GOING HOME TO Teach

Former international students return to their homelands to improve education and expand opportunities for the younger generation. BY SUSAN LADIKA

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Investing the time in studying abroad can have a profound, long-lasting impact on the lives of educators.

They may return to their home countries immediately after graduation, or may go back decades later, but they're all driven by the same desire—to improve lives and educations in their home countries. Their approaches are richly influenced by their own years spent studying and working abroad.

They may be striving to influence their home countries' educational systems by adapting a new model to the local environment, providing educational opportunities to those who would not normally be offered such a chance, or taking part in programs that are designed to improve social systems.

Here are the stories of four seasoned international educators who have brought their experiences studying and working in the United States back to their homelands, where they hope to impact the lives of their students, as well as society as a whole.

Piyush Swami

INDIA

Piyush Swami believes his 30-year teaching career in Ohio has served to prepare him for where his life has led him today—founding a small college in his Indian hometown in order to offer higher education to all of the region's students, including those who are members of the country's lowest castes.

"If that (the years in Ohio) was the preparation, this is the test ground," says Swami, who was professor of curriculum and instruction and science education when he retired from the University of Cincinnati in 2011.

Since his retirement, Swami and his wife, Cathy, who retired from her job as a highly honored elementary school principal, have focused their attention on starting the East West Educational Institute in the village of Badnoli, just outside his hometown of Hapur, near New Delhi.

This spring, about 20 students completed their first year at the school, and for the upcoming school year, Swami hopes to have 80 students enrolled at the institute, which offers bachelor's degrees in business administration and computer application.

"It's very gratifying to see how the things I learned in the U.S. can be adapted, modified, and implemented in India," says Swami, who now spends four or five months a year back in his homeland.

It had been a long absence for the professor. Swami left India in 1970 to further his education in the United States because no graduate programs in science education existed in India at the time. He already had earned a bachelor's degree in botany, zoology, and chemistry from Agra University (now known as Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar University) in India and a bachelor's degree in secondary science from Rajasthan University in India.

In the United States he received his master's degree in education from Western Washington University, as well as a master's degree in botany from Ohio State University and a doctoral degree in science education from OSU.

He spent the first five years of his career in the United States with the Ohio Department of Education, serving as a science consultant.

COURTESY OF PIYUSH SWAMI

Through that job he came to know leaders at the University of Cincinnati, who asked him to join the university faculty in 1980. Over his 31-year career at the school he served in a variety of positions, including director of the Center for International Education and Research. He was a professor of curriculum and instruction and science education when he retired in 2011, and he continues his ties with the university as professor emeritus.

After his retirement, Swami, who describes himself as "fairly young and energetic," wasn't ready to sit home in a rocking chair. Along with continuing to work at the University of Cincinnati as professor emeritus, "I began to think about what my strength is and how I can continue to work on that."

He decided, "The biggest contribution I can make is to go to India, where I came from, and open a college and really try to implement so many things I learned in the United States."

He quickly discovered that his plans were going to be easier said than done. He was beset by challenges setting up the institute and soon found that India had undergone major changes since his departure more than four decades before.

On the one hand, the economy has opened up dramatically and there's a "resurgence of optimism in the country." Yet the country has remained bureaucratic and regulated, and, "quite frankly, very mismanaged," Swami says. The government launches projects in fields such as education, but fails to do the proper advance planning that is required to make them a success, he asserts.

Even finding well-qualified educators can be a struggle. Swami interviewed 20 teachers for the East West Educational Institute before finding one who met his standards.

After several years of laying the groundwork, Swami was finally able to accomplish his dream and open the East West Educational Institute in 2014. The school focuses on providing educational opportunities to India's lower classes, such as the Dalits, or untouchables.

Those lower castes traditionally have been deprived of access to education as well as access to business opportunities, and most of those who have enrolled at the institute are first-generation college students. "They have no concept of what is a really good education and what would provide them with jobs. They have no exposure to it," Swami says.

A lack of financial resources has been one impediment for young people from lower castes who might be interested in higher education. Another stumbling block has been traditional values and family attitudes, particularly toward young women. Many girls had not been allowed outside their homes, and because the girls typically wind up in forced marriages, families haven't seen the point in sending them to school, he says.

Now that they can gain access to education at the East West Educational Institute, "the ladies are much more excited about the opportunity," Swami says. "There's so much energy in their approach," Swami says.

Students at the East West Educational Institute, which is the college that Piyush Swami started in his hometown of Badnoli, India.

Extra time is set aside to help students hone both their personal and professional skills so they can succeed in the classroom and in their future careers.

The institute provides scholarships so students who need financial assistance can attend classes, and many donations come from the United States.

"If I can change just a few lives, I am making a huge change that has not occurred for many, many years here," he says.

Along with his work at the institute, Swami helps provide guidance to Indian doctoral students. It's a continuation of his well-respected work at the University of Cincinnati, where he served as a mentor to about 40 doctoral students over the years.

This year, the school's College of Education, Criminal Justice & Human Services created the Piyush Swami Award for Excellence in Doctoral Student Mentoring, which is designed to honor excellence in mentoring future leaders.

"That was totally unexpected," Swami says.

Now four universities in southern India are sending him the work of doctoral students to critique. "My place of work has changed. The kind of work hasn't changed too much," he says.

And Americans have come to visit him at the institute. That's helped the small village feel more connected to the larger world. Swami recounts the visit of one group. During the visit, one of the guests handed out $1 bills to everyone. The villagers had never seen a dollar bill before and were fascinated, wanting to observe what the money looked like. Such a small thing "really brings the people of the two countries together," Swami says.

COURTESY OF PIYUSH SWAMI/ STICKER: SHUTTERSTOCK

By interacting with the guests from the United States, "students here begin to feel and see the similarities (among people). They suddenly are coming out of their cocoons and starting to see the world outside of themselves."

The power that comes from creating linkages between cultures is something Swami has witnessed through the years. In 1973 he took a group of 27 U.S. students who planned to be teachers to eight countries. "Those who were scared in the beginning were most enthusiastic as they found students of similar ages in different parts of the world. Some of them became life-long friends.

"If future teachers are the ones traveling, then it provides them a plethora of models of instruction in different countries. American education is one looked up to in most places, but each country and culture has something to contribute to our students' understanding on how to teach better, how to relate to others across the world, and essentially consider others as partners with each other rather than as adversaries, or as strangers. There is no better way to develop international peace than to bring people from different parts together."

Aicha Lemtouni

MOROCCO

COURTESY OF AICHA LEMTOUNI

Aicha Lemtouni strives to help transport the U.S. higher education system to her native country of Morocco.

Lemtouni, who currently serves as president of the Institute for Leadership and Communication Studies (ILCS) in Rabat, Morocco, graduated with a PhD from Cornell University in 1991 and helped cofound ILCS five years later. The founders were a group of graduates with doctoral degrees from U.S. and Canadian universities.

In its first year, the school had only nine students. Today there are about 150. "The vision is to be the Cornell of Morocco," Lemtouni says of the institute.

At a time when nearly 20 percent of Morocco's 18- to 34-year-olds are unemployed, ILCS has been a great success, with 95 percent of the school's graduates landing jobs within six months of completing their degrees.

Along with providing high-quality academic instruction, the school focuses on offering classes that prepare students so they can be successful in the job market. ILCS also requires that students be involved in service projects that stress giving back to the community, and enrollees interact with students from an array of cultures. In fact, about 20 percent of the institute's students come from sub-Saharan Africa.

With its academic achievements, interest in aiding underserved communities, and focus on diversity, "we would love to be used as a model for the country," Lemtouni says.

Lemtouni, who earned an undergraduate degree in agricultural engineering from the Agronomy and Veterinary Institute Hassan II in Rabat, first headed to the United States to study in 1979. "My dream was to speak English," she says.

She graduated with a master's degree in nutrition biochemistry from the University of Minnesota in 1981. "From there it took off." She returned to the United States in 1985 to work on her PhD in sociology and international nutrition from Cornell, graduating in 1991. "It's quite an amazing school," she says of Cornell.

Despite her admiration for the university, "I never thought of staying in the States," she says. "I am more needed here."

After completing her studies at Cornell, she returned to the Agronomy and Veterinary Institute Hassan II, where she taught nutrition for 25 years. She also spent time as a visiting professor at Johns Hopkins University as a Fulbright scholar.

ILCS was created as a way to contribute to Moroccan society through education. The school aims not only to help its own students flourish, but also to help those who live in underserved areas of the country, such as the Berbers who reside in the High Atlas Mountains.

Many of the institute's courses are taught in English because it's imperative that the students have strong English language skills if they hope to succeed in today's world, Lemtouni says. And ILCS is modeled after the Anglo-Saxon educational system, rather than the French system.

Students who attend the institute can earn degrees in journalism, communications and marketing, translation and interpretation, advertising and public relations, and leadership and management.

ILCS is unique in the country because students are required to spend one month each year taking part in volunteer work. They may serve in their home country, or travel to places such as Senegal, Brazil, and India.

In one of her roles, Lemtouni serves on the board of CorpsAfrica, a nonprofit founded in 2011. The organization is a sort of African Peace Corps, and helps young people from Africa become involved in volunteer opportunities in their home countries.

Along with having an influence on its own students, ILCS also is host to an extensive study abroad program. It offers academic programs, such as French language immersion and Arabic language and culture, for visiting students. It also has experiential learning programs, such as a health and nutrition program for which students spend time teaching basic health and nutrition skills to parents and children in rural parts of Morocco. They also work with local health care providers in delivering medical care.

Students can also volunteer for such projects as assisting at a day-care center in the High Atlas Mountains, helping the elderly in a retirement home, and spending time with orphans.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Returning to East Asia to Start an English School

Yi-Chieh Lin

CHINA

Yi-Chieh Lin believes kids should have exposure to an international education at an early age.

The native of Taiwan graduated from the University of San Diego with a master's of education degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), literacy, and culture in 2012, and moved to Dongguan, China, in 2014 to share her teaching skills.

Since opening the doors of the Pangea Educational Center this spring, about 35 elementary and middle school students have been taking part in after-school and weekend programs to hone their English language abilities. During the summer, the 9- to- 15-year-olds are offered the opportunity to attend a summer language camp at the center.

But Lin's focus isn't only on China's children. Dozens of teachers from Chinese public schools have attended teacher training sessions and workshops organized by Lin to improve their own English skills.

Lin enrolled in the University of San Diego in 2008. She had graduated from Feng Chia University in Taiwan with a bachelor's degree in international trade the previous year. By moving to California, she aimed to improve her English skills.

Her original plan was to obtain a master's degree in business from the University of San Diego, but after taking several classes, she decided it wasn't the right fit for her.

Instead, she was drawn to the field of education. She had tutored students in English in Taiwan, and saw education as a way to blend together her two loves. "I love kids," she says, "and English has been my interest. I love watching American drama movies, and I love songs in English."

At the same time, "teaching English is a huge market in Asia."

Lin already had experience in the field. During her undergraduate years in Taiwan she was a teaching assistant at the Oxford English Institute and also worked as a private English-language tutor.

As a graduate student in San Diego, she served as a teaching assistant and student teacher at the English Language Academy, which is a part of the professional and continuing education program at the University of San Diego.

When she and her husband, who was born in Hong Kong, decided to move to China in 2014, Lin decided to start the Pangea Educational Center.

It took time to get her plans off the ground. She spent a year developing connections between herself and the government to obtain the approvals she needed. "You have to find someone on staff (with the government) who can open the door," she says.

At the Pangea Educational Center she's using the Cambridge Global English series and Hooked on Phonics to educate the students. Younger students receive part of their instruction in English and part in Chinese, while the older students receive their instruction only in English. She also strives to teach the youngsters to develop critical-thinking skills.

More than 250 study abroad students come to ILCS each year from countries such as the United States, Canada, China, and Australia. They reside with host families during their time in Morocco.

Having foreign students come to Morocco not only exposes the visitors to real-life situations in the North African country, but it also gives the Moroccan students a chance to interact with peers from around the world and gives them extra opportunities to hone their English language skills.

At the same time, "community work helps ILCS students and students from around the world to develop their leadership skills," Lemtouni says.

The work in the community changes the students' lives, she says. But it also impacts the nongovernmental organizations that the students assist, as well as the families who host them during their stay.

By bringing together students from around the world with ILCS students, and with Moroccans from all walks of life, it serves to foster dialogue and understanding among people of various cultures and this "contributes to preventing extremism," Lemtouni says.

Lemtouni is a big proponent of also having educators spend time studying abroad. It allows them "to be open minded, overcome their prejudices, adapt more to their students, keep the human dimension in everything, and mainly to develop empathy."

Yi-Chieh Lin, originally from Taiwan, teaching English in China

COURTESY OF YI-CHIEH LIN

A teacher who is a native English speaker also works on staff so the students can learn to speak with the accent of a native American.

Lin wants the parents of her students to see ''what kind of benefit the American education system can bring if you learn English in this way.''

In many places in China, students simply are required to memorize and repeat English sentences and grammar. ''This doesn't help students learn,'' Lin says. ''Language is a flexible thing.''

Along with her efforts focusing on the students, Lin also helps to teach the teachers. She works with the local government to train elementary and middle school teachers from public school how to speak English fluently. She regularly provides instruction to more than 60 teachers a week.

Her academic adviser from the University of San Diego, Sarina Molina, who is an assistant professor in the Department of Learning and Teaching, recently visited the Pangea Educational Center. She was accompanied by three graduate students from the university.

Molina held an English language workshop for about 85 middle and elementary school teachers, while the graduate students helped teach English to the schoolchildren.

''The education I had in the United States totally changed me,'' Lin says. ''It's helped me to become a different educator.''

Solange Uwituze

RWANDA

Solange Uwituze is driven to give back.

After six years studying in the United States, there was no doubt as to where she was headed when she graduated in 2011 with a doctorate degree in animal sciences from Kansas State University.

She returned to her native Rwanda, where she taught in the Agriculture Department of the University of Rwanda.

While she might have been able to remain in the United States "and maybe get a big paycheck, life is bigger than a paycheck," says Uwituze. "There's a sense of fulfillment in giving back to the community."

She's done that through her work in her homeland, striving to educate and motivate young people. She also done that through her work in the region, which is designed to build connections among university agricultural programs.

After her return from the United States, Uwituze was selected to serve as dean in the Faculty of Agriculture. She was the first female dean ever appointed in the history of the National University of Rwanda, which was founded more than a half-century ago. In 2013 the university was merged with other public institutions of higher education to form the University of Rwanda.

She moved from her position at the university last year and is on a three-year leave of absence to work with the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) based at Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda, where she is responsible for the training and quality assurance of the program.

The RUFORUM program brings together 46 universities from 22 sub-Saharan African countries to build the capacity of highly skilled Africans who are active in innovative research and community outreach. It's designed to develop the skills of graduate students in agriculture, with the goal of eradicating poverty in Africa.

RUFORUM has adapted the land-grant university model that exists in the United States and works to "proactively solve real-life problems and to acquire new knowledge and conceptualize it in a manner that is critical for transforming Africa," she says.

It also supports academic mobility to make the most of human resources and infrastructure that are in short supply at African universities.

The U.S. educational system and culture have had a great influence on Uwituze's life and career. She grew up in a French-speaking home in Rwanda, and longed to head to the United States to improve her English and learn the American way of life. "I was fascinated by the way they do things, the work ethic, the determination," she says.

She also was drawn by the fact that U.S. society is relatively flat, rather than hierarchical, and "that allows people to be judged by their performance," she says.

Uwituze graduated in 2002 with a bachelor's of science degree in agriculture from what was then known as the National University of Rwanda, and then held positions in research and at the university, including working as academic secretary in the Faculty of Agriculture at the National University of Rwanda.

She headed to the United States in 2005 as a Fulbright scholar. Her first stop was the University of California-Davis, where she spent eight months, polishing her English skills and earning certificates for her English proficiency.

Her next stop was Kansas State University, where she earned a master's degree in animal sciences in 2008 and a doctorate in animal sciences in 2011.

While she was attending Kansas State University, she worked as a graduate research assistant and then as manager of the preharvest food safety laboratory, overseeing the lab and training and supervising undergraduates who were working on research projects.

In her own research she looked at ways Rwanda, a small country the size of Maryland with a population of 12 million, can make use of the best agricultural production techniques to use the country's limited land most effectively and decrease the competition between humans and livestock for the sparse land that is available.

That helps in contributing to food security, and also aids in wealth creation. At the same time, it contributes to peacemaking, she says, by reducing the likelihood of conflict over land.

After her return to Rwanda in 2011, she served as a lecturer in the agriculture department at the National University of Rwanda, and was quickly assigned administrative responsibilities, including serving as head of the animal production department; being appointed vice dean for research, consultancy, and postgraduate programs; and then being named dean of the Faculty of Agriculture in 2012.

Solange Uwituze, a native of Rwanda, returned to her home and now is in Uganda working for a regional universities consortium to improve educational quality. Here, she is teaching a data management class to graduate students at the University of Venda in South Africa.

COURTESY OF SOLANGE UWITUZE

She also served as team leader for a joint program with Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) to develop the curriculum for five PhD programs in agricultural sciences at the Rwandan university by 2018.

And she was project director of the Women Leadership Program in Agriculture, which was funded by USAID and Higher Education for Development (HED) to develop a gender-sensitive master's of science degree in agribusiness to serve the needs of Rwandan women.

The program, which launched this year, was developed in conjunction with Michigan State University and is designed to promote women's leadership in agribusiness and develop their analytical and business skills.

Uwituze says mid-career women in the country are often torn between devoting their time to their family or investing it in their career. With the new program, women who can't attend night classes, for example, can take part in Saturday classes or receive instruction from a DVD that they can watch at home at their convenience.

The program aims to "make sure higher education is accessible to women," she says.

Having such a program available to Rwanda's women doesn't only affect the women who are enrolled, she says. "If we educate the women, we educate the family."

Uwituze also sees herself as a voice for the victims of genocide. Her father and two brothers, as well as members of her extended family, were killed in the 1994 violence that flared between Hutus and Tutsis. She was 19 years old at the time.

She works to encourage other survivors of the genocide to have a sense of purpose. "The greatest loss is no ambition to do anything with your life," she says.

The time she spent in the United States has had a tremendous impact on Uwituze's life, helping her to develop self-confidence, a sense of responsibility, and an urge to act.

She tries to share that with the students and young people she mentors today. She aims to "make them aware of their accountability vis-à-vis the community, especially those who haven't been blessed with access to education. Through motivational speeches and interactions I challenge them to decrease their sense of entitlement and increase their sense of responsibility and accountability vis-à-vis their country and the world in general." **IE**

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