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Local News from The News Journal

Arab English teachers study at UD

State Department sponsors six-week program training educators from Middle East

By **VICTOR GRETO**
Staff reporter
07/30/2004

Teaching English in the Middle East is not just a matter of learning how to conjugate verbs and memorizing an array of rules and their inevitable exceptions.

It's also about breaking open stereotypes and having the opportunity to converse with a teacher or facilitator who has some familiarity with American culture, where the language breathes and changes, and where expressions such as "cold feet," or "riding shotgun," or "winging it" actually make sense.

Of the four English language skills that Emad Dabain teaches his fifth- and seventh-grade students in Jordan - reading, writing, talking and listening - the concentration is often too much on reading and writing, he said.

"The teacher must put the student in a more real-life situation" and not just teach to the exam by emphasizing reading and writing, he said Tuesday, during the first of his last two weeks learning new classroom techniques in the United States.

The Jordanian English teacher and 11 colleagues are learning and reinforcing teaching techniques and methodology at the University of Delaware's English Language Institute.

It's a six-week program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State's Fulbright Teacher Exchange Branch of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

The teachers will take what they learned back to their native country and teach other would-be English instructors how best to teach the English language to mostly Arabic speakers.

For two of the six weeks, the teachers lived with an American host family.

They traveled to New York City, Washington, Dover, Philadelphia and Lancaster, Pa.

In Jordan, learning English is mandatory, beginning in first grade.

"One of the important things we learned here is that movies don't represent real life," said Zeina Abdallat. "It's much more relaxed here and quiet. People are welcoming."

That's important in teaching English to students with preconceived notions of American life, said Abdelouahab Senhaji, a Moroccan teacher who is beginning his third week of instruction.

In Morocco, located in northwest Africa, learning English has taken place mainly in high school.

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The News Journal/BOB HERBERT

English teacher Zeina Abdallat on Tuesday demonstrates some of the teaching techniques she has learned during a six-week program at UD's English Language Institute. Twelve English teachers from the Arab world are participating in the program and learning more about America.

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Recently, junior high students have begun to learn the language, and by 2009, younger students will be learning it, Senhaji said.

"Many students believe Americans are just interested in themselves, are individualistic," he said. "But it's totally different."

Many of the Moroccans and Jordanians participating in the program learned much of their English in Great Britain, they said. Most could never afford a trip for six weeks to the United States to experience American culture, which makes this experience invaluable, Lahoucine Ajnaou, a Moroccan teacher, said.

"This is the authentic language," he said, referring to speaking with Americans. "We need this experience to prepare our future teachers to communicate better."

In fact, Ajnaou and his friend, Mohammed Mokhlis, have hung out at the Deer Park Tavern to talk to the locals, they said.

"All of them want to talk to us and ask questions," Mokhlis said. "If you want to know culture, you have to go to public places."


People in Morocco often think that Americans are rich and don't want to talk with other people, and they tie too closely what the American government does with who Americans are, said Abderrahim Saadouni, a Moroccan teacher. "But because we've been here, been invited to parties, I can tell them now this is not what Americans are all about."

Dahbi Mohammed, another Moroccan, said, "You can't separate English from culture. I know more about English than ever before."

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