

# Foreign Teachers to Become Ambassadors for Korea

By Kang Shin-who  
Staff Reporter

A number of foreign English teachers gathered in Seoul last Friday to participate in the "2008 English Program in Korea (EPIK) Reunion," organized by the National Institute for International Education (NIIED), a government agency under the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

Some 160 out of 204 native English speakers who were placed last March at elementary and secondary schools across the nation joined in the farewell event and shared each other's experiences and memories of their time in Korea.

"It was the first meeting of its kind to have all EPIK participants around the country in one place. This event is to create a network for foreign teachers and form an alumni-like group of foreigners who can become Korea-friendly celebrities back in their home countries," said Song Yu-sun, a training manager for EPIK.

It is the ambitious goal for NIIED to produce more and more foreigners who can be "promotional ambassadors" of Korea. Hence, the international agency plans to have more and more events to bind foreign guests for its programs together.

During the two-day event held at the Olympic Parktel in southern Seoul, Prof. Kevin Price of Kyung Hee University presented his experiences about Korea as an English teacher.

Also, the other foreigners shared their experiences with each other. They also watched a famous performance in the



EPIK program teachers across the nation arrive for a farewell party, "2008 EPIK Reunion" organized by the National Institute for International Education at the Olympic Parktel in Seoul, last Friday. Korea Times photo by Shim Hyun-chul

evening and took a city tour on a boat cruise.

Meanwhile, NIIED recruited some 490 foreign assistant teachers last fall semester and placed them at elementary and secondary schools. The interna-

tional education agency plans to hire 608 more foreign teachers for the next spring semester.

The program teachers can earn 1.5-2.5 million won per month according to their degrees and teaching certificates

and will receive an entrance and settlement allowance and free single furnished housing. Successful candidates will conduct English conversation classes with Korean co-teachers.

Those who are interested can apply either by visiting Korean consulates and embassies around the world, EPIK offices in Korea, or online at [www.epik.go.kr](http://www.epik.go.kr)

[kswho@koreatimes.co.kr](mailto:kswho@koreatimes.co.kr)



By Suzanne Wagener

My husband and I have always wanted to live and work overseas, to enable us to experience a different culture, so after much

## 'No to Corporal Punishment for Discipline'

research on the Internet and a trip to visit Korea, we decided that the opportunity to participate in the EPIK program was an ideal opportunity.

There are many cultural differences between Australia and Korea. As a foreigner, it is important to be aware of such differences. I have found that when you make the effort to recognize these differences and try to do "the right" thing, you are always greeted with appreciation, and any mistakes that you make are overlooked.

However, the greatest difficulties faced have come about by

not being able to speak the language. From simple things like not understanding the instructions on the computer or the washing machine, to constantly having to seek assistance to complete banking transactions and pay bills. This has led to lack of independence and privacy. Shopping has also proven to be an interesting exercise. However, at all times the people in the local community have been most helpful and have gone out of their way to give assistance.

EPIK is an ideal way to bring English to students. As more teachers participate and give

feedback, the program will go from strength to strength. A greater focus at the elementary level of schooling, where students are keen to learn, and less at the high school level, where some students don't see the value of continuing with English education, may be a better allocation of resources.

I have only experienced students at a boys' middle school in Cheongju and I have found these students to be polite and, on most occasions, well behaved. I have used the strategy of focusing on good behavior — and rewarding "good English" has

worked well.

I have not had responsibility for implementing any discipline and I have struggled at times to watch boys receiving the "cane" for infractions. I believe that teachers should be role models for their students and using corporal punishment for discipline seems to me to be condoning violence and bullying.

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## Encourage Students to Speak English Publicly!

By Grahame Wagener

Teaching English in Korea has been a tremendous experience. The teachers and the students have shown a great interest and have participated fully in all the lessons. It has been a challenge to always come up with something new and innovative that will capture the students interest, but that is part of the challenge of teaching.

There is a natural reticence for students to speak English, especially to speak English publicly, so

it was an important achievement to conduct an English speaking contest, in which all the students must participate, and then hold a final event with all the school participating as the audience. The students braved their reluctance and did very well.

They were proud of themselves and their school community. Importantly, it showed the kids that they could do it. That sense of achievement is very important. While social activities, like the Mud Festival, will be remembered as a bit of fun, the

most important memory is the look of triumph on the faces of so many young people when they realized that this "public" speaking thing was not as hard as first thought.

The Korean people are very tolerant of foreigners, and make concessions for those of us who inadvertently make mistakes. This is especially noticeable when Korean people can see that you are trying to overcome the differences and misunderstandings. If you are willing to make an effort, then

the more likely it is that the Korean folks will meet you half way.

My advice to new EPIK teachers is to be tolerant, observe, try to immerse yourself in Korean culture, make an effort to learn Korean, be flexible because last minute change frequently happens, but above all enjoy.

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Grahame Wagener



By Danielle Henderson

I chose to live and teach in Korea because I heard that it is a safe and clean country in which to live. After being here for nearly one year, I must

agree with the people who told me this information. I feel safe not only in the classroom, but also walking home alone at night after making a trip to the supermarket.

I think that it is natural to experience difficulties, especially in terms of cultural differences while living in a foreign country. In the beginning, I was so embarrassed by my inability to speak Korean. I did not know how to say thank you or the magic word please! My decision to teach in Korea was, however, rather last minute, which made it difficult to learn Korean prior to my arrival.

Even if you are an English

teacher, having knowledge of Korean can not only help you when out and about, but it will also impress your students and your school's staff, thus gaining their respect. I wish I had at least a weekend crash course in the Korean language. I was only given a few travel brochures and tourist maps of Seoul and Cheongju, which were of little help to me since I live in neither of those locations.

In regards to schedule changes and exam dates, it appears that the last people to be informed are the native English teachers, in my case anyways. For example, I would go to

class and, either it would be empty, or my students would have a confused look on their face. I would then return to my desk in the office and my co-teachers would find me and inform me that the schedule had changed. There was another time when I arrived to school only to be told to go home because the students had an exam and that my classes were cancelled. I soon realized that things are done differently here. So I had to adapt and expect that my schedule may change at any moment.

Tips for future EPIK teachers: get to know your students, ask them questions and do your re-

search. For example, find out what music groups or singers are popular. I did just that. When I told my students that I enjoyed listening to Big Bang and the Wonder Girls, not only were they impressed that I knew of these groups, but they were proud that I took an interest in Korean music. Finding a commonality can also open many doors with regards to mutual understanding.

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## Teaching Guidelines, Training Needed!

By Connie Defalco

My Korean age is 48, soon 49. I've been in the workforce for over 25 years. My first jobs after university were in Customer Service and Contract Administration. When I was 39, I decided to go back to school to become a software developer, which is the job I held for over 9 years before coming to Korea.

South Korea is not well known in Canada compared to Japan, so, originally, I was going to try to teach in Japan. My daughter is currently teaching English at a Japanese university. After doing research on Japan and Korea, I realized that South Korea would suit me better. Busan is not far from Japan and the Korean alphabet was much easier to learn. I also felt that the EPIK contract was better than Japan's JET program's contract. I was also very impressed with the government's commitment to English education in Korea.

I think the most difficult time was when I first arrived in Busan. I didn't know what to expect. At our orientation, EPIK told us that they could not tell us what to expect because everyone's experience would be different. Since I never worked as a teacher, I would have appreciated being able to observe some English classes before I be-

gan teaching. I would have appreciated being given a lesson outline and told: "Teach this your first week." I would have appreciated seeing videos of actual classes depicting different experiences.

I also find it difficult to have to depend on a Korean friend or co-worker to help me do simple tasks like ordering merchandise or buying a ticket online.

But, all in all, I've enjoyed learning about the Korean cultural and have not felt any serious culture shock or been homesick. I know this is because of the wonderful people I work with and have befriended during my time here.

My advice for future EPIK teachers: inform yourself. Read about Korean customs and culture. Use the EPIK mentor program and support personnel if you have questions or issues. In your first week, bring bread or cake to share with your co-workers. Expect that after the initial honeymoon period, the students will probably be more talkative and your class management skills will become more important. Finally, just do your best, that's all that can be expected.

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Connie Defalco

## More Communication With School Principals!

By Penny Li

This is the first time I have been involved in the teaching-English overseas profession — right after graduating from my undergraduate studies in management economics. I'm very glad that I chose EPIK in Gangwon Province over other offers in hagwon and public schools in the Seoul area. The most memorable part of my teaching this year would have to be one of my principals, who has been most supportive of the initiatives that I have proposed, which has led to the success of penpal programs at two of my elementary schools with a junior high school in Japan.

I am confident that even after I leave Korea, there will be a push for the English education programs at the school to be a success by possibly developing them into student exchange initiatives, which still cannot be done at the moment due to the low level of English abilities among Japanese students.

I admire my principal very much for his efforts in becoming capable in English all on his own without majoring in it in university or going to a foreign land. I also respect his passion for English education at his schools.

Of course, not all principals are like the one mentioned above, and that is mainly where most of my difficulties originate. Most principals are not capable of communicating directly with me,

which would usually involve the co-teacher as a medium of up-down communication within the school. However, the Korean-English teachers are very busy people, who tend not to

ask the principal for the school's support in developing new English initiatives, since doing so would potentially risk their relationship with their superior for the rest of their teaching career at that particular school.

In order for EPIK teachers to function more effectively within their schools, I think it is essential to have an English education budget in each school in which EPIK teachers are placed. It can then be readily accessed for purchasing more fitting English

textbooks as well as developing new education programs, since changing the hierarchical structure at Korean public schools would be very difficult in the short term. Also, I think it is necessary at this point for EPIK to organize seminars for principals of EPIK schools in order for them to gain a fuller understanding of the teaching goals of EPIK teachers, so the EPIK program would be more integrated into the Korean public education system.

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Penny Li