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Peace Building through Education Reforms Case study: Objectives and Philosophy of Jordanian Educational System

Megan McKeown
SIT Study Abroad

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Peace Building through Education Reforms

Case study: Objectives and Philosophy of Jordanian Educational System

By Megan McKeown Gleason

SIT, Jordan: Modernization and Social Change

Academic Director: Dr. Ashraf Al Qudah

ISP Advisor: Dema Aloun

Chapman University

Peace Studies

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Abstract:

In the field of peacebuilding, education reform is the most tangible way to propel forward and build positive change. Access to schooling is not the only factor that will eradicate structural violence and inequality in our world. This can be seen with violence and inequality increasing even though educational enrollment has reached upwards of 90% in developing areas. We must begin a movement to learn from educational systems already in place, to pinpoint their strengths and expand on them, discover possible themes to change, and suggest diverse avenues to overcome obstacles for achieving social justice and peace. The ensuing research paper is the beginning of this movement, highlighting lessons to be learned from the educational philosophy and objectives in The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The philosophy and objectives of education, and the actions encouraged to apply these, show better than any other marker, the social project of a country. Jordan has a history of emphasis on educational reforms and boasts important improvements in literacy, school enrollment, and social stability. In 2015 King Abdullah II will launch the latest educational reforms to renew the current structures and content. This research was carried out throughout 4 weeks to gauge how the philosophy of Jordan's education system is taught and applied by students. Interviews and focus groups with students between 8th and 11th grades were the main methods for data collection, as well as analysis of material culture, informal observation, and secondary sources.

Key words: Education, Peace-building, Philosophy of Education

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Introduction:

In the year 2000, goal number two from the eight Millennium Development Goals was to achieve universal education throughout the world. This goal aimed to achieve at least basic education enrollment in all countries and was created under the belief that education is an essential social component which if homologous and addressed effectively, would change many of the most formidable problems in our world today. Issues such as world poverty, inequality, injustice, and violence.¹ Initial efforts showed significant results, achieving 90% enrollment in primary education in developing regions only ten years later. Yet in 2012, 58 million children of primary school age were still out of school and the promising tendency lagged considerably.²

On a global scale, countries have become less peaceful and more unequal over the last seven years, with markers for peace steadily deteriorating by a variety of causes. These include outbreaks of violence in the Middle East, the civil wars in Libya and Syria, a deterioration of security institutions in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the escalating drug war in Central America, increasing violence in Somalia, South Sudan, DRC, and Rwanda, and violent demonstrations in several European countries due to the economic difficulties of the last decade.³

In 2013, the Institute of Peace and Economics released figures of the economic impact that violent conflict has on our world, citing a total expenditure of 9.8 trillion dollars per year. This figure constitutes 11.3 percent of the global GDP and is equivalent to \$1350 USD per person per year.⁴ On a similar note, as a guest lecturer at Yale University, Queen Rania of Jordan

¹ UN: Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015 (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>)

² Ibid.

³ Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Peace Index Report 2014 (Global Peace Index & Institute for Economics and Peace) 2014

⁴ Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Peace Index Report 2014 (Global Peace Index & Institute for Economics and Peace) 2014

mentioned that in 2009, it would have taken 11 billion dollars to provide schooling services to 75 million children who did not have access to education. She sustained that even though the number seems steep, the figure is actually less than the capital invested in the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq per month.⁵ Entrenched in a culture of violence and seemingly unstoppable injustice, instability and structural violence, we fail to realize the actual impact that these issues have on our personal lives. The biggest issue however, is that we fail to efficiently address the root cause of these issues, denying any responsibility for the people who are contributing to violence and fear around the world, and subsequently failing to organize our priorities strategically for catalyzing and achieving positive change.

In the field of peacebuilding, education is the most important and tangible way to propel forward and build the much needed and desired positive change. As we reach the year declared for the completion of the MDGs, the global community must re-address the ways in which goals for improving education quality and accessibility will be approached and pursued. Access to schooling is not the only factor that will eradicate structural violence and inequality in our world. This can be seen in the data exposed previously, with violence and inequality increasing even though educational enrollment reached upwards of 90% in developing areas.⁶ The creation of schooling techniques and spaces must be redefined to genuinely and justly address the main urgent needs and issues that society members are facing. Examples of these are, structural violence, unemployment, intolerance of difference and pluralism, and adoption of violent methods of conflict resolution over peaceful constructive options for problem solving.

⁵ Yale University, A Conversation With Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fROidpenw1E> 2009)

⁶ UN: Millenium Development Goals and Beyond 2015 (<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>)

This research is a response to some of the previously mentioned global obstacles for the achievement of positive peace. How can we begin to improve the quality of education? How can we create educational institutions that provide the necessary change and support to the urgent issues experienced in different countries and communities around the world? We must begin a movement to learn from educational systems already in place, to pinpoint their strengths and expand on them, discover possible themes to change, and suggest diverse avenues to overcome obstacles for achieving social justice and peace. The ensuing research paper is the beginning of this movement, highlighting lessons to be learned from the educational objectives and philosophy in The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

History of Education in Jordan:

The history of education in Jordan is a clear example of the positive and timely outcomes that can be achieved with leadership's interest in education and societal development. Jordan is one of the most resource poor countries in the world, having no oil or significant minerals and holding the second place in the world's most water scarce countries.⁷ As such, the country's leadership has focused on developing and relying on their human resources as the vehicle to sustaining the country's society and economy. Former King Hussein is loved and respected by the population, greatly because of his understanding of the importance of education and his policy's emphasis on providing quality education to all Jordanians.

⁷ Ministry of Water and Irrigation, *THE HASHEMITE KINGDOM OF JORDAN: Establishing the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) towards Water Security The Jordanian Perspective*. March 2014

There are three important markers in the history of educational development in Jordan. The first is from 1950 to early in the 1970's, when the government's main educational objective was to enforce compulsory education for the entire population. During this period, the Ministry of Education was obligated by law to open a school in any place throughout the country where there was a minimum of ten school aged children without access to a school.⁸ The second important period of reforms spanned between the 1970's until the 1980's. During this time, initiatives to increase elementary education were coupled with efforts to diversify secondary education.⁹ From the early 1990's, the main focus of educational reforms was on improving the quality of education, including teaching, content, and facilities. Also important to mention is the leadership's specific effort to create educational reforms that were coherent and helpful to the kingdom's plans for economic and social advancement. During this period of time, Jordan was spending 10.78% of the total budget on education, placing the country in the bracket of countries spending high amounts on education.¹⁰

For 34 years these active pro education campaigns raised the literacy level from 33% in 1960, to 85.4% in 1996. The level of enrollment is estimated to have reached 95% with a very small disparity between urban and rural areas. This percentage is a significant improvement from the 47% enrollment in 1960. The main issue continues to be a substantial gender gap, which shows that two-thirds of all illiterate Jordanians are women.¹¹

⁸ Mohammad Khalil Abbas, EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN JORDAN FROM THE 1950S UNTIL TODAY: STAGES AND CHARACTERISTICS, (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula. Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition.2012)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mohammad Khalil Abbas, EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN JORDAN FROM THE 1950S UNTIL TODAY: STAGES AND CHARACTERISTICS, (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula. Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition.2012)

¹¹ The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan: Human Resources (<http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/resources3.html>)

In fact Delwin A. Roy and William T. Ireland argued in early 1990's that the most serious problem in Jordan was the excess of highly qualified graduates who would find it increasingly hard to find adequate job opportunities. This however was categorized as an issue with planning not with the educational system per se. Overall the Jordanian education system was reported as doing an excellent job in educating the population, which when considering the extent of the country's resources and sociopolitical context, is described as an important accomplishment.¹²

In 1998, in an effort to improve the quality and relevance of education, the government restructured basic and secondary curriculum with a focus on developing problem solving capabilities, critical thinking skills, and creating a more tangible understanding of the relevance of academic knowledge in students' real life.¹³ This ten year initiative was complemented with plans dedicated to improving all aspects important to educational processes such as teachers' skills, school administration, educational information systems, pre-school education and education for children with special needs. The investment of over 1 billion dollars in these educational initiatives showed positive outcomes and accelerated the literacy rate.¹⁴

Jordan has a very young population, 44.2 percent is younger than 14 years of age and 31.4% are between 15 and 29 years old. Given the huge percentage of youth that comprise the population, Jordanian officials continued to make strides to achieve successful development of incoming generations.¹⁵ Some of these include the implementation of pilot schools with the Global Education Program, starting in 40 schools around Jordan. The aim of the GEP education

¹² Delwin A. Roy and William T. Ireland, *Educational Policy and Human Resource Development in Jordan* (Middle Eastern Studies, 1992), 178-215

¹³ Mohammad Khalil Abbas, *EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN JORDAN FROM THE 1950S UNTIL TODAY: STAGES AND CHARACTERISTICS*, (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula. Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition.2012)

¹⁴ The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan: Human Resources (<http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/resources3.html>)

¹⁵ Ibid.

program is to empower learners and involve them in transformative social action, starting from the local and regional levels, to build education institutions who work based on human dignity, justice, equity and freedom.¹⁶

In September 2002 , the Forum for Future Education in Jordan was held as a response to King Abdullah II's goal to participate in the global knowledge economy, particularly in the technology industry. Creating a knowledge economy means creating lifetime versatile learners who can adapt to the knowledge demand and supply of their society. These initiatives materialized into the Education Reform for a Knowledge Economy, commonly known as ERfKE. These reforms put forth an education policy and new educational objectives designed to meet the needs of students and the society alike.¹⁷ The reform aimed to improve the quality of teaching and learning as well as enhance early childhood education. Other important aspects of these reforms included renewed learning and teaching strategies, fostering computer-based e-learning, including universal concepts and openness towards global cultures in curriculum as well as global exchange of knowledge and encouraging innovators who challenge the status quo.¹⁸ The government also formed important partnerships with international agencies and launched a variety of educational initiatives, such as the Jordan Education Initiative (JEI) and Queen Rania's organization Madrasati (my school). After the implementation of these reforms, Jordan was the country in the Arab world with the most fair and efficient educational system, as well as the country with the largest percentage of enrollment and literacy.

¹⁶ Omar H. El-Sheikh Hasan, *“Improving the Quality of Learning: Global Education as a Vehicle for School Reform Theory into Practice”*, (Taylor & Francis, Ltd: Global Education: Viewed from around the World Spring, 2000), pp. 97-103

¹⁷ Mohammad Khalil Abbas, EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN JORDAN FROM THE 1950S UNTIL TODAY: STAGES AND CHARACTERISTICS, (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula. Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition.2012)

¹⁸ Ibid.

Philosophy and Objectives of Jordanian Educational System:

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan did not have a clear educational philosophy until 1964. This was firstly because there was no clear or shared social philosophy, given that the state was in the process of being formed. It was with Education Law no. 16 that Jordan's leadership established a clear educational philosophy.¹⁹ This law expressed the objectives of the educational system, linking education to the long term needs of Jordanian society.

In the 1980's King Hussein called for a renewed emphasis on the development of the education sector, focusing on content and objectives. The Provisional Education Law no. 27 of 1988 thus created links between Jordan's educational philosophy and its constitution, outlining the general objectives of the kingdom with specific emphasis on critical thinking. From this law educational authorities created the Educational Development Plan (1989– 1998), which dealt with all aspects of the educational process in Jordan.²⁰

The philosophy of the Jordanian education system is based upon the principles found in Islamic Arab civilizations, principles of the Arab Revolt, the Jordanian constitution and Jordanian identity. From this philosophy the ministry of education created a set of general and specific objectives for each of the cycles of education.²¹ The general objectives aim to form citizens that have faith in God, identify with their nation, uphold human virtues and show

¹⁹ Naseema al-Khalidi, "*THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION AND THE RANGE OF ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONTENT OF CIVIC EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS IN JORDAN*" (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula, Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition. 2012)

²⁰ Mohammad Khalil Abbas, *EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN JORDAN FROM THE 1950S UNTIL TODAY: STAGES AND CHARACTERISTICS*, (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula. Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition.2012)

²¹ Naseema al-Khalidi, "*THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION AND THE RANGE OF ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONTENT OF CIVIC EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS IN JORDAN*" (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula, Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition. 2012)

maturity spiritually, mentally, and socially. All educational affairs are directed according to these foundational ideas and are articulated in Education Law no. 3.²²The philosophy and objectives are classified into five categories: intellectual foundations, national foundations, ethnic foundations, humanitarian foundations and social foundations.²³

For the intellectual foundations, Islam is seen as an important intellectual and behavioral system that promotes respect for humankind, promotes the importance of intellectual activity and encourages learning, work and creative activity. It also provides a comprehensive value system for the consideration of individual life and the community. It also brings to light the relationship between Islam and Arabism. The category of social foundations, covers accepted social agreements and behaviors, stating for example how all Jordanians have equal political, social and economic rights and duties. The only factor that differentiates between every individual in society is the way that they participate in their society. Society is built on social justice, cooperation, shared fate, and understanding the individual and his/her social responsibilities.²⁴

The national foundations in the educational philosophy touch on the importance of understanding Jordanian society within the context of the Arab world, and forming a part of the Arab-Islamic community. According to this category, the Jordanian people are an integral entity, with no ethnic, regional, sectarian, clan or family-based intolerance. Ethnic foundations revolve around the importance of the Arabic language as a pillar of the Arab community. Another element of this category are the principles of the Arab revolt teaching the importance of

²² Ibid.

²³ Naseema al-Khalidi, *“THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION AND THE RANGE OF ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONTENT OF CIVIC EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS IN JORDAN”* (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula, Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition. 2012)

²⁴ Ibid.

independence, freedom, unity and progress.²⁵ The humanitarian foundation focuses on raising awareness on the importance of national, ethnic and religious identity and balancing it with openness towards global cultures. It also focuses on enabling individuals to meet the demands of the modern world.²⁶

The current objectives form the basic education system, which stemmed from the EREfKE reforms, aim to prepare citizens in ‘all aspects of their personality’.²⁷ Firstly, they must have clear knowledge on Islam’s history, principles, and values, as well as exemplify these in their quotidian behavior. They must also exemplify social behavioral basics, and be in tune with their society’s traditions, habits, and values.²⁸ They must have strong basic skills of the Arabic languages and acquire basic skills of at least one foreign language. They must be aware of essential facts relevant to the natural and geographical environment in Jordan, surrounding region, and the world. They must cultivate love for their homeland, feel pride for it and ‘hold the consequent responsibilities’.²⁹ In the primary education system, students must also be able to understand all types of technology available to them and utilize them in daily life.³⁰

In the secondary education system, grades 11 and 12, the objectives aim to build citizens who can have excellent use of the Arabic language and have proficient grasp on at least one foreign language. Students are encouraged to exhibit a cultural identity based upon past and present civilizations as well as be aware of the necessity for being open to world civilization and

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Naseema al-Khalidi, “*THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION AND THE RANGE OF ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONTENT OF CIVIC EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS IN JORDAN*” (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula, Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition. 2012)

²⁷ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan: Ministry of Education: Goals and Philosophy (<http://www.moe.gov.jo/en/MenuDetails.aspx?MenuID=32>)

²⁸ Ibid,

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

contribute to its development. Another goal states students must ‘endeavor for the prosperity, eminence and pride of his country,’ and must participate in resolving its problems and bringing about its security and safety.³¹

Students will be encouraged to work with a team’s spirit and to understand the basis of consultation and democracy as well as believe in the principles of social justice and apply them in their daily life actions. Students graduating from secondary education must understand international issues.³² They must understand the importance of international understanding as well as view peace as built through justice. Another objective is to train students how to do research and become practical in the process of collecting, and processing data. They are encouraged to develop a habit of self learning throughout their obligatory educational cycles and throughout the rest of their life. Finally, they must understand create and enjoy artistic work.³³

Research Question and Previous Scholarly Conversations:

The ensuing analysis focuses on how the objectives of the Jordanian educational system are taught, perceived and applied by students and teachers between 8th and 11th grades. In general I found limited literature that specifically focused on the philosophy and objectives of the Jordanian education sector, let alone how these were perceived and applied by students. I did find different articles that related to specific goals of the education system, as well as literature on different issues experienced in the education system and hopes for their improvement.

³¹ Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan: Ministry of Education: Goals and Philosophy (<http://www.moe.gov.jo/en/MenuDetails.aspx?MenuID=32>)

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

My most helpful resource has been the book *The Politics of Educational Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula* Edited by Samira Alayan, Achim Rohde & Sarhan Dhouib. From the chapter of *Educational Developments in Jordan from the 1950s Until Today: Stages and Characteristics* by Mohammad Khalil Abbas, I was able to gage a detailed description of the timeline of educational development and initiatives in The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The chapter on *The Philosophical Foundations of Education and Range of its Implications for the Content of Civic Education Textbooks in Jordan* by Mustafa Abu al-Sheikh and Yasser al-Khalailah gave me important background on civic education in Jordan and how the five categories in the philosophy of education are incorporated into the curricula.

This section of the book was specifically important in understanding the objectives relating to national identity and social cohesion, as well as religious teachings. According to al-Sheikh and al-Khalailah civic education in Jordan strives to prepare society members who are committed to their duties, believe in freedom, justice and equality before the law and feel a sense of belonging to their nation and community. This subject is supposed to give students the skills to participate in decision making, cultivate a respectable moral character, use reason in debate and respect the opinions of others.³⁴ The curricula must also encourage students to embody values such as reliability, objectivity, curiosity, perseverance and social justice. This subject also teaches the theoretical concepts and practice of democracy, how to work as part of a team, act in the best interest of their nation, maintain its stability, place public interest above

³⁴ Naseema al-Khalidi, "*THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION AND THE RANGE OF ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONTENT OF CIVIC EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS IN JORDAN*" (*The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula*, Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition. 2012)

personal interest, make sacrifices for the common good, and support pluralism within the framework of national unity and national development.³⁵

Researchers in this article carried out qualitative and quantitative analysis, by tallying how many times content related to the five categories of the philosophy appear in eighth, ninth and tenth grade textbooks. The research showed that the category that appeared the most was the content on social foundations, followed by national foundations. Intellectual foundations took third place in number of apparitions, humanitarian foundations the fourth and ethnic foundations the fifth. In discussions of these findings, authors speak about the imbalance that exists in the representation of the five foundations of the Jordanian educational philosophy. Some foundations are included to a high extent, others only to a medium degree, and others extremely infrequently.³⁶ The authors suggest a lack of sufficient care and forethought in the creation of the textbooks. As such, textbook authors may not be prepared or supervised to include the educational objectives in their work, even though the foundations are explicitly stated in the law and are mentioned in the general outline for the curricula issued by the Education Council.³⁷

The authors also mentioned coming across ambiguity in passages describing national, ethnic, and humanitarian categories and argued that one possible reason for this are the actual values and beliefs of the people writing the books. This would explain the important presence of social and intellectual foundations, given that they are extremely prevalent in Jordanian society and

³⁵ Naseema al-Khalidi, "*THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION AND THE RANGE OF ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONTENT OF CIVIC EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS IN JORDAN*" (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula, Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition. 2012)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

dominate social formation in families, the local community, in the media, and in social and cultural centers.³⁸

This same book also had a couple of articles that painted an interesting perspective about how civilizations outside of the Arab world are taught, particularly Western European cultures. In chapter 9, *Images of Europeans in Jordanian Textbooks*, Oasem al-Newashi carried out a qualitative analysis on the way that Europeans are depicted in Jordanian classes on history, geography, civic education and general culture curricula from the seventh to the twelfth grade. The researchers read through textbooks and classified explicit and implicit references to Europe and Europeans with an attempt to understand how the curricula aims to construct the image of these civilizations for the students.³⁹

The researchers concluded that Europe is commonly described as a place of modernity and the way to connect with development, global civilization, freedom, and reason. In these descriptions, there is no important distinction between different countries in Europe stating generalizations such as Europe does not have water scarcity problems, which is not true for all the countries in the European continent.⁴⁰ Researchers found that the textbooks contain several references to the role the Arab community played in the advancement of European culture and how they wrongly claimed credit for advancements in areas like numerology or medicine. In the period of colonization, textbooks have harsh descriptions of how each European country became

³⁸ Naseema al-Khalidi, *THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION AND THE RANGE OF ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONTENT OF CIVIC EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS IN JORDAN* (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula, Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition. 2012)

³⁹ Qasem al-Newashi, *IMAGES OF EUROPEANS IN JORDANIAN TEXTBOOKS* (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula. Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition. 2012)

⁴⁰ Ibid.

involved in the different regions of the Middle East, as well as the legacy that these invasions had in the region.⁴¹

In the article *Perceptions of Jordanian Secondary Schools Teachers towards Critical Thinking*, Osamah Batanieh and Khaled F Alazzi from Yarmouk University in Irbid, expose an important analysis that relates to the Ministry of Education's goal of teaching critical thinking in schools. This article focuses on the way that critical thinking is understood and taught in Jordanian secondary schools. Batanieh and Alazzi analyzed the curriculum criteria for junior and senior high school levels and found that the general teaching guidelines of the Ministry of Education include a goal to enable junior and senior students to think critically. Yet this goal does not appear in individual teacher manuals.⁴² When the researchers searched the curriculum criteria at both the junior and senior high levels, it was found that the Ministry of Education Guidelines did indicate, in the general teaching guidelines, that one educational goal of secondary education is to enable students to think critically. Specifically in citizenship and moral education, history, and geography, teachers manuals do include statements on critical thinking but don't provide any strategies for teachers to materialize these goals. Consequently, each teacher applies their own definition of critical thinking strategies and exercises to their students.⁴³

In a textbook analysis made by Kawood, Jordanian textbooks were considered monotonous and to contain simplified information, usually tending to focus on the goals of social

⁴¹ Qasem al-Newashi, *IMAGES OF EUROPEANS IN JORDANIAN TEXTBOOKS* (The Politics of Education Reform in the Middle East: Self and Other in Textbooks and Curricula. Berghahn Books. Kindle Edition.2012)

⁴² Khaled F. Alazzi and Osamah Bataineh, "*Perceptions of Jordanian Secondary Schools Teachers towards Critical Thinking*" (International Education Volume 38 Issue 2, 2009) 56-72

⁴³ Ibid.

harmony and security.⁴⁴ In these books, students must find either a correct or wrong answer and there are no exercises to incite critical thinking. Alazzi argued that teaching critical thinking in Jordanian schools was not actively encouraged because “Critical thinking was misunderstood as criticizing, finding fault with, blaming, restructuring, and differentiating”; therefore, Jordanians did not like it.⁴⁵ Alazzi also provided a quote by Jordanians who argued “the Arabic culture in Jordan strives for harmony and security.⁴⁶ Questioning is viewed as opposing the accepted ways of doing things; thus, it is not promoted by the educational system.” Teachers teach students to respect the leadership and view them as protecting the culture and people. According to Alazzi and Batanieh, social studies teachers fear to move away from the set curriculum and do not teach or discuss sensitive issues in class to avoid dismissal.⁴⁷

In his article, *Performing the ‘Knights of Change’*, Roozbeh Shirazi does an analysis of the national identity in schools in Jordan, how it is taught and how students chose to express their identity. This article found that students had very diverse views on how to express their identity. Students consistently spoke of their alternate identities and criticized the famous governmental slogan of Jordan First or We Are All Jordan.⁴⁸ It was harder for students to establish a specific personal identity and easier to express their opinions on national unity and progress of the country.

In his conclusion, Shirazi found that class participation was controlled by teachers based on gendered assumptions of conduct. In attempts to maintain discipline in classrooms and school

⁴⁴ Khaled F. Alazzi and Osamah Bataineh, “*Perceptions of Jordanian Secondary Schools Teachers towards Critical Thinking*” (International Education Volume 38 Issue 2, 2009) 56-72

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Roozbeh Shirazi, *Performing the ‘Knights of Change’: male youth narratives and practices of citizenship in Jordanian schools*, (Teachers College, Columbia University, 2012)

spaces the use of corporal punishment and threatening use of violence actually made students less willing to participate in class discussions.⁴⁹ Additionally, the researcher argued that the way state schools are expected to ‘implant the values of belongingness, participation, democracy, and citizenship’ does not allow enough emphasis on the views and questions of the students and does not give enough validation to the important social and political role teachers play in schools.⁵⁰

Another article whose findings I found informative was Dr. Fakhri Khader’s work titled *The Malaysian Experience in Developing National Identity, Multicultural Tolerance and Understanding through Teaching Curricula: Lessons Learned and Possible Applications in the Jordanian Context*. This research is an analysis on the ways that Malaysian authorities created a curriculum that focused on teaching mutual understanding and pride for the different cultures and sects found in the country. This research found that it was the aim of the founders of Malaysia to unite their culturally diverse society through their education system.⁵¹ For example, textbooks have stories of Malay, Chinese and Indian children working and playing together. As children go through their basic education, students must build their own value systems emphasizing the importance of peace and non-violence as ways of conflict resolution. They have specific subjects that dedicate school time to learn about the importance of empathy, compassion, harmony, friendship, forgiveness and peace.⁵²

This article gives an outline of the national and civic education in fourth and tenth grades in Malaysia. Subjects include Egoism, which deals with knowing personal points of strengths

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Dr. Fakhri R. Khader, *The Malaysian Experience in Developing National Identity, Multicultural Tolerance and Understanding through Teaching Curricula: Lessons Learned and Possible Applications in the Jordanian Context* (International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 2 No. 1; January 2012) 207-288

⁵² Dr. Fakhri R. Khader, *The Malaysian Experience in Developing National Identity, Multicultural Tolerance and Understanding through Teaching Curricula: Lessons Learned and Possible Applications in the Jordanian Context* (International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 2 No. 1; January 2012) 207-288

and weaknesses and learning about self control, self management and personal health and appearance. There is also a subject called loving the family in which students define nuclear and extended family, as well as learn about their personal family roots and those of their classmates. Also included in the curricula are subjects like Coexistence at School and My Community, Culture in Malaysia, Malaysia My Country, and Current Challenges Facing Malaysia.⁵³

This specific work came about because of the author's belief that there are prominent weaknesses in the national and civic education in Jordan, specifically in the development of national identity and inclusion of diverse cultures that live within the country. The author argued that addressing these weaknesses would strengthen internal peace, which is especially important when considering social, economic and geo-political challenges surrounding Jordan today.⁵⁴ In fact, Queen Rania has expressed similar concerns, showing how Jordan's education system is threatened by violence and by regional tribal allegiances over national identity and in the view of many, has failed to build an inclusive national identity.⁵⁵

I was unable to find theoretical contributions to the effects that learning different languages has specifically in the Jordanian context, yet I was able to find psychological studies on the effects of multilingual education on young people's brains. Ellen Bialystokm found that multilingual education will enrich student's brain development. In a whole-brain analysis, bilinguals show different patterns of brain activity in the conflict condition section of the brain. It is well documented how knowing several languages improves cognitive development, and cultural tolerance and understanding. As such, the effect of bilingualism on cognitive

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Dr. Fakhri R. Khader, *The Malaysian Experience in Developing National Identity, Multicultural Tolerance and Understanding through Teaching Curricula: Lessons Learned and Possible Applications in the Jordanian Context* (International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 2 No. 1; January 2012) 207-288

performance is a striking example of how ordinary experience accumulates to modify cognitive networks and cognitive abilities.⁵⁶

In relation to the educational objective that aims to build Jordanian students in all aspects of their personality, I came across Gardner's theory on multiple intelligences which shows how important it is for educational institutions to foster different types of learning, given that each individual has varying strengths and defacto ways of interpreting and developing in the world. According to Gardner intelligence is a bio-psychological potential. Intelligences cannot be seen or counted. They are used to process information and are activated by any situation or cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture.⁵⁷The potential for the activation depends upon the values of a particular culture, the opportunities available in that culture and the personal decisions made by individuals and/or their families, schoolmasters and others.⁵⁸ It was enlightening to learn about the ways in which Gardner categorizes intelligence as it further supports the importance of the Jordanian objective to develop students intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and in the context of their society. All of the scholarly conversations that I came across were enlightening and helpful, yet I wasn't able to find an ongoing conversation on how teachers are addressing the objectives and philosophy of the educational system, and more importantly how students are applying them in their daily life.

⁵⁶ Ellen Bialystokm "Benefits of Bilingualism." *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology* 65 2011.

⁵⁷ Vargas, Jose G. "Multiple Intelligences and the Future of Education in Mexico." *Asian Social Science* 6, no. 6 (June 2012): 139-47.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Theoretical Framework for Analysis:

In order to answer this research question and analyze my interviews and material culture I will be using Paulo Freire's framework on praxis. Praxis means, practice in applying the use of knowledge and skills. According to Freire, proper human activity is constituted by both action and reflection. Freire says that a revolution is achieved with neither verbalism nor activism, but rather with praxis; with the reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed. This active praxis is, according to Freire, the power that transforms our environments.⁵⁹ Thus, coherent human activity is theory, reflection and action. This theory will relate to my research question, given that my curiosity is fueled by how the goals of the education system are taught and how these are understood and applied by the students.

I will also base my analysis on Okoro Kingsley's framework on education for building peace in a society. Kingsley argues that conflict is built into each particular society through the way it is organized. This suggests that social conflict is tied intimately to the socio-political and economic arrangements within a particular society. Injustice, poverty, disease, exploitations, inequality, are some of the main catalyzers for conflict.⁶⁰ Okoro Kingsley heavily relies on Johan Gultang's view on the differences between peacebuilding and peacekeeping. Peacebuilding leads to the institutionalization of positive justice and freedom, by addressing the root cause of conflict and eradicating the possibility of more conflict arising.⁶¹ By analyzing the educational goals from this lens, I will be able to pinpoint the strengths of these objectives and their

⁵⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (2nd ed. New York: Continuum, 2000)

⁶⁰ Okoro Kingsley, "African Traditional Education: A viable Alternative for Peace Building Process in Modern Africa." (*Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 2010)

⁶¹ Ibid

application. I will also hopefully discover any possible themes that could be addressed to overcome obstacles for achieving social justice and peace.

I chose to speak with students in 8th to 11th grade because, during this age there are very important brain strengthening activities that shape the way individuals will use their brain for the remainder of their life. From 9 to 16 years of age, human brain's neurocentricity strengthens, creating the pathways for multitasking, problem solving and the capability to process more complex information.⁶² This stage of brain development is important in developing talents and lifelong interests. Given this important activity in the brain, being exposed to trauma, stress, or not having access to stimulus could impact brain maturation. Linda Burgess argues that brain activity and maturation in adolescents is a period of "use it or lose it".⁶³ The neuronal connections that are simulated and used habitually will be strengthened and the connections which are not used will be eliminated. Similarly new experiences will create new neurological connections.⁶⁴

This period also sees an important development of the prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain that controls good judgment, impulses, problem solving, setting goals, organizing and planning, among others. During this period of maturation, adolescents strengthen their ability to comprehend critical thinking.⁶⁵ What I found very interesting about this period of brain maturation is that teenagers will process information differently than adults. Adults use their frontal lobes to respond to situations. By contrast, adolescents rely on the amygdala which controls emotions. This is why they are more prone to react quickly to situations without

⁶² Linda Burgess, *The Amazing Adolescent Brain: What Every Educator, Youth Serving Professional, and Healthcare Provider Needs to Know* (Teen Provider; Multiplying Connections, Advocates for Youth)

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Mariam Arain, Maliha Haque, Lina Johal, Puja Mathur, Wynand Nel, Afsha Rais, Ranbir Sandhu, and Sushil Sharma, *Maturation of the Adolescent Brain* (Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment, 2013), 449-461

considering the consequences of their actions. As such, the period of maturation and solidification of neuronal patterns is driven by decisions relying heavily on the emotional sector of the brain.⁶⁶ Additionally, Linda Burgess argues that teens who develop surrounded by fear and chaos will tend to default into the survival mode of their brain, spending more energy on trying to feel emotionally balanced than on developing the connections of the prefrontal cortex to the fullest. For these reasons adolescents need healthy environments and caring adults to optimize their brain development process.⁶⁷

Methodology:

My main instrument of data collection was carrying out interviews and organizing visits to both private and public schools in Amman. I visited one private school and three public schools. At each school I spoke to two teachers and lead focus groups with 3-5 students in each, all ages ranging from 10-15. I spoke to teachers of history, religion, Arabic, English, and citizenship and social education. I also interviewed a former teacher who taught for the ministry of education in Northern rural areas, a teacher from an army school in Amman, an expert in Jordan's curriculum and education system, an individual with a doctorate in Business Administration and experience managing private schools, an individual with up to 15 years of experience in civil society initiatives in education, as well as a former high ranking worker from the Ministry of Education. All names and specific working details will not be included for reasons of safety and anonymity while talking about possibly sensitive national issues.

⁶⁶ Mariam Arain, Maliha Haque, Lina Johal, Puja Mathur, Wynand Nel, Afsha Rais, Ranbir Sandhu, and Sushil Sharma, *Maturation of the Adolescent Brain* (Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment, 2013), 449-461

⁶⁷ Linda Burgess, *The Amazing Adolescent Brain: What Every Educator, Youth Serving Professional, and Healthcare Provider Needs to Know* (Teen Provider; Multiplying Connections, Advocates for Youth)

In schools each interview was facilitated by myself with the amazing help of a native Arabic speaker. Questions were asked in English and translated into Arabic immediately. Most teachers did not know English and as such answered in Arabic. Students who wanted to practice their English, spoke in English and referred to the translator for help with the words they did not know. Other students answered the questions in Arabic and I was subsequently helped by the translator who translated the words or concepts I was uncertain of.

I organized my interviews basing myself off of the objectives of the educational system. I created questions that would provide space for the students to elaborate on different themes that I believed would shed light on how they were applying the philosophy and objectives of the education system. During each interview I focused on participant's responses as well as observing how the participants responded to the questions; what emotions arose and what type of body language I perceived throughout the interviews. I also did research and analysis of material culture within the schools that I visited, consulting newspaper articles on education throughout the time I resided in Jordan, as well as watching videos published on educational and peacebuilding initiatives in Jordan. Informal observation of societal interactions as well as the thematic lectures and readings provided by my study abroad program SIT also played an important role in my understanding of the cultural, social, and political background and as such formed an important part of my final analysis and conclusions.

Process Remarks and Material Culture Analysis:

Every interview began with the customary warm welcomes which are characteristic of Jordanian culture, followed by insistent invitation to have tea, coffee, or juice. Multiple times I

was offered candy, cookies and chocolate. Hospitality is the defacto trait that I found on all my interactions, as well as a willingness to share and do their best to meet my expectations and needs. Everyone was very happy to be part of the process of research and were excited to answer questions about their culture, nation, and religion. In one of my interviews, a religion teacher was surprised I wasn't also Muslim as she picked up from the questions my genuine interest and openness to learn about the culture and religious instruction in schools. In some instances when teachers overheard the questions I was asking the students, they seemed happy and curious to hear what their students hoped to be when they grew up and what dreams they had for their country and the world.

The first school I visited was a reasonably priced private school. I walked through the school before I began interviews and got to observe classrooms and student to teacher ratios. Many students greeted me in English as I walked to the room where we would conduct the interviews. The classrooms were small and had from 10 to 15 students to each teacher. The academic director held a PHD from a university in the United States and spoke perfect English given that he had lived in the US for 17 years. He considered that the most important difference between private and public schools was the amount of care and control on the students. He stated that private schools have close relationships with parents and will notice if students aren't in class and corroborate with parents and students the reasons for absences or grade status. Each subject has a lead teacher and these lead teachers collaborate to make sure they aren't asking too much from students. At the same time, teachers must submit weekly reports on the process of students, monitoring their grades, attitudes, and aptitudes. If there are any changes in students' performance the teachers and academic director will have meetings with the pupil to figure out in which way the institution can be of best service to the needs of the student and family.

The school had few visual aids and apart from the customary pictures of the King and royal family in the reception and offices, there were few images or murals connoting national identity. This school organized grading in a different way, dividing the points in each class in three different categories: preparation and personal research before each class, in class participation and engagement, and the mandatory homework and outside of class exercises to materialize what was learned in the classroom. Another important benefit of attending private schools is students' access to more languages and extracurricular activities. My interviewee mentioned that about twenty five percent of students graduating from secondary school have a very clear idea of what they are planning on doing for a living. For the ones that aren't completely sure of future interests, private schools provide talks from different professionals who explain the nature and perks of their occupations. This school prepares students for the Taugehee only. Other private schools have international curriculums and prepare students for the examination of their choice be it the SAT, the British examination or the Taugehee. The interviewee mentioned that private schools are a business and as such, administrators must make sure that they can deliver the product that the parents are spending significant amounts of money for.

The first public school that I visited was a boys primary and secondary school which was created with funding from USAID. In the entrance to the school there was a message displayed thanking USAID, alongside large pictures of the king and Jordanian flags. As I was being welcomed, teachers were very happy to point out these images and reiterate that the entire school had been built thanks to foreign assistance. While I was waiting for the teachers and students to come meet me for the interviews, I could see the groups of students playing soccer in the front esplanade of the school. A few minutes before the break ended, the school started playing usual

songs dedicated to the King and the army. Eventually all the kids went into their classrooms and I had the opportunity to do my interviews.

In this school there seemed to be at least 30 children to one teacher in each classroom. There was a social worker that was highly respected by the kids. He spoke to me and the translator as we were waiting. He mentioned that in this school, few students were performing on an average rate, most were either motivated and achieving high grades or not motivated at all, especially in higher levels. In this school, no person mentioned the Tawjeh, even when speaking about the future of the students.

The next school we visited was the girls school for this same neighborhood. We were welcomed by the director who did not engage in conversation with us and promptly enabled the interviews to take place. This school was very carefully decorated. On the inside there were the customary pictures of the King, as well as posters and decorations such as paper flowers that the students had made. On the outside, the walls had murals of commonly seen images that denote national unity and pride. This was also a USAID school, there were a few posters of gratitude but not as obvious as the boys school. The students in this school chose to answer everything in English and had an impressive grasp on the language, only asking for help from the translator in a few instances. While answering in English, these students were the fastest to form responses and opinions and were the most excited to share.

The next public school that I went to was in another region of Amman. This school had two buildings right next to each other, one was a girls school and the other a boys school. I however only did interviews in the girl's portion of the school. This school had more murals with the same images connoting national identity. When we arrived, there was still the school break and I could hear all the students noisily enjoying their time in the school's open space. As the

director was welcoming us, a teacher started speaking to the students through the microphone urging them to go back into their classrooms.

In this school, the director said that we could only do the interviews if she was in the room as well. I was hoping to be able to interview the teachers and students by themselves, yet I decided to carry on with the interviews. Given this situation, I was able to get some insight into how the school leadership and teachers interact with each other and the students. These students had the hardest time answering the questions. Several times the translator had to reframe the question and give examples as to some possible options for them to consider how to answer. When the interviews were over I also spoke to the principal as she seemed eager to participate in the interviews as well.

Because of time restraints, I wasn't able to organize a visit to the military school in Amman. Yet I did have the opportunity to see it from the outside and look at pictures of the different events and activities in the school. I was also fortunate enough to interview a history teacher and a student from this institution. I learned that military school is a medium between private school and public school. There is more rigorous care for the students in the school and students have the opportunity to learn both English and French. Teachers also have more resources to organize school trips and events for all the students. The school goes by the national curriculum and the ratio of student to teachers is still the same as most public schools 25 to 40 students per classroom. The teacher that I interviewed remarked that this did not use to be the case. However, since the Syrian crisis, more Jordanians have moved to army school due to overcrowding in public schools around Jordan.

In army school, students have the choice to become a part of the scouts, similar to girl scouts in the US. These students wear a military uniform and carry out different activities of

social service and awareness raising on national issues, culture, and the environment. Teachers who are part of the army will wear their uniform but there are also teachers who are civilians. Teachers that are from the military however, have extra meetings and a physical training requirement. Students graduating from this school are not expected to fulfill any military service but they are allowed to go onto this job. Especially because being part of the army is considered an honor and citizens find being a part of the protection and stabilization of their country a dignified area of work.

Findings:

Jordan has an estimated 19,750 teachers, 6,400 schools and 1.3 million students. In 2006, thirty percent of schools were overcrowded and since the Syrian crisis overcrowding has become an urgent obstacle for providing quality education in Jordan. Jordan has public schools, most of which are separated by gender. There are many private, very expensive institutions that according to my interviewees are the best fit for students who wish to leave the country to pursue their undergraduate career. There was no dialogue or discussions if whether or not it was good for Jordan to send students to study and work abroad. Public and private schools must utilize the national curriculum, yet there are also schools that teach international curriculums, including the British, United States, and French systems. There is also a significant number of UNHCR schools, as well as organizations of Non Formal Education. These are for children that left school for more than three years and have decided to return to finish their studies.

According to my interviewees, the curriculum in Jordan is one of the strongest in the region. Students coming from Iraq and Syria are having significant issues adapting to the rigor

and the content, given that by comparison, students in Jordan have more advanced information in each grade of school programming. One of my interviews mentioned that the physics curriculum in Jordan is one of the strongest, and biology has progressively improved. One teacher spoke about the strengths of the history curriculum, stating that students in Jordan have the opportunity to learn about the Byzantines, Roman Empire, and, the Nabatine civilization, among many others and then visit ruins of these civilizations, making the content learned in class more relevant and tangible.

When speaking about the curriculum, most of my interviewees mentioned several aspects that they personally believed would strengthen the learning experience of Jordanian students. One theme that I came across was concern with the content, focusing on modifying format rather than information. Teachers spoke a lot about the necessity to create structural changes so that students understand how what they are learning in school is relevant to their lives and how the knowledge gained can be applied. According to the history teachers, students commonly shy away from engaging fully in the subject, given that there is too much content to be covered and limited time for explaining the relevance of history and how it relates to the students lives.

Another insight from a history professor was that students are taught different eras of history in separate units and there is no emphasis in teaching how each era of history influenced the other and how these are connected to and influence other subjects. Two other teachers mentioned the desire to adapt the curriculum for students who have different interests, giving the example that if a student loves biology, he/she be given the opportunity to pursue this interest more deeply, instead of gaining only a short and hurried overview of every subject available.

The desire to develop the curriculum into tangible lessons that can be related to and clearly influence students life and understanding of the world, was found in every interview that

I carried out. These remarks were backed up by my interactions with the students, who mentioned history was by far their least favorite subject and they wished that the school was more about understanding and less about writing and memorizing. The issue for the students here is the pressure to cover all aspects of the curriculum to prepare to pass for the exit examination Taujehee. All but one of the teachers believed that the curriculum should include less content to enable students and teachers to explore and truly understand the concepts talked about in class. In the opinion of my interviewee from the private school, the curriculum, especially in mathematics has gotten increasingly easier and thus has been challenging the students less and decreasing Jordanian students' scores in Taujehee as well as in international assessments in sciences and mathematics. He personally believed that students learn better when younger and as such it does not make sense to scale down the content in the curricula.

As mentioned above, a very important aspect of the content of the curriculum is the preparation for the secondary school examination. It is an extremely rigorous exam that tests the proficiency of students in the area that they choose to pursue higher education studies. Students in 12th grade as well as their families experience high amounts of pressure during this period, given that the examination is known to be extremely rigorous. The stress is highlighted because the outcomes of this examination will determine what area of study they can pursue as well as what university they can attend. Students with high levels can qualify for studying medicine and engineering, and students with lower grades can decide to focus on management, accounting, business administration or the humanities.

Most teachers mentioned that this testing system has the potential to be unfair, putting to test all twelve years of study and work solely on one day, without taking into account the student's testing abilities, learning preferences and strengths or the environment surrounding

each student. It was mentioned that it is a pity that students must memorize such large amounts of information, when they could instead be focusing on truly understanding and expanding on the concepts learned in school. Students are forced to go through Taujehee because being educated is one of the most important cultural milestones to becoming an active member of Jordanian society. This societal pressure was corroborated by the academic director at the private school, who stated that in Jordan you aren't considered a human being if you don't have at least your Taujeehe.

According to my interviewee with fifteen years of experience in civil service initiatives in education, the Jordanian curriculum must be changed. Assessments of academic performance especially in 7th, 8th and 12th grades aren't showing great results. In his view, the most important thing is aggressively bringing back the dignity that goes into vocational work, which is at the end of the day, an essential part of maintaining a healthy society and economy. He has been working in collaboration with UNESCO, to include materials that teach students about the different working positions available in society, their perks and their importance. The implementation of these materials would be the first step towards improving the perceptions towards skilled work, the ideal being that students have the opportunity to actually take workshops of all different vocations to see if students have interest or talents in these and provide the best opportunity to develop them.

Even though there was a lot of excitement, as well as ideas when speaking about the curriculum, one of my interviewees with former experience in curriculum reforms mentioned that it is extremely hard to make changes in the curriculum. There are two committees of officials that work with curriculum development, one of them writes the curriculum and the other evaluates it. Every three to four years there is an official review of the curriculum to develop the

content to fit the needs and expectations of the society. Both of my interviews with individuals who have extensive experience in this realm, emphasized the fact that the curriculum changes are a direct response to changes in the society and the needs of the population. There is a committee that is destined to evaluate societal needs and create the basic objectives to meet these needs. The committee contains 18 people, 4 from the ministry of education's committees of humanities, science, IT, and mathematics, and 16 people with experience in education from outside of the ministry. When changes in the curriculum are implemented there is an assessment and evaluation period divided into two cycles. There is an evaluation during the implementation and subsequently there is a follow up evaluation a year after the changes were implemented. After the outcomes are quantified the curricula is left as it is or will undergo more changes. Most recently the objectives have been outcome based, thus creating goals that can be evaluated not on the content that should be taught but on what outcomes teaching the content has on the students and development of the society.

This year, King Abdullah II issued a statement suggesting that there will be further reforms to the educational system and curriculum. The most current analysis of the needs and changes in Jordanian society show a need to improve vocational education and the perception of it in society. This is a problem faced in all parts of the world, not just Jordan. The IT and Health tracks for Taujeehe will be eliminated and an emergency responses track will be added. There will also be an emphasis on improving genetic engineering and catalyzing the new generation to transform Jordan into a center for technology and innovation. In the personal opinion of one of my interviewees, the most needed and important change in the education curricula is increasing students loyalty to their homeland.

The most recent educational reforms will develop all subjects of first, second and third grade on the first year and fourth, fifth, sixth and ninth on the second year of reforms. The reforms will also develop English curriculums in 6th and 12th grades. I was told by a former worker at the Ministry of Education that these new reforms will incorporate feedback from teachers and will also require more ministry visits to schools to reassure the changes are being adapted properly.

Teacher interviews were very interesting and I was happy to see how willing the teachers were to share their experience and opinions on the strengths and possible changes to the curricula. Both religion professors explained that they became teachers because of a deep desire to share the teachings of the prophet to their students. Both teachers in the girls and boys schools expressed a strong desire to help students understand and apply all the teachings in their personal life in order to lead happier and better lifestyles. Both stated their desire to teach in public school because, not only is there more need for their work but it is also more appreciated by the students. An Arabic teacher explained that she teaches this language because she loves it very much, yet she mentioned she did not have a choice to become a teacher. She explained that she chose to study Arabic in school and for her to get a job in that area, teaching was the only option. This was the most common theme I found, with the exception of the religion teachers. All other teachers did not choose to teach because of a vocation or love for teaching. Instead, they studied areas in which teaching was their next best option professionally. Most can work half of the day, salary is acceptable and there are more benefits than most jobs.

Currently, teacher preparation constitutes a semester to a year of teaching assistantship and a three day training at the ministry of education. Before, however, there used to be special centers that were designated to train teachers in their trade. There were longer courses and more

emphasis on teaching not only the importance of the content but enabling teachers to be good leaders, facilitators and educational professionals. My interviewee from civil service initiatives in education was adamant about how the most urgent and important changes needed in the education sector have to do with the quality of educators. There should be a renewal of the houses for training teachers in order to assure that all educators are working under the same moral code, the same educational standards and disciplinary guidelines as well as prepare teachers to encourage critical thinking as well as utilize technology in their classrooms. On top of this, there should be more emphasis on creating teachers that can teach music, arts, sports, within the obligatory curriculum. This in order to cultivate students' potential and talents, as well as orient them towards their main areas of interest.

All teachers from public institutions were confused and not sure what I was talking about when I asked about the philosophy and objectives of the ministry of education. These objectives were revamped during the 2000 educational reforms. They serve as guidelines that will bring about the desired development of the educational system and society. The objectives are created by the planning committee in the ministry of education and are based off of the law of education in Jordan, the Jordanian constitution, as well as international structures and conventions of education. Once they are drafted they are revised by the manager of general education and subsequently by managers in other departments. Once it has been approved by the managers and minister of education, then the ministry sends them to the prime minister and parliament who approve them and send the final draft for the King's approval. Once the King has signed them, the goals are implemented.

When asked how the goals were included into the curriculum, I got differing answers. As mentioned above most teachers had no idea what I was talking about by referencing the

objectives of the education system. The former worker at the ministry said they were not included in the general curriculum at all and just served a framework for teachers and educators. The teacher at the private school shared that there are no specific ways or recommendations as to how include these goals into the curriculum or pedagogical practice. He stated each institution has the freedom to interpret the goals and do their best to achieve them. Academically the goals aim to enable students between first and third grade, to be prepared and comfortable with basic math, science, reading, and writing. From fourth grade to sixth, they must boast a good level in mathematics, social sciences and have a strong grasp in their culture and society. From seventh to ninth they must build on their academic achievements and are taught how to respect others and others opinions. From grades tenth to twelfth students will be prepared to deal with real life.

As mentioned previously, the goals of the education system that are found in Education Law no.3 were classified into five categories. Below is further information that I collected organized into these categories:

Intellectual foundations:

To encourage students personal curiosity and ability to find information and develop their opinions on concepts and issues, students do research projects beginning in third grade. This forces students to look outside of their usual resources and learn how to find information and utilize technology to strengthen their knowledge and understandings. Teaching religion is considered extremely important given that Islam has the principles and values that encourage individuals to develop intellectually alongside their emotions. The teachers of Islamic studies were the most adamant on giving students lessons that they can apply in their daily life, thus facilitating their daily human interactions and helping them successfully achieve their personal goals.

At the boys school, all the students said that their favorite subject was English. I wondered if they said that because they assumed that I was from the US or because it was their English teacher that brought them to the room for the interview. All the female students I interviewed loved sciences and mathematics. One stated she loved learning biology because it is very important to understand what is happening in our bodies and how to remain healthy. Students who mentioned math and physics as their favorite subjects spoke happily about their teacher and also mentioned enjoying using and challenging their brains. Only one girl mentioned Arabic as her favorite subject, explaining that it is very important for the culture and she liked to understand what people are saying and what is going on around her.

It was very easy for them to explain the different teachings in their Islamic studies class. They had a very clear grasp on how learning this subject could be directly translated into their daily life. Their favorite thing about Islam is that it builds peace and provides the life of the prophet muhammad as an example to follow and look up to. All students spoke proudly of the importance of treating their family with love and respect as well as using honesty and peace in dealings with others of all ages. They mentioned the importance of praying and fasting and the girls mentioned the importance of the hijab and encouraging each other to be faithful. All the students spoke highly about Ramadan and were very proud of the rule to give charity to the less fortunate in their community. When I asked if the students embody these teachings on a daily basis, six of the ten girls said they do and they consciously try every day. Two girls said they do a little and the rest that they try every day. In the group of boys only one said he was absolutely embodying the teachers, the others said they try.

National Foundations:

In the theme of national identity, all teachers mentioned how important it is for students to have this class. According to one of the history teachers, the subject of nationality is an important factor in creating the stability of the country. In these courses students are encouraged to apply the learned religious principles, such as peace and tolerance, and understand them in context of their history their geography and current region and world issues. In these classes they learn about the Jordanian constitution, their rights and responsibilities as citizens. They learn the concept of democracy and freedom and how to utilize their freedom within their culture. They also touch on important societal norms such as how to deal with their parents, not to go out to party late at night etc. They also talk about relevant domestic issues such as unemployment and try to re frame vocational work as dignified paths of life and societal participation. The teachers of national and social studies mentioned that this is an extremely important subject and students should have more hours and requirements related to this subject. The students spoke about their love for their country but couldn't exactly give me specific answers about their favorite parts of their culture without the help of the translator and myself giving them different examples. After prompting them with different options, students spoke about the cordiality in relationships between people in Jordan and how they are proud that when there are problems between families the first thing they do to solve the problem is to find a third party mediator. They loved the brotherhood that is lived in Jordan and the willingness to share and celebrate happy moments with friends and family.

Ethnic Foundations:

Jordanian law on education stated that every Jordanian child had a right to free education. In 2006 however, the government changed the law to say every child within Jordan has the right to be educated. I gathered very little information on how ethnic foundations are applied and understood by the students. Two of the students that I talked to specified that their biggest hope for their country was that all refugees and people living within Jordan are treated equally. After the interview, my translator told me that from their accents he could tell that one of the girls was Syrian and the other Palestinian.

The influx of refugees has overcrowded schools forcing schools to take up to 90 students per classrooms and reduce school hours to be able to include two school shifts per day. These issues were also felt during the influx of Iraqi refugees in 2003. In fact, many impoverishment Iraqis could not afford the fees required to become enrolled in even basic education, and large amounts of children were pulled out of their academic programs. In August 2008, the Jordanian government decided to waive these fees, allowing refugee children to continue their education. Nevertheless, a large number of Iraqi children have missed vital periods in their education. The government has made efforts to avoid internal backlash towards refugees in school, such as ensuring that the NGOs budget spent on educational issues is divided fifty percent for refugees and fifty percent for Jordanians. Yet from the comments of the students it appears they might still be experiencing backlash from Jordanian students. My interviewee with experience in civil society mentioned that in this area of education the government failed greatly to create a national identity in which all minorities are represented.

Others argued that it was not necessary to include all histories in the curricula, given that minorities strongly understand their culture and identity. During the first waves of Palestinian

refugees, there were no significant changes in curriculum given that Jordanian leadership assumed the refugees would be returning home. Sadly, it has been more than 60 years and the Palestinian question has not been resolved. Even though there are clear divisions in society as to who is Palestinian, Jordanian-Palestinian and who is Jordanian-Jordanian many Palestinians have completely adapted to the country, while others don't identify with the national messages of unity and pride. When discussing if the Syrian refugee influx will have an effect on the curriculum of ethnic and national identity, one of my interviewees said that they should not be considered part of Jordan, loyalty to the nation should be enforced for Jordanians but not for Syrians.

Today Jordan's population is estimated to constitute 12 million people. Sixty percent of these are from Palestinian descent and another significant percentage are Iraqi, or foreign workers from Southeast Asia and Egypt. It is estimated that by 2020, if the Syrian population is unable to return, there will be 10 million Syrians incorporated into Jordanian society. One interviewee stated that this issue will be resolved only if the international community takes on more responsibility. Despite government changes and initiatives to meet the needs of the refugee population, I commonly came across talk of a lost generation, especially of girls and women between 15–25. My interviewee cited UNICEF's report from March which showed that 1.2 million Syrian children have found themselves as refugees in host countries, and roughly 37,000 children have been born since the conflict began.

Apart from the lack of educational activities, I am very interested in learning more about how these generations of children will develop. Seeing as the initial stages of life are the most formative, I wonder what their lived experience and perception of the world will be after being shaped by such harsh initial life experiences. This would have serious implications for the future

of these individuals and the communities in which they will settle. For the percentage of these kids that have come to Jordan, how will the Jordanian government deal with this new population and over crowded schools, and how will it cater towards the Syrian children who have been born since the conflict or have lost the ability to go to school.

Social Foundations:

One of the important aspects of the social foundations category was enabling students to work as teams. Every teacher mentioned that they utilize teamwork in their classes. They use team presentations and class work in groups. Some teachers also mentioned going through problem solving activities in which they state a hypothetical problem and then go through with the group to find possible solutions and ways of reacting to the problem. The teachers also spoke of the importance of complementing teamwork with individual work, to make sure students are grasping the concepts properly. Most of the students that I talked to preferred to work in a teams. One explained that it is better, faster, and more fun to share the work and enjoy the product with everyone who participated. The students who were more interested in math and sciences said they much preferred to work on their own because it seems easier that way. Especially when they need to make sure they are understanding how to do it and not compare their personal performance with the process of other students.

According to the teachers social and national education create social harmony given that they teach the most important and essential aspects of the society the children are developing into. When speaking about their favorite aspects of their society, students again mentioned the clear peace in the culture. They love the importance of caring for family and the ability of society members to collaborate and coordinate to get things done.

Most students that I talked to want to be doctors because they want to either help people or make their family proud. One of the male students mentioned being an engineer or pilot and another wanted to work with cars. Only one female student wanted to be a business woman, all the rest were on the track of medicine. As mentioned previously, students in the last two years of their education must start thinking of what area of study they will go into. If they don't get the score they wished they might not be able to go to a good university or study the career that they had hoped. One of my interviewees mentioned that the biggest issue with this structure is that the government assumes that students can't change, that students might become more interested in school or outright decide that they want to study something different. I gathered from conversations about the overcrowded schools, unemployment and shame culture attached to vocational training that these structures don't allow the time and space for Jordanian youth to truly discover and develop their passions and interests.

Humanitarian Foundations:

In private school I found many initiatives for teaching and encouraging students to apply humanitarian foundations. Most private schools have summer programs to study English and spend a couple of weeks living in another country. They also have programs to get students in contact with other students around the world through online chatting. The teacher mentioned that these initiatives have shown positive outcomes with students forming strong long lasting friendships. In this private school they also organize programs that bring students from the United States and Germany to spend time with the students in the school. No public school teacher or student told me about such initiatives, yet the army school does have similar visits,

specifically of students from the United States that once a year visit the school and interact with the students.

All of the students in private school enrolled in summer programs will be traveling to China. The academic director reiterated that all students wanted to go to China and not the United States. In public schools, one student said she wished to travel to Japan because of her exposure to their culture through media and cartoons. Two students in different schools mentioned a wish to go to India, two to France and the rest to the United States. When speaking about the US and France, students thought that everything in these countries is new and modern and that there are less problems than in their region.

Another theme that I talked about with students was how to solve problems in daily life and what are their attitudes and beliefs towards quotidian conflict and peace. One student stated that she likes to solve problems on her own. Everyone else mentioned seeking help and advice from other people, as well as needing time to think before deciding how to respond.

Every person said that their religion and their culture mean peace. Two of the students mentioned peace as meaning security and not being scared about the future, saying 'peace is when we can do anything you want' another student in a different school said 'peace means when you can do what you want and need without feeling scared'. The group of boys said their main hopes for the world were first, a resolution to the wars in their region and around the world. When speaking about hopes for their country, all three boys mentioned the hope of creating an Arab nation and that by creating such a nation, new generations would solve all the problems around their borders. They mentioned living in peace and justice and having a world that is peaceful.

A group of girls mentioned their hopes for their country would be to be more modern and create a public transportation system that would be fueled by renewable energy sources, their hopes for the world were to live in a world without wars. The second group of girls mentioned the desire to live in a world with peace and equality. They spoke to the need for equality within their country and better economics to make things easier on the population. As mentioned before this was the group of girls that asked for equal treatment and opportunities for all refugees within Jordan.

Discussion:

This research set out to understand how the objectives of the education system were being taught and applied by students. The analysis was carried out using Paulo Freire's theoretical framework stating that valuable knowledge is the result of human praxis on our reality. He suggests educational structures should begin shying away from concepts of a bipolar educational process, meaning solely teaching and learning knowledge.⁶⁸ Freire proposes that valuable knowledge is not facts and numbers, instead it is a process through which human beings act upon and transform their reality. This process comes in three phases, the first being sharing of knowledge, the second individual and group reflection, and finally action based on the first two phases.

My impressions from the officials working in Jordanian educational sector or in civil society, was that the philosophy and objectives are on a track to enlighten Freire's description of

⁶⁸ Dr. Virginia Guichot Reina, Docencia y compromiso socio-político: el legado pedagógico de Paulo Freire (1921-1997) (PROFESIÓN DOCENTE, 2003), 63-74

valuable human knowledge and activity. However, the full cycle has not been completed or balanced just yet. All teachers in public school did not have a clear grasp of the objectives or philosophy of the education system. Most of them were actually confused when asked about these and were unable to formulate answers. These interactions made me conclude that there might be a lack of emphasis in the first phase of Freire's framework, which constitute not only clearly stating the knowledge that will be reflected upon and applied, but also how the knowledge will be presented to the learners. This insight, coupled with the lack of teachers who are actually in the system for love of teaching and being a part of children's development process, brought to light issues of teacher quality that could be further addressed and improved upon. To strengthen the first phase of Freire's theory, ministry officials should be sure that each teacher understands the philosophy and educational objectives that are supposed to be informing the way they teach and relate to the students. This clear grasp on the philosophy and objectives should be coupled with sufficient resources to encourage teachers to effectively convey the information and important aspects of their educational process.

Newest developments in the structure of the system however, are now focusing on measuring the success of the objectives basing themselves on students outcomes from the teaching process and no longer on the content itself. Similarly, increasing encouragement of critical thinking by institutions and teachers will further enforce the second or reflection stage of Freire's theory, increasingly encouraging students to reflect on what they are learning before they act. The strong desire seen in teachers to be able to impart knowledge that is useful and can translate to students' lives was encouraging. From my conversations with students I gathered that this trait is already applied, given that all of the students that I talked to mentioned needing time

to reflect and think about the best possible solution before taking action to solve conflict in their daily life.

The area in which I found the least amount of emphasis on all three of the phases of knowledge creation, according to Freire, was in the objectives relating to ethnic foundations. The objectives within this area specify that education is the cornerstone to building Arab and Pan Arab unity and students must exemplify Arab and Islamic values and strive for human perfection in his behavior. From my interviews and theoretical research I found that there is no clear emphasis on embracing Jordan as a multicultural and multiethnic society. As mentioned above, one of my interviewees mentioned the government significantly failed at building a national identity that finds pride in multiple cultures. Ethnicity goals are also the ones that have the least presence in school textbooks and students from non-Jordanian identities voiced concerns of lack of equal representation and treatment.

From my observations, the intellectual foundations were the strongest, education has a history of importance in Jordanian culture and this can be felt as an essential part of the society. In my opinion, the fact that the intellectual foundation is heavily based on Islam has helped the knowledge transfer into reflection and practice, especially the objectives from the humanitarian, social and national foundations. According to the objectives, students must not only understand and vigilantly acknowledge Islam's history, principles and provisions and values but also exemplify them ethically and behaviorally. Students were proud to say that their religion meant peace and the culture embodied peace as well. They were proud of the values found in Islam and also identified them as being used in their culture and daily life.

Themes such as collaboration and teamwork in the society, respect and forgiveness when dealing with others, and being open to learn from other civilizations and religions were the most

mentioned. This intellectual foundation seemed to be in my opinion the strongest in bringing together all three phases of learning and consequently strengthening the rest of the foundations as well. Yet strengthening all three knowledge creating phases in each of the philosophical foundations, would significantly strengthen the education system and could create more stability and peace in the face of marked changes in the country and instability in the region.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research:

This research was carried out throughout four weeks, a very small amount of time to be able to gauge how the objectives of the education system are being applied and received by students. This research is only the beginning of many more questions to be asked and pondered. How gender dynamics are dealt with and taught in these objectives, philosophy, and curricula is an important and interesting extension to this analysis, as well as pondering how refugees will be included and represented in the curricula and educational sector. Further research could also focus on gauging how the Jordanian context might benefit from including, shared fate courses, alternative conflict resolution and human rights education in basic and secondary levels. Even more relevant would be research to further understand how to include arts and vocational training as part of the official curricula. In the objectives and philosophy, I did not come across any specific goals or movements to improve environmental issues and awareness. This could be another area of research to undertake, especially since it is an urgent issue that has the ability to bring countries around the world together in collaboration. This was only a small overview of my impressions of the objectives and philosophy of education in Jordan as a whole, yet each of the

foundations and their respective objectives should be researched extensively to further understand their impact and the proper avenues to enriching their outcomes.

Conclusion:

The efforts on behalf of Jordanian leadership have shown positive outcomes in the development and growth of their country. The educational objectives are strong and encourage values and aspects that should be further strengthened as they continue growth initiatives in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Contrary to common negative perceptions of religious instruction in schools, this research found that religious instruction was the subject that was taught the best when analyzed through Paulo Freire's three phases of creating value and sharing knowledge with the intention of improving our reality.

The most current efforts to improve critical thinking, dignity in vocational education and participation in the society are on the right track and will begin to see positive outcomes only when educational institutions truly encourage them and strengthen the way information is provided to students. This will give more tangible options for students to apply what they are learning in school to improve their daily experience and future goals. I strongly believe that these options would give Jordan a steady base from which to shift the emphasis on stability building into active social change focused on peace building.

Each individual goes through life, living experiences that shape how they view and participate in their constructed reality. Every experience leaves a mark that will inform how they respond and resolve similar experiences in the future. Learning is this essential process of creating knowledge and shifting perceptions which inform and mould the way we live as human

beings in the world. Parenting figures and family arguably play the most influential role in each individual's education. Coupled with these sources for individual growth and maturity, teachers and schools serve as the second most important mean for transmitting a culture from one generation to another. As one of the oldest industries in human history, education is the main instrument employed by societies to form, reform, maintain and grapple with social peace and equilibrium.

Schools are the source of the most essential societal information without which students would not be able to participate effectively in their communities. Grappling language is essential to communicate and participate in a community, mathematics is necessary to understand how to grasp quantities and depths as well as effectively participate in the categorization of the quotidian components in a society, such as number of hours in a day, days of the year, or knowing how to participate in the economy. Subjects such as biology and geography inform young society members about important natural processes of life, as well as build awareness of students' physical environment, community and larger cosmos they belong to.

Other subjects such as history and civics education teach awareness of a historical timeline and provide guidelines on how their community has behaved before, what values are essential to their community, how to behave in a culturally appropriate manner, and how to form their cultural and societal identity. In the way these lessons are taught, students also learn extremely important societal messages, such as how to relate to authority figures, how to understand change, how to deal with and solve quotidian conflict and the different ways of effectively managing the information mastered. Within our current understanding and expectations of teacher-pupil education, teachers must encourage students to develop their intellectual capabilities, in order to reach their fullest potential and become active and contributing members

of their society. Thus, having a good educational system is arguably the principal ingredient to creating a successful and stable modern society.

According to Paulo Freire we easily forget how important education is to society, and how much it is charged with ideology and political values. Freire reminds us that human beings are actors and creators of history, a history that in turn forms and transforms our worldview and physical contexts.⁶⁹ We live in a world of options, and educational systems have the responsibility to impregnate in newer generations the consciousness of making a decision based on learning, reflecting and acting on behalf of humanitarian history, with a sense of responsibility towards social and political ethics and morals.⁷⁰ The philosophy of the education system and the actions done to apply these principles show, better than any marker, the social project of each country, and implies the responsibility to further humanize our world, by enriching the experience of each individual as an active member and transformer of any society.

⁶⁹ Dr. Virginia Guichot Reina, *Docencia y compromiso socio-político: el legado pedagógico de Paulo Freire (1921-1997)* (PROFESIÓN DOCENTE, 2003), 63-74

⁷⁰ Dr. Virginia Guichot Reina, *Docencia y compromiso socio-político: el legado pedagógico de Paulo Freire (1921-1997)* (PROFESIÓN DOCENTE, 2003), 63-74.

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ISP Ethics Review

(Note: Each AD must complete, sign, and submit this form for every student's ISP.)

The ISP paper by Megan McKeown Gleason does conform to the Human Subjects Review approval from the Local Review Board, the ethical standards of the local community, and the ethical and academic standards outlined in the SIT student and faculty handbooks.

Completed by: Ashraf F. Alqudah, Ph. D.

Academic Director: __Ashraf F. Alqudah, Ph. D.

Signature:

Program: JOR Spring 2015

Date: May 12, 2015


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Human Subjects Review

LRB/IRB ACTION FORM

<p>Name of Student: Megan McKeown</p> <p>ISP Title: Cultural Action For Stability? Analyzing Jordanian Education Curriculum and Pedagogical Practices in the Secondary Schools</p> <p>Date Submitted: 03/22/2015</p> <p>Program: SIT: Modernization and Social Change</p> <p>Type of review:</p> <p>Exempt Expedited X Full</p>	<p>Institution: World Learning Inc. IRB organization number: IORG0004408 IRB registration number: IRB00005219 Expires: 9 December 2017</p> <p>LRB members (print names): Dr. Ashraf F. Alqudah, Ph. D. (Chair) Dr. Ismael Abu Amoud, Ph. D. Dr. Badr Al Madi, Ph. D.</p> <p>LRB REVIEW BOARD ACTION:</p> <p>Approved as submitted</p> <p>LRB Chair Signature:</p>  <p>Date: April 1st 2015</p>
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Form below for IRB Vermont use only:

Research requiring full IRB review. ACTION TAKEN:

___ approved as submitted ___ approved pending submission or revisions ___ disapproved

IRB Chairperson's Signature

Date