



SCHOOLS ONLINE

Global Connections and Exchange

West Bank & Gaza

October 2006

Each month, we will publish a newsletter like this one to update schools in our network, our donors and other interested readers about the activities and progress taking place within our program in the West Bank and Gaza.

Do you have something you would like to add to the newsletter?

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GCEP-West Bank & Gaza enhances local and global educational opportunities for youth in the Middle East. The project provides access to technology and the Internet for schools, extensive training and exchange programs for teachers to integrate technology into classrooms, and a network of collaborative online projects focusing on civic education and global citizenship for students.



Two community centres have been established in Jenin and Hebron, and new partnerships formed with private schools and schools serving the refugee and destitute sections of society across the West Bank. Through extracurricular student activities, the project will integrate local community initiatives with the education system to build on existing connectivity and exchange projects to reach and integrate disadvantaged youth from isolated communities.

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The importance of ICT and Active Learning to Education in Palestine

By Mrs Sana Abu Amsha, GCEP teacher, SOS Bethlehem

Being a successful teacher means that you are loved and accepted, and that you in turn love your students. You must use the best communication skills, be well qualified and always ready to deal with inquiries raised by students. You need to respect the genuine abilities and talents of your students and help them to reach their highest potential.

As we all know, life is changing rapidly. Discoveries are made every day, in every field, and so in order to be a successful teacher, you

also need to renew your techniques to make learning an enjoyable and beneficial process. The Internet is now a part of all aspects of our lives, and as teachers, it can help us exchange our experiences with other teachers from around the world. We can share opinions about methods of teaching, lesson plans, new theories, and provide each other with general support and advice. Teachers can

breakdown and simplify difficult topics for students when they have access through the Internet to images, activities and games. In addition, teachers can research unfamiliar topics and learn about different programs that will help them to improve their teaching skills.

The Internet is equally important for students. For example, encouraging our students to search for the information they want on the Internet helps us to teach. In the process of searching the Internet, students discuss their findings with each other, promoting team-work and shared learning. I have found that students accept and enjoy this way of teaching and are more likely to remember what they learn. Instead of just retelling or memorizing, they search for, synthesize and evaluate information. This is far more effective than the traditional "I tell..you listen" method. In these ways using the Internet can improve learning both for students and

teachers.

Despite all these benefits we, as teachers, should also be aware that there can be negative effects to using the Internet to teach. The Internet is easy to copy, enticing students to copy and paste - quoting blindly without grasping what they are writing. It is important to match e-learning with applied learning techniques such as asking students to create presentations on what they have learned and encouraging others to comment and discuss each others work and ideas.

If we think deeply about these different levels we can see that most teachers in the West Bank and Gaza use only the first two levels of recall and understanding. We therefore need to work together to change our assessment techniques, the ways in which we ask questions, and we must always make sure that we connect the information to the students' lives. When teaching any subject, if we

want the students to understand we must let the students discover things for themselves by asking them questions and letting them search for the answers.

This method has a special added value for us in the West Bank and Gaza. We share a diverse community consisting of different religious and social backgrounds. Our diversity presents a special challenge for us as teachers; students can often lose hope in the future when hardship has tended to widen the divides between us. Being open to the experiences of others and learning about new theoretical developments in teaching methods can help to bring communities together and help students think beyond the current hardships. Such tools, I believe, are therefore essential to the development needs of this country. Hopefully they can help us to work together to build a better future.



Mrs. Sana Abu Amsha introduces her students to the Internet and new technology in her classroom.

Life Skills Training

The Jenin Center of Excellence was founded in January 2006 as a joint initiative between RI-SOL and HP. The Center was designed to bring together students, teachers, women and community members to participate in training sessions, community projects and to foster online interaction. More recently this Center has become part of GCEP with a unique setting that allows students participating in this program to not only gain understanding of other cultures, but also to work with others within their communities. Students at the Center receive training in life skills such as communication, networking, time management, CV writing, self promotion and team work. In this way GCEP and the Center of Excellence reinforce each other's work, with powerful results.



Students engage in an open dialogue during a workshop at the Jenin Center of Excellence.

A World of Opportunities

Students Develop Life Skills at the Jenin Center of Excellence

By Hala Gh. Abu Bakr, 10th grade student at Jenin Secondary Girls School

My experience with the Global Connectivity and Exchange Project of RI-SOL has been very beneficial. I have attended lectures and participated in seminars and workshops. Along with my fellow students, I have discovered how to effectively communicate with people - to exchange views and to have open discussions. In addition, we have received computer training and can now take advantage of the various applications for Information Technology. A wide range of activities take place in the open, proactive and friendly environment of the Jenin Center of Excellence. In just one room, trainers and volunteers help young girls and boys become exposed to the wide range of new developments in the telecommunications world and introduce us to a "global village." At the Center people help each other acquire new life skills, build self confidence, start a career and think creatively. All of this takes place with a spirit of teamwork and volunteerism. A sense of ownership and shared vision prevails in the Center at all times. I do not exaggerate when I describe this small place as a "Bee Hive" - you cannot find a better place!

The students at the Jenin Center, in coordination with students from all of our GCEP programs in the West Bank and Gaza, are enthusiastically preparing for the International Education Week set to take place during November. Working together in teams, students will use their newly developed communication and networking skills to help promote GCEP activities throughout their communities. Students will create posters that demonstrate the importance of connecting students internationally through educational activities and print the best ones to hang in local schools and youth organizations. In addition, students will interact in a global discussion with partner schools in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Bangladesh and the United States about issues affecting education internationally.

Through the workshops and training held at the Jenin Center for Excellence, students gain practical skills and discover a forum for discussion of important social issues affecting them. We look forward to a full schedule of events at the Center in the future.

Student Exchange in Action: Interview with Alana Oren

This month, two of our GCEP graduates, Aseel Shamasneh and Nagham Addasi, both aged 16, conducted a telephone interview with Alana Oren, a final-year student from Champion Valley Union High School in Vermont, USA. Alana has demonstrated amazing initiative, determination and a desire to learn about other countries, all of which are qualities that set her apart from many students of her age. This can be seen in the fact that Alana single-handedly managed to persuade her teachers to create a partnership between her school and students in Palestine through the GCEP initiative. This provided a powerful example to other students, showing them that students can influence the way in which their school is run and even the topics that they study. Aseel and Nagham decided they would like to find out more about this interesting and inspirational student:

Aseel: How did you become interested in what is going on in Palestine?

Alana: A couple of semesters ago I saw the film “Paradise Now” which was about two Palestinian men preparing for a suicide attack on Israel. It made me realize how little I knew of the world and, more importantly, about the peoples of the world. Before this film I had only seen the issue of the conflict in the West Bank and Gaza from the Israeli standpoint. It showed me that there are always two sides to any conflict. You need to see both before you are able to gain true understanding.

Aseel: Why and how did you get involved in the work of RI-SOL Palestine?

Alana: I was participating in a film competition involving 700,000 students which focused on the positive and negative effects of mainstream media. My entry compared the way in which the media was used to gain support for the Nazi party in Germany, the Black Panthers in America and more recently, the Iraq war. During my research for this film I came across the Gandhi Project – a project run by RI-SOL in the West Bank and Gaza promoting non-violence and adherence to Gandhi’s philosophy. My involvement really started from there as I contacted the RI-SOL office in Ramallah and through them heard about GCEP.



Alana Oren created a partnership between her school and schools in the West bank and Gaza through GCEP.

Nagham: Why did you see GCEP as an important project for your school?

Alana: I think that our society is often ignorant about the world around them. It’s probably due to America’s geography - we only have two international borders and are a very large country. I saw this project as a way to overcome this ignorance and to connect students despite their different cultural backgrounds. I think it is really important for students to realize that we are all the same underneath no matter what our background is.

Nagham: How did you persuade your school to take part in this project?

Alana: Through many, many, many meetings! Luckily the history department at my school was really interested in the project as they thought it could bring a valuable contribution to the school curriculum.

Aseel: Did you face any problems in setting up the partnership?

Alana: Not problems as such, but certainly a lot of bureaucracy! I made a presentation to our head-teacher and other interested teachers to tell them about the project, how it could work in practice and what it would contribute to our school. I really focused on the idea that this project would help to make our students become global citizens, and luckily they agreed! Their support really helped me to get through all of the red tape.

Nagham: Why did you choose teachers to participate who teach “Holocaust and Human Behavior” and “History”?

Alana: I chose teachers who I thought would be interested. Our History teacher is now leading the project – she also runs a model UN and an Amnesty International project and so is really interested in the international and human rights issues affecting Palestinians. As for the other teacher, I took the course on “Holocaust and Human Behavior” last year and could see how a lot of the issues discussed would be relevant in the Palestinian context.

Aseel: What do you think your school will gain from GCEP?

Alana: A lot. I think that this project is what the Internet was intended for. It provides a great way to bring students together. Certainly GCEP will allow us to understand the world as we haven’t understood it before – to reach beyond the walls of our school, our state and our country.



Aseel and Nagham reach out globally for inspiration.

Aseel: Will the program continue after you leave at the end of this year?

Alana: At the end of this year I am going to meet with all of the teachers to make sure that the project continues and will also hopefully expand the connections between our schools. I think this project is phenomenally important and so I definitely want to remain part of it in any way possible.

Nagham: If you could create one joint activity between Palestinian and American students which will rise above cultural differences, what would it be?

I think I would ask students to write about their hopes and dreams as these are the same for all young people, no matter what background they come from. Once students realize they have the same aspirations, they can work together to make these dreams come true. That would definitely be a really powerful outcome.

At the end of this interview Alana, Aseel and Nagham agreed that they would like to form a partnership, and are hoping to create a joint initiative in their respective schools in order to promote aspects of Gandhi’s ideas to fellow students. It is great to see that GCEP has enabled these students to also become part of RI-SOL’s Gandhi project. We hope that this is the start of a long and fruitful partnership for all three students and will keep you informed of their progress.

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