

# THE ROAD TO CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY: EXPATRIATE TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF SAUDI ARABIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

AMANI K HAMDAN *University of Dammam, Saudi Arabia*

**ABSTRACT.** This case study explored the need for culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in Saudi Arabian higher education, especially when students have a cultural background that differs from that of their instructor. The study documented how expatriate teachers structured their pedagogical practices in the Saudi Arabian context. It examined how these university teachers attempted to proactively accommodate students' needs, prior experiences and performance, and how they promoted academic progress while teaching in a different culture. Six themes were revealed: (1) the challenges of constructivism in the Saudi Arabian context; (2) linking pedagogy to the lives of Saudi students; (3) alternating and adjusting teaching to address student needs; (4) connecting with students'; (5) discrepancies in teachers' beliefs; and (6) teachers' assumptions and expectations about knowledge. It is argued that CRP offers opportunities for better learning experiences for Saudi students. Through CRP, learning can be made more meaningful and can help in the development of a positive student identity. Some pedagogical strategies are offered to help teachers implement CRP.

## VERS UNE PÉDAGOGIE CULTURELLEMENT ADAPTÉE : LES PRATIQUES PÉDAGOGIQUES D'ENSEIGNANTS EXPATRIÉS ET À L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR DANS LE CONTEXTE CULTUREL DE L'ARABIE SAOUDITE

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cet article examine les besoins en termes de pédagogie culturellement adaptée au niveau de l'enseignement supérieur en Arabie Saoudite et cible particulièrement les étudiants possédant un profil culturel différent de celui de leur enseignant. Cette étude présente comment les enseignants expatriés déploient leurs pratiques pédagogiques en Arabie Saoudite. Celle-ci analyse de quelle manière proactive les enseignants essaient d'accommoder les besoins, les expériences et les réalisations préalables des étudiants et comment ils encouragent les progrès scolaires tout en enseignant dans une culture différente. Six thèmes sont explorés: (1) relever les défis du constructivisme dans le contexte de l'Arabie Saoudite; (2) arrimer la pédagogie au vécu des étudiants saoudiens; (3) effectuer une alternance ou un ajustement de l'enseignement pour rencontrer les besoins des étudiants; (4) établir des liens avec les étudiants; (5) les divergences entre les croyances des enseignants et (6) les hypothèses et attentes des enseignants relativement au savoir. Dans cet article, l'auteur avance que la pédagogie culturellement adaptée offre de meilleures opportunités d'apprentissages aux

étudiants saoudiens. Grâce à la pédagogie culturellement adaptée, l'apprentissage peut devenir plus pertinent et faciliter le développement d'une identité culturelle positive chez l'étudiant. Quelques pistes pédagogiques sont présentées pour aider les enseignants à utiliser ce type de pédagogie.

The circulation of teachers around the globe, the internationalization of programs, and the growth in opportunities for students and teachers who are willing to travel abroad to learn and teach raise important questions about culture and pedagogy. This study focused on the perspectives of university teachers working outside of their native culture and on how the associated cultural differences affected their pedagogical choices and the learning of their students. The main question of this study is as follows: How do diverse teacher populations engage in culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) in Saudi Arabian higher education? The participants in this study have taught or are currently teaching in a culture that differs from their own.

Saudi Arabia is moving toward a revitalized vision based on a *knowledge-based* economy – which emphasizes human intelligence – and away from a *resource-based* economy – which emphasizes oil. This transition is increasing the demands on the higher education sector. Saudi Arabian graduates need to be prepared to address unforeseen problems in a knowledge-based economy with unique, creative solutions rather than with traditional solutions premised on the old resource-extraction perspective.

The article first provides an overview of the Saudi Arabian context, followed by a discussion of the culture of learning in Saudi Arabia and of how this culture plays out in higher education. This article focuses on the non-Saudi expatriate faculty in private higher-education institutions and on their use of CRP. The following section explains CRP and the framework for teaching from it in order to explore the Saudi context for foreign teachers and native students. The possibilities and challenges associated with CRP are revealed through a case study, and recommendations are offered for the successful implementation of CRP in the Saudi Arabian context.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

### *The Saudi Arabian context: Demographics, culture, and education*

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is a historic geographical area in the Middle East that extends over 2,250 million km<sup>2</sup>, making it the second largest country by area in the Arab world and the largest in the region. Saudi Arabia has the world's largest oil reserves and one of its highest birth rates. It is sparsely populated, with most of its population of 27 million (including 8 million non-native guest workers or labourers comprising 33% of the

population) being concentrated in large cities (Al-Seghayer, 2011). Almost all native Saudis<sup>1</sup> are Muslim, and nearly 98% are Arab (Central Department of Statistics and Information, 2010). They are bound together by a high degree of cultural homogeneity as reflected in their common mother tongue (Arabic), strong family tribal relationships, and adherence to Islam (Al-Seghayer, 2011). In Islam, education is highly regarded for both males and females.

Public education became mandatory from ages 6 to 15 starting in the 1960s. The public schools were open to all students. Schools are segregated by gender, with males and females attending separate schools from Grade 1. Public universities for men and women are found in most major (and in some small) cities, with universities offering specializations in arts, humanities, sciences, and professional programs. The KSA government aims to provide free education to all (AlMunajjed, 2009). The National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA), established in 2006, is responsible for the accreditation of higher-education institutions beyond the secondary level, with the exception of military education. The NCAAA seeks to upgrade the quality of private and public higher education to ensure clarity and transparency, and to provide codified standards for academic performance (Ministry of Higher Education, 2011a, 2012).

Due to the increasing birth rate in Saudi Arabia and the influx of expatriates and their families, the number of high-school graduates has exceeded the admission capacity of public universities. The capacity limitations of public universities have encouraged exceptional growth in the number of private institutions. There are now eight private universities and more than 15 private colleges and other higher-education institutions for every million people (Ministry of Higher Education, 2011b). These institutions are not free, but high-school students with a GPA of 3.75 or above are eligible for government scholarships. Many private and a few public universities aspire to offer courses strictly in English, and this is resulting in high demand for native English teachers to teach English courses and specific subjects in English (e.g., business, computer sciences, and engineering). Many higher-education institutions believe that there is greater prestige associated with hiring native English speakers to teach such courses. This overall increase in demand for these teachers has in turn led to an influx of expatriate teachers from Australia, Canada, the US, the UK, and South Africa. Consequently, there are more faculty members who do not share their students' culture (i.e., religion and language) than those who do (AlKhazim, personal communication, January, 31, 2012). The demand for high-quality, English-speaking teachers and the need to internationalize the curriculum have been partially addressed by offering scholarships to Saudi students for studies in English-speaking countries. These scholarships are offered with the expectation that the individuals will return with international ideas that will help achieve the national educational goals and make progress towards building a knowledge-based economy.

### *The culture of learning in Saudi Arabia*

In general, the Saudi education system manifests many aspects of the banking system of education (see Freire, 1970). Rather than engaging in dialogue with students, professors tend to impose information that may be irrelevant to students' lives and experiences. Saudi commentators have noted that the current education system is based on the transmission of uncontested knowledge from professors to students, depends heavily on rote learning, and generally fails to impart critical – and analytical – thinking skills (Al Lily, 2011; AlHashr, 2007; AlKhazim, 2003; AlMezani, 2010; AlQhatani, 2006; AlSeghayer, 2011). This pedagogical approach entails two major issues that contribute to the passivity of learners, an issue that must be addressed if Saudi citizens are to critically engage in creating a knowledge-based economy:

- Students' overdependence and overreliance on authority – the teacher in this case – to solve problems and provide ready answers; and
- The instilling in students the inability to question the teacher's answers.

Critical thinking – that is, reflective and independent thinking based on problem solving to determine what to believe or do – is discouraged in schools. Saudi students learn from a very young age that all knowledge is fixed as “truth [constitutes] a static entity that is context and value free” (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004, p. 37). What is taught in school or university cannot be questioned, an assumption that runs contrary to the needs of a modern knowledge-based economy. Indeed, the modern university was founded “as the site of critique. As Fichte put it, the University exists not to teach information but to *inculcate the exercise of critical judgment* [emphasis added]” (Readings, 1996, p. 6).

The author's experiences of working in two private higher-education institutions in Saudi Arabia for 4 years have revealed that these universities have begun to implement programs that challenge the traditional educational status quo. Students are required to attend all classes and failure to comply results in a warning letter that they will be expelled from a course after missing four classes. They are also asked to participate in their learning, to argue, and to debate, in addition to giving attention to memorization and testing. However, both private and public universities have yet to develop fully as sites of critique. Those who promote progress and reform believe that higher education is lagging behind because it still follows an instrumental, teacher-focused pedagogy. They are motivated to improve higher education (access, achievement and global competitiveness), and to that end they advocate that critical thinking be embedded in every aspect of students' programs. Such development is impeded by many administrators' preference for maintaining the top-down status quo. Those who are striving to maintain the status quo are likely to judge a critical approach to teaching, program design or policies as inappropriate, thus jeopardizing those who are promoting progress or even a moderate revision of old ways and traditional thinking (AlMunajjed, 2009). This

extends to the role of women in the new knowledge-based economy. Women generally have limited access to post-secondary education. Policies regarding access and opportunity are based on a strictly conservative interpretation of the Islamic faith and cultural practices that seeks to define the role of women. Improved equality of access and opportunity will help to expand the impact of universities in terms of building a knowledge-based economy.

Many expatriate teachers in private universities have become reform-oriented leaders in higher education. While some critique these reforms as an empty gesture toward progress (AlKhazim, 2003), I believe that these efforts are likely to be the next best step toward modernizing higher education.

### ***Higher education in Saudi Arabia and the use of Western curricula and professors***

Saudi Arabia's post-secondary institutions are aspiring toward international accreditation from agencies in North America and Europe that would allow more university graduates to gain acceptance in world-class universities (e.g., Columbia, Harvard, Oxford, etc.) for graduate studies and professional programs in business and medicine. The drive of the newly created private higher-education institutions toward national and international prominence clearly manifests itself in their importation of Western curricula and professors. Most, if not all, private institutions adopt curricula from the West with only a few adaptations.

Many of these imported "packaged" curricula – which include textbooks and teacher resources – overlook the contexts, knowledge, skills and needs that students bring to university and that must form one of the foundations for post-secondary education in a knowledge-based economy. Private institutions have overlooked the suitability of textbooks, and to scrutinize the hiring of teachers to ensure that they are sensitive to the Saudi Arabian culture and have a willingness to accommodate the students' cultures. Mohrman (2005) suggests that such imported curricula have made Saudi Arabian private higher education more "imitative than creative" (p. 23). Some educators counter this idea by claiming that such changes can beneficially widen students' horizons (Courchene, 1997; Thanasoulas, 2001).

Imported curricula are much less common in the public universities because curriculum committees are more likely to be chaired by and composed of Saudi faculty than expatriates. In these institutions, more care is invested into the selection of topics for students and into ensuring harmony with Saudi beliefs and values. As a result, the majority of textbooks and educational materials are culturally sensitive. The expansion of higher education has brought not only many academic programs based on Western models but also many academic staff who hold Western citizenship.

Before the emergence of private higher-education institutions, about two-thirds of university faculty and staff were foreign. Expatriates currently hold 90% of the teaching and administrative positions in private universities. The most recent report by the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education indicates that 40.2% of the faculty members at public universities are from outside Saudi Arabia (Mazzawi, 2005; Onsmann, 2010). These faculty are of Western nationality (Europe, US, Canada, and Australia), and many are originally from Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine but are now citizens of a Western country. The influx and prominence of expatriate faculty raise the issue of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP); this poses a profound challenge to the goal of achieving a knowledge-based economy.

### ***Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP)***

Culturally relevant pedagogy has been a part of important discourses in education for nearly two decades (Gutstein, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1994). According to Klump and McNeir (2005),

[CRP] recognizes, respects, and uses students' identities and backgrounds as meaningful sources for creating optimal learning environments... being [culturally relevant] is more than being respectful, emphatic, or sensitive. Accompanying actions, such as having high expectations for students and ensuring that these expectations are realized, are what make a difference. (p. 11)

CRP encompasses three teacher-student dimensions: social competence, academic success and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Social competence is the ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures, which is a critical factor influencing the interpersonal dimension in effective multicultural learning environments (Moule, 2012). As Johnson (2011) emphasized,

Academic success refers to teachers having high expectations for their students and learning is not at the expense of losing cultural identity.... Cultural competence is achieved through teachers helping students to develop positive ethnic and cultural identities.... Critical consciousness is the ability for students to identify, understand, and critique societal issues and inequities. (p. 172)

Leonard, Brooks, Barnes-Johnson, and Berry (2010) contend that for "CRP to be effective it requires teachers to carefully reflect on, and attend to, and pedagogically plan for nuances and complexities inherent in concepts such as culture" (p. 261). Teachers who embrace CRP require a certain degree of cultural competence, flexibility, and adaptability (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Teachers must exhibit three broad characteristics of teacher-enacted CRP: "teacher conceptions of self and others, teacher-structured social relations, and teacher conception of knowledge" (Johnson, 2011, p. 171). In the Saudi context, this refers to expatriate teacher understanding of self, the social context s/he is in and how is content and pedagogical knowledge being acquired. In saying this, Johnson defines three approaches whereby CRP teachers reflect an in-

depth appreciation of students' self and cultural identity in their approach to teaching. Mastering cultural competencies requires teachers "to master complex awarenesses and sensitivities, various bodies of knowledge, and a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching" (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 5). In this regard Johnson (2011) argues that

Teachers who espouse CRP believe that all students are capable of success, see their pedagogy as evolving, believe that they are part of the larger community, see teaching as a way to give back to the community and believe that instruction includes the mining of knowledge... encourage students to learn collaboratively with responsibility for others.... Teachers who are committed to CRP believe that culture is not static; rather it is shared, recycled, and actively constructed by the learner. (p. 12)

Castagno and Brayboy (2008) consider CRP to be "a promising strategy for improving the education and increasing the academic achievement of... students" (p. 941). The participants in the study are all expatriate university teachers (non-Saudi) immersed in the almost entirely homogenous cultural environment of all-male or all-female Saudi classrooms.

## THE PRESENT STUDY

This study is based upon research relating to the role of the culture of teachers and students as well as to the context created between these cultures – that of the teachers and of the students. It attempts to document these cultural perceptions and to discuss both students' and teachers' perceptions and how to find mutual ground. The general absence of expatriate teachers' voices in the higher-education and teacher-education literature led the author to use a theoretical framework developed by Johnson (2011). Johnson conducted a middle-school inquiry, focusing on culturally relevant science and on how teachers can navigate changes in pedagogy. My study is focused on expatriate teachers' pedagogy and on the use of CRP in the Saudi Arabian context.

## METHODS

### *Research questions*

The main question of this study is as follows: How do diverse professorial teacher populations engage in culturally relevant pedagogy in Saudi Arabian higher education? This question is embedded in contemporary views of inquiry teaching and constructivist learning. Moore (2003) has indicated that

teaching through inquiry is placing the voices of the learners at the heart of curriculum design by considering how and what students need to learn, which is the core of constructivist learning theory, and this in turn means that students construct their own learning while building on existing knowledge and experiences. (p. 33)

Teachers need to focus more on students' learning than on classroom procedures, which entails serious consideration of students' prior knowledge and their experiences, beliefs, values and aspirations. Such an approach requires insight into the students' worlds and into the use of teaching strategies that access and engage information about and from students. This pedagogical approach helps to ensure cultural relevance.

### ***Setting***

This research took place between 2006 and 2011 while I was teaching at two private institutions of higher education in Saudi Arabia. There I met and worked with many expatriate, non-Saudi teachers. Given the current thrust of Saudi Arabia towards a knowledge-based economy, given the power of culturally relevant learning, and given the predominance of non-Saudi educators, my work in this university setting inspired an interest in researching the extent to which and the ways in which these teachers embraced CRP and any potential misalignment between cultural and educational traditions on the one hand and 21<sup>st</sup> century goals on the other hand.

### ***Research design***

The case study used interviews, classroom observations, and instructional artefacts to document and explore expatriate teachers' pedagogies and the degree to which these were changed or modified as a result of teaching in the Saudi Arabian cultural context. The researcher employed various methods to document and explore possible answers to the research question, drawing on the triangulation of data sources.

A qualitative approach was chosen to address the research question as this allows for an in-depth examination of situations in which complex questions are posed. An interpretive stance best fit with the aim of gaining a "comprehensive understanding" of these teachers' use of CRP (Taleb, 2010, p. 292).

### ***Data collection***

While multiple methods of data collection were employed to produce a rich description of teachers' conceptions and practices, the primary method involved semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. The interview responses were supported by the researcher's classroom observations, readings of teachers' documents and the teachers' self-reported practices, which were provided in the interviews. The 13 interview questions were designed to elicit information about the teachers' experiences and pedagogical practices in different contexts—see Appendix I. A particular focus was placed on the relationship between the teachers' perceptions of their students' learning cultures (i.e., their ways and methods of learning) and their own implementation of associated CRP, as well as on the extent to which any changes in perception resulted in changes in practice. The teachers were asked to reconstruct their

various teaching experiences and to situate them within the applicable cultural contexts, referring to their own experiences and how their pedagogical practices were changed or altered to fit the new context. The conversations focused on teaching methods and strategies, on any preconceptions that the teachers may have had regarding the Saudi Arabian culture, and on the teachers' views regarding the status of education in Saudi Arabia.

The validity of the interview questions was explored through consultation with a member of a prominent Faculty of Education in Saudi Arabia, a professor emerita whose research focus includes curriculum and instruction. She suggested some changes to the questions and asked in the Letter of Information and Informed Consent, which was required by the research ethics board, for clarifications on the meanings of CRP and culture. Following this, the questions were sent to Canada to two professors who confirmed that these were valid inquiries into CRP. These three peer validations strengthened the process and attested to the validity of the semi-structured interview protocol. The questions were then given to faculty members who were prospective participants to invite them to be part of the research project.

Individuals who volunteered and signed the consent form were informed of the goals and nature of the study and, depending on their availability, were interviewed either face to face or by telephone for between 1 and 2 hours. They were asked probing and elaboration questions to clarify responses where necessary. Three participants whose teaching contracts had expired and therefore had returned to their home country before they could be interviewed were sent the questions by email. They returned their responses in written form through several emails; any unclear points were clarified through telephone conversations. The face-to-face and telephone interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants and were transcribed into written text, which were then analyzed for themes.

### ***Research participants***

Of 67 faculty members, 7 faculty members who had been teaching in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia between 2006 and 2012 volunteered as participants. They were willing to share their experiences and ideas about teaching in Saudi Arabia, to be observed in their classrooms, and to provide a curriculum vitae and instructional artefacts (course outlines, plans, assignments and other assessments). Complete datasets were obtained from all seven teachers. Two qualitative research professors at two institutions who were consulted about the number of participants supported the researcher's decision to limit the case study to seven participants in similar contexts. The participants taught at two private institutions in an urban area. Their cultural backgrounds varied and were different from those of their students. Table 1 summarizes the pseudonyms given to the teachers, their highest degree, their gender, their nationality, their

years of teaching experience in higher education, the number of cultures in which they had taught, and their professional education.

**TABLE 1. *Demographic profiles and backgrounds of the seven participants***

First name <sup>a</sup>	Highest degree/ gender	Nationality/ culture	Years of teaching	Cultures in which each had taught	Teacher training
Nadia	BA / F	U.S.	10	2	No
Haley	PhD / F	U.S.	20	4	Yes
Rick	ABD <sup>b</sup> / M	U.S.	20	2	Yes
Richard	BA / M	Canadian	10	3	No
Wendy	MA / F	Chinese / British	20	2	Yes
Tara	PhD / F	German	5	2	Yes
Emanuel	PhD / F	South African	20	3	No

**NOTES.** a. Pseudonyms assigned to participants; b. Denotes all but dissertation to complete PhD.

The participants represented a fairly diverse collection of advanced degrees (BA, MA, PhD), gender, and nationality with distinctive teaching experiences (length and setting) and professional preparation. Some participants had prior experience teaching in Arab cultures. Some participants had experience teaching Arab students in the United States, which may not be the same as teaching students in an Arab cultural setting. This subsample of 7 varied in their academic preparation and length of experience (5 to 20 years) and allowed consideration of how this range of experience influenced their CRP.

### ***Data interpretation***

The transcribed data were triangulated by cross-checking information derived from the participants' interview responses, classroom observations, instructional and professional artefacts (syllabi, assignments, assessments, curriculum vitae, publications, daybooks containing comments and reflections, email messages, etc.), as well as from the researcher's field notes and personal observations made while working at two private institutions in KSA.

### *Coding procedures*

A reflective-responsive approach to data interpretation (Ryan & Bernard, 2000) was employed in the sense that the main research question was revisited during the preliminary process – that is, how do teachers change or modify their teaching pedagogy to one that is culturally responsive to the needs of students and the culture of learning in Saudi Arabian higher education? The CRP lens (academic success, social competence and, critical consciousness) was used primarily to guide the earlier coding of the open-ended interview responses in order to reveal tentative results that would speak directly to the experiences of teachers. Once the tentative results had been identified, the interviews, classroom observations, and instructional / professional artefacts were cross-checked to authenticate the preliminary themes and to elaborate or revise the themes. The subsequent data interpretation consisted of several iterative processes pursuant to a rigorous thematic analysis (Merriam, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 2000). In other words, the data were interpreted after reading and re-reading the interview manuscripts in order to uncover themes and recurring themes. The resultant preliminary codes were sorted under themes (general phrases and words) which became the coding categories and subcategories.

The responses were coded in a manner similar to those in Johnson's (2011) study. *The teachers' conception of self and others* included the Saudi students' learning habits and the weaknesses of the students' education culture – their methods and ways of learning, their strengths and their suggestions for improving teachers' CRP. Evidence of *teacher-structured social relations* included building student-teacher relationships, increasing connectedness with all students, developing a community of learners, and encouraging students to learn collaboratively and with responsibility for others. The codes for *teacher conceptions of knowledge* reflected the principle that knowledge is not static but rather is shared, recycled and actively constructed by the learner and the principle that knowledge must be viewed critically instead of passively (i.e., there is no single right answer).

The preliminary themes were used to search and interpret the other information sources such as researcher observation. Supportive and non-supportive evidence from the classroom observations and from instructional / professional artefacts was used to verify or refute and revise the preliminary themes. Samples of quotes and data that were aligned with CRP were used to demonstrate the extent to which and the ways in which these teachers had changed their pedagogies. Information on all themes that arose was entered into one electronic document. As additional pertinent significant categories arose, the themes were revised and cross-checked against other data sources such as researcher observation and discussions prior to the research data collection with participants.

## RESULTS

Four themes were addressed consistently across all seven participants: (1) the challenges of constructivism in the Saudi Arabian context; (2) Linking pedagogy to the lives of Saudi students; (3) Alternating and adjusting teaching to address student needs, (4) connecting with students', (5). Discrepancies in teachers' beliefs, and (6). Teachers' assumptions and expectations about knowledge. Each theme and its associated evidence and elaboration are set out in the text below. Direct quotes from the interviews are indicated by quotation marks and the author's interpretations and elaborations are indicated in normal type.

### *Theme 1. The challenge of constructivism in the Saudi Arabian context*

Most of the teachers found that Saudi students were not accustomed to university teaching that promoted higher-level thinking and self-directed learning and study. Wendy, who has prior teaching experience in China and England, found that Saudi students "are shocked at university... students are used to using their memory rather than to think, analyze, synthesize, and critique... students here should be independent learners and that's not what they are used to." John complained that "students in Saudi are used to [using] one function of their brain, which is to store information.... I feel for my Saudi students who have been taught to memorize for their entire K-12 education." Both of these comments point to the discrepancy between traditional, teacher-directed rote learning on the one hand and contemporary, interactive-constructive approaches and student-constructed understanding on the other hand.

University study is a personal choice that requires motivation, self-direction, and responsibility. These expatriate teachers found that many students did not realize that learning is something that they must do themselves (in the sense of making and, constructing understanding) and that it is not something that is done to them by external powers. Tara observed that "motivating students was one of the major challenges in Saudi Arabia.... For instance in Germany when I teach German, students are motivated to learn the language as they want to be granted the citizenship, but here students sometimes wonder. 'Why [do] I want to learn a foreign language?'" Motivation was also an issue for Haley. Even with 25 years of experience, she argued that she had "learned more about [herself] through teaching Saudi students.... Shifting the responsibility for their learning to them... and motivating them to focus on their learning." Nadia compared Saudi and American students in terms of motivation: "Unlike the students in the US, Saudi students rarely work having a part-time or full-time job. Telling Saudi students that they need to pass the course for a job has little or no effect."

Haley brought a different experience to bear: "I previously taught in a Soviet-designed system. Students [were] expected to work extremely hard for their education. Success was the motivation. In Saudi Arabia, students do not have the hard-work default thinking, so other forms of motivation need to be identified,

such as anchoring theory to dreams and ambition.” Tara, however, struggled with directing students to have personal learning goals: “I ask my students what is your personal goal of learning? Sometimes I receive no responses... it seems too far for them and I can’t tell them what goals to have.”

### ***Theme 2. Linking pedagogy to the lives of Saudi students***

Most teachers realized that the Saudi Arabian cultural context is different from the other cultural contexts that they had experienced, and even from other Arab contexts. Tara suggested that at her institution there was a need for CRP to motivate Saudi students. As she wrote in her journal, “How can students learn when the textbooks are not culturally relevant?” She started a project in which students collected data about prominent Arab female figures. She contended that this created a greater degree of motivation for Saudi students to learn: “Motivation is [a] meaning-making process... some of my students had said that they don’t feel education would make a big difference for them... education and learning needs time, consistency, and lots of dedication.” Tara tried

to find topics that are of interest to [my students] that would benefit them.... I choose my topics so they are relevant to students’ lives. Otherwise no real learning occurs... a teacher can influence students’ learning cultures heavily if she / he wants too... not just the learning project, the learning culture, but also the students’ lifestyle.

Halley spoke enthusiastically about a novel method of teaching that she had initiated. As she explained, “I embed the lessons in the context of the lives they live. I use their family life as a platform to teach.” Another interesting approach that she used was to engage “the student’s dreams and life ambitions as part of the assignments. I get them to see how this theory or idea might help them achieve their goals.” Wendy endorsed this view: “I can’t just know my students but I have to know the culture... the society and the curriculum, and I need time [to understand] the perspectives and, most importantly, students’ attitudes toward education.” Tara cautioned expatriate teachers, for example, about infusing time-management strategies

because we are trying to teach Saudi students to take on Westernized ways of knowing without trying to learn what are the ways in which Saudis can do research. I don’t like to participate in what I call colonizing and degrading ways of knowing... there must be [a] Saudi research culture... and I as a foreign teacher need to know [it].

### ***Theme 3. Alternating and adjusting teaching to address student needs***

All of the teachers made adjustments to their instructional framework and strategies to address students’ needs and prior knowledge and experiences, as well as to promote academic development and growth. John, an African American Muslim teacher who had lived and taught in Saudi Arabia for 28 years, stated:

All one needs to do is to make adjustments in your teaching methods. [John said that he has been a co-learner in all Saudi private institutions in which he has worked.] I tell my students over and over again – you are learning from me and I am learning from you too.

Haley modified her teaching strategies: “I have made significant changes, most particularly in navigating serious cultural myopia on the part of textbook authors.... I think textbooks should be written by those who have had significant teaching experience in intercultural settings.” Nadia confirmed that “I need to fundamentally change my perception of my role as a teacher as well as to adopt a new teaching framework.” Both Richard and Rick explicitly stated that they changed their instructional framework and teaching strategies as they became more familiar with their students and the Saudi Arabian culture.

Cultural differences were encountered by these teachers as they engaged with the traditional values about education and with attitudes towards expatriate workers in KSA. Wendy highlighted that she and her students

have something important in common.... After all, in the classroom we are all human beings... and to me the relationships between teachers and students have to be very good and open up to each other.... Coming from a Chinese culture, I expect students to be polite with me.... I feel that in Saudi Arabia and for some Saudi students I fit the criteria of “servant teacher” – and this is not positive – because I am Chinese British.

#### *Theme 4. Connecting with students*

Haley, on the other hand, argued that “one of the better characteristics of Saudi culture is the respect for teachers.” She said that three aspects characterized her connection with students: “The excitement they express at learning new things... the hopefulness they express about their future careers... the respect and kindness they show me.”

The teachers tried to maximize their connectedness with all students and with their cultural, social, and natural contexts and to promote communities of learners. Emanuel said that “after 5 years of being here, I have to say that I am amazed how students in Saudi are disengaged from their environment, the desert, which puzzles me.” Haley felt that

Saudi Arabia has gone through an extremely severe culture shock over the past 70 years. The current generation of students is disconnected from the traditions of their elders and is somewhat adrift in uncertainty. Many respond with passivity to the challenge of education in the absence of strong mentors to guide them in culturally appropriate ways to respond to unprecedented life changes.

This situation does not bode well for socializing students for the nuances of a knowledge-based economy.

### ***Theme 5. Discrepancies in teachers' beliefs***

The teachers were aware of discrepancies between the endorsed instruction and their pedagogical practices and of how they engaged with these differences. Tara felt that the university administration appeared to endorse a top-down, professor-directed model of teaching and learning rather than a supportive-interactive community of learners and teachers and that it wanted the “expatriate professors, to transfer knowledge and leave, and they forget that learning happens in a context and it has to be in a social construct – it does not happen in a vacuum.” She also highlighted how learning is socially constructed:

There are so many Saudis who are graduating from American and European countries. Why aren't they employed? Why am I employed to teach Saudi nationals? I feel that this is influencing the sense of confidence in a nation... that we Europeans know better and teach better.

The expatriate teachers encouraged students to learn collaboratively and with responsibility for others. Group work was a particular difficulty encountered by participants. Tara said that “although Saudi is a collective culture, I found that students do not enjoy group work.” Haley identified a social cause for this: “a rather high degree of religious, political, and social intolerance blocks effective learning across a number of domains.... Religious and cultural divides create political roadblocks to group work and other class functions.” These socio-cultural and socio-political factors produced separate groups in classrooms and had an impact on group work. This diversity and discomfort with team learning and collaboration present challenges for Saudi Arabia's goal of shifting to a knowledge-based economy. One might assume that that Saudi Arabia is a relatively homogenous society (Arab, Islamic, Sunni) yet diversity here refers to students' learning styles, cultural background, home and family values and traditions, etc.

These teachers knowingly adjusted their pedagogical framework and classroom practices to engage and use their students' resources, values, and beliefs in some situations. They sensed their students' lack of comfort and the discrepancies between their high-school and university experiences; in some cases, they engaged with the discrepancies in an attempt to change the system and the endorsed methods. Clearly, these strategies could lead to conflict with the traditional methods, but the teachers believed that this was necessary in order to produce educated persons for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and a knowledge-based economy.

### ***Theme 6. Teachers' assumptions and expectations about knowledge***

The major ontological and epistemological assumptions about knowledge and knowledge production should be reflected in what is taught and how it is taught. Inquiry-based instruction assumes that students need to be actively involved in constructing understandings about target ideas as this will introduce them to the disciplinary enterprise and to the fact that knowledge is a human

production. These teachers viewed knowledge as being dynamic, not static. Their modernist view of knowledge differed from their students' traditional absolutist view of knowledge, an issue that has large implications for the shift to a knowledge-based economy.

This discrepancy in views about knowledge caused difficulties in terms of the students' expectations of teachers delivering "truths" rather than establishing a situation where students could make meaning and construct their own "tentative truths" that would apply in their own context. As Wendy said,

I want my students to appreciate that I don't want them to learn a language or a skill like writing or reading – that's not the end of it for me – but I want to see my lectures help them become useful in their society in the future.

Tara argued that both students and teachers are

undergoing a steady change of their cultures when they interact.... I don't have [the] same culture I had when I came to Saudi.... I am a different person when I finish my contract and leave.... I am going through permanent dynamic change... a dynamic discursive process of negotiating identities.... When I am in class for 20 hours per week with the same group of students, something must have gone through them and me.... We are intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or unconsciously changing someone's culture.... It's a constant process of change and interaction.

These teachers believe that knowledge must be viewed critically and not passively. Tara emphasized that Saudis should question the presence of Western curricula and education in their country: "Isn't this a land of Islam and Islamic knowledge? Why are you not following Muslim ways of learning and knowing?"

Richard stated that "memorization dominates Saudi culture.... There is no focus on learning... students here are always looking for ways to pass a course instead of learning.... This disinterest reaches a point where a student would come to class with no pen or a notebook." He found their disengagement from reading puzzling:

I am curious why Saudi students are not reading.... In Islamic Arabic history, [there are] so many poems and famous writers.... They have been much neglected in schools.... Students wonder "Why do I have to learn to read and write? I am a college student."

Emanuel concluded: "I need to adapt but make them adapt to learning – real learning not memorization.... I insist that they have to read and read and read... even if it's only their textbooks." The classroom observations indicated that the students focused on memorizing information so that they could pass courses, graduate and obtain jobs regardless of their knowledge content and changes in ways of thinking.

## DISCUSSION

In considering the possible value of CRP for expatriate teachers working in KSA and for their students, one must also consider what students bring to school and what educators want them to leave with (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). Johnson (2011) suggested that one of the driving CRP principles was the teacher's conception of self and others, a factor that becomes critical in a diverse context where different cultures, languages, beliefs, values, and practices exist. The differences do not need to be viewed as a potential source of conflict but instead can be viewed as a rich resource. These teachers viewed the challenges as opportunities for learning and teaching. The teachers in this study realized that their perception of self was not the same as their perception of the students and that these perceptions needed to be incorporated into their pedagogical framework and teaching strategies. John, for instance, felt that he was receiving as much as he was giving to his students. Wendy also felt that she was learning much about Saudi ways of living while she taught her students to live with and accept her as a facilitator instead of as knowledge transmitter. It is important for teachers to be aware of and to fully comprehend students' beliefs about learning and their established learning practices.

Students from the same cultural background tend to share the same learning styles (Almutairi, 2008; Alsafi, 2010). As discussed above, in Saudi Arabia there traditionally has been an emphasis on absolute knowledge, which entails a belief that truth is fixed and never changing, and an emphasis on learning by rote; this approach tends to differ from what expatriate teachers have encountered in their own culture and from what will be needed to ensure success in a knowledge-based economy. A knowledge-based economy will only emerge when students are global learners who are also comfortable with their own culture while also encompassing learning processes that will enhance creativity and innovation—two major aspects of a knowledge-based economy.

Courses with such titles as Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Professional Development and Competencies, Communication Skills (Written, Oral and Technical), and Leadership Skills are few and far between in Saudi Arabia. The courses that have been offered thus far seem to have done little or nothing to challenge the deeply embedded tradition of rote learning or to help foster a culture of innovation and research. Researchers in the field of CRP (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2006; Schmeichel, 2012) agree that teachers should adopt a teaching style that is aligned with their students' learning styles. Most often teachers teach based on their own learning style: if the teacher is a visual learner, then he or she teaches based on that method, and so on. If teachers are to teach from a CRP perspective, they need to change their priority to the students' perspective and to adopt several pedagogical techniques that are compatible with their students' resources, beliefs, values, and needs. Therefore, innovative courses (critical thinking, problem solving, communications, and leadership) need to start where the students

are and to scaffold their development and growth based on different ways of knowing and of dealing with unfamiliar epistemic domains. Supportive, low-risk learning activities need to be used to allow uncertain students to explore non-traditional skills and knowledge, to experience success, and to develop more positive identities.

The participants' scepticism about their students' performance could be related to the fact that these teachers have stepped outside their own cultural comfort zone. Despite their 10 to 20 years of teaching experience, some participants had never before experienced teaching in Saudi Arabia or even in an Arab culture. Saudi Arabia's culture is unique, and the students' learning culture was new to many and a source of apprehension. The students' focus on memorization rather than comprehension, their lack of interest in attending classes, their weak writing skills, and their lack of research skills were impediments. These characteristics may cause discomfort to teachers who are new to Saudi Arabia and who require knowledge of innovative pedagogical techniques to engage students to use their experiential resources and develop foundational abilities. Indeed, the teachers interviewed in this study – some of whom had been in the field for more than 15 years – showed some inadequacy in terms of their ability to embrace CRP.

Johnson (2011) identified teacher-structured social relations as another driving CRP principle for achieving academic success. CRP enables teachers to “have high expectations for their students and learning is not at the expense of losing cultural identity.... CRP further means modelling, scaffolding, clarification of challenging curriculum using students' strengths as starting points and teachers sharing responsibilities for students' success” (p. 172). The participants' feedback on their students' lack of engagement, along with the author's field notes, confirmed that, with a few exceptions, these teachers had difficulty understanding their students' learning culture (including their methods of learning) and the challenges that these students might face as a result of being taught by foreign teachers. Clearly, the students' reluctance to engage in social interactions and negotiations limits the effectiveness of inquiry-based and interactive-constructive teaching methods. These approaches to teaching require public dialogic interactions and shared responsibilities for knowledge construction and private reflection in order to integrate the public knowledge into their personal conceptual networks. Several teachers have used strategies and curricular and extracurricular activities to encourage interpersonal connections between teachers and students as well as among students.

Johnson (2011) identified the teachers' conceptions of knowledge as another CRP principle. In this study, it was apparent that the expatriates' modernist view of knowledge did not align with the traditional views of knowledge held by the Saudi students. Furthermore, their traditional view of knowledge dovetailed with teacher-directed delivery of knowledge. Therefore, the teachers faced many

challenges in attempting to fulfill their responsibility to systematically move students' views of knowledge closer to a modernist view in order for them to value the interactive-constructive approach to teaching.

### ***Limitations***

This case study was limited to seven male and female expatriate teachers working at two universities — one a private institution (with a male campus and a female campus) and the other a well-established public university (with a male campus only) — in an urban area in SA's Eastern Province. Like all qualitative studies, its generalizability is limited and the reader needs to consider the similarities between these contexts and the potential application context.

Issues of accessibility may have given rise to a gender bias in the results, as there were only two male respondents. As a female researcher in Saudi Arabia, it is a challenge to engage men in research studies because of local customs. The pervasiveness of gender segregation made it impossible to attract more men with a wider variety of backgrounds and disciplinary expertise.

### ***The wider context: CRP in other cultures***

The problems and concerns highlighted by these teachers are not particularly different from those that typically arise in other scenarios, such as white teachers teaching in black, indigenous or Latino contexts in the United States (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Schmeichel, 2012). Moore (2003) described how some teachers indicate that instructional decisions are based on existing cultural biases, including “mainstream expectations, dominant modes of thinking, and cultural values that come from experiencing and making meaning about the world” (p. 88). In the context of this study, the mainstream expectations were not the specific characteristics of the Saudi Arabian culture but rather the culture brought by the Western teachers — even those who had been teaching in SA for some time — along with the futuristic goals of a knowledge-based economy. These teachers generally expected students to abide by and conform to Western ways of knowing, overlooking Saudi Arabian learning styles. Schmeichel (2012) argued that teachers' cultural bias and the absence of race consciousness inhibits the implementation of CRP; this is echoed by the results presented in this study. Nevertheless, one participant, Tara, who was the most critical and most conscious of the importance of understanding the learning culture in the country in which one is teaching, did not try to force students to conform to a Western model. Indeed, “Validating the culture and language of students and allow[ing] them to become co-constructors of knowledge in the school setting” (Belgarde, Mitchell & Arquero, 2002, p. 22) is what defines the successful use of CRP. Yet, the lack of a training orientation for newly arrived teachers and the lack of mentorship led some of these teachers to overlook the importance of fully understanding students' needs and hindered them from following or attempting to teach using CRP.

Ladson-Billings's (2006) view, that CRP is not "what to do [but rather] how we think" (p. 30), clearly aligns with Tara's words regarding imposing the Western paradigm on Saudi students' learning. As Schmeichel (2012) puts it, "CRP is not only how teachers think about their students but how teachers think about their society... it's to improve students' lives" (p. 225). CRP is an ethical position – which is exactly how Tara phrased it. Indeed, a "firm grounding in the first language and culture is a prerequisite for the development of culturally healthy students" (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008, p. 942). After all, the aim of education is not to grow and raise students who are disengaged from their communities but rather people who are willing and able to fully participate as productive citizens. This requires a shift in educational approach and teaching methods, pedagogy, teacher preparation and school-community relations (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).

Although the small sample of participants in this case study does not allow for generalization, it seems that some of the Western professors at private universities do not have the training required to teach from a multicultural perspective. Lee and Fradd (1998) suggest that successful teachers must have knowledge both of their discipline and of diversity, including the ability to mine the rich experiences that students bring to the classroom based upon their home languages and cultures. However, as some researchers (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Diller & Moule, 2005) have argued, the awareness, knowledge and skills required are not often the focus of typical teacher-education programs; moreover, most white, middle-class people who became teachers in the US have not grown up with such background knowledge and experience. Thus, becoming a CRP-oriented educator requires the investment of additional time and energy. Castagno and Brayboy (2008) have suggested various strategies, including teachers exploring the communities in which their students live, connecting learning to students' everyday lives, participating in community events, and collaborating with community members on projects both within and outside the school. In the Saudi Arabian context, this would mean that the expatriate teachers would have to engage with the local society and with the traditional communities where students live, as well as to become familiar with ways of knowing and learning that might be different from what they had read and learned about Saudi Arabia and its people prior to living in the culture.

## CONCLUSION

The three most important aspects of implementing a CRP are "acknowledging and respecting students' ethnic identities, believing that all students can learn to acknowledge them as knowers and teachers, and structuring classroom social relationships that facilitate beliefs in first and second languages" (Feinauer & Curti, 2012, p. 713). This study has explored a new dimension of the significance of CRP in a context that has not previously been examined – Saudi Arabia. Over the last decade, Saudi Arabia has experienced a sharp

increase in the number of university teachers from abroad and especially from Western countries. This trend is largely a reflection of the Saudi government's desire to move from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy.

Teaching in a foreign land requires a change in how teachers view students' resources, classroom interactions and expectations of students. A primary finding of this study is that expatriate teachers who are starting to teach in Saudi Arabia, where the cultural context likely differs greatly from their previous experiences, would benefit greatly from exposure to the concepts of CRP. Some teachers in this study showed an in-depth understanding of how students are asked to embrace pedagogies and concepts foreign to them, and of the process of shifting students from the margins to the centre of the learning process. This is the focus of the new paradigm shift in education and is in line with CRP. The best teaching practices, as demonstrated in this research study, are those that acknowledge the differences inherent in academic, cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity (Santamaria, 2009). As Santamaria suggested, only teachers are able to determine "what is appropriate for particular groups of students in a particular classroom in a particular locale" (p. 24).

Criticisms about teacher preparation with regard to CRP have been fuelled by reports that indicate that many expatriate teachers in higher education have not been trained as teachers and have little awareness of the challenges of teaching in diverse settings. Recruiting departments in Saudi institutions need to consider CRP principles when selecting foreign English-speaking nationals. Regrettably, the recruitment of expatriate professors has contributed to excessive turnover rates. The high percentage of non-Saudis teaching at public universities and private institutions underlines the need for professional development. Public universities usually offer professional-development programs during the summer, but this is not the case at many private institutions.

While universities worldwide are obliged to engage in activities that promote lifelong learning and social transformation, this is not the case in Saudi Arabia and particularly not in its private institutions. This lack of community involvement can be explained by the fact that most expatriate faculty members prefer to leave the country for their 3 months of paid vacation (M. Alkhazim, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2013 personal communication).

It is hoped that the results of this study will encourage culturally relevant pedagogy, and initiate discussions about how Saudi Arabia might provide more effective teacher recruitment and professional development that would focus on appreciating and learning about the Saudi cultural context and priorities, as well as about the learning styles of Saudi Arabian students, for the benefit of teachers and students.

## NOTES

1. Saudi Arabians commonly refer to themselves as "Saudis." This usage is followed in this article.

## REFERENCES

- AlLily, A. E. A. (2011). On line and under veil: Technology-facilitated communication and Saudi female experience within academia. *Technology in Society*, 33(1-2), 119-127.
- AlHashr, A. (2007). *Women behind Haramlak: Nesaa khalf Aswar Alharamalk*. Beirut, LB: Arab Scientific.
- AlKhazim, M. (2003). Higher education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges, solutions, and opportunities missed. *Higher Education Policy*, 16, 479-486.
- AlMezani, H. (2010). *Hijacking education in Saudi Arabia: Lekteaf Altalem fee alмамalkah Alarabia Alsuada*. Beirut, LB: AlEntishar Alarabi.
- AlMunajjed, M. (2009). *Women's education in Saudi Arabia: The way forward*. Riyadh, SA: Booz & Co. Ideation Center. Retrieved from [http://www.ideationcenter.com/media/file/Womens\\_Education\\_in\\_SaudiArabia\\_Advance\\_Look\\_FINALy9.pdf](http://www.ideationcenter.com/media/file/Womens_Education_in_SaudiArabia_Advance_Look_FINALy9.pdf)
- Almutairi, N. H. (2008). *The influence of educational and sociocultural factors on the learning styles and strategies of female students in Saudi Arabia* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Leicester, UK.
- AlQhatani, S. (2006). *Education in Saudi Arabia: Critical perspective. Altalem fe almmalka alarbia alsoudea royahaa nagdea*. Riyadh, SA: King Fahad National Library.
- Alsafi, W. A. (2010). *Perceptual learning style preferences of Saudi medical students: A comparison between genders* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Essex, Colchester, UK.
- Al-Seghayer, K. (2011). *English teaching in Saudi Arabia: Status, issues, and challenges*. Riyadh, UK: Hala Print Co.
- Belgarde, M., Mitchell, R., & Arquerro, A. (2002). What do we have to do to create culturally responsive programs? The challenge of transforming American Indian teacher education. *Action in Teacher Education*, 24(2), 42-54.
- Castagno, A., & Brayboy, B. M. (2008). Culturally responsive schooling for indigenous youth: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(4), 941-990.
- Central Department of Statistics and Information. (2010). *Saudi Arabian census*. Riyadh, SA: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.cdsi.gov.sa/english/>
- Courchene, R. (1997). A mind-body problem? A reply to Lisa Taylor's article "Canadian Culture," cultural difference, and ESL pedagogy. *TESL Canada Journal*, 15(1), 77-79.
- Diller, J. V., & Moule, J. (2005). *Cultural competence: A primer for educators*. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.
- Feinauer, E., & Curti, R. (2012). Expressions of ethnic identity in pre-adolescent Latino students: Implications for culturally relevant pedagogy. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(7), 705-719.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ghosh, R., & Abdi, A. A. (2004). *Education and the politics of difference: Canadian perspectives*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Guba, E., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences. In N. Lincoln (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 163-188). London, UK: Thousands Oak, CA Sage Publications.
- Gutstein, E. (Ed.). (2007). *Connecting community, critical, and classical knowledge in teaching mathematics for social justice* (Vol. 1). Troy, MT: Montana Council of Teachers of Mathematics.
- Johnson, C. C. (2011). The road to culturally relevant science: Exploring how teachers navigate change in pedagogy. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 48(2), 170-198.

- Klump, J., & McNeir, G. (2005). *Culturally responsive practices for student success: A regional sampler*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dream keepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Towards a theory of culturally responsive pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(8), 465-491.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). Yes, but how do we do it? Practicing culturally relevant pedagogy. In J. Landsman & C. W. Lewis (Eds.), *White teachers/diverse classrooms: A guide to building inclusive schools, promoting high expectations, and eliminating racism* (pp. 29-42). New York, NY: Sterling.
- Lee, O., & Fradd, S. H. (1998). Science for all, including students from non-English-language backgrounds. *Educational Researcher*, 27(4), 12-21.
- Leonard, J., Brooks, W., Barnes-Johnson, J., & Berry, R. Q. (2010). The nuances and complexities of teaching mathematics for cultural relevance and social justice. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 61(3), 261-270.
- Mazzawi, A. (2005). The academic profession in a rentier state: The professoriate in Saudi Arabia. *Minerva*, 43, 221-244.
- Merriam, S. B. (2001). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ministry of Higher Education. (2011a). *National report*. Riyadh, SA: Author.
- Ministry of Higher Education. (2011b). *Higher education in Saudi Arabia: Local indicators and international comparisons*. Riyadh, SA: Author.
- Ministry of Higher Education. (2012). *National report*. Riyadh, SA: Author.
- Mohrman, K. (2005). Sino-American educational exchange and the drive to create world-class universities. In C. Li (Ed.), *Bridging minds across the Pacific* (pp. 219-235). Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Moore, R. (2003). Re-examining the field experiences of preservice teachers. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 54(1), 31-42.
- Moule, J. (2012). *Cultural competence: A primer for educators*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Cengage.
- Onsman, A. (2010). Dismantling the perceived barriers to the implementation of national higher education accreditation guidelines in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 32(5), 511-519.
- Readings, B. (1996). *The university in ruins*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ryan, G., & Bernard, R. (2000). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 769-802). London, UK: Sage.
- Santamaria, L. (2009). Culturally responsive differentiated instruction: Narrowing gaps between best pedagogical practices benefiting all learners. *Teachers College Record*, 111(1), 214-247.
- Schmeichel, M. (2012). Good teaching? An examination of culturally relevant teaching as an equity practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 44(2), 211-231.
- Taleb, H. (2010). Gender and leadership styles in single sex academic institutions. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 24(4), 287-302.
- Thanasoulas, D. (2001). The importance of teaching culture in the foreign language classroom. *Radical Pedagogy*, 3(3), 1-25. Retrieved from [http://www.radicalpedagogy.org/Radical\\_Pedagogy/Volume\\_3\\_Issue\\_3.html](http://www.radicalpedagogy.org/Radical_Pedagogy/Volume_3_Issue_3.html)

## APPENDIX I. LETTER OF INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

This is a study questionnaire for teachers who have taught or are currently teaching in a culture or in cultures that differ from their own. This study aims to examine teachers' pedagogical structure, highlight teaching strategies and the extent to which these change in accordance with the cultural context. In other words, I would like to know if teachers change or modify their teaching pedagogies and if teachers reconstruct new teaching strategies either when moving from one culture to the other or as a result of teaching in various cultural contexts. I also aim to explore if and how teaching in a different cultural context affects teachers on both a personal and a professional level.

Dear Sir or Madam:

This is an invitation for you to participate in a research project that aims to explore your experiences teaching in one or more cultural contexts that differ from your own culture. The data from this project will be used to advance academic knowledge of teachers' pedagogy in different cultures, intercultural education and, in particular, will be used in the development of scholarly presentations and publications.

*In this study, answers to the attached questionnaire and document analysis will be the primary method of data collection.* If you agree to participate, your role will be to provide your response. I will ask you to answer the attached questions in detail, providing your narratives of teaching strategies and pedagogies in the various cultures you have lived in with a focus on the Saudi cultural context.

The interview will take a face-to-face approach whereby you will be asked to reconstruct your various teaching experiences and to situate them within the applicable cultural contexts, including your own. You will focus on your teaching methods and any preconceptions that you may have had regarding the cultures within which you have taught and are currently teaching and, second, on your views regarding the status of education in the cultures within which you have taught and are currently teaching.

In addition, I am also requesting documents—all of which are outside the public domain—such as letters, stories, journal entries, reflections, and any other forms that are relevant to your points, as well as your published works that are relevant to your teaching and scholarly practice.

*Confidentiality of your identity and personal information will be maintained throughout the project and in any and all subsequent associated write-ups.* This confidentiality applies to any and all elements of the data that might disclose your identity as well as to any and all documents that you might choose to share that are outside the public domain. This policy also applies to any and all written reflections submitted by you. The original or raw data will be securely stored under lock and key, and only I as sole researcher will have access to this data. Furthermore, all original or raw data will remain securely stored for two years after the completion of the research, whereupon all the original or raw data will be destroyed or returned to you as appropriate.

*Your participation is voluntary, and you may at any time withdraw from the study or refuse to answer any question.* As a participant in the study, you will at no time be judged, evaluated, or subjected to any risk of harm. You will have the opportunity to review your answers and to delete the entire interview or any part thereof. Neither your name nor that of your institution will be revealed in any written reports.

Please send me your interest in participating in this study. If and when I receive your consent to participate in this study, I will follow up to arrange a suitable time for the interview.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Researcher

By signing below, you are indicating that you are willing to participate in the study, that you have received a copy of this letter, and that you are fully aware of the conditions set out above.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please initial if you agree to the following:

- a) To review the transcript(s) on request \_\_\_\_\_
- b) To receive a summary copy of the findings of the full study on request \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX 2. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### *Demographic Information*

- 1. Name:
- 2. Teaching/education degree? YES / NO
- 3. Degree(s) other than teaching/education and its/their level(s) (i.e. Do you hold a degree or degrees in English literature, history, mathematics, etc., in addition to or in lieu of a degree in teaching/education?):
- 4. Years of teaching experience:
- 5. Subject(s) taught:
- 6. Subject(s) you are teaching now:
- 7. Level(s) taught:
- 8. Level(s) you are teaching now:
- 9. Number of cultures within which you have taught including your own:
- 10. Number of countries within which you have taught including your own:

### *In-depth Questions*

In your answers below, please focus specifically on the Saudi culture and please think of specific aspects of teaching and learning.

I define “culture” as Geertz (1973) defines it: “historically transmitted patterns embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (p. 89).

- 1. What are the challenges that you experience as a teacher with respect to the students themselves? Please give at least 3 aspects.
- 2. What are the joys that you experience as a teacher with respect to the students themselves? Please give at least 3 aspects.
- 3. In the different cultures within which you have taught, compared to your own, what teaching strategies and pedagogy have you used in your teaching? Please focus on the Saudi culture.
- 4. In the different cultures within which you have taught, including your own, how would you change or modify your teaching methods to reach students' academic levels?
- 5. Do you believe that there are specific cultural influences that affect students' learning and academic progression? Please explain.
- 6. Have you considered the differences in expectations between students and their respective education systems in different countries / demographic contexts?
- 7. Have you considered or reflected upon your own personal expectations/tendencies/biases that you bring to bear in your teaching? Do you believe any of these could influence your teaching methods? Please explain.
- 8. How have distinctive characteristics of the various cultures within which you have taught affected students' learning styles?
- 9. What are the most apparent differences between students' cultural competencies in the different contexts in which you have taught?
- 10. How do students' cultural differences impact your teaching?

11. How do cultural differences impact your personal and professional communications?
12. Has the experience of teaching in different cultural contexts caused you to fundamentally change your perception of your role as a teacher as well as to adopt a new teaching framework? Or has this experience prompted you to make relatively minor, *ad hoc* adjustments to your teaching approach?
13. Are there any further points that you would like to add with regard to your teaching experiences in different cultural contexts?

AMANI K HAMDAN ALGHAMD I is an Assistant Professor and Vice Dean at the Faculty of Education, University of Dammam Saudi Arabia. Her research interests include education and curricula in Saudi Arabia, analytical and critical thinking and their infusion into teaching, online education and cultural manifestation, higher education, narrative research and critical multicultural education. Dr. Hamdan Alghamdi has over 19 years of international teaching experience. She can be reached at [akhalghamdi@ud.edu.sa](mailto:akhalghamdi@ud.edu.sa)

AMANI K HAMDAN ALGHAMD I est professeur adjoint et vice-doyen de la faculté des sciences de l'éducation de l'Université Damman d'Arabie Saoudite. Ses intérêts de recherche portent sur l'éducation et les programmes en Arabie Saoudite, la pensée analytique et critique ainsi que leur influence en enseignement, la formation en ligne et les manifestations culturelles, l'enseignement supérieur, la recherche narrative et la pédagogie multiculturelle critique. Le professeur Hamdan Alghamdi possède plus de 19 années d'expérience en enseignement à l'international. Il est possible de communiquer avec elle à l'adresse courriel suivante [akhalghamdi@ud.edu.sa](mailto:akhalghamdi@ud.edu.sa)