

# Upbringing and Education

By Samia Khoury



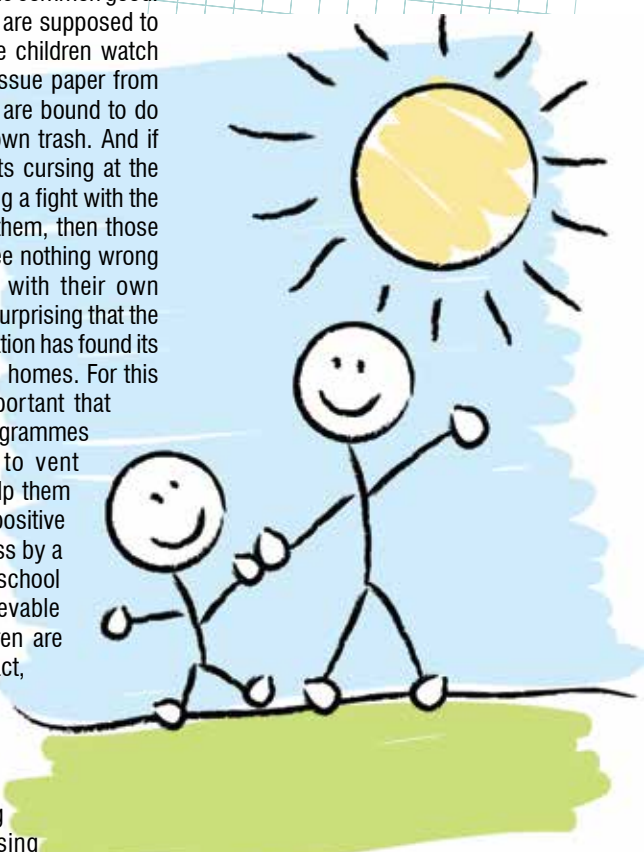
The ministry in charge of education is called *Tarbiyah wa Ta'aleem* in Arabic, which literally means "upbringing and education." So education not only means finishing a syllabus, which includes languages, sciences, and social studies, but also building character and instilling in children the moral values that make good citizens who care for the common good. Unfortunately, *tarbiyah* is practically non-existent in most schools. Although there are some schools that have very strict rules in order to guarantee discipline and a well-behaved class, this does not mean at all that moral values are built into the system. The students end up behaving well for fear of the administration or the system of punishment, but that does not create a permanent transformation.

We have a tendency to blame all the bad things that affect our community's behaviour on the occupation. There is a lot of truth in that, especially because we are all in a permanent state of frustration – when we are forced to wait for hours at checkpoints to be able to get to work and earn a living, or when our homes are demolished, or when the breadwinner does not come home at the end of the day because he was picked up by the army and thrown in jail. Yet there is still a lot that we can do to improve our lives. One example concerns the unethical behaviour of drivers, especially at Qalandiya Checkpoint. Instead of staying in line to ensure a smooth crossing for everyone, each driver thinks of outsmarting the other, irrespective of the confusion this creates and how it affects public welfare. In fact, every driver feels that he or she is the only one who is in a hurry and that everybody else is on a leisure tour. Actually, we are subconsciously angry at the occupation but we take it out on each other.



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Respect for the rights of others starts from kindergarten, and teachers and parents have a great responsibility to instil moral values in the children in order to create a generation of good citizens who care for the common good. Parents and teachers are supposed to be role models. If the children watch their parents throw tissue paper from the car window, they are bound to do the same with their own trash. And if they hear their parents cursing at the checkpoint and picking a fight with the car that just passed them, then those children will surely see nothing wrong with picking a fight with their own classmates. It is not surprising that the violence of the occupation has found its way into schools and homes. For this reason it is very important that the schools have programmes that allow children to vent their anger and to help them use their energies in positive ways. Very often I pass by a school at the end of a school day, and it is unbelievable how rough the children are with each other. In fact, the teachers are often unable to control the children. We must realise that there is something very wrong and that we risk losing a whole generation. So what can





we do? How can we put an end to this phenomenon? What kind of an education system do we need in order to bring up a generation that is caring and committed to moral values?

A remarkable spirit prevailed during the first Intifada as everybody struggled willingly for the same cause with discipline and cooperation. But at the same time, while the authority of the military was eroded, so was every other kind of authority, whether at home or at school. The young people took upon themselves a big responsibility and lost much of their childhood; a childhood that could not be retrieved as they became, overnight, responsible young men and women. The spirit of rebellion against all authority was a natural reaction. I remember once asking a young boy to pick up a bottle that he had thrown onto the street. He replied, "Let the municipality pick it up." This is when I realised that neither home nor school alone can repair the damage that has been done. Gone are the days when a young boy would heed my request. It now takes more than a request. We need to build on the spirit of cooperation and discipline that we all experienced during the Intifada in order to heal the brokenness of our society; a society that is still not liberated from occupation. We need a built-in system in our schools that stresses moral values and teaches ethics as one of the compulsory subjects.

Unfortunately many of the teachers themselves have been born and brought up under this brutal military occupation, while their own parents were struggling to make a living. So it is not surprising to see a lot of frustration reflected throughout the community. Anger and frustration do not help the process of healing or of bringing up a healthy generation. Frustration is very contagious. Thus we need teachers who consider teaching to be a vocation and who radiate joy and hope in order to provide children with a wholesome education that includes good citizenship practices and an appreciation of the common good.

Given that many of the contributors to this issue will write about the educational syllabus and the standardised exam that encourages memorisation instead of innovative and critical thinking, I will not touch on this subject. But I want to appeal to those who have anything to do with the school curriculum to include at least two periods of ethics a week in the school timetable, starting from the early childhood years. They can even be part of the religious education periods. It would be worth experimenting on combining both Muslims and Christians during these periods that would encourage tolerance and acceptance of the other.

Many schools and teachers can integrate ethics throughout the curriculum. At the same time I hope that the Ministry of Education will realise the need for this and that both parents and teachers will cooperate in bringing up a new generation that will enjoy living in a society that respects and promotes the common good. We need to give our young generation the hope that this is possible and that they can have a role in this change.

*Samia Khoury is a retired community volunteer. She is the author of Reflections from Palestine – A Journey of Hope, published by Rimal, and A Rhyme for Every Time, published by Turbo. Her reflections are published on her blog, [reflectionsfrompalestine.blogspot.co.il](http://reflectionsfrompalestine.blogspot.co.il).*

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