

AMMAN

JORDAN





MR. FAISAL, AMMAN, JORDAN

“He teaches us because he wants to understand and learn.”

– Ali, Mr. Faisal’s student

By Adriana Cortez, Hiba Salem, and Sarah Dryden-Peterson

ABOUT MR. FAISAL

Mr. Faisal is a Jordanian teacher in Amman, the capital of Jordan, with a classroom of over 40 students in an all-boys grade eight class in a public school. He teaches in two shifts: Jordanian students in the morning and Syrian refugee students in the evening. Understanding that his Syrian students face more challenges and uncertainty because of their refugee status, he seeks to build a holistic understanding of students’ lives and their needs. Mr. Faisal uses this understanding to create a community of care and protection for his Syrian refugee students. While Mr. Faisal develops nurturing relationships with his students, he feels this is a burden teachers carry alone, lacking resources and support from the school and wider community.

BUILDING UNDERSTANDING

Mr. Faisal seeks to better understand his students and the specific hardships they face in order to create safe spaces for them to thrive in school.

Understanding that his students are experiencing socio-economic hardships and isolation in Jordan, Mr. Faisal begins his lessons with a five-minute summary of previous work for students who were unable to attend class the day before. He doesn’t cold-call his students. Instead, he pays attention to who is volunteering to participate. Both during and outside of class, Mr. Faisal creates time and space for students to share their experiences, which allows him to learn more about their lives and their identities. He says, “I can feel that they just want to be connected with their homes as much as possible.” Building on this need for a sense of home even while displaced, he draws on the shared cultural and religious identities he has with his Syrian students, as an Arab and a Muslim.

CREATING RELEVANT CURRICULUM

Mr. Faisal designs his lessons in ways that extend the official curriculum to support his students. He works hard to ensure that students have time to cover the required curriculum as well as for

dialogue that is meaningful to them. One day when students were looking down at their phones, Mr. Faisal did not ask them to put the phones away, as he was inclined to do. Instead, he engaged with them and found that his students were downloading photos of destruction unfolding in Syria – in their homes – at that moment. He invited the students into conversation about how they were feeling, giving them space to process what they were experiencing, and, only after that, bringing conversation back to the lesson. He recognized both sets of content were relevant to their learning.

ACTING WITH RESISTANCE

Mr. Faisal uses the privilege of his Jordanian citizenship to acknowledge the importance of going beyond the traditional duties of a public teacher to advocate for his Syrian refugee students' needs.

When Mr. Faisal noticed that a student was not able to follow a lesson because he could not see the board, he tried to source money for glasses from the school. When he knew a Syrian family needed help paying for medical care, he connected with a national NGO. Searching for more resources to support his students, Mr. Faisal was left overwhelmed by the levels of needs across the country. With his colleagues, he began to wonder how their school could resist these external pressures and respond to students needs more holistically. He and his colleagues listened to what their students needed, like finding ways to organize and fund a school field trip, an experience they were initially told was not necessary for refugees.

ENGAGING IN FUTURE-BUILDING

Mr. Faisal encourages his students to think about their futures in ways that allow them to heal and dream.

When discussing a piece of writing in a textbook on “Optimism,” Mr. Faisal expanded the lesson in the official curriculum. After analyzing the piece, as they were expected to do, he encouraged his students to apply the thinking to their own lives. In particular, he asked them to identify factors that enhanced their own sense of optimism. Students openly shared their worries, their hopes, and their dreams for future careers and lives. In this way, Mr. Faisal connected processes of healing with future-building. He found this practice not only supported his students but also helped him process his own feelings of helplessness in his role as a teacher.

Learn More about Mr. Faisal and refugee education in Jordan, “[Protection in Refugee Education: Teachers’ Socio-Political Practices in Classrooms in Jordan.](#)” [Open access version.](#)