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# On Being Transcultural

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# **On Being Transcultural**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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Thesis Advisor: Ray Clark

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### **Abstract**

In this paper I discuss people who can move easily from one culture to another -- transcultural people. In chapter two, I discuss the concept of transculturalism. I discuss what motivates people to move from one culture to the other. I reflect on my cultural journey through Iraq, Canada, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia. This paper then investigates what helped me to build a transcultural identity. I also examine the stories of other people that led them to being transcultural. Furthermore this paper is going to look on how transculturalism works in the classroom, specifically how the students perceive a transcultural teacher.

### **Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Descriptors**

Language Teachers

Teachers

Teacher Attitude

Teacher Education

Teacher Improvement

Teacher Role

Teacher Skills

**Table of Contents**

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Chapter One, On Being Transcultural .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Chapter Two, What motivates people to go beyond their own culture? .....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1. Business .....	9
3.2. Immigration.....	9
3.3. For Adventure and Discovery .....	10
<b>4. Chapter Three, How do we achieve transculturalism? .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5. Chapter Four, My story .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>6. Chapter Five, Stories of others .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>7. Chapter Six, Implications for the language teacher .....</b>	<b>23</b>
7.1. In a homogeneous class .....	24
7.2. In a heterogeneous class .....	25
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>32</b>

## Introduction

The more I travel the more I learn. I like to think that seeking out new countries leads to more learning. I believe the length of the experience is important to my learning. The longer I spend in a different culture, the more I learn and adapt

I have also come to realize that the learning process is not just about everyday life and dealing with the locals. The learning process should include an appreciation of the way of life. It is important to read the history behind the culture. It is important to ask what the circumstances are that contributed towards creating the traditions.

I have had an interesting journey that took me from one culture to the other. What made me realize that I had adapted to each culture that I visited, is the lasting friendships that I have kept; this is what I like to describe as the tangible evidence. The other evidence is the respect and appreciation that I have for the visited culture especially after my departure. The space and time between moving from one culture to another is important for a transcultural person to reflect on and see the whole picture of the experience without being part of it.

In this paper I am going to talk about the mother culture. The mother culture is the native culture where a person has spent most of their life. There is also the host culture. This is the culture that the person has moved to and spent a lengthy amount of time in.

This paper is looking at historical journeys that took place. I am going to show similarities between experiences and shed light on what helped those individuals seek other cultures without judgment or fear. A transcultural person is a product of a journey that takes one from one culture to another. It's from my own personal point of view as an ESL teacher.

## **Chapter One**

### **On Being Transcultural**

A transcultural person is someone that invests in other cultures as much as their own. Transculturals adapt to and understand what the host culture has to offer. Most of all, they engage in a process of learning and approaching other cultures. At the same time, that we learn from other cultures' values and traditions, we approach the host culture with our own values and traditions as well.

Hall and Gay describe how an identity progresses through other cultures: "Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or where we come from, as much as what we might become." (2003, p. 4) The idea of being transcultural is really about what a person acquires through a lifetime. It is mostly about the transition from one culture to the other and how we react to the host culture. Transculturalism comes as result of a lot of reflection upon our adaptation techniques and how we handle the change from one culture to the other. In my opinion a transcultural person is an observer of the host culture. To observe mostly requires understanding and learning how every tradition or custom came from adapting to a particular environment.

Once a person understands the history behind the tradition, the journey to adapt to the new culture will start. There are a lot of definitions that talk about culture. I chose Pat Moran's definition of culture in relation to people's identities because it was the most relevant in this case. "Culture resides both in the individual members of the culture and in the various social groups or communities that these persons form to carry out their way of life. Culture is thus both individual and collective-psychological and social." (Moran, 2001, p.25)

Being transcultural comes as a result of various interactions with different cultures. These interactions, if they are successful, usually take the form of learning the language, traditions, and customs. It is an exchange between two different cultures; one is the mother culture and the other is the host culture. Transculturalism comes from mixing and adapting to different environments.

Milton Bennett calls this “crossing the barrier” He also mentions “First comes respect for cultural differences in behavior, followed by respect for the cultural differences in value.” (Bennett, 1993, p.48) Without achieving respect and understanding for the host culture, crossover will not occur. One of the key elements of achieving transculturalism is to understand the host culture in order to compare the differences between cultures. One must observe the environment and try to understand the reasons behind the customs. Once the major features of each community become apparent, adapting to a culture and understanding the host culture starts to take place.

The histories of the mother culture and host culture dictate the current reality and define the nature of interaction between the two cultures. By that, I mean the possible roles allowed or even censored during the interaction process. What also makes people different is their particular circumstances (social and economic levels), the environment (climate and biosphere) and the location of their culture.

We are products of our interactions. Moving from one culture to the other helps us to understand and respect other communities. This can be a true privilege as well as very humbling. In this day and age, there is nothing more important than reaching out to other cultures and interacting with them. This understanding helps build a truly diverse community. In the end, we want to celebrate our differences and

respect our traditions. I think the idea of building a global community cannot be achieved by everyone having the same traditions, or never interacting with another culture, but rather by celebrating our different traditions.

## Chapter Two

### What motivates people to go beyond their own culture?

“Culture resides in persons, in individuals. Each member of a culture, like a miniscule twist in a kaleidoscope, refracts and reflects the common colored lights of their culture in a unique display, recognizably similar yet unquestionably different.”

(Moran, 2001, p.98) I think what motivates people to go beyond their own culture can be attributed to three factors.

#### Business

Business is still the main factor that motivates people to adapt to and explore other cultures. Moving to another culture for a better job or to make more money is a more common motivator than exploring the culture. However, assimilation and transculturalism can occur in this case as a result of wanting to make a profit and achieve success.

Being in Saudi Arabia has allowed me to observe foreign workers trying to adapt. Some people wear the traditional Saudi *thobe* and grow a long beard. I can see the gain and the profits that are obtained by following these customs. Saudi Arabian people help and show a lot of respect to people who follow their customs but seeking natural resources and profit was, and still is, the number one reason behind many people's interest in other cultures.

#### Immigration

People seeking to immigrate come to the host culture with the intention of going beyond their own culture. My family's journey to Canada is the perfect example. My family moved to Canada from Iraq. They were willing to adapt before

their arrival in Canada. To their surprise their adaptation was not as easy as they thought it would be. They had many challenges. It was hard to adapt to cold weather, find a job, and speak the language. It was a different story for my brother and me. We did well in school, established friendships and managed to work too. Our adaptation period was shorter than that of our parents. In this case it was age that shaped the process of adapting. The younger the person is, the faster the process of adapting occurs for them.

Immigration for a better and safer life is still a decision that many families take more for their children more than for themselves. This cross-cultural trip is typically not as easy for the parents than it is for the children of a migrating family.

### **For Adventure and Discovery**

Here I would like to talk about people that seek other cultures for the sake of adventure and discovery. These are the people that have big atlases in their rooms and have kept postcards from all over the world. They dream of being somewhere else all the time. Although adventure is the attraction, they are more than willing to adapt because they are curious and they are willing to try and learn. They study the language and try the food.

The three above mentioned reasons: business, immigration and the love of adventure and discovery, were all motivations for me. These reasons do motivate other people, but this does not mean that belonging to one of the groups will guarantee you a transcultural identity. Being able to adapt to a different culture takes more than motivation. The love of adventure and discovery motivation can lead to a transcultural identity more than the other two. The reason behind this is that people who seek other cultures have done their homework before moving into the host culture. Having a transcultural identity takes a long period of time and

experiences with more than one culture.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **How do we achieve transculturalism?**

To achieve transculturalism is to accept traditions, religions, and customs that a person is not familiar with, and in a lot of cases, a person might not approve of the customs of the host culture. To realize transculturalism we have to be aware that we are in the host culture to observe and learn. If a culture has traditions that need to be changed, it is people of the host culture's responsibility to change it. A transcultural person does not attempt to change the realities of the host culture. On the other hand, the same person is more than welcome to change and criticize their mother culture.

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines "multiculturalism" as: "of, relating to, reflecting, or adapted to diverse cultures." The dictionary does not define "transculturalism." According to Donald Cuccioltta (2001-2002) Lamberto Tassinari the director of *Vice Versa*, a transcultural magazine in Montreal, Canada says transculturalism is based on the breaking down of boundaries, and is contrary to multiculturalism because in the latter . . . boundaries [are] based on past cultural heritages.

The idea of multiculturalism is that a person simply has more than one cultural identity. I think a transcultural person is the one that reflects on the host culture and tries to understand the value of the culture's language, traditions, and customs and achieves transculturism by taking judgment out of the journey, and at the same time not becoming a fully integrated member of the host culture.

We might not agree with everything in the host culture, and there may be lots

of traditions and customs that might interfere with human rights and with gender equality. For example, I live in Saudi Arabia where women's rights are non-existent. Do I feel like I want to encourage women to fight for their right and change their situations? No, I don't! This is a Saudi Arabian woman's fight not mine. There are a lot of educated Saudi Arabian women that express their opinions about women's rights. They might not achieve these rights quite yet, but it is a fight that they themselves must undertake for their future daughters, not me.

To achieve transculturism, it is fundamental to experience multiple cultures and have the full experience of interacting with languages, cultures and traditions. According to Pat Moran's description of a constructive marginal is very similar to the idea of a transcultural person . "Constructive marginals are persons with avowed identities with a relativistic outlook, not dependent on a particular group affiliations, who are capable of moving among all communities." (Moran, 2001, p.103)

In my opinion, being an objective observer while moving from one culture to the other is key to achieving transculturism. Reflecting on the observations helps successful transitions from one community to the other. Eventually it is also the awareness and the knowledge of other cultures that is going to distinguish a transcultural person from a multicultural or monocultural person.

Furthermore, there is motivation. This reason for exploring other cultures can also make the distinction between a constructive marginal/transcultural person and an encapsulated marginal person who is in the host culture to make money . This person will be very different from those who are in the host culture on an exchange program to learn the language and explore the traditions. In the end, they may well achieve

multiculturalism or transculturism.

This opportunity to explore other cultures and to gain the desire to learn about these new cultures brings awareness of the differences that each culture has and increases respect for all cultures starting with the person's own mother culture, helping them achieve a better understanding of their own cultural identity.

Engaging with several cultures as an objective observer motivated to become aware and knowledgeable leads to comparing similarities and experiences. Differences can start discussions and discussions can lead to understanding.

## Chapter Four

### My Story

I am a person who had a chance to cross different cultures. I was born in Baghdad Iraq. After the Gulf War in 1991 my family migrated to Windsor, Ontario in Canada. I became an ESL teacher and moved to Seoul, South Korea and lived there for five years. Now I am 35 years old teaching in a university in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. I also managed to travel to more than 30 countries whenever I had free time.

This chapter is going to cover a presentation that I gave last summer in Vermont for my ICLT (Intercultural Communication for Language Teachers) class at SIT. I started this presentation using Moran's framework, Avowed and Ascribed identities. (Moran, 2001, p.101) Basically there are two ways to look at an identity the way you see yourself and the way people label you. So I asked my audience to put a label on my identity, and this is what they wrote:

<b>Others see me as:</b>	<b>I see myself as:</b>
Arab Iraqi-Canadian "I heard you say this" Citizen of the world Western Iraqi-Canadian or Canadian-Iraqi (depending on the situation) Iraqi-Canadian Iraqi Canadian Iraqi /Canadian Free- Spirited Honorary Redneck Iraqi/Canadian Persian + Talker Community Hospitable Constructive Marginal " You seem to draw from different sources but have also constructed your identity through the force of yourself and know who you are"	Part of what everybody wrote in this presentation.

This experiment was really wonderful because it took the awareness of how we label other people to another level for me. My audience really took their time before they decided to write their labels. It is always easy to talk about who you are and where you come from. It feels different when it is other people's observations of who I am. What struck me the most is that they used labels that I am comfortable with. I still feel there are more labels to be added.

The goal of this presentation is to make people aware that you can experience who you are in the host culture. I never felt more Iraqi until I moved to Canada. It was my first year in university when I had to cover *The epic of Gilgamesh* for my Universals of Languages class. This was the first requirement for my bachelor's degree in Modern Languages. It was in Canada that I was really proud to be Iraqi. Finding my own native roots being celebrated in Canada made me realize how I took my homeland for granted and never tried to explore its monuments when I was there. It is the importance that the Canadian universities gave to the Sumerian civilization that made me feel so proud.

A similar example of finding identity happened to me in South Korea. It was in South Korea where I felt most Canadian. When I lived in South Korea the school where I worked was late in paying our salary. All the teachers were from different parts of Canada, and we decided to stop working until we got paid. At that moment I never felt more Canadian. We had a real community and we took good care of each other. We shared both the working and the living space, and protecting each other was a must for all of us.

I kept looking back and remembering what it is that makes people feel that they belong and feel pride. Sometimes it is the time where you were most needed in a community that makes you belong. It is also the moment where you are needed to share what you know and what you have experienced. The label that no one wrote in

the presentation back then and that I never used myself is open-minded. I am here to listen and learn. I might not agree but I am listening. Listening will invite trust and once you are trusted, you are adapting into the host culture. (Moran, 2001, p.103)

Moran spoke about two types of identities that he called encapsulated marginal and constructive marginal (The encapsulated marginal is the one who never left the mother culture in their mind and kept following the motherland's tradition in the host culture). It is my observation from living in a city full of immigrants such as Windsor, Ontario, that immigrants are more traditional than the people still living in their native culture. It is as if they never left home. They just changed their location. The term encapsulated is perfect in this case. They are trapped in the motherland's traditions that they grew up with. While a constructive marginal is more open to try, learn from and take from each culture and then move to the next.

At the end of presentation I explained that it is one of my goals in life to achieve a transcultural identity. I don't think it is about traveling and moving from one country to the other. It is really about understanding. I wish that I could claim that I understand every culture that I have experienced, or that I did not have judgments but this is not the reality. There are a lot of times where I ended up losing my patience and wound up misunderstanding the host culture. I like to call these occasions my learning moments. These are the times that I was willing to reflect and ask myself what went wrong. I am forever curious to learn about the reasons behind every tradition and culture. At the end of my ICLT presentation I remembered my IPP advisor talking about Gandhi's "open windows" so I looked it up and I found this wonderful quote that I left to the end as a conclusion to my journey.

*"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."*

Mahatma Gandhi

## Chapter five

### Stories of Others

I would like to start this chapter by writing about what inspired the topic for this paper. Her name is Naela. I wrote about Naela for the first time during my ICLT class while responding to an assignment. The assignment was to choose one of Pat Moran's frameworks that is closest to us and to explain the reasons behind the choice. My choice was cultural persons. I choose this framework because I was inspired by one of my students.

Last term I taught ORN05 (Reading and Writing), which is the highest level of English at Saudi Interlink. Naela is a fluent English speaker. She reads and writes with no mistakes. She is always on time and was the only student that gave me the assignments ahead of time. This class consisted of a great group of students, but I chose Naela because she was the only one who had not traveled abroad. She has never left the Kingdom but she still managed to excel in English. One of my colleagues suggested that Naela is not Saudi Arabian because being diligent and on time are not Saudi qualities typically. She also said that she is from a biracial family and that she was not born in Saudi Arabia.

I actually approached Naela and asked her where her family is from and if she had mixed blood. She told me that she is a pure *Najdi* (inhabitant of the central province) girl as were both of her parents. So I asked her the following questions.

What were the factors that helped you to become a successful student?

How were you were raised?

Was it the schools that you went to that helped you to succeed?

Or was it personal effort that helped you to do so well?

Naela said it was all the above. The other reason that I asked her these

questions was because she was outspoken and always expressed her opinion in my class and I know that being outspoken is not glorified in this culture. I was in awe of her commitment to and diligence at being the woman she is. In this case she belongs to her native land and culture but she still values other traditions; in this case she values Western culture. For example: in one class we were discussing traveling on a shoestring, Naela said, “couch surfing is a good idea if you want to save money. I read about this on the Internet”. This is coming from a young woman who cannot travel without her father’s permission or leave the country without a chaperon.

This chapter is meant to give examples of person who managed to adapt to other cultures. The idea is to examine their journeys in general and most of all to shed light on what they have in common. This process of examining should help me characterize what makes certain people achieve a transcultural identity. I am going to talk about three inspiring biographies that shaped history and inspired people over the years. I am mainly exploring the way they adapted to the host culture and what they had in common. The similarities are going to lead to fundamental strategies for adapting to the host cultures and they are eventually going to lead to having a trans- or multi-cultural identity.

My first example of a person that successfully crossed cultures is Khalil Gibran (1883-1931). Gibran moved to America from Lebanon and back to Lebanon from America in a unique journey that was full of both rejection and redemption. I always heard about Gibran and how I should read his writings. I ended reading *The Prophet* when a fellow classmate at university recommended the book. I found the book touches upon real life topics that need to be discussed where most people feared the discussion.

What strikes me the most about Gibran is that he never resisted change but he

worked with it. This is especially true because he did not even choose to leave his homeland. This was a decision made by his mother. He took an interest in art and writing. He documented his feelings and fears with the idea is to reflect on cultures rather than judge them. Despite the fact that Gibran only crossed through two cultures, I find it fascinating that he also chose to cross back to his mother culture. He actually went back home and decided to study Arabic. He also brought back with him liberal ideas and notions about women rights that were not popular back then in the Middle East.

Eventually, he decided to go back to America and publish his ideas freely there. Could Gibran have gotten away with these liberal ideas published in Arabic? No, he could not have. Gibran came up with Western liberal ideas that did not match the conservative ideas that the Middle Eastern society had back then. When there is resistance, there are always other ways of getting your point across. If a certain culture rejects your ideas, there is always another culture that will welcome innovation. There was always Boston waiting for Gibran. Boston is where Gibran lived in the USA.

At the end of his short life, Gibran requested that he be buried in his hometown of Bsharri in the north of Lebanon. His family and friends fulfilled his request. Eventually he chose to be buried in his hometown in recognition of his roots and as a celebration of his native heritage. In the end Gibran's journey ended with him being buried in his hometown. He explored, wrote, and painted his reflections on adapting in and out of his own culture successfully. He is, without a doubt, one of those people who has obtained a transcultural cultural identity that most other people would like to achieve.

Marco Polo (1254-1324) is one of those amazing examples of people who have explored and learned about other cultures. The fact that his journey was

supposed to have been for a few years but wound up lasting for 23, is one indication that he went to explore other cultures out of a personal passion. His writing is another indication that he was immersed in the host culture itself, but that he was not part of the culture; he was more as a dedicated observer. Marco had spent almost two decades in China and had learned four languages. There were a lot of people who were skeptical about him making this journey to China but the details in his writing proved most skeptics wrong. I think what makes a great explorer is the fact that one is not held back.

What hinders the process of exploring? I think the family ties, traditions, and values that you grow up with can stop you from going further into another culture and adapting to it. Once you are free from these obligations, you are set free to explore.

At the end of his journey Polo went back to Venice and published a book called *Il Milione* about his travels. This account was not welcomed by a lot of people.

One would think that after this big journey, this rejection would have been devastating to Marco Polo. It was not, and he kept going with his life. He had a nice normal life after his return until he died in Venice. I think this is one of the indications that having a transcultural identity is about not letting criticism slow you down or stop you from exploring. In the end Polo stands in history as an inspiration to many other explorers who followed him later.

Another outstanding explorer that stood out history and was from the Middle East is Ibn Battuta. Ibn Battuta (1304-1378) was born in Tangier, Morocco. He was supposed to do the *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca and then return home. He ended up going on a long journey of exploration and learning for 29 years. It was during his pilgrimage, while seeing other pilgrims from different parts of the world speaking different languages, that traveling fascinated him and he realized that there was a big world out there. He needed to explore and learn. He ended up traveling to Egypt, Iraq,

Iran, Turkey, India, and China. He ended up staying for a lengthy period in each country and working in high positions. The goal of his trip was to study Islam and other cultures. What makes Ibn Batutta significant is the fact that he documented his travels in a book called *Rihla* (which means a trip in Arabic). The book gives a detailed description of his travels and the people that he met. It describes the many customs and different traditions displayed in each of the respective civilizations that he traveled to. The need to observe and document is a very important process for adapting to another culture.

The reason behind choosing the above three biographies is that I am trying to reflect on adapting from three different perspectives: three men from three different backgrounds lived at different times and ages and achieved similar results. I started with Gibran who successfully adapted to both eastern and western cultures and was recognized by both. Despite this fact, recognition from the East took a long time and came posthumously. In end, he did get recognized for his writings and paintings in his hometown and the rest of the Middle East.

Marco Polo was a Western explorer adapting to different cultures and chose to go on a long journey, and the Middle Eastern explorer Ibn Battuta chose a very similar path and came up with the same results and subsequently wrote a book about his journey. These two men with very different backgrounds undertook two similar journeys and shared very similar findings.

All three men acquired a transcultural identity but came from different backgrounds. It seems that a transcultural person can come from any background, and that it is the capacity and the interest that you hold for exploring that takes you beyond your mother culture.

One other thing to notice about these biographies is the period of time which each person spent in the host culture. Each adaptation to the host culture was

long and, in some cases, exceeded the two-year period that Milton Bennett recommended for adapting to another culture. Furthermore each one of them documented their journey and reflected on it in a book or a journal. I also noticed that language learning was essential to all of them. They were curious, interested and willing to learn. They also managed to take the journey home either physically or to be buried there. I felt that the idea of going home was always there for all the men. The last stop was the first stop. The journey came to a full circle for each one of them.

## Chapter Six

### Implications for the language teacher

I have been teaching for ten years. I am a language teacher. I am way more comfortable with the term language teacher than that of English teacher. The term “language teacher” has broader implications than that of “English teacher.” Language includes syntax, structure, etymology and history. I believe that the word “language” also has more of a cultural connotation than the word English.

My first teaching job was teaching German 101. I was a teacher’s assistant for Dr. Helbing at the University of Windsor. My students were all from the same culture. Being in the ESL business for seven years made me realize that you could go from one culture to another and face many differences from one classroom to the next.

What should you know before you go into the classroom? I like to explore the culture and traditions that my students come from. I usually start looking into the school where I teach. Who owns the school? Where is the school? Who works there? And how long they have been working there? Next I move on to the city then to the province then the country. I always think of my classroom as a mirror that reflects the big picture.

As time passes most teachers will find themselves saying hello to their students in the market or meeting their parents. By this time, teachers will have a good idea where they are and how their students perceive them. Personally I find talking to the parents of the students to be one the best bridges that you can cross to the other culture. Once the teacher understands what the parent’s intentions are for their children they will gain more awareness of what motivates the students. The teacher can see how the students are influenced. Teachers will have awareness about what shapes a culture. Talking to the parents will answer a lot of the questions that a

teacher would have about the student's behavior and it will also explain some cultural issues that might not have made sense to the teacher.

Teachers should be aware of the student's background and have a good idea about their goal for taking the class. I have been fortunate enough to teach two very different groups of students. They helped me explain how the dynamics of one particular classroom can be completely different from another classroom within the same school. I am going to talk about teaching the two different groups.

### **In a homogeneous class**

Since I started teaching in Saudi INTERLINK, I have been teaching preparation English classes. My students are mostly Saudi women. Their age group is 18-25. Most of them come from upper middle class families and once in a while I have had a student from the royal family. My students in these classes are well traveled and some of them are fluent English speakers. Naela, who was mentioned previously in Chapter five, was one such student. These classes are considered very liberal despite the fact that most of my students come from Riyadh. Riyadh is part of the Nejd province, long considered to be one of the most conservative in the country. I find these classes to be very similar to any other ESL class that I had taught before. They go very well. Most students achieve the class objectives and move to the next level. I taught six of these classes last year and I can't remember having any trouble with any of the students. I was mostly impressed by their work and I was very proud of them.

The approach towards teaching that I took here was very experiential and very true to the SIT philosophy. The students were very familiar with group work and multiple activities. During the time allocated for feedback, they always asked to have more group work and lots of competitive games. They find the approach to be

stimulating. The only significant challenge for these students was writing the structured essay. Despite the fact they speak really well. Their writing skills are almost always not as good as their other skills. They struggle a lot with spelling and vocabulary. They don't have any experience in writing or journaling and they go right into the structured essay and APA format. I find these classes to be homogeneous also because the students are friends with each other's families, and having sisters in the same class is common. Most of them are also connected to the family that owns the university in one way or another. There are very few students who are not connected to one of the above examples. Being aware of this helps the teacher to anticipate who is going to be in the class and who is going to drop the class and who is going to be troublesome.

The dynamic in a homogeneous class in Saudi Arabia is dictated by the following factors: family name, wealth and family connections. Having dual identities, Canadian and Iraqi, helped me in this teaching context and gave me an advantage. Some students found it easier to approach a teacher with a Middle Eastern background. They usually came to ask questions about how they can improve or how to start a project. I encourage this and always offer my time while I am on campus. These are the main characteristics of the homogeneous class in my current teaching context.

### **In a heterogeneous class**

This fall I started teaching a different group of students. I teach the evening classes from 1:00-8:00 PM known as Continuous Education Program. The students are working towards their Human Resources diploma. Al Yamamah University organizes this program. They teach most of the diploma classes in Arabic and Saudi INTERLINK is responsible for one English class per each diploma. There are three

diplomas: banking, human resources, and insurance. The age group is 27-35. The tuition for these classes is paid by a grant from the king. Each class has 30 students. The students come from working middle class families. They have different family names from those in the morning classes. They have different skin color. It was the first time that I saw Saudis of African ancestry studying in INTERLINK. It was the first time that I had Saudi students from interracial marriages. I also had students from Syria and Palestine. I teach two human resources classes. The classes have numbers that indicate the level of the class but in reality the students are multi-leveled. Most of them do not speak a word of English. For a few of them, this is their first time ever to study English. For the first two weeks the students complained about my not speaking Arabic in class. My supervisor explained to the students that I am not supposed to speak Arabic in class.

After trying different activities and going back and forth with different ideas I gave in. I started to explain the lesson in Arabic at the end of the class. I tried to explain the benefits from having the whole lesson in English and talked about experiential learning, then I asked for their feedback. Because these classes are multi-leveled, the feedback was terraced according to level as well. Some understood the benefits of having the class in English and some asked me to give them a list of vocabulary about human resources to memories. This group explained to me that I could just give them this list of vocabulary about human resources and sit and relax for the rest of the eight weeks.

It is more than fascinating for me to teach these classes and it gives me true joy sometimes. Most of these women are either divorced women or spinsters. I tried my very best to make these chaotic classes work and for them to be useful to the students. I went so far as to read the Arabic curriculum to see if I can teach something in English that corresponds to the curriculum. I found it to be very disappointing. The

textbook is translated poorly from an English book, which contains no references. I found a series of articles that did not relate to human resources at all. The INTERLINK management attitude towards this program is for the teacher to do whatever they want with these classes. INTERLINK is basically obligated to teach these classes and they have no interest in organizing this program or putting together a curriculum for it.

To conclude this chapter I think it is essential for the teacher to examine and work with the class dynamics. The nature of each class can determine the teaching tools and might also invite creativity and innovation. I realize the heterogeneous class in this case was more challenging than the homogeneous class. The learning and the experience that I received from the heterogeneous class was more rewarding. It was more rewarding because it broadened my horizons of what Saudi Arabian society looks like and how it behaves.

My experience with the Continuous Education classes was an eye opener. I find experiencing both classes has provided me with tools of how to teach each class and provided me with fresh ideas about teaching in this particular context.

A transcultural teacher's mission in the class is to make a lesson plan that is culturally appropriate to the teaching context. This lesson plan is going to be adjusted and adapted to the host culture after a period of reflection. In my experience it really does not matter if it is a Continuous Education class, Saudi INTERLINK class or a business English class in South Korea. A period of assessment that involves the students' needs must take place. One experience that comes to mind here is teaching ENG8R last year. This class's achievement is a ten-page research paper. I organized this class's lesson plans well and enjoyed teaching so much that I asked to teach it again for the second term. To my surprise a lot of adjustments had to be made to the lesson plan because I had a different group the second time. Their level of English

was lower than the previous one and they were not as motivated to achieve good results. I actually ended up spending a lot of time with this group during my office hours to help them get through this class.

A transcultural teacher's journey from one class to another is really unique. You never teach the same class twice. I always try my best to be fair to my students and give them a chance to improve. My biggest struggle in the Middle East is to make the students understand that it is not about popularity. It is about the effort they put into their work. I find sharing and comparing their assignment is important in making them understand this.

Being familiar with different cultures and having taught different age groups help shape the transition from one teaching context to the other. I always wonder when I am traveling to different parts of the world what it would be to like to teach in the country that I am exploring. Exploring other cultures and teaching a new class can be similar. There is a lot of learning and reflecting in both cases. As I said previously the idea is to look at a class as a reflection of the culture rather than that of society. A competent teacher should teach according to the norms of the culture.

## Conclusion

Transculturalism comes as the result of a long journey that takes most of an individual's lifetime. It is the understanding and respect that we have for our humanity that comes in different forms and shapes. It helps us see diversity and celebrate the human tradition. Traditions after all are forms of expressing a culture's uniqueness. Where multiculturalism is about what we are going to learn, being a transcultural individual is not about traveling and exploring as much as living an everyday life in the host culture. This is how an individual adapts to the host culture. I often wonder if it takes a special kind of person to adapt. Or is it special circumstances that help certain people through their journey? Or is it the ability to learn and observe? Looking at other people's biographies and how they adapted to the host cultures that they passed through, I saw a lot of reflection, comparison, and acceptance. I think an individual who is trying to adapt has to be willing to be surprised and shocked by the other culture and to wait for the moments where two cultures clash and learn from the experience. We are living in a world that is wired and connected more than ever. We are more integrated and biracial than we ever have been before as humans. We have more in common with each other than we ever had before.

Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta were capable of adapting and learning hundreds of years ago. I think we can do even better and show more understanding in 2013. We can learn from their experience and learn about the history of humanity and how it evolved over the years.

Having the capacity to move from one culture to the other and adapt to change can be taught and learned. As a teacher, adapting techniques and acquiring respect in

the host cultures can be taught as well. What is also needed is the will to apply the teaching and to benefit from the learning.

A language teacher is adapting from one class to another in very similar way to that of a person adapting to a culture. Adapting to the class environment and circumstances is essential and it could be more difficult than the situation of adapting to a new country. Language teachers have power over the class. A language teacher controls the learning process.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of language in this journey of adapting to other cultures. The sounds and gestures that each language carries reflect the years of tradition that is embedded in each language. I know the value of language from my own cultural experience. I ended up having a positive experience in Canada because I speak English. I rediscovered my homeland Iraq through studying Modern Languages. I am a language teacher because I love what language produces and what it carries through time. Languages tell the story of the human condition and build bridges that help the process of understanding. As Nelson Mandela said, “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”

By studying the language of the host culture we break down barriers. We gain the respect of the local community, and our opinions will be heard. We can work on exchanging cultural ideas; we can also compare and contrast our differences and similarities. By taking a journey we achieve adaptation to other cultures through making connections and exchanging ideas. As a teacher I see that reaching out and explaining English as a language is essential to the cultural exchange. English structure and phonics are as important as experiential learning in my opinion. There are universal fundamentals in teaching that help the cultural

experience. I am talking about deciphering how languages work in comparison to the host culture's language. In the process of doing this the teacher will connect to the students' culture and show them how to relate to other culture and achieve better understanding.

Furthermore a teacher adapts to the rules and traditions that come with each of the students. From a homogenous class to heterogeneous class you will have two different styles of teachers and two different styles of adapting techniques. This journey that I am in the midst of right now in the Middle East feels like it is going to lead to a full circle taking me to my homeland Iraq, but not for long because there are other cultures waiting for me to explore and learn from. It is a passion of mine to move from one place to another. I have been doing it for the last twenty years and I'm afraid that I don't know how to do it any other way.

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