Capstone Project

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My understanding of the world has never been a simple line on a map, but rather a complex, layered palimpsest. My journey began in Cameroon, where I was a student at the university, learning within a familiar, rigorous, academic system. Subsequently, the map shifted as I moved to Montreal, a bustling metropolis and the heart of French North America. Finally, my path led me west, to Edmonton and the Francophone Faculty at the University of Alberta. This physical trajectory, from Central Africa to Quebec to Western Canada, has consequently served as the foundation of my Certificate in International Learning (CIL). However, the true journey has been the internal one: learning to read the invisible lines of culture, language, and identity that connect and divide us. In essence, my CIL experience was not just about acquiring knowledge; it was about learning to navigate the world with a more nuanced and empathetic compass.

Before this journey, I might have defined global issues in abstract terms such as poverty, conflict and climate change. However, some of my coursework dismantled them and revealed their profound interconnectedness. For example, in my "Issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in schools" class, we didn't just study the theory of systemic barriers; rather, we dissected how they manifest in local contexts. This became clear during my practicum in a Francophone school in Edmonton. I was teaching in my native French, yet I was a stranger to the cultural references of my students, many of whom were either from Franco-Albertan families or were new immigrants from various African countries themselves. As a result, a lesson I planned about a classic concept in Mathematics fell completely flat. In retrospect, it was a local issue, namely a disengaged classroom, that was a direct reflection of a global issue: the diverse nature of the Francophone world. Consequently, my understanding of "Francophonie" had to expand from a linguistic and literary concept tied to Europe to a global, living, and multifaceted reality. The interconnection was therefore clear; my own identity as a Cameroonian francophone was part of a global system, and my struggle to connect with my students was a microcosm of the larger challenge of building inclusive communities within that system.

Additionally, the CIL's emphasis on understanding one's own culture as one perspective among many has been the most transformative, and at times, uncomfortable, part of my learning. Upon arriving in Montreal, I felt an immediate sense of linguistic and cultural homecoming, for I was in a French-speaking society. Yet, I quickly learned that my Cameroonian French, with its unique cadence and vocabulary, marked me as an outsider. In other words, I was confronted with the realization that my culture was not the universal "French culture," but a specific, localized worldview. This feeling was only amplified when I moved to Edmonton. Here, I was not just a Cameroonian in a French minority context; I was also a

francophone in a predominantly anglophone province. As a result, my language learning, specifically in English as a Second Language, became far more than a mere requirement. Instead, it became a survival skill and a window into another worldview. Through this process, I learned the subtle codes of politeness in Western Canadian English, for example the importance of "small talk," and the directness that often characterizes communication here. More importantly, this process taught me to see my own communication style, perhaps more indirect or context-dependent, shaped by my Cameroonian upbringing not as a deficit, but as a different, equally valid approach. Ultimately, my identity, once a single, solid point on my internal map, has fractured into a beautiful constellation: I am Cameroonian, I am a francophone, I am an immigrant, and I am a future educator in Alberta.

The final test of this learning, however, has been in the application. Indeed, the CIL learning outcome focused on applying cultural awareness and language skills has been put into practice daily, both in and out of the classroom. My "Language Learning Theory" course gave me the academic tools to understand second-language acquisition, but it was in my French immersion practicum that I truly applied them. Here, I worked with anglophone students who were learning in my native language. Having taken my own ESL classes, I could empathize with their frustration, their moments of confusion, and their small victories in a way I couldn't have before. Therefore, I learned to be a more patient and effective educator, not just by explaining grammar, but by creating a classroom environment where linguistic risk-taking was celebrated.

This skill was most profoundly tested outside the school walls. For example, during a community 4event for new Franco-Albertan parents, I found myself at a table with a mother from Congo, a father from Vietnam, and an educational assistant from a small town in Saskatchewan. The official language was French, but the languages of understanding were patience, active listening, and cultural humility. In that moment, I didn't just hear their concerns about their children’s education; rather, I heard echoes of my own family's journey, my own questions about belonging. I was able to connect with the mother from Congo by sharing a memory of a dish from back home, and I could relate to the educational assistant's perspective on rural life after learning about the immensity of Edmonton. It was in that moment that I realized my CIL journey had equipped me with a new kind of fluency not just in English or French, but in the language of human connection across cultures.

In conclusion, what are my CIL takeaways? The most powerful one is that the journey itself is the destination. The highlight was not a single "aha!" moment, but rather the cumulative realization that I am a different person than the one who left Cameroon.

The program has answered old questions about how the world works, replacing simplistic notions with a complex understanding of global systems. However, it has also raised new, burning questions that will fuel my career as an educator. For instance, how do I create a classroom that is a true third space, where students from all backgrounds can bring their whole selves? Furthermore, how do I teach my own students to become cartographers of their cultural identities, and to read the maps of others with respect and curiosity?

Ultimately, my journey from Cameroon to Edmonton with a step over in Montreal has been a profound lesson in the fact that culture is not a border on a map, but a living, breathing thing we carry within us. The CIL program gave me the tools to understand my own cultural backpack, to appreciate the weight of others', and to build bridges of understanding in the diverse classrooms and communities I will now call home.