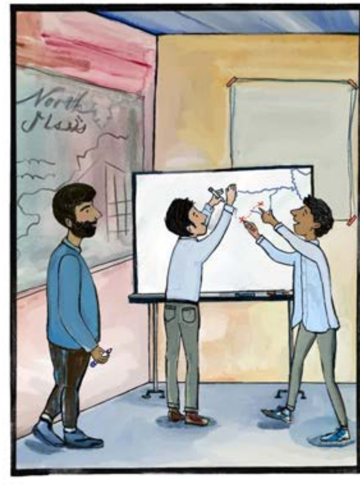
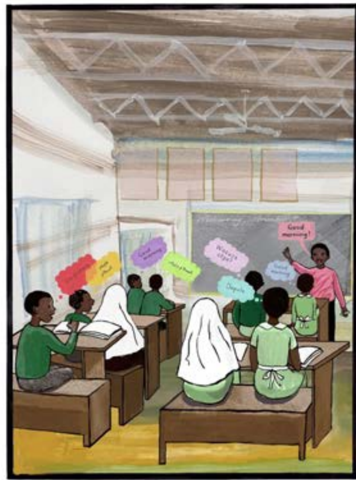
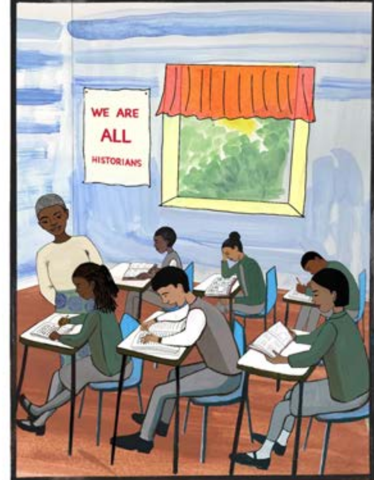
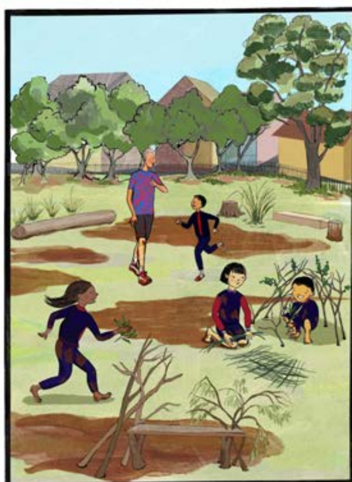
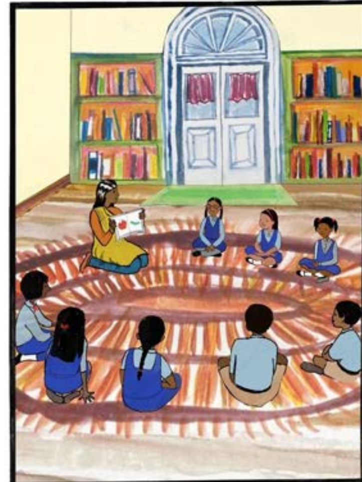





PEDAGOGIES OF BELONGING





Pedagogies of Belonging

Educators Building Welcoming Communities in Settings of Conflict and Migration

Gratitude

To the educators whose practices fill these pages, and for the time they shared with us to explain why they do what they do and how they make decisions in situations of struggle.

To the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Cheng Yu Tung Educational Innovation Research Fund who have supported the work on this book.

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INTRODUCTION

By Sarah Dryden-Peterson

What would it take to ensure that all young people have access to learning that enables them to feel a sense of belonging and prepares them to help build more peaceful and equitable futures? This is a question we have found educators in contexts of conflict and migration ask of themselves each day. And each day, in classrooms around the world, educators are acting in response to this question.

Educators are figuring out what to teach, ways to teach, and how to foster relationships of learning and belonging.

We learn from educators how they create space for dissent, for dialogue, for trust, for new identities, for future-building, and how they envision and build newly imagined and welcoming communities.

Pedagogies of belonging, featured in this book and in its title, emerge from these ways of thinking and acting by educators. We see across educators that what they teach, how they teach, and why they teach in the ways they do come together to enable all young people to feel a sense of belonging and prepare them to help build more peaceful and equitable futures.

This book is about educators and for educators. It is about the practices educators have developed to create welcoming communities in settings of conflict and migration. Each chapter is a "microportrait" of one educator who we have come to know by spending time in their classroom and school.

We focus on the why and the how of practices educators use. We show, through text and art, how educators learn about their students' experiences, needs, and desires. We describe how educators develop practices to meet these learning and belonging goals. And we recognize how educators address struggles that necessarily arise in this work. We hope the practices give us each ideas to try out in our own classrooms, schools, and other educational sites.

We see patterns in the purposes of the practices educators use, even if the practices themselves vary substantially across contexts. Educators describe **creating relevant curriculum** for their students, often despite rigidity in the content they are expected to cover. They show how they **recognize**

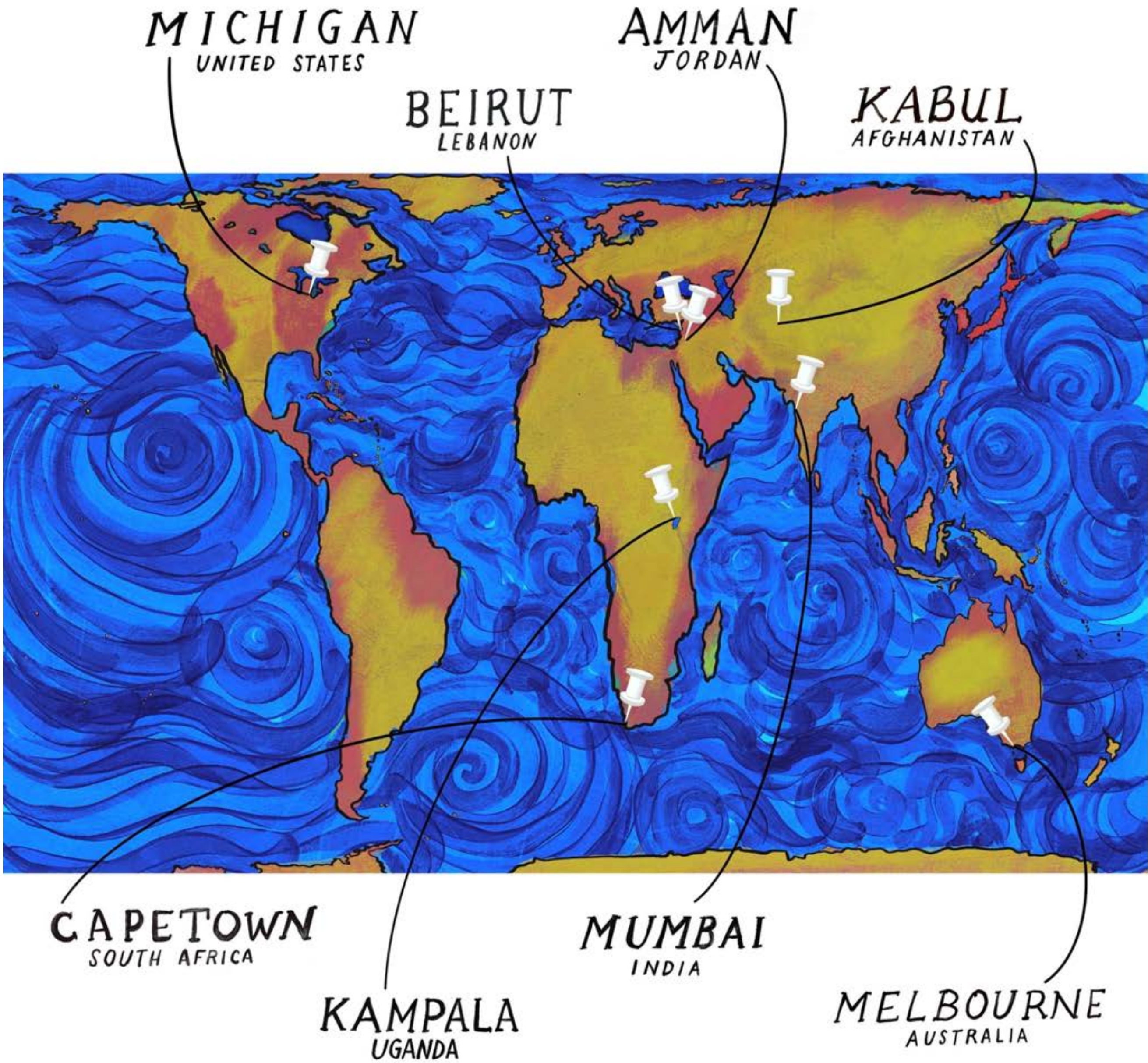
identities students bring to the classroom and ones they create newly in the place they now live. They emphasize how building relationships forms a foundation for experiences of learning and belonging, and they explain how they foster these relationships between students and teachers and among students. Educators demonstrate how they **engage in future-building** with their students, even when the future seems scary and unknown. They explain how often these practices compel them to **act with resistance**, often at great risk, to what school and national structures expect them to do and what their previous practices had been. Each of these practices do not stand alone. Educators show us how they are **intertwined** and how they all connect to purposes of creating spaces of belonging.

Each microportrait is grounded in research about educator practices. Authors of the microportraits came to know the educators through research projects that included interviews, observations, and sometimes participatory methods. Each project was at least a few months and at times spanned many years. The microportraits include links to articles that can support deeper learning about the contexts and practices of the educators.

This book is a collective project, and we welcome your participation. The intention of this book is that it lives and grows to include more microportraits over time and more patterns of practices that may emerge. Please be in touch with suggestions, to share your experiences with the practices of these educators, or to contribute a microportrait to the collection. You can reach us at reach@gse.harvard.edu.

A note on names. In almost all cases, the names of educators and schools where they teach are pseudonyms. The work these educators do is brave and sometimes full of risk. We hope they can continue this work without the danger that being known can often bring in the contexts in which they work.

A note on maps. Each microportrait in the book is accompanied by a map of where learning and teaching takes place. Maps and borders, like education, have been used as tools of colonization determining who belongs, and who has rights, where. Rooted in this history, the maps we share in this book remind us of the roles that borders play in shaping the lives and learning of educators and young people around the world. The educators in the microportraits help us think about how to help young people find belonging beyond these borders.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MUMBAI
INDIA
MELBOURNE
AUSTRALIA

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

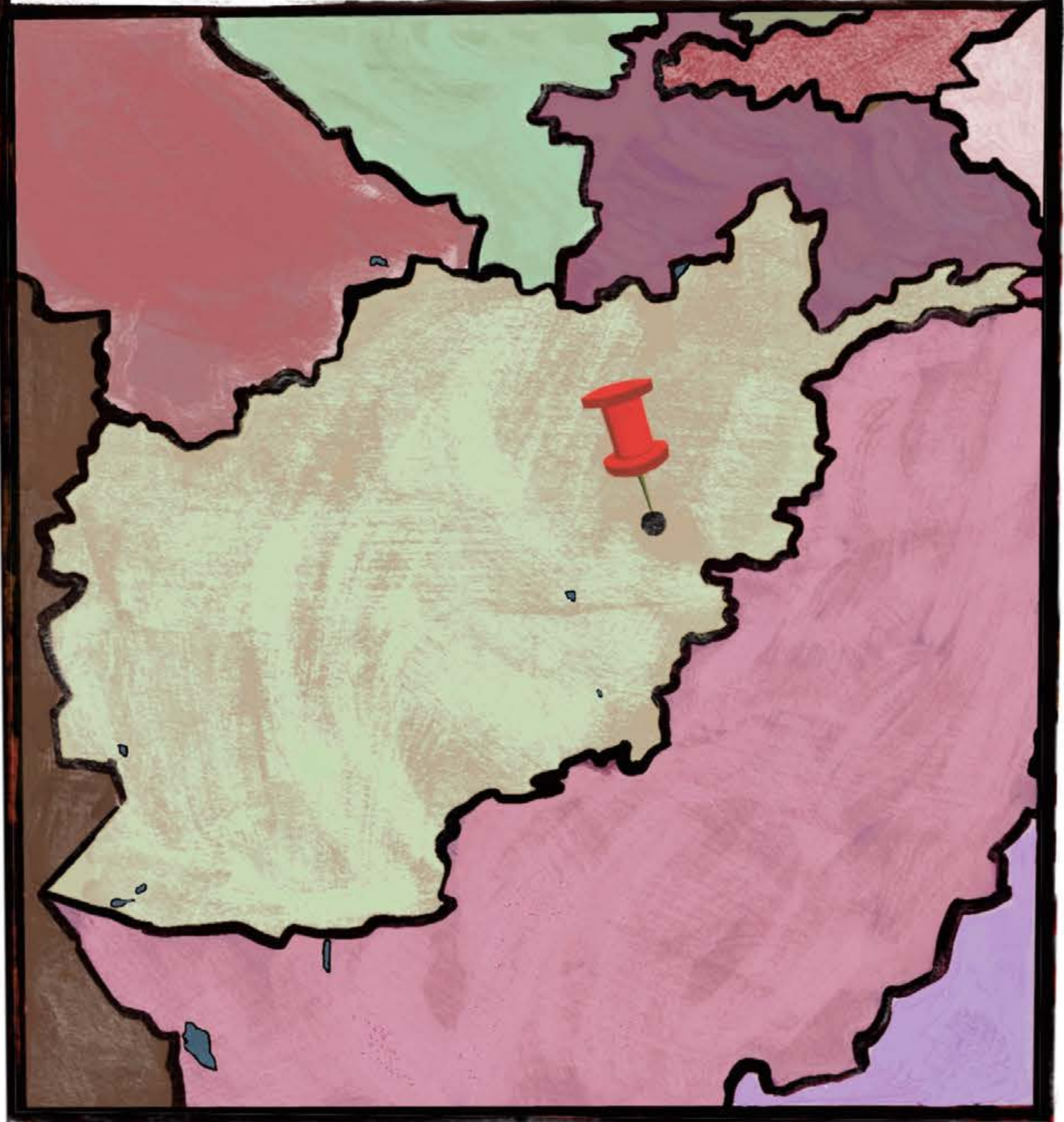
Mr. Faisal encourages his students to think about their futures in ways that allow them to heal and dream.

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.

KABUL

AFGHANISTAN



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THE QARI, KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

"The goal of education is to live our lives in light, to build a future life, and to educate others."
– The Qari

By Zuhra Faizi

ABOUT THE QARI

Qari is a common title for a religious leader who recites the Quran.

The Qari, age 38, teaches a grade one class in a community-based school in a room on the first floor of his home in Kabul, Afghanistan. While community-based schools are situated within informal spaces, they teach the national curriculum as students are expected to eventually transition to the formal system. In the class are 53 boys and girls, from five to fifteen years of age. These students have been left out of the formal education system after decades of war and being denied resources. Student artwork – a map of Afghanistan, cartoon characters, the Pashto alphabet – enliven the splotchy, white walls. Similar to many of his students, the Qari's family experienced multiple waves of internal and cross-border displacement before returning to his childhood home in Kabul where his family lived before the civil war in the 1990s. His teaching centers culture and religion through pedagogical methods that integrate active learning models and storytelling.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The Qari's relationship-building practices are focused on advancing the learning of all students. While the varying ages present many pedagogical challenges, the Qari works with students' different academic levels to enhance learning. Students with more advanced skills, typically older, are partnered with one or two students with developing skills to provide additional guidance. These older students, called "teachers," help their "students" find page numbers, solve math problems, and write new vocabulary. This practice ensures that all students are actively engaged in the learning process. Younger students receive support in a relatively large class where the teacher is not always able to provide individualized attention. Meanwhile, by assigning older students some responsibility, there is a sense of recognition and appreciation for what they bring to the classroom. One student joyously shares, "I'm a teacher and these two are my students!" Within these pods, student relationships also reflect characteristics the Qari has shown them as a teacher: affirmation, patience, and care.

CREATING RELEVANT CURRICULUM

The Qari extends the formal curriculum in ways that connect home and school.

The Qari brings in Islamic stories and lessons that highlight various community norms and practices: respect for parents, helping neighbors, and greeting each other. When he explains the rights of parents through the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad, the children listen closely, eyes glued on their teacher. These lessons connect school and home by reinforcing shared community norms. The focus on norms and traditions further strengthens a sense of community within the classroom and cultivates trust between the education system and families, many of whom have had negative experiences with past education policies that were designed to reshape local values, such as minimizing the role of religion. One mother praised this part of the Qari's teaching; she explained, "When [our children] come home, they respect us. They didn't say salaam [peace] before when they went out. Now when they go outside and see adults, they greet them with salaam. This makes us very happy." The Qari's practices demonstrate that, at times, adapting what is in the set curriculum is important to meet the needs of students.

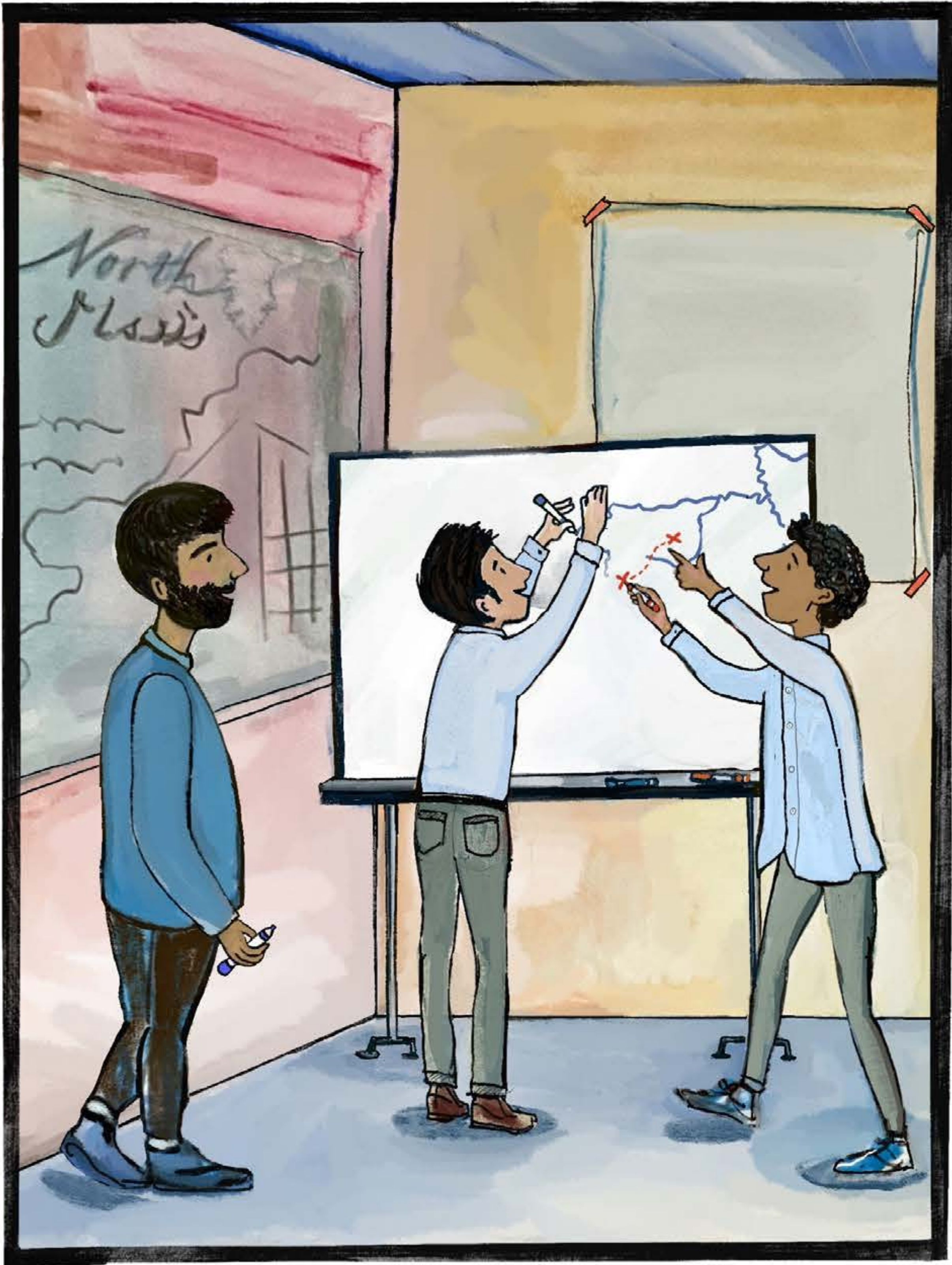
SUSTAINING CULTURE WHILE FUTURE-BUILDING

The Qari balances providing space for different cultural expressions and fostering new norms and skills that will help students navigate life in Kabul, part of their future-building in this new place.

The Qari's class has students with families from Kabul as well as those displaced from rural areas of the country who have had less exposure to the norms of formal public school education. While some boys and girls wear black and white public school uniforms, many wear colorful traditional clothes, beaded scarves and floral dresses. The Qari does not point out the differences as some teachers do. He does occasionally point out anything that might cause distractions in the classroom, such as jingling bangles, which would not be permitted within other schools his students will transition to in the future. Respect for diversity also extends to making space for various dialects of Pashto. He gently teaches his students, who speak dialects that differ from formal Pashto, multiple words that convey similar concepts, with some that are more commonly spoken in school. The Qari strongly believes in instilling cultural confidence as well as gaining new skills, such as formal language skills, that prepare students for greater opportunities. While approaching these sensitive issues can be challenging, he does so from a place of care and appreciation for local culture.

Learn More about the Qari and community-based education in Afghanistan, "Drop by Drop, a River is Formed: Community and Education in Kabul, Afghanistan."

BEIRUT
LEBANON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MR. AHMED, BEIRUT, LEBANON

"I didn't believe that a teacher could do that for their students but I found out that it was true."
– Tayseer, Mr. Ahmed's student

By Adriana Cortez, Sarah Dryden-Peterson, Vidur Chopra, Joumana Talhouk, and Carmen Geha

ABOUT MR. AHMED

Mr. Ahmed is a grade nine civics teacher in a school on the outskirts of Beirut, Lebanon. Most refugees in Lebanon attend public schools, where national students come in the morning and refugees in the afternoon. Mr. Ahmed's school is different; it is a private school run for and by Syrian refugees. Students must follow the official national curriculum in English or in French in order to pass the high-stakes Brevet exam at the end of grade nine, which determines whether or not they can continue in school. But Mr. Ahmed and other teachers work together to ensure that their Syrian students can both learn during the year and take this exam in Arabic, a language familiar to them. Mr. Ahmed builds upon this inclusive approach as his foundation for ensuring his students feel seen and heard, and that they matter, which runs counter to many of their experiences outside of school.

CREATING RELEVANT CURRICULUM

Mr. Ahmed knows that for his students to be successful in their education and in the lives they imagine for themselves, they must pass the Brevet exam. He maintains high expectations for students by keeping this goal in mind even as he incorporates modifications to the curriculum to make it more meaningful to them.

One time, Mr. Ahmed summarized a 100-page history book into 40 pages, making the content his students needed to pass their exams accessible to them. Each day, Mr. Ahmed also modifies the official curriculum to make it more relevant to his students. One day, he used a geography lesson to focus not only on the physical contours of borders, states, and compass directions as the curriculum specified but also on "identifying one location with respect to another location." He homed in particularly on Syria and Lebanon, places that held meaning for students. He also emphasized to students how maps were not just static markers of places but could be navigational tools. In this way, he tapped into their previous experiences of navigating multiple locations and their relationships with them as well as to possible future migrations.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Mr. Ahmed invests time in getting to know his students. It is clear to his students that he enjoys spending time with them. As Mr. Ahmed once said, "No matter how long I sit with the 9th grade students, I don't get bored."

From the outset, Mr. Ahmed wants his students to know that he cares about who they are, who their families are, and what they care about. At the beginning of the year, for example, he shares a questionnaire with his students asking about them and their families. During class daily, Mr. Ahmed engages with each student to better understand what they need. He knows them well enough to observe when a student is feeling shy or uncertain in a particular moment. Mr. Ahmed encourages them with a "bravo" when they complete a task, an experience uncommon to them with previous teachers. When he notices that his students are frustrated and tired, Mr. Ahmed recognizes the need to pause and encourage them. One year, the night before the Brevet exam, as his students were preparing, he reached out to them on WhatsApp and sent them encouraging texts and study tips.

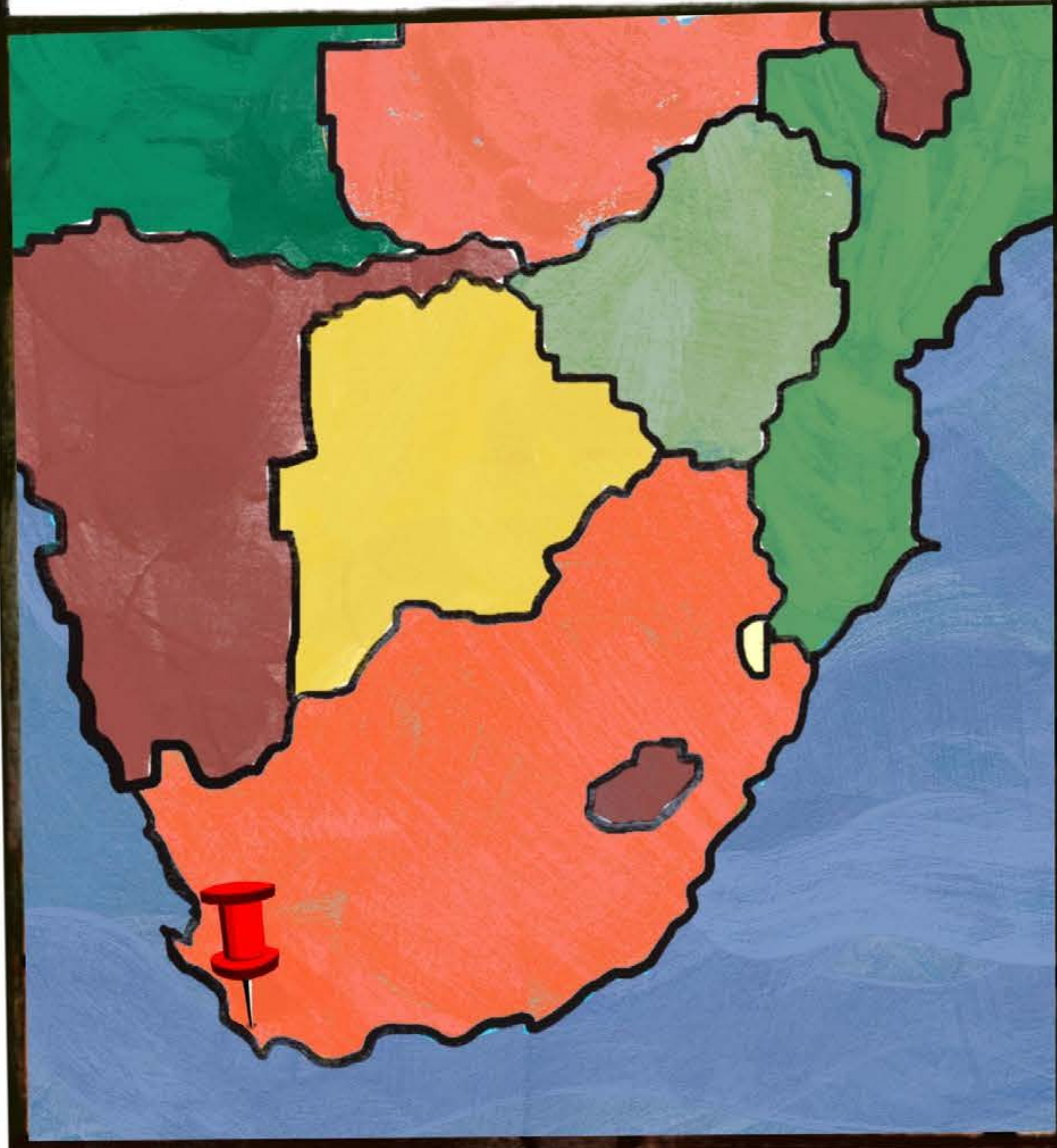
RECOGNIZING IDENTITIES

As a Syrian refugee himself, Mr. Ahmed understands the hardships his students and their families face, including lack of access to jobs and housing and experiences of discrimination in daily life. His own experiences as a refugee shape his insights and actions on how to recognize these social and political realities while also creating conditions that enable his students to feel safe and to learn.

Mr. Ahmed brings into conversation the official curriculum and the expectations and lived experiences of his students. Knowing that his students face challenges at home with overcrowded rooms, limited electricity, and limited bandwidth to study, he designs his lessons so that students learn what they need to know for the exam in class rather than for homework. He creates space for students to make comparisons between what the textbook says and their own experiences, including addressing disconnects between the two. In particular, he recognizes, instead of glossing over, that Syrians do not have most of the rights outlined in civics lessons. When teaching Lebanese laws, for example, Mr. Ahmed explained, "I make it clear that this is a law that exists but is unfortunately not applied. As simple as that."

Learn More about Mr. Ahmed and refugee education in Lebanon, "Creating Educational Borderlands: Civic Learning in a Syrian School in Lebanon" (forthcoming).

CAPETOWN
SOUTH AFRICA



WE ARE
ALL
HISTORIANS

MS. ETHEL, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

"I really loved history, and I thought I would make a change in history by teaching learners."
– Ms. Ethel

By Adriana Cortez, Sarah Dryden-Peterson, and Shelby Carvalho

ABOUT MS. ETHEL

Ms. Ethel migrated to South Africa from Zimbabwe and understands what it means to be othered in the context of recent violent, and sometimes deadly, xenophobia. She attributes her own successes as an educator to "firm discipline," which grounds her high expectations for her students. The public school where Ms. Ethel works as a history teacher and a school counselor serves diverse students, migrants and nationals alike, most of whose families have limited economic resources and whose communities experience high rates of violence. Ms. Ethel's identities and various roles allow her to understand her students' experiences on both systemic and interpersonal levels as she strives to help them be successful students and active members of society.

HOLDING HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Ms. Ethel wants her students to be successful and, to make this possible, she must help them understand how to be successful. To do so, she maintains high expectations for both her students and herself. Her students also hold each other accountable to Ms. Ethel's expectations, hushing each other when the classroom gets too loud.

The writing prompts Ms. Ethel assigns require deep thinking, asking students to study their historical sources and filter out unnecessary information. She asks them to craft and present original arguments and defend their positions in debates. She believes all students can do this work. To support this learning and success, Ms. Ethel uses several strategies consistently: she reviews previous lessons, scaffolds tasks by doing them together first, and offers guidance on what evaluators look for on high-stakes exam responses. She also pays close attention to who is participating and who has been quiet, making sure to include everyone in the conversation.

Ms. Ethel believes in hard work and models this for her students. She makes herself available for students to meet with her and discuss personal or academic matters. As she said, "The only joy we get as educators is to see these learners excelling in life."

RECOGNIZING IDENTITIES

Ms. Ethel's personal experiences with migration, as well as her unique position as both teacher and counselor, give her insights into the identities and lives of her students.

Ms. Ethel brings this awareness into her history classroom, asking students to discuss complex topics like exploitation, child labor, and human rights and responsibilities, not only in the historical context of the Industrial Revolution, as is on the syllabus, but in the context of contemporary conditions of migrants and others in South Africa. She asks her students to connect the history they are learning to these present conditions and to the kinds of community members she expects them to be in the future. Ms. Ethel calls her students "historians," placing them in an important role not just as inheritors of this difficult history but as creators of new knowledge with the power to think in new ways about the future.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Ms. Ethel seeks any available moment to learn more about her students as individuals.

As Ms. Ethel looks through her students' workbooks, she gives them personalized feedback, and praises them when they've done a good job. She compliments them on their creativity. These words of encouragement help her build rapport and create a safe space for students to learn from their mistakes. She said, "These are learners who actually want to engage. These are learners who are actually inquisitive. These are learners who don't fear educators."

Ms. Ethel knows which of her students – both migrants and nationals – are struggling in history class because they are still learning English, she knows who is close friends with whom, she knows who reads books in their free time, she knows whose family has insecure housing, she knows who loves history and who needs to be convinced they are indeed a "historian." These relationships with her students shape her approach to teaching, including the "firm discipline" that is core to her pedagogy. Although compromise does not come easily to her, she describes how she adjusts the nature of any discipline to align with what each student needs to succeed at school, needs she knows well through her relationships with students.

Learn More about Ms. Ethel and schools as welcoming communities in South Africa (coming soon!).

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.

MELBOURNE
AUSTRALIA

DAVID, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

“[We use] the money that we’ve got to have the maximum number of people to have relationships and look after all of these students.”
– David

By Mervi Kaukko and Jane Wilkinson

ABOUT DAVID

David – everyone calls him David, teachers, students, families – was the principal of Noble Park Primary School, a public school in the outskirts of Melbourne, Australia for 17 years. Ninety percent of students at the school speak a language other than English as their first language, and about one in four students have experienced forced migration. During David’s leadership, the school took intentional steps away from focusing on standardized testing and adjusted its practices to meet the needs of each student. These changes transformed the curriculum and the school environment to give balanced support not only to children’s academic success, but also their natural playfulness, social competencies, and overall wellbeing.

CREATING RELEVANT CURRICULUM

Australia’s emphasis on standardized curricula and scores on national tests in literacy and numeracy shapes the way many schools approach meeting the needs of students. David found that this standardization and focus on testing disadvantaged newly arrived students and in particular, students of refugee backgrounds.

With his students always front and center, David worked against the grain of what is typically expected from school leaders in Australia in several ways. He said, “Some will argue that our prime responsibility is to make [students at Noble Park] literate but I don’t think it is. I don’t think that’s creating better people. Our responsibility is broader than that, making sure that we bring a whole lot of things into play in children’s learning [and] support an environment which makes it a safe place to learn.” David did not sacrifice the academic side of schooling, he had a larger vision. He insisted with children, teachers, parents and system leaders, that schools can do more than just support the literacy that can be measured by tests.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Core to meeting students' needs at Noble Park were sufficient numbers of caring staff to work with every student, personalize their learning, and create an environment that made all students feel safe and welcome.

Experiences of safety and welcome went hand in hand at Noble Park. David described how at the school, "We're creating a secure place for children to learn." In fact, feeling welcome is not possible without safety for refugee students. David explained, "We have many of our children experiencing trauma as a result of their refugee experience so we have tried to put in as much support as we can, based on where they are at both at a social and emotional level and where they're at at a learning level." David decided to spend most school funds on people, hiring as many staff as possible so the children could be surrounded by caring adults. This approach did not require sacrificing anything. It required "having a resolution to spend all your money [on supporting students]".

EMBRACING PLAYFULNESS

Safety and play worked together at Noble Park and supported all students' education, but this was especially true for students who experienced their absence before coming to this school.

Playfulness was one of the five core values of Noble Park. At Noble Park, students were allowed to build hiding places, huts, treehouses, and hammocks. They also often chose where they would study. These child-built spaces were not cleared away at the end of the school day but left to be, so that students could return and develop them later. While playing, students learned and felt a sense of control over their environment. David said, "Kids are learning every minute of the day – it just doesn't look like it when kids are not in a traditional classroom. There's other ways to skin that cat…. When they go outside there are multiple choices for them to continue their learning but it's sort of like vicariously because they don't necessarily realize their learning when they are building a hub [an outdoor play which the students had built using recycled and nature-based materials] with their friends or spending time with the chooks [chickens]. They are learning about caring for animals or they are learning about their own mindfulness and what they need to do to be calm." Using the outdoors is particularly important in this urban environment, since "the majority of [students] live in flats or apartments so they don't have a play area like that."

Just as he resisted a focus on standardized testing, embracing play – and in particular outdoor play – required David to challenge some of the education system's demands for low risk environments. Like with all situations, David treated risk as a learning moment and trusted the children to be able

to learn from it. He supported students to play freely in the natural environment while encouraging them to make wise choices about riskier play, such as when they were climbing trees.

Learn More about supporting refugee students in Australia, Leading & Creating Powerful Learning Relationships.

KAMPALA
UGANDA

Good morning!
Do purwe
عليكم
السلام
Good morning
السلام عليكم
Wasuze otya?
Dapule
Good morning

MS. ISABEL, KAMPALA, UGANDA

"A child feels proud of his or her own language, and I think he has a right to it."
– Ms. Isabel

By Celia Reddick

ABOUT MS. ISABEL

Ms. Isabel is the Head Teacher (principal) of a government-run (public) primary school in Kampala, Uganda, where nearly 50% of students' families have been affected by conflict and forced migration. Ms. Isabel became a science teacher in 1981, and while she had never aspired to school administration, she became a Head of Department early in her career and then a Head Teacher in 2014. She was appointed to her current school at a time when it was struggling to stem the tide of families leaving urban public schools for the private schools popping up all around the city. Under Ms. Isabel's leadership, demand for the school has begun to surpass capacity, with many new refugee and immigrant students. The school sees itself as part of a large collection of institutions that supports the diverse, multilingual community living in this neighborhood. The community is made up of Ugandans from around the country, newcomer refugee and immigrant families, and longtime residents from surrounding countries.

CULTIVATING EMPATHY

Ms. Isabel's leadership of this large, public primary school where so many children have been affected by war and violence is guided by her empathy toward all of her students.

One morning, a young boy knocked on Ms. Isabel's office door and handed her a newspaper, folded to reveal his face. Ms. Isabel took it gratefully and congratulated him, telling him she wanted to make a copy of the article to hang in the front hall. As he left, Ms. Isabel explained that she wanted to celebrate this student's achievement. The article was about how this Somali student decided he wanted to become a mechanic and apprenticed himself to someone in the community. She knew that Somalis rarely become mechanics, instead facing employment and educational discrimination in Kampala. Ms. Isabel hoped that by sharing this student's achievement publicly, she might dispel stereotypes and encourage children to dream in ways that countered the frequent dismissal of their capacities by peers and teachers alike.

RECOGNIZING IDENTITIES

In her leadership, Ms. Isabel centers her students' histories, rights, and needs, and she encourages her teachers to do the same.

Ms. Isabel's approach to multilingualism at school is a key place where she resists the expectation that students should leave behind their diverse cultures for membership in Uganda's economic and education systems. Pointing to the sense of self embedded in being able to practice multilingualism, Ms. Isabel draws on her own experience to shape her approach. She explains, "A child feels proud of his or her own language, and I think he has a right to it…I think the language is part of them. It is part of them. For me, even if you take me [some]where [far away], I can't forget my language. I can't. Even if I'm dying, I will not cry in English."

For Ms. Isabel, language and culture are intimately entwined with children's present wellbeing and with their futures. Knowing that she must enforce an English-only policy in classrooms, handed down to her from the national Ministry of Education and Sports, Ms. Isabel finds ways to symbolically affirm children's multilingualism outside of class. When she first joined the school, Ms. Isabel started an annual Cultural Gala, which she initiated as a way to recognize each of the children and where they come from, celebrating the school's diversity. During this annual event – a brief 'moment in time' in the rhythm of the school – anthems, for example, other than Uganda's are welcomed onto campus.

ACTING WITH RESISTANCE

Ms. Isabel recognizes that national education policies do not always serve the learning needs of her students and she takes discrete actions to support her teachers and her students as they navigate these dilemmas.

Ms. Isabel knows that despite her commitment to affirming children's linguistic diversity, she must also follow English-only policies set at the national level, requiring English at school. This is not an easy balance. To achieve it, Ms. Isabel discourages her teachers from being too public in their embrace of multilingualism in the classroom, although she doesn't ban languages other than English as many Head Teachers at other schools do. In her own grade seven class, she even permits her students to use languages they are more comfortable in to translate words, but she does so discretely.

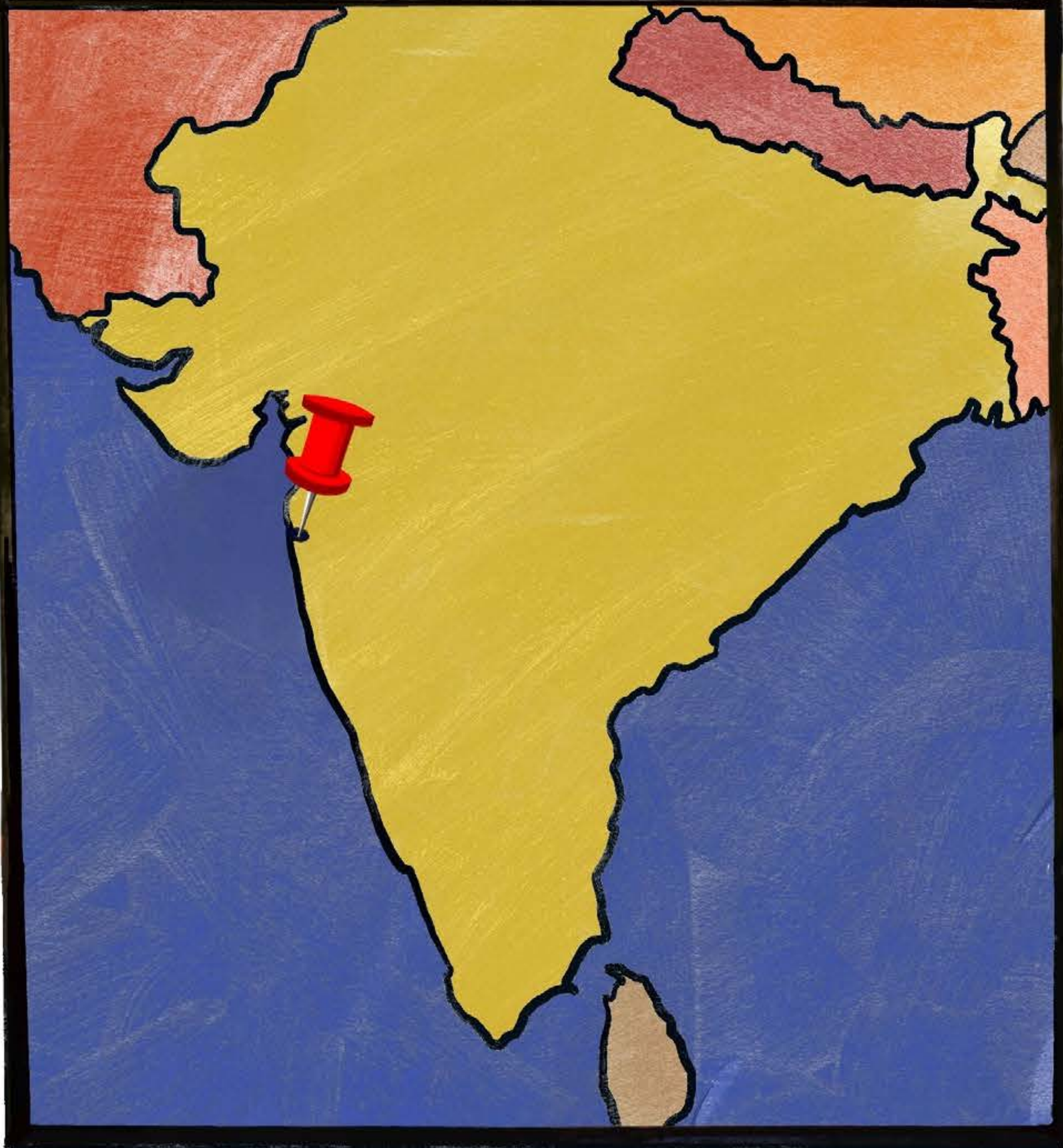
Ms. Isabel acknowledges the need to enforce English at school because she sees this language as

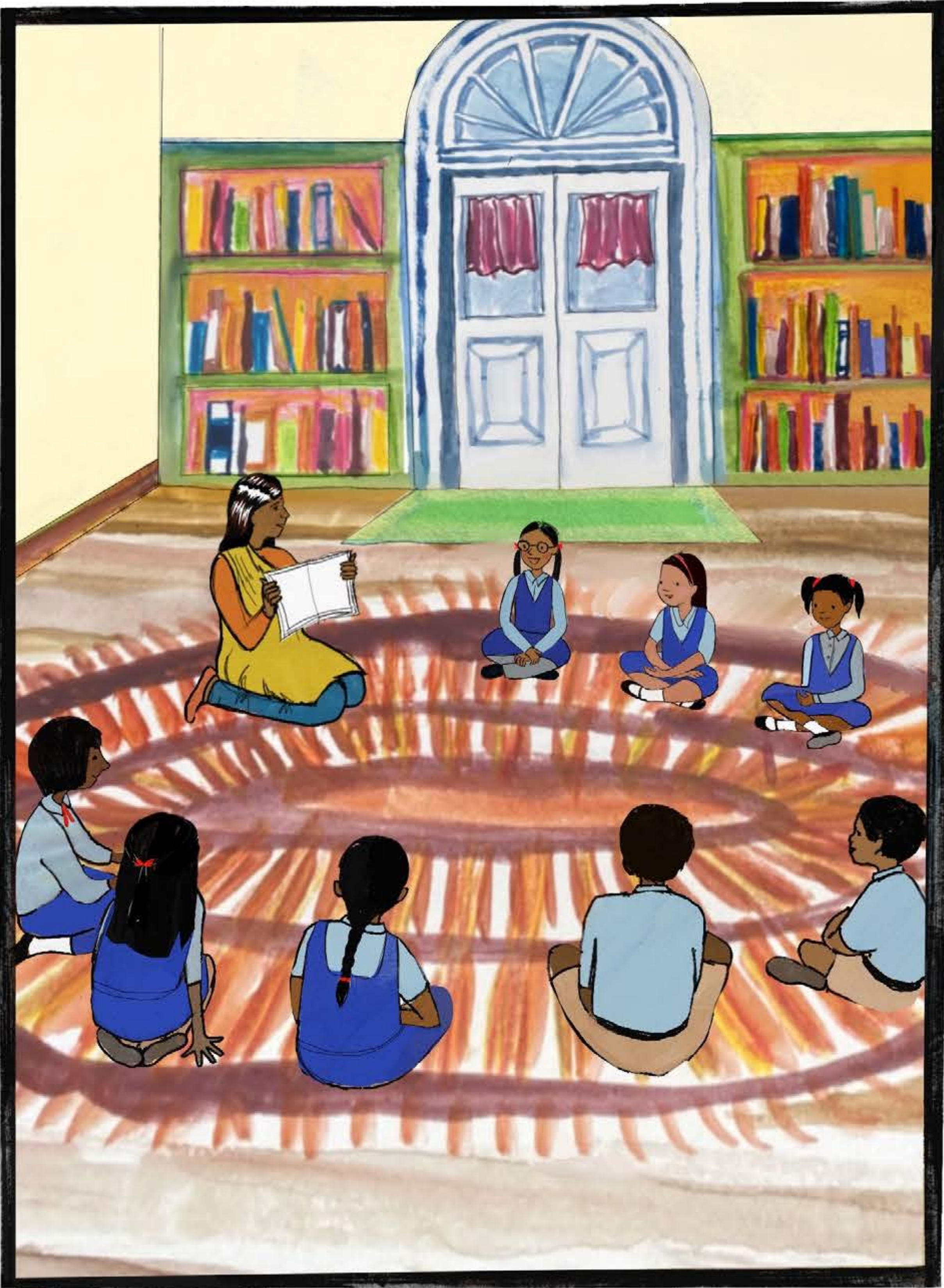
connected to power her students seek in their present lives and for their futures: to succeed on high-stakes examinations in grade seven; as parents' perceived route to opportunity; and as a language of broader communication, facilitating unity in the diverse student body. As she looks for ways to achieve both an affirmation of students' diversity and assimilation to this language of power, Ms. Isabel continues to focus on children's humanity and the navigational skills they will need for the future.

Learn More about Ms. Isabel and refugee education in Uganda, "Language Considerations in Refugee Education: languages for opportunity, connection, and roots" and "Who Can Participate, Where, and How? Connections between Language-in-Education and Social Justice in Policies of Refugee Inclusion."

MUMBAI

INDIA





MISS LEELA, MUMBAI, INDIA

"Inclusion, for me, means building my classroom today for the generations of the future."
– Miss Leela

By Nomisha Kurian

ABOUT MISS LEELA

Miss Leela grew up with a younger sister, Sosha. Sosha acquired a visual impairment when she was four. The experience of caregiving for Sosha gave Leela a lifelong commitment to serving the differently-abled. As an Early Years teacher (teaching children from 0-7 years of age) in a government (public) school in Mumbai, Miss Leela now makes a special effort to promote inclusion of learners with disabilities. In her current, co-educational classroom of 15 children, these learners with disabilities are seven year old girls, Mala and Trisha. Mala is visually-impaired, while Trisha struggles with her hearing. Miss Leela is particularly attentive to these girls, aware that their dual identities as female and differently-abled sometimes render them more at risk of being overlooked or bullied. She is also aware of Mala and Trisha's background as children of migrant workers, and that because of this, they are constantly changing schools. This, and knowing that they were previously bullied due to their disabilities, deepens their need for a safe and nurturing space. Miss Leela does her best to provide emotional stability for the girls, and prevent social exclusion.

CREATING RELEVANT CURRICULA

Miss Leela prioritizes diversity in her teaching materials, selecting picture books that represent children with additional needs. She regularly asks local booksellers to inform her when books that represent diverse needs or backgrounds come in. She affirms, "I want the kids to learn from a young age that there is no such thing as normal - if anything, difference is what is normal. Throughout their life, they will encounter people who look different from them and I want them to enter each encounter with empathy and kindness." When she cannot find existing resources, she tries to create them herself. She asks the children to draw what inclusion means to them, or re-imagine how traditional stories and fairytales might look and sound with differently-abled characters. By normalizing disability, Miss Leela aims to create a culture of celebrating differences.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Miss Leela makes an effort to know each student personally, including Mala and Trisha. She boosts their confidence by giving specific praise and sets clear expectations with consistent consequences. For example, when Mala kept chatting to classmates while Miss Leela was teaching, Miss Leela asked her to focus on the lesson using loving affirmations (“I know you can do this”) and without using stigmatizing or shaming language, and inserted 5-minute “Talk Time” breaks within the lesson to allow Mala to have some time to bond with her peers.

Miss Leela faces the challenge of limited resources in accommodating special needs. However, she encourages peer mentoring so that differently-abled learners do not have to be ostracized or isolated. For example, she seats Mala and Trisha with children who seem empathetic or sociable, so that Mala and Trisha are more likely to enjoy healthy friendships and have sources of support close to hand. If she sees children being unkind or making derogatory remarks about Mala and Trisha’s appearance and behavior, Miss Leela firmly intervenes to remind them about the importance of inclusion and make it clear that discrimination is not tolerated in her classroom.

At pick-up time, she gives Mala and Trisha’s parents regular updates on their progress and any concerns. She knows that as migrant workers, these parents face multiple stressors. Within the Indian context, migrant workers are those who routinely move between states and cities in search of employment. Typically originating from rural areas, migrant workers tend to move to urban centers, where labor is in demand. Migrant workers often work in minimum-wage jobs with long hours and little job security. They often live in informal settlements, and the majority of migrant workers and their families struggle to access basic amenities such as clean water, sanitation facilities, and healthcare.

Within this context, Miss Leela aims to help Mala and Trisha’s parents feel well-supported. Maintaining a strengths-based lens, she makes sure to convey the children’s accomplishments: “I like to tell them when their child has done something well, big or small. For example, Mala was patient and waited her turn in the queue today, Trisha helped her classmate find a missing pencil today...the parents’ faces light up hearing that their child has done something right.”

ENGAGING IN FUTURE-BUILDING

Miss Leela strives to stay informed about early childhood education development, but struggles to find time to read. She takes notes on the behavior of children in her class during moments of respite, using them to inform her practice. She has observed that girls with disabilities consistently

face harassment and exhibit distress.

To help prevent this trauma, Miss Leela speaks to parents at pick-up time and in parent-teacher meetings about how it is crucial to address and dismantle cultural stereotypes about gender and disability at an early age, as she has noticed that children as young as two and three start to develop understanding of what it means to be a boy or a girl or to be 'normal'. By age six, they may have already formed biases about boys and girls' intelligence and the rights of those with disabilities.

Miss Leela recognizes the intersectionality of inequalities for girls with disabilities. She notes that female learners may face additional pressure to be compliant and uncomplaining, even when bullied. As they get older, these biases can become even harder to challenge. She encourages parents to recognize and address these issues early on. As a teacher who actively advocates for equality, she calls her classroom the 'cradle of the future'.

Learn More about protecting the wellbeing of at-risk children at "School as a Sanctuary: Trauma-Informed Care to Nurture Child Well-Being in High-Poverty Schools."

MICHIGAN
UNITED STATES

ELCOME

MISS ALATA, MICHIGAN, USA

"Beginning of the year, no one comes to me and talks to me. And then when they feel more comfortable, more connected to me, the connection that they feel allows them to speak to me about so many things… I always try to make them feel that they're part of this learning process and they are responsible. Like I show them that they're important."

– Miss Alata

By Michelle J. Bellino, Vikrant Garg, and Mara Johnson

ABOUT MISS ALATA

Miss Alata teaches English language, literature, and composition courses to newcomer students at a public high school in southeastern Michigan, in the United States, where 72% of students enrolled are classified as English Learners/ Multilingual Learners (EL/MLs). A majority of the multilingual learners are native Arabic speakers from Yemen; a smaller portion of students are from Mexico and Central America. A number of these students experienced violent conflict and other forms of socioeconomic precarity in their countries of origin, entering the US school system with limited or interrupted exposure to formal education.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

A sense of relational care drives Miss Alata's instructional choices and her interpersonal relationships with students. This care is informed by her own experiences as a migrant and multilingual learner who transitioned from middle school in Syria to high school in the US.

Noting that she often felt "invisible" in high school, Miss Alata stands outside her door during class transitions to greet students. Having experienced a school curriculum that decentered diversity, she selects books, resources, and classroom displays that represent and support students in drawing upon their identities and cultures. This desire to ensure students feel seen and valued extends into the genuine excitement Miss Alata shares with students as they see their academic strides. In the beginning of the year, some students are learning the alphabet or how to write full sentences. When students are frustrated about their learning, Miss Alata reminds them that she once was in their shoes, and their possibilities are vast. By the end of the year, students compose essays that summarize and analyze texts. Miss Alata encourages students to recognize where they began and celebrate how much they have grown, and these reminders build students' confidence through an

ethos of care wherein they are seen and valued as capable.

CREATING RELEVANT CURRICULUM

Miss Alata readily creates moments for exchanging cultural knowledge among her students and herself, and she draws on this cultural knowledge instructionally.

In planning classes, Miss Alata follows state curricular standards and adds in supports for multilingual learners, such as using sentence stems (phrases to begin a sentence, to scaffold writing development). She also designs curriculum with her students' identities and experiences in mind, intentionally selecting resources that will resonate with students' backgrounds or draw out meaningful contrasts. For example, during a role play activity in which students had to place a restaurant order, Miss Alata invited students to share their preferences for coffee and tea, knowing the cultural significance of sweet, milky tea for Yemeni families. As a class, they ask questions about how authors make choices about representing themselves and others. After watching Disney's live-action *Aladdin*, Miss Alata invited her students to consider the decision to cast an Egyptian actor, as well as why there is no Arabic spoken in the film. Moving back and forth between intended and implicit messages, Miss Alata encourages students to become critical readers and viewers, asking questions about the texts they are exposed to.

RECOGNIZING IDENTITIES

Miss Alata's classroom is not a monolingual space. Though developing English language fluency enhanced her confidence as a learner, Miss Alata recalls, "I still never felt like I belonged." Miss Alata recognizes that "language is an essential part of their [students'] identity," and thus invites students' home languages into the room on a regular basis. She works to ensure that migrant students in her classroom develop and practice English language and literacy while maintaining connections to their home languages, gain confidence in their skills, and build community across students with diverse backgrounds.

The practice of 'translanguaging' recognizes the need for continued support for first language use as a foundational bridge in other language development. Routine practices in Miss Alata's classroom involve direct translation, app-based translation tools, and teacher-student or student-student interactions in their home languages before full class interactions in English. Fluent in Arabic, Miss Alata easily communicates with Arabic-speaking students and can offer spontaneous translation. However, most of the classes she teaches include Spanish-speaking students as well. Keenly aware of how a student who is a linguistic minority both in the school and in their English class may feel

doubly isolated, Miss Alata seeks out Spanish vocabulary words to integrate into lessons, actively invites Spanish-speaking students to translate key words and phrases for the class, and positions herself as a learner of other languages.

SCHOOL-WIDE COLLABORATION

Miss Alata emphasizes that she does not do this work in isolation. Creating a welcoming and inclusive school culture happens not only in her class but across the school and has been a priority amongst school leaders.

Drawing on her own memories of feeling socially isolated in school, Miss Alata wants newcomer students to be aware of and interact at school events and after-school programming, such as athletics, clubs, dances, and fundraisers. Importantly, Miss Alata does not insist on student involvement or dictate the terms under which they should participate in school events; rather, her goal is to ensure that newcomer migrant students are aware of opportunities so that they are able to make decisions about whether and how to participate.

Outside of classes, teachers and administrators communicate about students' academic, socioemotional, and sometimes material needs. Miss Alata invites other teachers into her classroom to observe practices that support multilingual learners, and occasionally co-plans with teachers working in different subject areas. Supporting students means that teachers and staff need to work together, and their collaboration emerges from, and reinforces, a supportive school culture that values diversity. This strong ethos of care and a culture of mutual support sustains teachers, as well as students.

Learn More about Miss Alata and school-wide efforts to welcome migrant learners and create a space where everyone belongs in "Supporting recently arrived students: Lessons learned from MHS" and "From welcoming to belonging at Melvindale High School."