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Before getting on the plane headed to Casablanca, Morocco for two months, I had so many expectations about this upcoming experience. I thought to myself, “Wow, teaching English for two months will be no problem, after all I speak the language.” After spending this much time in Morocco I came to realize that these two things are non-correlational. My experience in Morocco was not a conventional one because of my Arab background and my headscarf indicating my religion. This experience was hands down the most labor-intensive and personally rewarding experiences during my time at Notre Dame.

Outside of the United States, English is not only considered a sign of power, but a benefit that distinguishes the haves and have-nots. I came to understand this very soon during my time in Morocco. As a result, I wanted desperately to share my language skills and teach everyone that was willing to learn the English language. In reality, the English language or any language for that matter takes a bit more than six weeks to teach effectively. Nonetheless, World Teach is a great resource to explore teaching the English language while integrating into a society and culture that is drastically different from your own.

During my eight weeks in Morocco I was teaching at the *Centre de Langues & de Communication* in Hay Adil. This center is located in Casablanca, about 25 minutes from the city center. I taught Beginner One students, and Intermediate One students, essentially students with minimal background in the English language. I also co-taught dance classes and administered activities every night at the partner school. During my first week of teaching, I was told I would only be teaching three hours a week. For me, three hours were not enough and I

discussed some other options with my in-country coordinator. As a result, she placed me with two other World Teach volunteers at a nearby English language center. Those three hours soon became seven hours, in addition to the activities and dance classes, and that was a perfect schedule for me. Overall, the administrations at each of these organizations were helpful in integrating me into the culture of the centers, and in answering all questions I had about procedures and policies.

In terms of English language teaching, I was given full freedom to teach my students whatever I wanted. This was helpful, because I was able to start from the basics that many of my students had a hard time remembering. Due to the fact my students were from a largely beginner background I had to go over things such as greetings, the verb “to be”, and how to introduce oneself in English. After a week of explaining these English basics, I began teaching new topics such as aspirations, favorite hobbies, favorite foods, and how to describe cultural events in English. These lessons became my favorite because it was a joy to learn from my students about their culture, yet be able to have a common ground of English among our conversations. Early on, I came to realize many of my students did not know the alphabet very well, and had minimal exposure to the foundations of English language learning as Americans understand it. While slightly frustrating, I learned to just dive into the material and explain the small nuances of the language along the way. As a result, the class did not become tedious going over letters, yet students still developed a background in the language through conversation and open dialogue.

The most memorable teaching experience was at the culmination of the holy month of Ramadan, a holiday that includes eating and visiting family members. The day we came back to class I taught my students how to describe this holiday in English and compare their experiences with their fellow peers. Granted, they are still beginners, so their sentences often were not

grammatically correct, nonetheless, they were so excited to get the opportunity to share their experiences about Morocco with me in English. It was after this class that my students developed a higher level of respect for English and for me as their teacher. They came to understand that I was in their country and partaking in many of their cultural norms while still teaching them the English language in an interactive way.

Morocco is such a beautiful country, and displays a very interesting conversion between traditional Arab Islamic values and French influence lasting through the post-colonial era. During my time there, I was able to experience many different facets of society that reflected this in various ways. For example, my host family was very religious and from the Berber tribes in southern Morocco. They did not speak French, prayed five times a day, all of the women wore headscarves, and they read the Quran daily. However, when you take a 20-minute tram ride to downtown Casablanca where the youth hang out, the environment changes completely. The youth wear modern clothes, they speak English and French, headscarves are not as common in these urban areas, and religion is not a driving force in their everyday lives. This dichotomy truly opened my eyes to the varying levels of religiosity that are apparent even in a predominantly Islamic society such as Morocco.

In terms of personal growth, I would say this experience definitely shaped who I am today. Although it was challenging at times, learning to target issues while teaching or in other areas allowed me to reason through them and come up with solutions. Being an American-Arab immersed in an Arab country, I felt judgment from Moroccans for not being, “Arab enough” and for displaying more of my American side. I was able to grow in my faith, because I spent the entire holy month of Ramadan in a predominantly Muslim country, which was an incredibly enriching experience for me. Finally, my host family made these six weeks so memorable, and I

truly felt like a part of the family for the duration of the trip. I would break fast with my family every night of Ramadan and each night it brought us closer and closer together. We joked around, went out on trips together, and talked about our days like my family does here in America. I learned a tremendous amount from them about Morocco, Moroccan politics, and about their family dynamic as well. It also helped that my host mother was undoubtedly one of the best cooks in all of Morocco!

In conclusion, my experience this past summer in Morocco was unlike any other. Coming back to the so-called “Notre Dame bubble” really puts this experience into perspective. I learned from my surroundings and from my students about Moroccan culture. I also built a better understanding of how truly blessed I am to be an American citizen, and to speak English fluently. Seeing the dire need to learn this language abroad, and how effortless it comes to me allowed me to put over 110% effort in my volunteer work and with my students. Although they are not fluent in English and still have a long ways to go before achieving fluency, my presence there meant more than just tests, quizzes, and busy work. Even though I am back in America, I carry with me the lessons I have learned abroad, such as the importance of the familial unit, not making unsupported stereotypes, and the beauty of building relationships with those who are not like you.