



QUEEN RANIA TEACHER ACADEMY
أكاديمية الملكة رانيا لتدريب المعلمين

DILEMMAS IN SCHOOLS

A CASEBOOK FOR EDUCATORS



Edited by Katherine K. Merseth

Professional
Education

HARVARD



GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF EDUCATION

DILEMMAS IN SCHOOLS: A CASEBOOK FOR EDUCATORS

Katherine K. Merseth, Editor

Sponsored by

Queen Rania Teacher Academy
& the Middle East Professional Learning Initiative
at Professional Education
Harvard Graduate School of Education
2020

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan
The Deposit Number at The National Library
2020/2/870

370.15

Queen Rania Teacher Academy
Dilemmas In Schools: A Case Book For Educators/Queen Rania
Teacher Academy.-Amman: The Academy, 2020

()p.

Deposit No.: 2020/2/870

Descriptors: /Teacher Training//Educational Guidance//
Educational Psychology/



QUEEN RANIA TEACHER ACADEMY
أكاديمية الملكة رانيا لتدريب المعلمين

Professional
Education

HARVARD



GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

As embraced by users of case studies across the professional world, the following cases are intended to activate and enhance the problem-solving skills of current and aspiring leaders, particularly within the field of education. While each case is unique, the book as a whole provides an expansive assortment of opportunities to dissect the various influences, dilemmas, and responsibilities that educators face. Engaged users will be able to confidently address the tough choices the future may hold, and, ultimately, leverage their leadership skills to secure sustained actions for their community and beyond.

While we are confident in the quality of our product, the cases in this book are by no means extraordinary. In fact, the very ordinary nature of these dilemmas – that they could be found in a variety of contexts, not just in Jordan but around the world – is what makes them so important. These are real stories and real people. The cases present complex dilemmas that were chosen for their ability to accurately reflect the experiences and feelings that school leaders may have when confronted by a combination of different, potentially conflicting, lines of thought and values. However, while the organic nature of the cases conveys the humanity of the situation and its actors, the cases omit any form of analysis themselves. Rather, the responsibility for such analysis and the growth that follows rests solely upon the readers and those who will discuss these cases.

When carrying out a discussion session, groups should consider the events of the case, and after reflection about the dilemma presented, they should reflect how the situation and circumstances may apply to their own school(s) and context. Because these cases center around multi-tiered dilemmas, there will most likely be disagreements among group members regarding recommendations for the protagonist or even the more seemingly simple interpretations of the situation's details. It is important to embrace these differences, as they will contribute to a healthier foundation for learning for the whole group. Furthermore, case discussions usually rely on a designated facilitator to balance the voices in the room. When there is no assigned discussion leader, members must be especially mindful to actively encourage the participation of all those present. Everyone present has a valuable contribution to make; accordingly, everyone present also has something to learn.

CASES

LIST OF CASES

Teaching and Learning

Costly Change?
Can Coaching Help Everyone?
Conflict of Desires
Moment of Truth
Pass in Science . . . Fail in Arabic!
We Don't Want You
Where to Start?

People with Disabilities

Should I Continue My Studies?
Don't Leave Me Behind
What's Your Problem?
It's Not Fair

School–Community Relations

A War of Words
Excused Absence
My Family or My Principles

Behavior Management

Save Me Before You Lose Me
I Don't Care
You Can't Force It

TEACHING & LEARNING



COSTLY CHANGE?

Mirvat parked her car in her regular spot, turned off the engine, and sat looking at the school gate where the few early-bird students were hanging around, waiting for the arrival of their schoolmates.

“They’re what matter,” she murmured to herself. “What is best for them, though?”

She thought back to her first day as a principal of Al Ram Secondary School and remembered how excited she had been to put her certificate of educational leadership to good use. She had believed then that once the teachers learned of her vision for the school, they would embrace it gladly. She had been aware of how difficult enacting a shift would be; however, she had still hoped the teachers would at least attempt to make a change. She was now facing the truth that the assumptions she had once made were erroneous and that some teachers preferred the status quo.

Her frustration with trying to affect change was growing; she clenched her teeth and made her way to her office, hoping she would be able to find the right solution.

THE SCHOOL AND CONTEXT

Al Ram Secondary School is a public secondary school for girls in an urban area on the outskirts of Jordan’s capital, Amman. The school offers classes from seventh to twelfth grade and has 700 enrolled students. Each classroom has an average of thirty-five students. The school caters to families living in the neighborhood, and students come from a middle socioeconomic class. Parents value education as the main means through which their children can succeed in life, and they measure their daughters’ success by the grades they obtain. The school has become well-known for the high results its students earn in the General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (Tawjihi). The school administration proudly shares the fact that 85 percent of its students are admitted to and enroll in university.

The Ministry of Education in Jordan, pushing for change in public education, has recently published teachers standards focusing on

learners and learning, assessment for learning strategies, instructional differentiation, and inclusion.

A FORWARD-THINKING PRINCIPAL

Mirvat, a tall woman with dark eyes and an aquiline nose, makes a strong impression. Her preference for conservative clothing gives her a sober air that adds to her powerful presence. She became a principal at the age of forty-one, after serving as a teacher for eighteen years, and she has been in her position for four years. She holds an MA and a PhD in education and has a certificate of instructional leadership. She completed her doctorate and certificate work while balancing her full-time teaching schedule.

A straightforward person, Mirvat speaks in an assertive tone. She has confidence in the teacher education program and wishes that all the new teachers joining the school were coming with proper teaching qualifications. With a staff of qualified teachers, she believes she can affect a shift from teacher-centered instruction to a student-centered approach that is based on developing twenty-first-century skills.

THE NOVICE TEACHER

Salwa, a new teacher, is a twenty-four-year-old woman of average height, slender build, and expressive features. She prefers to wear colorful clothes and is meticulous about her appearance. Her youthful features and smiling brown eyes give her a lighter bearing, leading some to underestimate her. Although she is quiet, she is also confident and tenacious when she believes in what she is doing. She enjoys meeting new people, but she maintains a distance from those around her and has only a few close friends.

She graduated with a bachelor's degree in English literature and then joined a teacher education professional program. She showed a passion for teaching and was inspired to choose it as a career by her mother, a teacher with more than twenty years' experience. She was hired by the Ministry of Education and appointed to Al Ram Secondary School as an English teacher for grades 7, 8, and 10. She had been glad to meet the principal and learn that they share the same vision for education. Salwa

had looked forward to applying her newly learned strategies, such as student-centered instruction and life-skills development, rather than the traditional rote learning and teacher-centered style of instruction that she had experienced as a student. She had hoped that she would build good relationships with the existing teachers. She had immediately started planning her lessons and challenging the other teachers to create efficient lesson plans.

Six months later, Salwa had conflicted feelings. She was certain that her ideas would help her students become more confident language users and learners. However, she needed for her colleagues to allow her the space to implement her methods. The principal had asked the English coordinator, Amani, to mentor Salwa and help her adjust. Salwa became upset with Amani because she described Salwa's teaching as poor while providing feedback. Salwa considered following Amani's suggestions, but during class all but two of her students had reached the desired outcomes. Salwa felt the students' work should speak for itself.



"You must make sure all the students are looking at you and listening. What I saw was not good teaching," Amani said.

"It was good learning. That is what I aim for," Salwa replied.

"Are you saying we do not pay attention to learning? That's —" Amani responded.

"No! That's not what I meant," Salwa answered. *"I was talking about —"*

"I will wait to see the lesson with tenth grade later this week before I finalize my report," Amani interrupted.



Amani concluded the conversation with a firm expression and harsh tone before walking away.

Salwa wondered if the next day would be any better, despite her interpretation of events being different from Amani's.

CHAOS: CREATIVE OR CATASTROPHIC?

Mirvat looked up when she heard the knock on her door. It was Amani, the English coordinator, waiting to get her attention.



"Good afternoon, Amani. How can I help you?" Mirvat greeted.

"You need to come and see what is going on in the tenth-grade classroom right now. I have two crying students in the teachers' room refusing to return to class. It is complete chaos. Maybe now you will see what I see."



Mirvat calmed herself, thanked Amani, and told her she would follow her. Sighing as Amani left the room, she took a deep breath and went to investigate the issue.

When they reached the second floor, Mirvat could hear excited chatter and a lot of movement coming from the tenth-grade classroom. As she walked in, she saw groups of students, some sitting on the desks, others on the floor, and one group huddled around the board, writing on it. Her first instinct was to raise her voice, but she caught herself and looked more closely at the group at the board. She could see that they were writing a dialogue together and referring to their book and notebooks for help. It was true that in some groups students were chatting about their lives, but there was still a product in front of them. She could also see Salwa going from group to group to check and guide. She pointed this out to Amani, who then pointed out a pair seated alone and visibly upset. They said that their classmates had walked out in tears earlier and that they could not work.

Mirvat braced herself and walked into the teachers' room, where she saw Rama and Arwa, two of the top students in tenth grade, with teary faces and stubborn expressions. While she was approaching them, she noted that they were being comforted by Hind, an eleventh-grade teacher who was also Rama's aunt.



"Girls, what is it? Why have you left class?" Mirvat inquired. "That's not the type of behavior I expect from you."

"Ms. Mirvat, we can't take it anymore! Tenth grade is not a time for fun. We need to be prepared for next year, and the teacher is not taking it seriously enough and is going to cost me my high grades. I am not going back into her classroom!"

Mirvat held her hand up and said, *“First, go wash your faces. Then I’ll see you in my office.”*

After the girls left, she looked at the teachers in the room and said firmly, *“Thank you for letting me know. Please get back to your work and let me deal with this in the proper manner.”*

The teachers nodded and Mirvat turned and left, thinking about what she needed to say.

After the girls came in, they explained that Salwa had asked that they work in groups on a writing assignment and had assigned the groups.

“Miss, I cannot be asked to work with Israa, Aysha, and Mona when everyone knows that Israa can barely write, Aysha is always absent, and Mona and I don’t get along. Telling us that the grade given will be the same for all and that we must show how we worked together is not fair. They didn’t want to listen to me, and time was running out! I wanted to work alone or with Sara, who doesn’t like her group either.”



Mirvat asked the girls to sit down and talked to them about the importance of getting along and respecting their teacher. She convinced them to return to class, but she felt that this was only the beginning.

Earlier in the week, Salwa had used the same approach in the seventh-grade classroom with Amani in attendance, and while the classwork had started out in a chaotic manner, the groups did cooperate and the results were accepted by all. The class did get noisy, as the principal had noticed when she passed by. However, she had also noted that the students were working toward the desired lesson outcome.

At the time, the coordinator’s evaluation had not been positive; she had focused on the noise and reported it as a “lack of classroom control.” This created tension between Salwa and Amani and left Mirvat in a quandary as to whether she should stop the coordinator from mentoring Salwa or trust that the report had merit. After all, she had seen only ten minutes of the lesson. She let the evaluation stand but was aware that it would affect Salwa’s annual review.

A SENSE OF LOSS

In her view, Amani felt that Mirvat was giving Salwa too much flexibility. She had been teaching long enough to know what works. She felt that her methods had allowed their school to become known for good marks in English, so she did not understand why a newcomer who did not consider the importance of control in the classroom was seen as someone with more credibility.

She had been there with the other teachers when the principal had introduced Salwa.



"Everyone, I am happy to introduce you to Salwa. Having recently completed a teacher qualification program, she will add a lot to our school."



Only four months later, Salwa had been asked by the principal to give a workshop on active learning to all of the teachers at the school, some of whom had more than twenty years of experience. Most of the teachers in the English department had been there for at least seven years and on average had nine years of teaching experience. Many teachers had felt resentful of the newcomer, and Mirvat could still remember some of the comments from others:



"Why was Salwa chosen to present a workshop, when she has only been teaching for four months?"

"Is it fair to ignore all of our years of experience just because she has a teaching qualification?"



The workshop had raised some good ideas, but it had been counterproductive for the youngest teacher to lecture the more experienced teachers. Only a few of Salwa's colleagues stayed for the duration of the workshop. Amani had to leave fifteen minutes into the workshop to pick her son up from the elementary school, but she trusted the other teachers' opinions.

PARENTS STEP IN

In addition, Salwa's students were not getting the same high grades as those in other classes. In fact, a father had stopped by to complain a few days prior.



"My daughter wants to study medicine. Unless she can get a high mark, there is no way she can enroll at the university. It is not the time to change things. Let my daughter graduate, then do as you like!" one parent complained.

"Sir, please," Salwa tried to contain her emotions and present a cool front.

"Language is not something that improves overnight. Give it a chance, and you will see that she will be using English more fluently. It is not about marks," Salwa added.

"How can you say that? Will you be writing the Tawjihi exam? Will you be deciding if she gets into university? We all know what the Tawjihi exam is like. Teach them to pass this exam, and don't ruin my daughter's future. I am not going to listen to you anymore. You obviously do not understand what you're doing. I will tell the principal to move my daughter out of your class, or better, move you to a different grade."



NOW WHAT?

Four parents came to school to complain to Mirvat. Salwa was in tears in her office, saying that she would resign if she were moved to the lower grades. Amani, meanwhile, was adamant that Salwa should not remain with the upper grades.

Mirvat continued to think about the available options and how each would impact the students and the school. She thought of ways to resolve the tension between the senior staff and the novice teacher and to overcome any tensions that might arise when more novice teachers joined in the future, all while maintaining a positive school atmosphere. She wondered what to do about Salwa. How might Mirvat continue to encourage her and still reassure the parents, students, and staff? She just did not know what to do.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What decisions should the principal make? Should she move Salwa to the lower grades? How will this be interpreted by colleagues and parents?
- How might the principal encourage teachers to try out new strategies and different approaches, considering what has occurred?
- How might Salwa regain the trust of students and parents?
- How might tensions between teachers be resolved in a way that leads to better teaching practices and a positive school environment?
- How is student success defined in a school context? How would you personally define student success?

DILEMMAS IN SCHOOLS.

A CASEBOOK FOR EDUCATORS



Edited by Katherine K. Merseth



QUEEN RANIA TEACHER ACADEMY
أكاديمية الملكة رانيا لتدريب المعلمين

Professional
Education

HARVARD



GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF EDUCATION