

Education as Reparation

Rebuilding Hope and a Future for
Displaced Students from Sinjar

Ismail Issa

**DIGNITY
BELONGING
AGENCY
HOPE**

My own interrupted educational journey

1998

Later

University

Afterward



Left school

Family circumstances led me to work in tailoring.

Returned

Completed middle and high school.

Graduated

University of Duhok, Department of English.

Led

Became a school administrator supporting displaced students.

“An interruption does not have to become the end of an educational journey.”

Sinjar and the loss of educational continuity

AUGUST 3, 2014 – THE GENOCIDE

Mass atrocities and displacement fractured the routines that made the future feel possible.

Homes and security

Education and examinations

Friendships and daily routines

Belonging and expectations

A student planning for university suddenly had to think about survival.

Reparative education

An educational response that recognizes harm and deliberately restores interrupted opportunities, dignity, belonging, confidence, and the ability to shape one's future.

It cannot erase

atrocities, loss, or the need for justice and professional care

It can protect

a young person's right to imagine and pursue a future

The Ronahi School experience (Taakhi Schools Project)

A school established for displaced students from Sinjar

505

students
in 2015–2016

880

students
in 2016–2017

35

teachers and
administrative staff

Each number represented a family, a disrupted life, and a future still worth protecting.

Three practices that mattered

01

Continuity

Restoring safety through continuity.

02

Belonging

Building belonging through relationships.

03

Agency

Restoring confidence and the ability to shape their future.

Restoring safety through continuity

After displacement, ordinary school routines become extraordinary.

A trauma-sensitive school:

- *restore structure and predictable routines*
- *provide emotional and physical safety, trust, and hope*
- *no pressure to retell painful experiences*
- *referral pathways for specialized care*

**Timetable
Teachers
Classmates
Activities
Examinations
Goals**

“Your life has not stopped. Tomorrow is still worth preparing for.”

Belonging begins when students feel cared for

**“Someone cared about me
when I needed it most.”**

THE PHOTOGRAPH I WILL NEVER FORGET

A student placed a photograph of the school’s teaching and administrative staff as the wallpaper on his personal computer.

He remembered not only lessons—but relationships.

Belonging means taking care of students, respecting them, their culture, identity, and community memory.

Recognition can restore confidence and agency

AWARDS

Celebrate achievement

A SONG

Share hope personally

AGENCY

See a future self

Recognition should include more than top grades:

Perseverance • Improvement • Attendance • Cooperation • Returning after interruption

What Should Reparative Education Look Like?

It should ask:

- 01** What educational opportunities were lost?
- 02** Who was excluded from education?
- 03** What barriers continue to prevent students from returning?
- 04** How can we restore not only access to education, but also dignity, confidence, belonging, and hope?

It should include:

- 01** Restoring educational continuity;
- 02** Providing safe and inclusive learning environments;
- 03** Supporting students who have dropped out;
- 04** Providing psychosocial and psychological support;
- 05** Training teachers to respond sensitively to trauma;
- 06** Recognizing and celebrating students' achievements; and
- 07** Creating pathways to higher education and employment

A CALL TO ACTION

Shared responsibility, urgent priority

Displaced students didn't cause their situation — rebuilding their future isn't theirs to carry alone
Governments, donors, humanitarian organizations, schools, and communities all share responsibility

Educational continuity = essential to recovery, not a secondary service

What's needed

- Sustained funding
- Trained, supported teachers
- Psychosocial referral systems
- Flexible pathways for students who missed school
- Routes to higher education and employment
- Meaningful participation by affected communities

Reparative education is not only about replacing what was lost. It is about restoring possibilities, dignity, belonging, confidence, and hope

Thank you