

AMMAN

JORDAN





MS. SUSAN, AMMAN, JORDAN

“One thing I know about them now is that no matter what the conditions are, they love to come to school.”

– Ms. Susan

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

ABOUT MS. SUSAN

Ms. Susan teaches grade eight at a public all-girls school in Amman, Jordan. She teaches Syrian students in an afternoon shift; they come to school after the Jordanian students have finished their school day. Her priority in the classroom is to maintain high expectations while also meeting the needs of her students. She relies heavily on predictable classroom routines to make this fluid approach to teaching possible. Ms. Susan also seeks to understand her students and how their identities, in the face of the many harms they face as refugee girls, shape their experiences in the classroom. Through her teaching practices, Ms. Susan creates a community of care and protection in her classroom.

CREATING RELEVANT CURRICULUM

While Ms. Susan would prefer to have a more rigid approach to the curriculum and learning sequences, she sees that her students need something more flexible and adapts her approach to support their learning and well-being.

Ms. Susan understands that her students’ safety and financial stability are threatened, given their status as refugees in Jordan and living away from their homes in Syria. Knowing that many of her students may have missed months or years of learning through their displacement, Ms. Susan reviews past lessons when she presents new ideas. This adapted approach allows her to address students’ needs while maintaining integrity in the curriculum.

Ms. Susan also adapts her lessons when she observes her students come to class in different emotional states. Rather than ignoring this challenge, she stops the lesson to let students breathe. As one student explained, “She doesn’t spend the entire lesson teaching and teaching... she gives you two minutes to relax and chat.” This approach helps her maintain high expectations of her students while also giving space for dialogue and acting on harms that arise. When one of her

students was unable to answer a question, Ms. Susan approached her closer and asked gently, “Where has your mind been today?” It is a question her student wanted to actively discuss because of the mutual bonds of care she feels with her teacher. Similarly, when a student makes a mistake in Ms. Susan’s class, there are no moments of shame or punishment. Her students say, “She doesn’t yell at us and she is caring.” This approach to teaching allows students to have their sense of hope protected and nurtured.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Ms. Susan makes it a priority to create kind and gentle bonds in her classroom through relationship-building.

Ms. Susan’s students describe their learning space as “calm,” “gentle,” and “kind.” She creates a familiarity in her classroom where students feel like they are sisters or daughters, encouraging them with affirmative words and actions of care. These relationships are strengthened by the shifting roles she takes on as a teacher; for example, offering guidance and advice, and sharing her own vulnerabilities with her students. She says she does not want to “act with them in a way that makes me seem like an authoritative figure.” “I like to win them over,” she says, “like we might laugh in class, we might joke, we might talk about something unrelated.” By doing this, Ms. Susan creates an atmosphere of mutual care, where students will also ask her if she’s doing okay and respond to her needs as their teacher.

RECOGNIZING IDENTITIES

Through relationships, Ms. Susan has developed awareness of her students’ intersectional identities and shapes her pedagogies to reflect them.

Ms. Susan recognizes her students as refugees and as young women. As refugees, they are required to attend an afternoon school shift in Jordan. As young women, they face harassment from boys and men who wait outside of school for them as they leave in the dark. In response, Ms. Susan collaborated with other teachers to cancel the last lesson of the school day so their students could walk home while it was still light outside. This shift allows families and students not to fear for safety and to support young women in continuing to attend school.

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