

I, Too, Am an Émigré: Developing Global Cultural Competencies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study begins with the story of how two teachers met, taught, and became friends in Africa, before one of them returned to the United States and organized the other's immigration there. The rest of the story narrates the immigrant's experience teaching and researching in a cultural setting very different from his own. It is a case study aimed at benefitting those educators who are teaching or leading in international settings, or those who plan to do so.

GLOBAL COMPETENCIES

Specifically:

Core Concepts

- Perspectives are shaped by varied belief systems which create social affiliation structures, cultural norms, and build a sense of purpose.

Values and Attitudes

- Values multiple perspectives.
- Questions prevailing assumptions.

Skills

- Selects and applies appropriate tools and strategies to communicate and collaborate effectively.

CASE BACKGROUND

I was born in 1949 just northeast of Lake Victoria, 24 miles east from the source of the Nile in Uganda. I remember a time when my country was not incomprehensible. It was very happy and vibrant. It had the best economy in East Africa and it was a mecca for African education, a vanguard of African development.

My academic background is so diverse that my colleagues call me a “renaissance man,” but for the purposes of this narrative, I will highlight my secondary and tertiary education. By that stage, I had become proficient in the English language, taken off in the appreciation of literature, not only as art, but also as a cultural vehicle, and started my lifetime writing career. In 1964, Mrs. D, a British teacher, who taught us English as a second language, treated the class to some poems by some of the British writers, introducing us to literary analysis and criticism. As a result, I started sensing that words had sounds. I also thought that poems were quite different from ordinary talk, or ordinary reading, like that of the newspaper or even a novel. I was captivated.

I learned English by extensively and intensively reading a lot of novels and plays. My classmates and I had novel and play reading competitions, where I learned to read George Orwell’s works from start to finish. I built my vocabulary through writing essays, writing and analyzing sentences and paragraphs and grammar. English became a very interesting thing for me. Writing became something similar to mixing chemical agents and creating new compounds. Similarly, I created new products in my writing, using words. Always, there was that subtle part of my personality that was super-sensitive to my surroundings. I became sensitive to my time and place and the relationships that I had with people. As early as 1965, I started expressing myself, or rather my moods, in writing. In 1968 I won the East African Brooke Bond Tea essay competition, and that boosted my ego.

At school, it was easy for me to write in English, the national language of instruction. So I did well in subjects like History because I read the textbook, took notes in the class, and then wrote essays. I was good at that. I found things like Math and Physics a little tricky, but after I burned the candle on both ends studying them, they became manageable too. Biology was fine because most of it was writing in prose. I also found Chemistry very interesting and enjoyable. Subsequently, for my East African O-Level examinations I took Math, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, History, Christian Religious Education, English Language and Literature and Biology.

In the East African O-Level exams I did equally well in the Arts and Sciences, but because the Ugandan government needed “hard” scientists for the development of the economy, they arbitrarily decided that I must do the Sciences for my East African Advanced Certificate course. So, from 1968-1971 I studied Chemistry, Biology and Geography for my A-Level in high school. I did not, however, give up

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