

Encouraging words from my students

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If you're reading this essay, it is probably safe for me to assume that you have successfully passed your interview with the English Program In Korea (EPIK). Therefore, I must first begin by saying congratulations on such a remarkable achievement. You are well on your way to what is likely to be one of the most rewarding cultural experiences of your life. How exciting, right? As your journey to Korea quickly approaches, you will inevitably find yourself contemplating what to expect of the cultural differences and school life. I can assure you that there is nothing like having firsthand knowledge readily available to you to ease your mind. Thus, it is with great pleasure that experienced Native English Teachers (NETs) like myself share our own personal experiences with you. Here is mine.

On April 26, 2009, I was interviewed at my school's commencement ceremony. The young female journalist asked me a single question, "what are your plans after graduation?" I remember thinking to myself, this is an easy one! The year after graduating college, I planned on applying to law school. Of this I was certain! Almost two years later, on February 16, 2011, I was sitting on a connecting flight from Philadelphia to San Francisco. The woman who was seated inquired if San Francisco was my last stop. I answered, "No; my last stop is Seoul, where I will meet with a liaison for the company that has just hired me to teach English as a Second Language (ESL).

At that time my emotions fluctuated quite frequently between excitement and apprehension. I was 23 years old with the following credentials: degrees in Political Science and Latin American Studies, two months of experience working with special education students, three months of experience living in another foreign country, and 23 years of experience living with my mother who is an educator. Thankfully though, after the pre-orientation course and nine days at Jeonju University, I received 60 hours of training before entering the classroom. Whew! But I was still so nervous. How would I know that my newfound teaching skills would have a positive impact on my students' ability to have a conversation in English? Through a letter my student wrote, that's how!

Approximately one month ago, my school had its semi-annual English Camp. The lesson that I prepared for said camp was geared towards interviewing skills. I presented my students with the three main types of interview questions: open-ended questions, close-ended

questions, and follow-up questions. To practice the language that was introduced to them, we played a game that is very similar to charades. The game proceeded with me pretending to be either a character from a movie or someone famous. My students were allowed to elicit information pertaining to who I was using only the types of interview questions they had learned. I answered their questions with the appropriate amount of information. When a team successfully asked me one question from each of the three types, they were allowed to ask me who I was in an attempt to earn points for their team. Finally, to apply the language to a real word experience, I set up interviews with my friends and family in the United States via Skype. To show their appreciation, my students wrote postcards to the individuals they interviewed. It was during this activity that I was most impressed with my students for writing such encouraging words about me. Here is a letter that a student wrote to my friend Jon:

Dear Jon,

Hello! My name is Cho Sung Kim. I am 14 years old. I live in Gyeongsan, South Korea. I'm Lea teacher's student. I have a very good English teacher because she is so happy and enjoys her students and listening to music. It makes me happy! You have a good friend. And I have a good teacher.

Bye!

I cannot count on one hand just how many times I have thanked my students for writing such kind words about me. The truth is, I don't think I could ever thank them enough! As an ESL teacher, I have become very accustomed to giving positive feedback and words of encouragement to my students. And when I least expected it and needed it most, they reciprocated. To say that this job isn't challenging at times would be untrue. You will reflect on your teaching ability because you care about your job. And that is what good teachers do. My advice to you is to remember that encouragement is a two-way street. Encourage your students and they will encourage you!



Dear JIN I live in Gyeong San, ^{South} Korea
 Hello! I'm do sung ken, I'm 14 years old.
 I'm Lee teacher's student, I have a really
 good English teacher, ~~she~~ because,
 she ^{is so} happy and ^{enjoys} ~~join~~ her students.
 And ~~she~~ ~~is~~ listening ^{to} the music. It makes me happy!
~~However~~. You have a good friend and I have a
 good teacher! Bye!

Dear Lee
 Hi. My name is kang seung woo
 My English name is Jack
 How are you?
 I'm fine.
 Your sister is ^{a very} ~~very~~ good teacher.
 I want to see you!
 What is your Phone number?
 My Phone number is 010-5551-
 Please call me!
 Bye~ see you later.

Dear Lee...

Hi! Lee. My name is Beak Kyeong min.

My English name is Messi. It's funny!

How are you doing? I'm fine.

Lea teacher is great teacher ^{at} ~~in~~ ~~Munmyeong~~
~~Middle~~ School!!

~~Um ~?~~

See you later! good bye.

I'll miss you!

Dear Lee...

Hello, Lee!! My name is Lee Chang bin. My English name is Tommy. How are you doing? I'm good these days.

You are Lea teacher's sister, right? Is she a good sister? I'm curious about it. She is a great teacher in school! Did you know that?

Then, good bye. I want to meet you, and I'll miss you. Bye ~!

Perfect!