

Campus in Camps
Collective Dictionary

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جامعات في المخيم

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CAMPUS IN CAMPS

Campus in Camps is a two-year experimental educational and project oriented program, engaging the participants from the West Bank's refugee camps in an attempt to explore and produce new forms of representation of camps and refugees beyond the static and traditional symbols of victimization, passivity and poverty. The program aims at transgressing, without eliminating, the distinction between camp and city, refugee and citizen, center and periphery, theory and practice, teacher and student.

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The Collective Dictionary is a series of publications containing definitions of concepts.

The terms proposed are those considered fundamental for the understanding of the contemporary condition of Palestinian refugee camps. These words have emerged as a result of actions and active dialogs with the camp community. Written reflections on personal experiences, interviews, excursions and photographic investigations constitute the starting point for the formulation of more structured thoughts.

The Collective Dictionary is both the reference and conceptual framework for all Campus in Camps projects and interventions.

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Even a toy is a source!

Ahmad Al-Lahham

One day when I was 16 years old, I was standing with a man on his balcony watching his 3 year-old daughter playing with her small toy car in the street in front of the building. There was a sort of garden full of sand and big stones beside the street. The child decided to drive her toy in the garden. When I saw her doing that I started yelling at her, saying that it was wrong and that she should not do that. Her father told me to stop shouting and to let her do it! He said that when she tried to drive it in that garden she would discover and understand that she couldn't drive it there. She would understand that driving the car needs smoother ground. The father told me that the little child would then not try again to do it, because after that little experiment, she would have a personal experience and knowledge of such a thing.

As the father told me, when the little child tried to drive in that garden she found that it did not work. So, she carried her toy back to the street but with a new knowledge and experience. Now she knows well that she can't do it again in a garden!

Now, I am wondering what would have happened if the child listened to me and did not try to drive her toy in that garden! I think the child would have missed the chance to get such an experience herself. I think that if she did not drive it in that garden she would always look at that garden with a desire to do it every single time she passed near. She would doubt that she cannot drive her toy in that garden because she has acted based on my experience and knowledge that the toy cannot work there since the moment I started yelling at her. The result would be that she did not build a relationship or an experience-based knowledge regarding the issue.

The term *knowledge* is a wide and complicated concept because there are a variety of knowledge sources in this new era (in the academic way). When I decided to write about knowledge and about my personal story with this concept, I refused to write a complicated story or experiment but wrote a very simple and clear one that has a deep meaning and an impact on my life. This story taught me a lot about life and made me think deeply about what happened between me and the three-year-old child. To be more precise, I can say that the conversation I had with the father of that child convinced me even more and made me believe in the power of knowledge and that conviction stems from personal experience.

Real knowledge for me is the one you get through

your experience, stories and relationships with anything. But the “pre-packaged knowledge” – which I’ve represented when I started yelling at the child – you get based on a story or an experience of someone else’s rather than your own would lead to filling our minds with information about many things we don’t have any relationship with.

Most of what we consider as knowledge these days is a “ready or a pre-packaged knowledge” with which we don’t have any relationship. It’s a knowledge that we never participated in building its meaning. It’s a knowledge to which we did not add our own meaning. Basically, it’s a knowledge we don’t know!

I totally respect the experiences and experiments of others, but I want to have my own experience. I want to build my knowledge and experience with every concept in life. I want to know everything I say, and I believe that the best way to reach this level is to depend on my experiences and stories to build my own knowledge and concepts rather than using the ready-knowledge that comes out because of others’ experiences.

I believe that my dependence on my personal experience in knowing, interpreting and understanding things, will lead me to a better and deeper understanding along with being a co-author of the meanings and concepts in my life.

Finally, I'm not saying that we have to try everything in life in order to build our knowledge, because it's not advisable to jump into a volcano in order to know whether it would kill you or not. But at least we have to build our daily life concepts or knowledge that we use every single day in our life based on our personal understanding and experience.

Source of value

Qussay Abu Aker

I worked as a project coordinator, an accountant, an office coordinator and a communication officer.

The learning I have gathered through these experiences gave me the ability to work today in the IbdAA Cultural Center as a fundraising and communication officer. To clarify my idea, here is an example of one of my experiences as a project coordinator.

I received an offer to work as project coordinator in one of the organizations. I had been active with non-profit organizations but never worked in such a position or had duties that were required by such position. Still, I agreed to take the job, looked at the project, requirements, duties, and phases, and mainly I had to do the administrative duties and financial reporting. For three months I had been working on the project, trying to manage it properly, organizing with media, universities, students, trainers, food suppliers for meals and refreshments, and I finally got to the point of finishing the narrative and financial reports of the project, which also had forms to consider. I managed to get them ready, and this experience gave me the knowledge of project

coordinating.

For sure obstacles and problems arose during the project period, and even though it was my first time as a project coordinator, it only took my active engagement with the project, the well of success, and the knowledge I have learned through my practical and social life to reach a secure side of the project, in my sense of it.

Now, looking to what is previously mentioned, and as we are living in an education regime that values individuals as grades and certificates, where your degree gives you a job, I imagine myself working in these positions and different organizations, despite getting offers to work in different positions that would require as a minimum a bachelor degree even though up till now I am still studying at the university to complete my BA. My knowledge that evolved through practical experience gave me the ability to be involved in different fields of work, and today I think of my attendance at the university as only a step toward a social status that my community categorizes me by.

For me knowledge comes through experience. It's easy to categorize people as educated or not, but can we categorize them as having knowledge or not? Can I call someone not knowledgeable? Taking into consideration that each person has his/her experiences in life?

Knowledge is what comes through my interacting with daily life, things that I do with passion and motivation, and the contents of life that would contribute to my concerns and aims. There is an Arabic saying that suggests "contentment is inexhaustible treasure", I would say: knowledge is an inexhaustible treasure, not valued by grades and doesn't need certificates to be approved.

We are the ones who build our knowledge

Ayat Al-Turshan, Nedaa Hamouz

PHOTOS BY
Sara Pellegrini

Our personal story of knowledge springs from our project that consisted of interviews and our visit to Beit-Al Karama in Nablus. We realized that knowledge is practical as well as theoretical, and that it is an action. We used to look at knowledge as represented by a book or an academic certificate and that the person's experience will never have a role in furnishing his personal knowledge, but now, after the new experience which we got from interviewing the women, we can definitely say that one's experience has a great role in forming his personal knowledge. Most of the women we interviewed don't have an academic certificate; however, they are well educated by the events they had in their life, and they can speak about anything easily. Life itself is a school, we can all learn from what's happening in our daily life.

As to the interviews, we were shocked how many of these housewives know a lot of things that we don't even realize. We can say that each woman is a wide

world of knowledge. Each of them has something that differentiates her from the others. Some are interested in sewing, which is a skill that needs good experience to be done perfectly. Others are interested in designing clothes and flower-making using simple materials. It's obvious that their embedded knowledge led them to recognize that beautiful things can be fabricated by these simple and available materials. We expect that the all these knowledges will be shared during the project we will implement, each singular knowledge will be enriched and supported by the other knowledge that the other women have.

The activities to be held in the project are also opportunities for knowledge sharing, and each activity



Women meeting 19th November 2012
Fawwar refugee camp

will be considered as knowledge since knowledge is viewed as an action. For example, making maftoul will be a great opportunity for the women to know more about this popular Palestinian dish. Even maftoul itself is a knowledge transferred between the generations, we learned how to make maftoul from our



parents, and they learned that from their parents and so on.

The visit to Beit-Al Karama enhanced our new concept of knowledge in all its meanings. Their project is pretty similar to ours. They are making workshops for women including English learning and cooking workshops. The woman responsible for this house said an important thing related to knowledge: she said that women can learn from each other, others and also

from themselves. They come to Beit-Al Karama not only to have the language sessions, but also to have a chat where lots of knowledge can be shared. In other words, they come to have fun and spend good times together.



All in all, we can say that knowledge is something flexible and can be modified according to any new experience in our life. Each new day brings a new knowledge that can be furnished and modified by the next coming day. It's also clear that knowledge is not related to certain people since each of us can be considered as a source of knowledge that can't be ignored.



Women meeting 19th November 2012 / Fawwar refugee camp

Academic knowledge

Ahmad Al-Lahham

Ever since I was a child, since my very first day at school, and for a very long time, I considered true knowledge to be the knowledge I was taught at school or college, or any kind of academic institution. Realistically speaking, people have become accustomed to the concept that knowledge stems from education only, and that people who have the knowledge are the ones who received an education. Unfortunately, we adopted this concept and started using it to categorize people according to those who “know” and those who “don’t know” based on their academic certificates: a holder of a bachelor’s degree knows less than a holder of a master’s degree, who in turn knows less than a holder of a PhD. Personally, I think that everything we learned academically was pre-packaged and prepared in which we had no experience or knowledge. It’s almost impossible that any of us participated in the definition of a certain concept in some book that is taught to the first graders! To avoid falling in the same trap and for this to not take another form of academic writing that I’ve just been criticizing, I want to give another example of my own experience in *Campus in Camps*. Before I

was part of this project, I admired the kind of “knowledge” that a fresh graduate from school would have. But now, I stopped to think of one knowledge that I learned in school or college and that I felt I related to, or that has actually made a difference in my life, or that I’ve felt to be a participant in creating, or that I’d added any value or meaning to in my sixteen years spent in educational institutions, and unfortunately, I found none.

But today on the other hand, I can totally say that I can speak about sustainability, for example, which is the first word that I’ve redefined in our collective dictionary. I can say that I participated in creating a definition for this word and that it means something to me. I can say that Ahmad can relate to this concept!

Another example, I’ve studied a lot about development of all kinds at school. I’ve read a lot of academic definitions for development and they all agreed that development is a necessity for the society to rise. But when I came to see what agricultural development, for instance, actually means, I found that it meant a lot of chemicals applied to the soil in order to increase fertility and earn more money for big companies without taking into consideration the fact that what was conceived as development in that case is actually poisonous when consumed by humans. So development, in its universal concept, is improving the outside appearance and ruining the inside.

What I'm wondering about now is whether these terms or concepts, such as development, which we learned from academic institutions, and on which we build our lives and societies, are mostly terms that are meaningless and useless, because they were found by certain people, rather certain parties, that are interested in ruining other societies and growing new consuming generations. The best example that we could give to this effect, is that of the giant American company which specializes in creating seeds, which are genetically manipulated in order not to reproduce. That way, a simple farmer would just have to buy more seeds from the company. What exactly is the kind of development we're talking about here? I don't want to get caught up talking about development, since I only mentioned it as an example of knowledge or a concept taught at school which in reality could be destructive and does not fit with our reality.

I always wonder why we and our children have to live with a concept made by someone else, at some other place, on the planet, and at a time that suited that other person and not the time I live at right now.

I wonder why our children and Filipino children have to study the same concepts, the same knowledge, and the same equations although each one lives under different circumstances. What works here wouldn't work there and vice versa.

Do we have to live and raise our children according to someone else's knowledge? Or do we have to build our own knowledge and concepts based on our own life and in way that fits with our reality? Does my grandfather, who has cultivated and planted trees for a quarter of a century, need to study agriculture to know it? Does he have to get a certificate in agriculture to own that knowledge? Do we have to reconsider the knowledge that's pre-packaged and ready to use? Or do we have to keep taking it as it is without trying to use our own experiences and stories in making our own knowledge? Is it right to categorize and recognize ourselves according to a certificate that we take because we have mastered the knowledge that others wrote in books?

I now believe that what academies did is created several generations across the world that think the same way, generations that have the same "knowledge" and beliefs because they learned the same concepts at schools and universities everywhere. They all consumed the same knowledge that was written in curricula. They all learned how to be good consumers in order to serve the current world order. I am not saying that we should not consider what others do or write in other parts of the world, because we might find what they figured to be of importance and that it fits our world. But we do not have to believe that there is only one universal concept that works with all people all over the world.

We have to build our own knowledge from our daily life, and the stories we've experienced.

I asked my fifteen-year-old brother how he knew that $1+1=2$, and he said that he knew it because his teacher told him so at school. So I asked him if he would have believed his teacher if the latter told him that $1+1=3$, and my brother said "yes."

My new knowledge

Bisan Al-Jaffari

In truth, when I chose to redefine the term of knowledge didn't know whatever tried to redefine the knowledge still something mysterious.

The knowledge that I received when I was young was closed and rote. There are still terms we use that don't touch our reality, our experience or our life. Rote knowledge prevents the mind from thinking, imagining and experiencing and gives him assumptions from other people's experience that might be right or wrong.

My first story about knowledge comes from my daily life, but the second story comes from my curiosity and my desire to go to walk in the streets of the camp and observe the houses, the streets, and the faces, thoughts and emotions of the people. And in that way, I arrived to a new knowledge that I couldn't receive if I hadn't gone. I found a new source of knowledge especially in the camp: what I learn, and what I touch when I walk in the streets of the camp.

While walking in the camp, I see an old woman, her age perhaps 70. I say hi to her and sit beside her.

Campus in Camps and *knowledge*

Ahmad Al-Lahham

I start to ask her about the camp and the people in the camp, and she answers me clearly. I ask her what distinguishes the first generation of refugees from the third. She tells me her generation didn't go to school or learn how to read and write, "but," she says, "we learned from the land- history, science and everything else. The difference between our generation and yours is when we speak about the land that they took from us, we speak with belief and from experience." At that moment, I understood the real meaning of knowledge, and I found the real meaning comes from trust in yourself and your ability to learn and desire for experience. I found out how much the people love and hold on to their land, their stories and their houses, so I found the first generation of refugees the most important source of knowledge in the camp. This woman, for example, has the ability to narrate the refugees' stories. To this day, I still remember the small details that happened. So this woman is a very important source of knowledge in the camp.

I can't evaluate this knowledge, but I believe these people have special knowledge.

This is a nine-month-old experiment. It hasn't been around long enough, but it has changed a lot of the concepts that have historically made me who I am.

Here, we conclude and make our personal experiences. Here, we question all that exists around us, whether it is concepts, knowledge, terms or definitions.

I can say, simply, that I found myself here. I do not want to exaggerate, I am an ordinary person who lives here, and I have always built my knowledge based on what I was taught at school and university, and what I read in several educational books.

But from the moment I registered in this program, or to be more precise, from the moment our discussions started with the Muallem Munir Fasheh and with each other, my life changed. My whole way and methodology of looking at things and the world changed. Now, because we consider stories and

examples to be the right way to reach the knowledge, I would consider my story and example of what I am saying to be the whole text I wrote.

The most significant thing that we do in this project these days is a collective dictionary, in which we are choosing words that relate to us, and redefining it based on our experiences and stories, so that they become meaningful to us.

To be honest, this is a new thing that I never thought

of before. Now, several of my colleagues and I, who have been touched by this idea, only believe in the knowledge that we build and define according to our experiences and stories.

At Campus in Camps, we discuss everything. We no longer accept concepts that have already been defined. We reject the idea of a universal concept that works everywhere. We even started avoiding saying or using any word that has not been built upon our experiences and stories lightly.



– ph. Brave New Alps

A story about *knowledge*

Bisan Al-Jaffari

Knowledge is when a person has the ability to know himself, his passion and what he is feeling from the information that comes from his experience and his simple or in-depth analysis of things that arrives to given result. And this result comes from personal inspiration, his feelings, his mentality and his love of knowledge. Through this story I will explain the meaning of knowledge in simple terms. In my opinion, children are the best at believing in and have ability to build knowledge in a correct way. Without any interruption or input, they can be this way because they are the only people who experiment with anything, who learn and want to discover the world in their hands, and who build their knowledge from feelings and mentality. Others try to build their knowledge not from believable experiments but rather from ready experience.

My story of a small three-year-old describes my understanding of knowledge.

Every morning this girl comes to me and asks for candy. And every day she is taken to same place, to the same box, to be given candy. After awhile, she knows by herself where the candy box is. So she comes to me with the candy box, and she's tells me with a smile "I can get candy by myself!"

The idea of this story is that this girl refuses to blindly accept other people's experience. Instead, she tries to rely on herself and do something she likes, something that comes from her passion. And because she tried by herself to find the candy box, she built her own experience.

The reason I chose this story is to show that in the world there are wrong sources of knowledge that we imitate. Nevertheless, if a person likes something enough, he will imitate it even though it's wrong.

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