

# GRACE TESFAE

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Grace Tesfae's path from teaching in Michigan to serving as a vice principal in Morocco is marked by curiosity, adaptability, and a deep commitment to student success.

Over the course of her career, she has embraced new challenges, learned from diverse communities, and cultivated a leadership style rooted in empathy and support.

Her story reflects the transformative power of both international experience and lessons learned from Summer Principals Academy.

## Teaching Around the World

Grace began her career as a high school social studies teacher in Grand Rapids and Detroit, Michigan. Alongside teaching, she earned a master's degree in history and took on leadership roles such as department lead and head coach of her school's first robotics team. "I think I was mostly shaped by the people I had the opportunity to meet

in the schools... and learning to adapt as I came to see the realities of the inequalities in our school system."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Grace's school announced its closure, and a friend encouraged her to consider teaching abroad. She applied to international schools across Africa and the Middle East, and she felt a connection with the leadership at a school in Saudi Arabia. Despite having

only briefly traveled to the Middle East, she eagerly accepted the position.

In Saudi Arabia, Grace discovered classrooms rich with “diversity in nationality and language,” which brought “a different conversation into the classroom” as a social studies teacher. While her teaching style remained consistent, she became more aware of cultural nuances, learning to “bring certain things forward or bring certain things back” to respect the environment she was in.

She emphasizes the importance of adaptability:

**“You have to be okay with being uncomfortable and curious. Sometimes being flexible and understanding through the lens of your host country is essential.”**

Despite occasional language barriers and cultural adjustments, she found her students’ enthusiasm and the kindness of the community deeply rewarding.

### Experience at SPA

Though Grace initially dismissed the

idea of taking on an administrative role, her experience in Saudi Arabia helped her see that “leading is about supporting teachers and supporting kids.” One of the leaders at her school was a SPA alum, who told her about the program and encouraged her to apply. She was accepted as part of the 2023 Cohort and graduated just last year.

Grace values SPA for allowing her to continue teaching while gaining leadership experience.

**“One thing that SPA has really drilled home for me is the honor of being able to work with other people’s children every day.”**

She describes this responsibility as both “heavy” and “exciting,” shaping her perspective on the importance of doing her best for the students and communities she serves.

She also came to see education as being “more than what you teach... it’s about learning” and about “embracing the humanity of each of your students.” SPA reinforced that leadership is not about perfection but about constant growth and adaptation.

## Leading in Morocco

Grace recently moved to Morocco to serve as vice principal of an international school. She focuses on “student culture and well-being” for grades 7–12, with plans to integrate a robust SEL program and enhance curriculum alignment and counseling.

Preparing for the start of the school year, Grace reflected, “I’m just stoked to hear about the community and support them in what they see as their next steps.”

When asked about the different student bodies she has encountered in different countries, Grace commented, “you really see such a progression and difference in some ways, but really similarity and strength in the different humans that you work with.”

Her experiences in international classrooms—from the United States to Saudi Arabia and now Morocco—have shown her the universal nature of working with teenagers.

**“Teenagers are  
developmentally teenagers.  
That joy of building  
relationships is universal.”**

## Looking Ahead

Grace plans to remain in her role for several years, continuing to implement student support systems and learning from her school’s long-standing community. She keeps an open mind about future destinations, reflecting that “the whole world is your possibility.”

For current and future SPA students, she offers this advice:

**“Give yourself grace and  
lean into your growth.  
The purpose of SPA is to  
build leaders who represent  
their students and support  
their students in their  
communities to thrive.”**

**“If your goal is to be in SPA  
to be that leader who does  
that thing, then it's really not  
about the assignment or it's  
not about who can win NSD.  
It's actually about becoming  
the best you can be so that  
you can support the people  
in your community.”**

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