusion possessed by most of the teachers interviewed, while the second, in strong connection with the first, is to be identified in the fact that all the schools involved in the research, as a result of the international aid interventions that have occurred over time, have been equipped with infrastructures that allow to break down architectural barriers, thus making them, in the eyes of teachers, inclusive schools.

This interpretation opens the space for further research activities aimed at investigating in depth the relationships and correlations that are established, as a result of the international aid interventions, between the temporary improvements that they produce on the material living conditions of the beneficiaries and the cultural changes that allow them to change the situation in a stable way and to acquire autonomous process management skills.

The students have a totally different perception regarding the level of inclusion of their schools. From the surveys it emerges a description of a school which is all but inclusive: many are the examples of teachers that threat the students verbally, use verbal and physical violence on the class or do not listen to the needs of the students. These behaviours are quite known

by the interviewees and are often replicated by them under the form of daily violent arguments, fights or episodes of bullying.

The level of inclusion that is breathable in the school by students is a strong requirement to achieve social inclusion. Likewise, applying the Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development (1979), the level of social inclusion hinders of fosters the level of school's inclusion.

It is easy to understand how violence, aggressiveness, hate towards the diversity, frustration, and segregation – all critical issues strongly present in the Palestinian society – can perturbate the school system and influence the operate of teachers and the students' behaviours.

If, on the other hand, we consider the fourth research question, i.e. to investigate the impact that the use of the Index for Inclusion and Empowerment has had on the teaching design practices of Palestinian teachers, we can say that the logic of the project has been particularly adapted to the needs of this context. The Palestinian school system, in fact, is currently characterized by the tension between the new inclusive policies introduced by the MoEHE and a strong curricular rigidity. A markedly prescriptive approach that does not leave much room either for individualized planning built on the real needs of the students, or for moments of confrontation with colleagues or self-reflexivity. The introduction, during the research, of the IIE tool and the creation of spaces for comparison in which to enhance the moment of analysis of educational needs and planning, has allowed teachers not only to move away from the consolidated logic of mere bureaucratic fulfilment of school paperwork respectful of ministerial prescriptions, but also to become more attentive to students' needs and, in a perspective of empowerment, to the improvement of the school's capacity to respond to them. The bottom-up approach that required the empowerment and direct involvement of teachers in design and training research activities - recognized as an important element of the teacher's professional activity and remunerated through project funds - allowed them to reflect on everyday practices and improve their theoretical and operational skills within the inclusive perspective. This observation highlights a structural problem present today in the Palestinian school system where the exercise of the teaching profession is almost exclusively carried out in the classroom and does not require any collective moments for its design and evaluation.

To these difficulties must be added two additional elements that do not facilitate the consolidation of the new organizational and educational practices proposed to schools and communities reached by the projects.

These are two aspects that prevent the necessary reaction times which are necessary for those receiving aid and which are functional to the reworking and consolidation of innovation experiences. The first element concerns the limited duration of emergency cooperation interventions which, given the time constraints which generally does not exceed one year, tend to meet immediate needs to ensure the survival of communities. Such interventions, in school contexts, often translate into the supply of materials (e.g. technology or equipment) or structural interventions (such as the construction of ramps to make the environments accessible). In order to allow for a stable change in organisational culture and educational practices, a truly effective intervention should be carried out with a more extended time frame so to allow a continuous structural relationship, in a climate of trust and constant mutual growth. The second element, as it is easy to realise, is represented by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which is the background to all the events of the Palestinian people and also of its young school system. Although the international community cannot be prevented from intervening with aid initiatives, for the moment it seems inevitable to come to terms with the state of permanent conflict and with the operations carried out by the interventions of the Israeli army and settlers of systematic occupation of the territory and destruction of everything that is structural and continuous. To this end, future research or future project initiatives could be more effective if, sharing the strategic view of building stability and continuity, local universities were involved as reference centres for training events aimed at the students involved in educational studies and the teaching and managerial staff already working in the schools. A reference centre at University level could also support professional activities, such as planning and evaluating, throughout a constant comparison with an updated international scientific community that would need a structuring and stabilization of academic cooperation relations both in presence and at a distance.

## 3.2 Part II: I-CAN project

### *3.2.1 Methodological framework: a necessary remodulation*

The aim of the I-CAN project (I-CAN: Independence, Capability, Autonomy, iNclusion) as originally planned by EducAid, was to contrast the sense of de-development, segregation and isolation (Roy, 1987) present in Gaza Strip, by establishing a centre for the empowerment of persons with disabilities.

The purpose of the centre, which adhere to the principles of integrated formative system (Frabboni, 2000), is to serve as a hub for promoting in families and schools a culture for inclusion. Together with the centre a large part of the I-CAN project involved the schools in Gaza in actions concerning teacher training and experimenting with the use of IEE (Pacetti, Soriani, Castellani, 2020).

However, the program of the activities was hampered by the outbreak of the COVID-19: the project had to undergo a remodelling of all the actions, especially those involving schools. These adjustments interested the planning of distance activities to supervise the implementation of the IEE and to train teachers about its use.

In this scenario, school-family communication was one of the main concerns that emerged from the exchanges with teachers and MoEHE representatives: they expressed the interest and the need to work on guidelines for school-family communication that would support the actors involved in managing the relationships dynamic mediated by digital contexts.

The work hereby described was structured by following an exploratory research approach (Mortari et al., 2020) with the intention to explore school-family communication practices mediated by ICTs during Covid's lockdown in the Gaza Strip's schools and develop guidelines for inclusive school-family exchanges.

### *3.2.2 Objectives and problem definition*

The aim of the research was to investigate the school-family communication practices mediated by ICTs during Covid's lockdown in the Gaza Strip's schools to develop guidelines for inclusive school-family exchanges.

The need for investigating these dynamics emerged from the local Ministry of Education (MoEHE) representatives, from the teachers involved in the project and from the I-CAN project's coordinator (EducAid).

During the months when the pandemic stroke, all the Palestinian schools (both in West Bank and in Gaza Strip) found themselves in a very complex scenario: guarantee to all their students a proper schooling despite the lockdown and the closure of all the schools and maintaining an open dialogue and contact with their students' families.

The issue of the communication between schools and families, already quite a complex and delicate matter *per se*, reached new peaks in terms of

complexity due to the emergency situation caused by the pandemic: all the schools around the globe had to come up with a quick response not only in providing solutions for distance schooling but also in not losing the connection and the relationship with the families.

The one of the relationships with the families was a problem not to underestimate especially because, from what emerged by other researches (Lucisano, 2020; Izzo, Ciurnelli, 2020; Soriani, 2021), the families that suffered more of this impossibility to communicate were those more in need and those which already were afflicted by other difficulties (economical, presence of persons with disabilities, migratory background, etc…).

### *3.2.3 Phases*

The research initiative involving the development of the guidelines started at late lockdown, in September 2020, and ended in December 2021, following these steps.

- **September 2020 – October 2020:** Identifying the schools and the population of the research
- **November 2020 – December 2020:** Building of the structure of the focus groups
- **January 2021:** Focus group with parents
- **February 2021:** Focus group with teachers
- **March – April 2021:** Translation of the focus groups
- **April - June 2021:** Data analysis
- **July – September 2021:** Draft of the guidelines
- **October – November 2021:** Finalization of the guidelines

### *3.2.4 Tools*

Listening to the voices of the actors directly involved was key to understand at best the phenomenon in such a complex context as the Gaza Strip: this is the reason why the researchers opted for a series of structured focus groups for teachers and parents.

The questions for the teachers' focus group were structured in six sections: instructional design; distance learning; distance evaluation; digital competences; school/family communication; communication between teachers. See them listed in the table underneath.

*Tab. 16 – Teachers' focus groups structure*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Section 1 – Instructional design** | • During the pandemic, have you managed to keep organising a regular meeting with the rest of your colleagues? |
| **Section 2 – Distance learning** | • During the pandemic, have you changed and adapted your way of running and managing your lessons? How?<br>• Which major challenges have you faced?<br>• Which aspects of your past practices have you maintained because successful? |
| **Section 3 – Distance evaluation** | • During the pandemic, have you changed and adapted your way of evaluating your students? How?<br>• Which major challenges have you faced? |
| **Section 4 – Digital competences** | • Were your digital skills sufficient to manage the emergency and distance learning moment? |
| **Section 5 – School/families communication** | • During the pandemic, which communication channels have you used to communicate with parents?<br>• Which major challenges have you faced? Which aspects, if present, have you appreciated the most? |
| **Section 6 – Communication between teachers** | • During the pandemic, which communication channels have you used to communicate with your colleagues?<br>• Which major challenges have you faced? Which aspects, if present, have you appreciated the most? |

The questions for the parents' focus group were structured in four sections and are listed in the following table.

*Tab. 17 – Parents' focus groups structure*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Section 1 – Distance learning** | • Which kind of challenges and struggles are generated by the management of your children's digital-school-lives? Especially when one has more than one son/daughter<br>• Concerning digital distance learning during the pandemic: does the management of your home spaces generates struggles or difficulties?<br>• Were the technological devices at your family's disposal enough to guarantee everybody's participation in school's distance activities? |
| **Section 2 – Digital technologies** | • Were your digital skills sufficient to manage the emergency and your sons'/daughters' distance learning?<br>• Which were the most challenging aspects for you? |
| **Section 3 – School/families communication** | • Do you manage to communicate effectively with the school (Teachers, head teachers…) using ICTs? Which major challenges have you faced?<br>• Which aspects, if present, have you appreciated the most? |
| **Section 4 – Parents/parents communication** | • Do you feel the need to communicate more with other parents of your children's classmates?<br>• Do you manage to communicate effectively with the other parents using ICTs? Which major challenges have you faced? Which aspects, if present, have you appreciated the most? |

The choice of isolating these sections (the six of the teachers' and the four of the parents' guidelines) was motivated by a previous focus group conducted with 12 of the 15 school head teachers of the educational institution involved in the research. In this focus group the research team discussed with the schools' deans with the scope to better understand the different schools' context, the most relevant aspects to insert in the guidelines, and the modalities of involvement of the schools.

### 3.2.5 Research population

The Gaza's educational institutions involved in the research where fifteen elementary schools (from first to sixth grade) distributed in all the Strip's territory.

Seven of these institutions were public school managed by the MoEHE and eight were UNRWA schools.

*Tab. 14 – Schools involved in the research*

| Schools involved | Public schools | UNRWA schools |
|---|---|---|
| 15 | 7 | 8 |

Three focus groups have been organised:

- one with teachers from first to fourth grade;
- one with teachers from fifth and sixth grade;
- one with parents with children in different schools.

Consult the table below to see the composition of the different focus groups.

*Tab. 15 – Focus groups and participants*

| Focus group | Number of participants from public schools | Number of participants from UNRWA schools | Total of participants |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teachers from I to IV grade | 3 (3 F) | 3 (1 M, 2 F) | 6 |
| Teachers from V to VI grade | 3 (2 M, 1 F) | 2 (2 M) | 5 |
| Parents from various schools | 5 (5 F) | 5 (5 F) | 10 |

The focus groups took place online with participants selected on a voluntarily base from the fifteen schools and were conducted by two members of the local EducAid's staff properly trained by the researcher of the University of Bologna to run them.

This allowed to maintain the Arabic as common language and to keep the duration of the focus groups close to 60 minutes.

To facilitate the data analysis process and to provide support to the interviewers, the researchers opted to structure the focus group's scripts in a

list of guiding questions that served as frame for conducting the discussion (Ochieng, Wilson, Derrick & Mukherjee, 2018).

In the following pages we will provide an overview of what emerged from the teachers' and the parents' focus groups.

We will tackle first the teachers' perspectives and then the parents' ones by providing a detailed overview of what were the most relevant outcomes from the questions of each section present in the focus groups' structures.

### *3.2.6 The teachers' perspectives*

Section 1 – instructional design

Question 1 – "During the pandemic, have you managed to keep organising a regular meeting with the rest of your colleagues?"

Many of the participants at the focus group (7 out of 11) stated that in Gaza's schools, during the pandemic, was hard to maintain regular meetings between colleagues.

The causes of this struggle have to be found in different factors. The most important, according to the group, was the teachers' lack of digital competence which hampered to have regular online meetings with all the staff. This caused various kind of difficulties in the management of the online didactical proposals and to the social climate between colleagues.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher M, IV | "I faced big difficulties, since they [the other colleagues] have limited experience in technology. […] it was really frustrating because I felt like I was alone doing things." |

Teachers encountered big difficulties in interacting through digital tools. In this sense, instant messaging applications like *WhatsApp* represented one of the only spaces where they could communicate effectively between colleagues.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher F, II | "Yes, we managed to stay in contact, but only through WhatsApp. It was very convenient." |

In one of the public schools, the dean managed to organise face-to-face meetings with some teachers where they could organise the "online migration" of the lessons.

In two UNRWA schools, some teachers could meet online quite regularly especially in the first weeks of the lockdown and managed to plan a strategy to communicate with the families, especially those which were cut off from the school-family communication because of the lack of digital tools.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher M, VI | "We talked about finding a solution to involve the children's mothers we knew that could face more difficulties… who live more isolated, of who don't have stable connection." |

## Section 2 – Distance learning

### Question 1 – "During the pandemic, have you changed and adapted your way of run and manage your lessons? How?"

This question divided the focus group's participants in two main categories: those who manifested a change in the way they managed their lessons during the pandemic (6) and those who did not (5).

The six teachers from the first group opted for different methodologies such as sharing clear learning goals with the students, creating audio instructions, making videos and creating WhatsApp groups with their students to share materials and to collect homework. The fact that these teachers decided to use unofficial digital spaces (such WhatsApp or Facebook) to interact with their students can be seen as evidence of the lack of digital competence among teachers and students and the lack of effective official digital spaces that can serve the same purpose without all the controversies of using similar social networks.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher M, V | "We faced great difficulties in using the virtual class for planning our digital lessons. WhatsApp was the perfect alternative […] it is easy, everybody has it" |

The five teachers from the second group stated that they did not change their way of conducting lessons during the pandemic: these teachers only operated a simple adaptation of their learning goals (making them simpler) and disseminated them through different platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, …) but they were quite aware of the fact that they did not do much. What hindered them to change their way of teaching was mainly the lack of digital competence and the lack of knowledge in teaching strategies.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher F, III | "No, I wanted to change my [teaching] style but I couldn't since I don't know how to do it." |
| Teacher, M, IV | "I basically do the same thing I used to do before COVID-19 but I make video instead of standing in front of my students in the classroom." |

Teachers encountered difficulties in planning the online lessons and rethinking the teaching strategies using the virtual classroom platforms at their disposals: this brought them to operate a simplification of the teaching strategies which result in a more frequent use of pictures, PowerPoint presentations and in the proposal of easier and shorter tasks.

This simplification implied a shift in the attention of the teachers: before the lockdown their attention was focused more on the values and behaviour of the students (cooperation, respect, inclusion) and during the pandemic they could concentrate only on more practical aspects and general learning goals.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, F, V | "Seen the state of things, we could focus only on the general learning goals to be achieved and less on the values to be learned during the class." |

Question 2 – "Which major challenges have you faced?"

The main challenges that teachers said they faced were the following:

- The lack of digital competence (of the research participants, and their colleagues);

- The lack of adequate and effective digital tools both from teachers and families;
- The lack of pedagogical competences to use technology for implementing active learning strategies;
- Technical issues (such as problems with audio and video devices to record or share materials);
- Lack of parents' cooperation and involvement in the distance learning process;
- Lack of students' participation during online lessons and in sending feedback or homework;
- Workload: teachers denounce a significant increase in the time spent in planning the lessons, preparing the materials, running the lessons and manage the follow-up.

Question 3 – "Which aspects of your past practices have you maintained because successful?"

Some focus groups' participants, especially among the teachers from first to fourth grade, stated that they kept using systems of rewarding for students like words of encouragement, badges and stickers in particular (6) and various forms of verbal feedback and encouragement (8).

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, F, I | "When a student answers correctly, I reply with 'excellent', 'well done' and feedback like these." |
| Teacher, F, III | "I used a lot of stickers to certificate successful students. […] I keep a list of the students in a notepad, and I put stickers on it then show it in front of the camera." |

Teachers from fifth to sixth grade provided different kind of answers and reported to keep a certain way of planning their lessons that is focused on the learning goals of the curriculum (4) and to maintain a moment at the beginning of each online sessions where they share explicitly the learning goals of the lesson (4).

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, M, VI | "I keep planning my lessons, even those online, with the basic learning goals in my mind. This I have always done." |

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, M, V | "At the beginning of my lessons I always say: 'now we are going to learn this and that'." |

Section 3 – Distance evaluation

Question 1 - During the pandemic, have you changed and adapted your way of evaluating your students? How?

In regard of this question, it is important to differentiate the answers provided by teachers working in different school grades.

The teachers working in 1st to 4th school grade implemented different forms of digital-mediated evaluation: self-learning worksheets which students were supposed to fill and send back for evaluation, online video call oral tests, online written tests run in front of a webcam to monitor the pupils, or production of videos showing the students while they were engaged in solving the assignments as video evidence.

This category of teachers did not refrain from pointing out some difficulties such as the complexity of the task (see teacher F-III) or issues of control (see F-IV).

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, F, III | "The evaluation process is very complicated especially since I have many students in my classes. " |
| Teacher, F, IV | "It is a bit of frustrating. I give them worksheet and written tests but sometimes their parents do them." |

Teachers from 5th to 6th grades, on the other hand, used mainly traditional forms of assignments exchanged via email or social media to their students.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, F, VI | "Yes. What I do is creating the word version of a test and send it to my students via mail. They, then, have one hour to send it back to me with the answers" |

Question 2 - Which major challenges have you faced?

Like the previous question, even in this one a distinction between 1st to 4th and 5th to 6th grade teachers must be considered.

Participants belonging to the first category of teachers reported that they have encountered the following difficulties:

- Technical issues (internet cuts, electricity cuts…);
- Lack of adequate devices at disposal (smartphones, cameras, etc…) among teachers and students;
- Lack of support from parents (in terms of sharing a common vision but also in terms of parents' digital competences);
- Lack of communication with children (especially with students with learning difficulties or with disabilities).

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, F, II | "Some parents are not educated […] so they don't understand even the simplest instructions, which mean that they participate partially in following their kids." |
| Teacher, F, II | "Some parents and some students have limited experience in dealing with technology tools. This makes things more difficult." |

Teachers from the second category (5th to 6th grade) listed the following elements:

- Technology-mediated evaluation presented lots of troubles and problems: written tests were not considered as sufficient for a proper evaluation;
- Difficulty in getting feedback from the students about their learning process;
- Parents seem not to understand the importance of the evaluation and tent to help too much – if not doing the homework instead of their children – or to underestimate these moments.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, M, V | "It is clear that some parents are not interested and not keen on the evaluation process. They think it is not calculated and unimportant during this Covid period." |
| Teacher, F, V | "[…] and in some case, it was evident that students were only present in front of the screen as their parents were solving the tests." |

Section 4 – Digital competences

Question 1 - Were your digital skills sufficient to manage the emergency and distance learning moment?

To this question, almost the entirety of the focus groups' participants admitted that they had great difficulties in managing digital tools.

In this sense it can be reported that the teachers' general level of digital competence was quite low when they faced the lockdown.

This situation and the need to cope with the situation brought some teachers to develop certain competences and technological skills by following capacity building programs or online learning videos.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, M, VI | "The Ministry of Education held a course on how to manage virtual classes and I followed it. It was interesting and certainly useful, but it was not enough! I had to practice a lot." |

Section 5 – School/families communication

Question 1 – During the pandemic, which communication channels have you used to communicate with parents?

What emerged by the interviews is that, in general, the schools have not set up any official tool for school-family communication.

Teachers could communicate with their students' parents with the support of digital tools they spontaneously choose to use, such as: Zoom, Facebook groups, Messenger groups, WhatsApp groups.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, M, V | "Facebook groups: it is very useful" |
| Teacher, F, III | "I also use WhatsApp to send things to the parents" |

Question 2 – Which major challenges have you faced?

Among the difficulties concerning school-family communication that teachers encountered we can list the following:

- Technical issues like internet or electricity cuts;
- Lack of adequate devices (smartphones, cameras, etc…) at disposal of teachers, families and students;
- Lack of support from parents;
- Privacy issues represented by the fact that some parents contacted teachers and ask for appointments in inappropriate times and on personal contacts.

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, M, VI | "I experienced lot of disrespect to my personal privacy. Many parents asked me for appointments and sent me messages during my free time. They could not understand that I don't work all the time" |

Question 3 – Which aspects, if present, have you appreciated the most?

The lockdown and the situation of remote schooling made teachers appreciate the following aspects:

- The importance and the value of face-to-face meeting with colleagues and with parents;
- The importance of getting more in contact with the families;
- The importance of implementing and using active learning strategies;
- The importance of managing the working time properly, with a particular attention toward the privacy;

- The importance and the role of the parents in the educational processes. This element should not be underestimated if one wants to try build a more concrete school-family alliance.

## Section 6 – Communication between teachers

### Question 1 – During the pandemic, which communication channels have you used to communicate with your colleagues?

Participants to the focus groups reported that their schools did not provide any official tool to support communication between colleagues.

This brought teachers and deans to exchange communication via other digital tools such as:

- School-related group-chats on Facebook or WhatsApp, which allowed them also to make calls (individual or collective);
- Thematic group-chats for teachers who teach specific subjects.

### Question 2 – Which major challenges have you faced?

The main challenges concerning the communication dynamics between colleagues that teachers who participated to the interview reported touch the following aspects:

- Struggles in sharing experiences with the colleagues due to lack of time (5);
- Difficulties in conducting regular meetings and, therefore, finding occasions to have a confrontation with the colleagues (6);
- Stressful work-conditions. Teachers lamented too much workload during the lockdown, with no free time and no breaks (3), some teachers had to replace other who, due to technical or health reasons, could not deliver their lessons;
- Lack of digital competences among colleagues (8).

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, F, I | "For me, communicating with my colleagues became more difficult and less natural. We used to confront every day about anything, but with the lockdown less." |
| Teacher, F, II | "no free time! You have to be there (online) to make lesson and to talk |

| | |
|---|---|
| | to students and to some parents […] it is very very tiering.” |
| Teacher, F, IV | “with some (colleagues) it is impossible to communicate! They don’t follow the conversation… so frustrating” |

Question 3 – Which aspects, if present, have you appreciated the most?

The aspects that teachers have appreciated the most concerning the communication with other colleagues mediated by technology can be listed in the following points:

- The importance of being physically at school: a great number of teachers (9) remarked the importance of living the spaces of the school where the presence and the support of the colleagues is considered priceless;
- The importance of sharing the experience with the colleagues and also with colleagues from other schools (4);
- The sense of cooperation with the colleagues (6);
- The fact that, through technology, teachers could exchange skills, worksheets, methods of explanation, and exam questions (3).

| | |
|---|---|
| Teacher, F, II | “I miss the times when I could meet the others every day […] more immediate, easier.” |
| Teacher, M, V | “we used to help each other more, now…” |

### *3.2.7 The parents' perspectives*

Section 1 – Distance learning

Question 1 – Which kind of challenges and struggles are generated by the management of your children's digital schooling? Especially when one has more than one son/daughter
Question 2 – Concerning digital distance learning during the pandemic: does the management of your home spaces generates struggles or difficulties?
Question 3 – Were the technological devices at your family's disposal enough to guarantee everybody's participation in school's distance activities?

Before listing the main challenges that parents expressed concerning the management of their children's schooling it is important to report one relevant element emerged transversally in the interviews: the condition of psychological stress inducted by the fact of being confined at home and being forced to follow school's duties and home/family management while engaged in other tasks.

To give an example, when school asked students to produce video materials, many parents lamented problems and difficulties in managing the noise in the house (especially in numerous families), or the lack of proper spaces and proper devices.

Moreover, during virtual lessons, many parents reported the lack of privacy for their children and, contextually, lack of control for the rest of their sons/daughters.

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent, F | "[…] too much homework and assignments! I can't follow everything. I have three children. It is too much!<br>During the day, my kids cannot follow up all lessons and solve the assignments then send it back to their teachers. They can't do it alone, they needed me and, also, we have only one smartphone. How can I make it?" |

The main struggles generated by the home-management of the students' digital schooling are the following:

- Lack of personal devices for all the family members. This lack can hinder the possibility for some children to work on their assignments properly. Less devices (sometimes one smartphone, most often the one of the mothers, is shared with 3 or 4 children) also means less space to store apps, videos, photos and learning materials;
- Low quality of internet connection;
- Frequent electricity blackouts;
- Too much homework to manage;
- Absence of a consensus on a proper time for the schools to send the communications and homework;
- Some parents do not have the sufficient competences to help their children and support their schooling.

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent, F | "[…] sometimes I don't understand what the task is about. It's not clear" |
| Parent F, | "The homework assigned to my son are too many, and sometimes we lose track" |

## Section 2 – Digital technologies

### Question 1 -Were your digital skills sufficient to manage the emergency and your sons'/daughters' distance learning?

At the early stage of the lockdown, the parent's digital skills were far from being sufficient in order to face the emergency situation. Nonetheless, the continuous efforts and engagement brought parents to develop new competences (in part supported by teachers, in part developed by themselves thanks to online tutorials, etc.).

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent, F | "At the beginning no (the digital competences were not sufficient), but then I started to learn new skills […] thanks to some videos that teachers sent us." |
| Parent, F | "No (the digital competences were not sufficient), but the teachers supported us and helped us in |

| | |
|---|---|
| | learning the basics. […] through video calls, messages, and useful links to follow" |

Question 2 - Which were the most challenging aspects for you?

In the focus group, many parents stated that they struggled in dealing with different software and apps and using them to communicate effectively with teachers (8). Another element that represented a challenge for the parents who have more than one child was the necessity to monitor all the different platforms to check the homework.

Lastly, the limited storage space in the devices at their disposal represented a big obstacle and caused struggles in being able to download (or produce) all the videos and all the materials that the teachers asked.

Section 3 – School/families communication

Question 1 - Do you manage to communicate effectively with the school (Teachers, Head teachers…) using ICTs? Which major challenges have you faced?

Most of the parents reported that they felt the need for a more open and continuous communication with their sons and daugthers' teachers. The main reason is the fact that parents felt uncomfortable in explaining to their children the materials that teachers prepared.

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent, F | "I didn't receive a proper education. So I need to talk to teachers to get clarification! Otherwise it'll be impossible… I'm becoming mad!" |

In addition to this, parents reported that not all the teachers were available (on WhatsApp, Facebook and on virtual class), but in general they could communicate with them sufficiently.

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent, F | "Yes (I can communicate with teachers) but not with all of them! Some are simply impossible to get in touch with" |

As a comment to this aspect, it must be remarked that some parents complained about the fact that teachers not always replied on time to their request for help: in this regard, the participants of the focus group stated that 1st to 4th grades' teachers were more available and reachable compared to 5th to 6th grades ones.

Question 2 - Which aspects, if present, have you appreciated the most?

Regarding the aspects that parents appreciated the most in the communication with teachers mediated by technology, what emerged is that some teachers (especially in 1st to 4th grade schools) managed to dedicate one-to-one time with students, especially with those more in difficulty.

Another aspect strongly appreciated is the fact that working side-by-side with their children made the parents in a closer relationship with them.

| | |
|---|---|
| Parent, F | "I never thought about it, but I feel that spending more time in helping her helped. Now she listens more and she talks more about school" |

Section 4 – Parents/parents communication

Question 1 - Do you feel the need to communicate more with other parents of your children's classmates?

What emerged from the interviews is that parents did not feel the need to have a closer relationship or a more intense communication with other parents. In fact, all the interviewees convened that they did not even look for occasions to confront with other families rather than their relatives.

Solutions like parents' group-chats or parents' mail exchanges were not present, nor explored by the group.

### *3.2.8 Overview*

Being clear that human and educational relationships need to be carried out face to face and that the massive use of ICT has been made necessary by the pandemic emergency, the analysis of interviews with teachers, parents, and students during the pandemic has underscored several critical challenges

and learning points in school-family communication. The necessity of working on comprehensive communication guidelines is evident from the multitude of issues identified.

First and foremost, the technical challenges faced during the pandemic highlighted a significant digital divide. Many families lacked reliable internet access or sufficient devices, which hampered students' ability to participate in online learning. Teachers, too, were not spared from these technical difficulties, often struggling with unstable connections and limited access to appropriate technology. These issues made it clear that equitable access to technology is fundamental for effective communication and learning.

Moreover, the pandemic revealed a gap in digital competence among parents. Many parents found it difficult to support their children's learning due to their limited familiarity with digital tools. This lack of digital literacy created barriers in communication between schools and families. To address this, schools need to provide training and resources to help parents become more comfortable with technology. By doing so, they can foster a more supportive learning environment at home.

Privacy concerns also emerged as a significant issue. Teachers often found themselves contacted by parents at inappropriate times on their personal devices, leading to a blurring of professional and personal boundaries. This underlines the need for clear guidelines on appropriate communication channels and times. Schools should implement official communication platforms and establish boundaries to protect teachers' privacy and personal time.

The pandemic also emphasized the importance of face-to-face interactions. Despite the availability of digital communication tools, both teachers and parents expressed a preference for in-person meetings. These interactions were seen as more effective for discussing student progress and addressing concerns. Moving forward, schools should strive to maintain a balance between digital and face-to-face communication, ensuring that parents and teachers have ample opportunities for direct interaction.

Additionally, the increased involvement of parents in their children's education during the pandemic had a positive impact on parent-teacher relationships. Parents appreciated the one-on-one time with teachers and felt closer to their children. This highlights the potential benefits of maintaining a high level of parental involvement in education, even beyond the pandemic. Schools should encourage ongoing engagement by keeping parents informed and involved in their children's learning journey.

Finally, the need for effective time management and active learning strategies became apparent. Teachers faced significant stress managing their

workload and communication demands. Schools must support teachers by providing adequate time for planning, teaching, and communication. Implementing active learning strategies can also help in creating a more engaging and effective learning environment, reducing the pressure on teachers and improving student outcomes.

In conclusion, the pandemic has brought to light the critical need for comprehensive communication guidelines between schools and families. Addressing technical challenges, enhancing digital competence among parents, protecting teacher privacy, maintaining face-to-face interactions, fostering parental involvement, and supporting effective time management are essential steps. By developing and implementing these guidelines, schools can ensure more effective and supportive communication, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for both students and families.

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## 3.3 Part III: The guidelines

The guidelines that we attach here have been published in English and Arabic (Pacetti, Soriani, 2023) and have been spread among the fifteen schools involved through the channels provided by the local Ministry of Education and the educational division of UNRWA.

### *3.3.1 Teachers' guidelines*

**Instructional design**

As group of teachers, organise periodic meetings (weekly or monthly) to discuss about:

- professional development trainings (teaching strategies, digital competences, etc…)
- planning of educational activities
- relationship with families

**Distance learning**

- Being forced to deliver online lessons does not mean to apply the same teaching strategies that are effective in presence it always needs some adaptation. You can, for instance, use online digital tools like *Jamboard* or *Padlet* to create online shared brainstorming activities, or *Mentimeter* or *Kahoot* to create online real-time surveys that you can use to get feedbacks from the students.
- Having one official space where to store all the information, all the lessons' materials could be useful: *Moodle*, in this sense, is one of the most useful platforms, together with *Google Classroom*.
- Having the lessons' materials shared and stocked in a unique and officially recognized online space could help families to make some order in all the materials they receive. It can also be useful for you to store the homework from your students.
- To avoid losing communication with your students, you can organise weekly meetings with these small groups and ask also questions about their quality of life, how they feel, how they are copying with all the difficulties.
- Interacting with parents is also a key issue: you should try to organise a safe online space (with defined and negotiated rules)

where to share the most important information with them. A group-chat on *WhatsApp* or on *Facebook* could be useful to keep in touch with them and to work on a sense of community. Be aware that these spaces, if not moderated or curated, can easily generate conflicts and misunderstanding.

**Distance evaluation**

- Asking your students to make small projects can help you in the evaluation process. You can work on short digital storytelling, podcasts, presentations, but also online boards (using *Jamboard* or *Padlet*).
- You can also ask your students to work on these projects in small groups so that they are fostered to interact with each other and not being isolated.
- To avoid loosing communication with your students, you can organise weekly meetings with these small groups and ask also questions about their quality of life, how they feel, how they are copying with all the difficulties.

**Digital competence**

- It is paramount to organise trainings and professional development occasions about digital competence for educators.
- The manual (Pacetti, Soriani, 2023) contains lot of information about digital competences, please feel free to share it among your colleagues and to organise moments with them to discuss about the topic.

**School-family communication**

- Using too many channels and too many communication environments could lead to misunderstandings, stress, and privacy issues.
- Concentrate your communication only in one space and define the timings (in coordination with families and with your colleagues).
- Use a virtual class platform like Moodle or other blogging platforms, as hub for all the learning materials and as a space for all the communication history. If parents lose track of some updates they will know that they can find all the information in one single space.

| Communication between teachers |
| --- |
| • Like with parents, using too many channels and too many communication environments could lead to misunderstandings, stress, and privacy issues: agree with your colleagues which platform to use.<br>• Organise periodical (weekly or monthly) meetings (in presence or online) with your colleagues to discuss about classroom issues, future planning or simply to share valuable materials or teaching strategies. |

### *3.3.2 Parents' guidelines*

| Supporting distance learning |
| --- |
| • If possible, dedicate one device of the house to your children school's tasks. If it is not possible, try to store the pictures and the videos on free online storage services (like *Google photos* or *Amazon photos*): this could help in creating more storage space on the device.<br>• Try to involve older brothers or sisters in helping the younger ones: this mutual support could be key in the management of the school's tasks. |

| Digital technologies |
| --- |
| • If you find hard using some apps or some software, try to reach your children's teachers for support. Or try to ask your son/daughter: he or she may be very talented!<br>• Another way to find help are online tutorials (you can try looking for them on *YouTube* or other platforms)<br>• Involve older brothers or sisters in helping the younger ones: this mutual support could be key in the management of the school's tasks. |

| School-Family communication |
| --- |
| • Discuss with the teachers and try to find a time span, weekly or daily, when it is possible to contact them.<br>• Using official emails and other official platforms is a safer, more appropriate, and more efficient way to contact teachers: it will help them, also, in not losing track of the many messages they receive. |

- If your school have not set up an official way to communicate with teachers, try to find one together with them.

**Communication between parents**

- You may consider creating a parents' group-chat where you can get in touch with other parents and ask for clarification, information, and help.
- Be aware, though: when you create such a group, pay attention on sharing the rules on how to use it. Parents group-chats can easily become spaces where parents share useless things, pointless jokes and fruitless complains. These groups should not be place for complains or bad talks about teachers or other parents. They should be, on the opposite, inclusive spaces open to everyone, with the aim to provide an immediate support for important matters.
- In using group-chat, if you want to reach one specific person, do not involve the others: write directly to him/her.

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## Some critical remarks

At the end of the report on this international cooperation and research set of projects, all connected under the inclusion and empowerment paradigms, several critical remarks can be brought to the attention of the reader. Beyond the already commented results achieved with respect to the single project goals, and also academically, we assume that the initial idea, shared by the research group, to build inclusive and empowering processes, contextualizing them together with Palestinian teachers and local education authorities, turned out to be essential in trying to ensure acceptable continuity in time. It would have been very important to actively involve them also into this final report but, as mentioned, one of the greatest limits of these projects has been their lifetime: one year only, for each of them, due to their nature of "*emergency projects*". Lifetime further shorten by: the restricted amount of time the researchers' team could spend on site; the temporal gaps between them and the periods dedicated to the design of all the actions taken.

Such considerations lead us to the first critical question: are emergency policies compatible with educational projects? The answers are actually more than one and, of course, not free of contradictions. We must indeed assume that when there is an emergency it is necessary to intervene with targeted, restricted and effective actions. However, if emergency is converted into routine, short span initiatives can lose their efficacy and be at risk of becoming episodic, of no structural value. The presence of the international community is still preventing, or at least slowing, the process of exclusion of Palestinians from Palestine, a project more and more often openly claimed by Israel political authorities. Nevertheless, this project has affected the work carried out for decades by the many international agencies involved. Their actions have forcibly been short-sighted, flattened on constrained emergency policies, hardly sustainable, and have become one of the many weak spots targeted by the strategic variable intensity war led by Israeli soldiers and settlers, in blatant violation of the international

humanitarian law. This raises a very hard to answer question that is beyond our capacity for analysis and academical duties: is it correct that the so-called *security issues* prevail on peace processes? Or, on the contrary, can be security a direct consequence of peace? Anyway, in the specific case of Palestine, we must consider that cooperation projects are at risk of fostering a culture that helps the chronicisation of the emergency status, where any attempt of structural intervention, either physical or conceptual, is followed by intentionally caused destructive actions and reactions.

This leads us to a third question: what kind of education is preferable to build a culture of peace in violent emergency environments? After these experiences, we are even more convinced that education in such contexts must be nothing but progressive, problematizing and practical. The choice of the inclusion and the empowerment paradigms, if considered as the most advanced peaks of progressive education, confirms this conviction. Indeed, they have inspired and guided the actions taken in the different projects designed by the Bologna University Team together with EducAid. On the one hand, we have considered education as a mean to tackle any progress of the emergency culture. A strategy to overcome it. A peaceful revolution against the violent order imposed by the low intensity war status. Moreover, it has also been used as a tool for building communities and developing values. As clearly indicated by Booth and Ainscow (2002), there are at least three dimensions that have to be simultaneously considered in implementing an inclusive project: the creation of inclusive cultures; the production of inclusive policies and the evolution of inclusive practices. For all these reasons it is important to insist on the fact that inclusive education is not merely a school matter, but a strategic asset to change and improve personal life and societies. On the more practical side, the development of the *Index for inclusion and empowerment* for the Palestinian school system has been intentionally conceived as a useful tool aimed at promoting processes that can generate tangible changes in personal and social customs, beliefs and behaviours, inside and outside the school setting.

It could be thought that talking about inclusive education in such a violent, exclusive and fragmented environment is just a quixotic race against the windmills. In reality, it turned out to be a way to emphasize the contradictions inherent in declaring commonly accepted principles, like the inclusion one, not followed by coherent consequent actions. The stubborn creation of physical and cultural barriers, that keep separating and fragmenting the social life of Israeli and Palestinians, highlights these contradictions. In this regard, the theory and practice of inclusive and empowering education represents a promise of social enhancement achievable only if supported by the whole society and, in this particularly

complex situation, by the international community as a whole. The strong connection with other mainstream international projects, first of all the *UNRWA inclusion policy and strategy* (2013), and the related implementation programs at field and school level, is there to demonstrate how the *Index for inclusion and empowerment* can be considered part of the wider education plan for Palestine shared and supported by the international community. Without forgetting Israeli direct responsibilities in what is going on in the area since 1948, we can not ignore also the internal paradoxes, brought by cultural, religious and political beliefs, existing in the Palestinian society. In the educational field, according to the inclusive paradigm principles, this can be observed, for instance, in the gender issues, or in the management of conflicts, as well as in the approach to diversity and diversability. This means we share with the MoEHE the risk and the responsibility to keep the *Index* alive, to allow it to educate the educators, as well as the students, to use it to disturb the already written future, rather than accepting it as a barren statement of principle.

And this leads us to the last question, which is about the role of inclusive education in social development. The artificial and abstract idea of "*nation-state*", largely considered outdated in the European contest, is still prevailing and intoxicating the debate around the future of all the people who live in Israel and Palestine. And this is preventing any possible, innovative, peaceful solution to the conflict. As a result of this narrow-mindedness, on both sides, education policies are directed towards the training of militants, considered necessary for the survival of a possibly ethnically, religiously, linguistically purified nation-state, rather than citizens able to act in order to peacefully live together and change this tragic situation. And here, again, it clearly emerges also the failure of the international community in taking a firm political stance towards peace and against the reproduction of the dehumanization policies and practices deeply analysed in the, here partly quoted, vast academic literature. In this sense, we make our Paulo Freire's lesson (1970) against *the banking concept of education*, observed in the oppressive societies, where education is a practice of domination. Instead, we stand with him in favour of any free dialogical practice of teaching and learning: a *problem-posing education* policy aimed to develop critical, creative and empowered thinkers, able to succeed where we have so far failed.

The challenge of inclusive education needs time. And perseverance. And peace. Today there are no doubts in considering learning a direct or mediated lifelong experience whose actions, either formal, informal or non-formal, must be intentionally supported and monitored. This involves not only teachers and students in school, but all the human beings in everyday life.

From Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of hope* (1992) to bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* (1994; 2003), we keep working to widen the breach in that wall that keeps hindering the full vision and comprehension of what, since 1993, Edgar Morin calls a *new humanism*, where the concept of nation-state is superseded by the idea of *earth-homeland*: the awareness of been *earth citizens* belonging to the same *community of destiny*.

What, in more poetical words, Pier Paolo Pasolini (1962), in the tireless research of a common happiness, called *the dream of a thing*: *il sogno di una cosa*.

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# Iconographic sources

Fig. 1 - 1947 UN Partition Plan.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Partition_Plan_for_Palestine#/media/File:UN_Palestine_Partition_Versions_1947.jpg .
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https://education-profiles.org/sites/default/files/inline-images/ISCED_Palestine.jpg.

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The book is aimed at educational professionals (educators, teachers, trainers) and policy makers, especially those working in international environment and in challenging contexts.
The volume illustrates the results of research carried out between 2018 and 2022 within international cooperation projects conducted in West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza.
After the creation of an *Index for Inclusion and Empowerment* with local teachers, the research team trailed its use in supporting inclusive and equitable education school policies and instructional design practices. The *Index*, conceived in partnership with NGO EDUCAID, aims to enrich the original tool, focused on inclusion only (Booth and Ainscow, 2011), with the value-added concept of empowerment, thus not only overcoming obstacles hindering learning in the situation experienced by Palestinians, but providing teachers and students tools to enhance self-confidence and awareness, autonomy and responsibility for the own and community benefit. Integrating inclusion and empowerment incorporates the will and capacity of the young Palestinian school system to be inclusive while providing individuals with such necessary competences.

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