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Comings and Goings: Considerations and Reflections on the English Program in Korea (EPIK)

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COMINGS AND GOINGS:

CONSIDERATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON

THE ENGLISH PROGRAM IN KOREA (EPIK)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines both practical considerations for sojourners who are planning to work overseas in South Korea's English Program in Korea (EPIK) and reflections on the author's experiences with this program. The first section of the paper presents pre-departure, arrival and descriptions of what the school and housing might consist of, followed by reflections on the author's direct experiences through three paradigms: world view, intercultural adjustment, and culture shock. While the main focus of this paper is on native English speakers participating in EPIK, the practical considerations and discussion may also be generally helpful for hosting organizations as well as others who are considering working overseas.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In early 1997, the Korea English Teacher Training Assistant program (KORETTA) was renamed the English Program in Korea (EPIK). This paper was written in response to my personal and professional experiences as a KORETTA/EPIK teacher in 1996-7. EPIK was an interesting and diverse program; yet often it was complicated due to a lack of information provided to native English Teachers about Korean life and educational practices, and to Koreans about working with people from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia. A concise, informative guide about such issues would have been extremely helpful to promote better intercultural understanding. This paper is intended to provide insight and information for administrators and participants of EPIK, or similar programs, to develop such a guide in the future.

The second chapter addresses the needs and concerns of ESL teachers before and during their first year in Korea. The third chapter examines some of my experiences and learning through the lenses of a world view model, a resource for intercultural development, and culture shock.

In an attempt to avoid or reduce confusion, I have employed the following abbreviations. To distinguish between the two groups of teachers, the foreign native English-speaking teachers invited to work in Korea are referred to as Native English Teachers (NETs), while the Korean teachers of English are referred to as Korean English teachers (KETs). As well, the geographic term for the area called Republic of Korea, informally known as South Korea, has been shortened to "Korea" for the purposes of this paper. This is for stylistic purposes only and does not represent a political statement of any kind on the part of the author. As well, spelling in this document is Canadian.

CHAPTER 2

PREPARATIONS FOR NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS

In this chapter I will address foreign employees specifically, although it may be useful for Korean nationals to read, to get another perspective.

Here is some information of a practical nature, divided into pre-departure information, things that might be useful as you settle into your new life in Korea, life at the school, and a few things that fall into the category to which I refer as "Minor Technical Details."

Pre-departure Information

Medical Concerns: An overseas vaccination program is best begun early in the application process. Visit your local health center (immunization center) well in advance of your departure date. Keep in mind that some immunization series take several months; Hepatitis B vaccinations, for example, are administered over a six-month time period. Doctors are reluctant to take over a vaccination program begun elsewhere as there are several varieties of vaccines that cannot be combined. Keep a copy of your immunization records; it may be useful if you plan to do any travelling in other parts of Asia. Hepatitis A vaccinations are not available in Korea. Vaccinations against Japanese B encephalitis, a mosquito-borne viral disease, are available in Korea in the summer months only. If you

feel concerned, there are some good resources on the market, such as Travelling Well: The Essential Handbook for Healthy Travel by Dr. D Mills (1989), which offer advice on pre-departure immunizations and various diseases. Also, books such as Healthwise Handbook: A Self-Care Manual For You (Stilwell 1995), published by a not-for-profit organization called Healthwise Publications have much useful information, including First Aid treatments and handling other emergencies. Concerning personal medications, I think it would be prudent to take a supply of all medication with you, along with a prescription from your doctor that gives the chemical compound rather than the brand name as this may vary from country to country. As well, if possible, make arrangements with someone at home who would be able to get a prescription filled and sent to you in a pinch. Discussion about the health care system will occur further on in this chapter.

Personal Records: Make a duplicate copy of all the postal and e-mail addresses you plan to use overseas. Include banking and credit card information: account and branch numbers; bank addresses and telephone numbers: pertinent information about loan repayment schedules and loan payment amounts. It is amazing how quickly one can forget those "little details." Keep the copy in a separate, safe place, just as you would travellers' cheque receipts.

Plan for Your Kitchen in Korea: You might want to do some food shopping before you finish packing your suitcases, even if you are not crazy about cooking. Familiar herbs and spices are comforting reminders of the tastes of home, and may be appreciated as

novelties by some new Korean friends. It is not necessary to bring spices such as hot peppers with you overseas as they are commonly used in Korean cooking. However, blends such as Italian or poultry seasoning can go a long way and are versatile. Bay leaf (also called laurel) and cinnamon, for example, are easy to find in supermarkets there, but more exotic things such as cardamom, tarragon, and basil are more than difficult to find. Various kinds of instant powdered soup stocks are also available in Korea. However, people concerned about monosodium glutamate and preservatives might want to bring bouillon cubes or powder with them as the Korean products seem to contain these chemicals. Perhaps those who can read Korean very well will be able to recognize whether all brands there have these chemicals or not. Otherwise, prepackaged soups and sauces from home can serve double duty when added to rice and bring variety to your dinner menu.

Recipes From Home: Try to collect a few non-bake recipes, such as refrigerator or microwave methods for desserts, cookies, casseroles and soups. This may sound like strange advice, but consider the following. Ovens and electric ranges are extremely expensive and hard to come by. Most cooking is done with a two-ring gas hot-plate, a rice cooker, and sometimes a microwave oven. Fancier versions of the hot-plate have a very small broiler pan set in underneath the rings between the knobs. It is large enough to broil two rather small fish, or one medium-sized fish. Thus, any chance of making an apple pie is quite reduced! These recipes might be useful for a pick-me-up when you are going

through a culture shock phase. Commercial baked goods are also readily available and Korean bakeries make some excellent pastries and cakes.

Books: The selection of English fiction in Korean bookstores is limited, but includes classics such as Jane Austen and Shakespeare, and bestsellers. English language travel guides for the region are also useful as they can serve as an excellent introduction to the culture and language. Surprisingly, I did not find a good selection of Korean travel guides, other than the Lonely Planet series, while I was in Korea. A large and well-known bookstore in Seoul is Kyobo Bookstore which probably has the largest selection of English language books in Korea. It also carries other foreign language books. Reference and source books for teaching are readily available in larger cities in Korea. Professional conferences in Korea have book fairs, which are also excellent sources of professional resource materials. Even if space is a consideration, you might wish to pack a few books pertaining to a hobby or pleasure reading. Used book stores and garage sales net the best buys. University bookstores also have used copies of interesting works at discounted prices. I was glad both for the books that I brought with me (including a few trashy novels), and the books and newspaper articles that people sent to me.

Easy-to-Pack Decorations or "Personal Artifacts": Simple decorative items such as favourite cards or photographs of family, friends and special places are easy to pack. They will really personalize your new living space and make you feel more "at home." Flat, light ornaments associated with events, holidays, or festivals you typically celebrate

will help take the edge off seasonal homesickness. A wall calendar with events such as major holidays and daylight savings time changes is also useful. Some NETs use these items as "realia" (real artifacts of everyday life) in their teaching. I generally do not use them as such as I prefer to keep something of my life private.

Linens and Bedding: I would recommend that you bring washcloths (not available in Korea), and a big bath towel (available but expensive). Regular Korean bath towels are approximately the size of a hand towel in Canada and the US. Western-style beds, or even beds on frames off of the floor, are expensive, so it is possible that you will be sleeping on a mat on the floor. The traditional mat is called a *roh*, densely packed with heavy cotton filling. A more inexpensive and perhaps slightly more comfortable variation of the *roh* is made of foam plastic. It is much thinner than its North American counterpart. The *roh*'s snug covering has a zipper at one of the ends so that it can be removed for washing. (It is a bit of a struggle to get the foam back into the coverlet, and offers viewers endless amusement.)

You may want to bring a few top sheets and pillowcases with you. To my knowledge, neither flat nor fitted sheets were available in Korea. Traditional quilts have a removable cover, but blankets do not, hence the need for flat sheets. Keep in mind that traditional quilts are much more expensive than blankets. Most people I talked to found the Korean pillows too high and firm. The pillow itself is not fully responsible for this; the snug, traditional pillowcase which holds it so tightly in place clearly adds to its unrelenting

firmness. The snug pillowcases and blankets were provided by one of the schools. Linens from home will make your bed more comfortable and easier to maintain.

A "Care Package" for Yourself: If you are incredibly organized and have both time and money left before you depart, you might like to put together a package of goodies for yourself. Send it by sea mail before you leave, or ask a reliable person to forward it to you as soon as you have a mailing address. Things to include could be a few serious books, a few light novels, blank Christmas cards, local magazines, your favorite non-perishable snack foods or anything else you think you might desire when you are away. Packages sent by sea mail usually take about three months to arrive, which means that ones sent right at or near your departure will probably arrive in time to help you with your first cycle of culture shock. Let people know what kind of books or magazines you enjoy so that they can send something appropriate to you for "care packages," too. Incidentally, homemade cookies packed carefully in tins travel fairly well. Although this did not happen to me, several NETs' personal mail was opened by their schools.

Your Adventure Begins

So, now you are ready to go. Your suitcase is packed with items to help you settle comfortably in your new home. Perhaps you have begun your own research about Korea to acquaint yourself with its culture and people. And, with any luck, you have learned some basic things such as numbers, the *hangul* symbols of the Korean alphabet, or a few polite expressions. You are about to begin your adventure as an EPIK teacher.

The two-week training and orientation session at the Korea National University of Education in Chungju will be part one of your first adventure, and where you will meet other new EPIK teachers and other people involved with the program. In September of 1996, the placement procedure was that each teacher would select three places in which he or she would prefer to live. These preferences were submitted to the organizers at Chungju. They decided who went to which province or city, based on government quotas and teachers' preferences.

In the following I have assumed that you will be working exclusively with one school. However, there were some itinerant placements which involved moving from school to school in the area or district, perhaps returning once or twice per term, or working with two or three schools with a set schedule. This did not entail moving apartments, only adjusting to new work environments on a continuous basis.

Your living situation will depend largely on what part of the country you are placed. This variance is more complex than the potential differences in climate. There are vast differences between urban and rural life, not to mention the degrees of conservatism within the country as a whole. For example, Pusan is considered to be quite conservative and "hick-ish" in comparison with Seoul, despite its importance as a major and very busy seaport and its population of over four million people. To help put this into perspective: according to The World Almanac and Book of Facts (1999), the population of Pusan is larger than that of Los Angeles (USA), Toronto (Canada), or Sydney (Australia), and is

much larger than either Birmingham or Manchester (UK). Seoul is thought to be the apex of sophistication by many Koreans because of its immense size and population (over 11.6 million people). Its popularity and population density make it more expensive than other sizable cities in Korea.

Placement within a city, as opposed to a rural area, will mean that you must share an apartment with at least one other person. It is most unlikely that local officials will allow men and women to share an apartment unless they are married. Living arrangements have already been decided before you have arrived. Keep in mind this decision may not be yours to change. In my situation, all EPIK teachers placed in Pusan were housed in a downtown hotel during a seven-day orientation session to the region. There we were allowed to decide with whom we wished to room for the year before we selected the district where we wanted to live. The apartments were procured at the local school level; one of the three schools my roommates and I worked at was responsible for everything to do with our apartment. After the week in a hotel, we were placed in homestays, which was quite contrary to the promises made by the Regional Director just before we signed our contracts in Chungju that apartments had already been found for all of us.

Apartments: Apartment complexes have at least one little guard box, usually one per building. It is a small structure with an intercom system that connects the "guard" with individual apartments. The "guards" manage the parking area, hold tenants' large mail parcels, and are in charge of general security. Some of the complexes can be extensive

and a bit confusing to find your way around in, unless you have an unerring sense of direction. When you first begin to explore your neighborhood, a copy of your address written in Korean will help others to assist you if you become lost.

Directly inside your apartment, you will notice that the apartment floor is raised several inches higher than the small entrance area right in front of the door. There is usually a short built-in cupboard to hold your shoes (if you wear large size shoes, the cupboard door will probably not close). It is the custom in Korea to remove your shoes before stepping onto the apartment floor. These raised floors are heated with pipes which circulate hot water. This heating system is called *ondul*. At one time, Korean homes were heated with a system of floor pipes that circulated warm air from a fire located outside the dwelling. This resulted in many deaths due to carbon monoxide poisoning. Eventually, a new kind of linoleum, impervious to carbon monoxide, was invented. The modern kind of *ondul* is a series of hot water pipes set into concrete floors. The linoleum is cut to be several inches larger than the floor on each side and the excess simply rests against the walls. This gave me the impression that I was in a shallow dish or a sandbox, minus the sand.

Kitchens in Korea usually have a sink and counter, some built-in cupboards, perhaps a hood fan, but probably little else. The school responsible for the apartment should provide the basics. How well it will be furnished depends largely on two factors: first, the location within the city or region of the apartment; second, how local officials have

managed the funds allocated for furnishings. For those placed in high-priced Seoul, most of these funds will be spent on "key money" and rent. Key money is much like an apartment deposit, but it is up to four or five times the monthly rent amount which may not be fully refunded. Unless you are moving into an apartment already set up for previous EPIK teachers, the school responsible for your apartment will be busy in the first days after your arrival finding, purchasing, and arranging the delivery of furniture and goods to your new home. This should include a refrigerator, a two-ring gas hot-plate, a kitchen table and chairs plus some kitchen utensils and pots and pans.

In our apartment, we were provided with three sets of eating utensils and dinnerware: forks, knives, spoons, dinner plates; bowls for rice, soup, and dessert; plus four mugs. We were also given one large pot, one large rice cooker, one large frying pan with a lid, and a cutting board. Other teachers in other parts of the same city received less than we did, which understandably resulted in some antagonism toward local school administration.

A typical Korean apartment has a living area, and several bedrooms. The sizes of these vary, but there is a master bedroom with a very small en suite bathroom, and then usually successively smaller rooms. There are no built-in closets in Korea, so freestanding wardrobes must also be purchased by the school. As stated earlier, western-style beds are extremely expensive in Korea, so the school may not be able to afford to buy beds for each teacher. For very small bedrooms, a *roh* is more convenient as it folds up easily to

make the room less crowded. While blankets and pillows were also provided for us, curtains were not.

Due to the design of the apartment buildings, each apartment will have at least one balcony which will be screened and glassed in. There are hot/cold faucets and an electrical outlet, a drain in the tiled floor for the washing machine's outpourings, and a large drying rack with several moveable cross poles. I believe that electric or gas dryers are uncommon and expensive. If your school has not provided a washing machine, request one as politely and insistently as possible: there are very few laundry facilities open to the public in Korea. Make it clear that a used machine would be acceptable. Appliance manufacturers usually offer an extensive warranty on their products, including used items.

Bills: You can expect to receive separate monthly bills for electricity, telephone, and gas. However, a monthly bill for "apartment fees" may come as a surprise to many new EPIK teachers. These fees included charges for hot and cold water, hall and stairwell lighting, electricity for the elevator, heat (a flat fee in the winter months, regardless of how warm or cool you keep the *ondul*), small salary for the guards, spring (drinking) water (which should still be boiled), among other miscellaneous items. My two roommates and I split the bills equally (except for long calls and overseas telephone charges) and each paid between 50,000 – 80,000 Won per month on apartment fees, about sixty to ninety Canadian dollars. Although it was not an unreasonable amount, it was an unexpected

expense. In North America, these charges are generally included in rent fees, or billed separately to the tenants (perhaps, similar to condominium fees).

Your School Life

In 1996 and 1997, most teaching assignments were in middle schools. Only a few teachers were placed in elementary or high schools, or teacher training centres. At that time, the opportunities for instructors to specify at which level they wished to teach was limited. However, a recent edict from the education minister has made English mandatory from second grade on, so perhaps more positions will be available for those who wish to teach younger age groups. The golden rule seemed to be that younger students are more open and friendly, but know less English; older students know more English, but are less eager to experiment with language.

The School: The size of the main building will depend on how many levels are taught, and whether it is a public or private school. The students do not change classrooms, except for sports, science lab, music or art classes, so there are no rows of lockers in the hallways. Usually, the building is the width of one classroom plus a hallway. My school was four stories high with three large stairwells. In much of the southern portion of Korea, the buildings are not heated in the winter, except for the teachers' room.

Co-education is a recent innovation in Korea, so most are segregated, with the exception of newer schools. This has repercussions for staff: women working in boys' schools, for

example, may find that toilet facilities are limited, and need to plan accordingly. I worked in a boys' middle school and could only use the one women's staff washroom on the second floor. Keep in mind that this was a four-storey building! Schools in Korea do not have gymnasiums as we know them in Canada or the US. There are small rooms for teaching gymnastics, but most sports are taught outside in a large, multipurpose playing field directly in front of the building. This is where students gather for assemblies unless the field is extremely wet. Then students would remain in their home room classrooms and listen to the announcements, award ceremonies, or lectures over the public address system. In many public schools, neither teachers nor students may wear street shoes indoors. Instead, slippers are worn inside the building. Cupboards at the entrances are provided for storing footwear.

Probably the most important rooms for you, besides your classes, will be the washroom/toilet facilities, the male or female teachers' lounge or resting room, and the teachers' room. The teachers' room is separate from the principal's and administration offices. It is usually quite large, filled with metal or wooden desks, with a chalkboard on one wall the width of the room. The schedule is written on it in chalk, and updated weekly or as needed. Every teacher has his or her own desk; their arrangement within the room is significant. Usually the vice-principal sits at a large wooden desk in the centre of the room facing one of the entrances. There is another low chair beside him where the principal sits if he or she attends the morning meetings. In my school, course attendance books were arranged in a cupboard on the wall opposite the vice-principal's desk. This

area is the "power centre" of the room; those teachers with desks next to or near this centre have more political or administrative power than those who sit at the edges of the room. This may help you in avoiding some social blunders by showing them more respect, for example.

The teachers' lounges or resting rooms are segregated. I do not know what the men's lounge looks like from first-hand experience, although a British NET reported to me that he avoided it at his school because the male teachers there chain-smoked and were not very tidy. The ladies' lounge, in contrast, was always tidy, according to him, and he looked forward to being invited in by one of the female teachers. The one at my school had about eight chairs around a large dining table, where those who brought their own lunches or ordered a lunch in would eat. A large wardrobe divided the room. On the other side was a raised platform about a foot or so off the ground onto which blankets, pillows, and full-length adjustable heating pads were arranged. There were also a microwave oven and a kitchen sink in the room. Female teachers could rest there during their spare periods, eat lunch, or just relax in a non-desk environment.

There may be other smaller buildings on the property. At my school there was a low building at the back for basic woodworking or shop classes. There also was another building which had a commissary for the students (a little store and limited food service) and a "restaurant" for the teachers. It had one set meal every day which consisted of soup,

rice, various side dishes called *banchi*, and a main dish, which was different every day of the week. The cost was very reasonable, although the menu not always appealing.

The Students: Classes have a minimum of thirty-five students, with main-streaming as the norm. Lower, intermediate, and advanced levels are grouped together; thus, there is a wide range of abilities within each class. Students with special needs are included in regular classrooms. As mentioned before, it is the teachers who move from class to class rather than students, who are assigned to one classroom at the beginning of the year. Each class has a class leader, or monitor, who has various duties, including daily entries into a book which is checked regularly by the home room teacher, and periodically by school administrators and officials. Other students have the dubious honour of being responsible for keeping the classroom clean and tidy, with such duties as mopping the floors and emptying the trash.

Uniforms are required at all levels of school from elementary to senior high school. For boys, it is long pants, a matching jacket, and two white shirts: one long-sleeved, for the winter, and the other short-sleeved, for the summer. Short pants are worn in the summer also. Girls wear a skirt, coordinating vest and jacket, and a white blouse. Each student must purchase several name tags at the beginning of the school year in a specific colour which denotes the student's grade. They are embossed with his or her name and an assigned student number. These are sewn onto the breast pocket on the jacket and another is contrived to stay on the shirt front in the summer when the weather is too warm for

jackets. Students are not required to wear their uniforms for activities outside of school hours, or on school picnics, when many strive to show their fashion sense.

The Academic Year: The academic year begins in the first week of March, and ends the third week of February. Summer vacation begins around the third week of July, and school resumes at the beginning of September. Winter vacation usually lasts from the third week of December until the first week of February. There are also national holidays, and school holidays such as the bi-annual school picnic. Often the last day before a holiday is a half day and consists of a closing assembly and cleaning of the building, usually done by students and supervised by home room teachers.

During the February break, there is a great deal of staff activity in Korean schools. Instructors are assigned new classes, and are required to be at the school to prepare for it. Every fourth or fifth year, a teacher is rotated into another school; these transfers also occur at this time of the year. So, in addition to rigorous preparation, this week is one of orientation for many new staff members as well.

The Teachers: Korean teachers have an incredible amount of administrative paperwork. They are usually required to complete it by hand, in duplicate, and the finished product is required to be flawless. Reports on individual students, home room documentation, forms from various levels of government administration, course outlines and lesson plans are all expected to be filled out promptly and accurately. In addition to this massive amount of

paperwork, instructors are also responsible for daily tasks such as lesson planning, examination preparation, and marking. As a foreign teacher you will not be expected to do any of this, except perhaps to submit a copy of your lesson plans at the end of each term. Understandably, this discrepancy may cause some hard feelings amongst the Korean teachers. Keep in mind that they see you as receiving a very good salary, compared to theirs, for less work. One of the reasons you are in the school is because you are not a Korean national, and because you are not, you are unable to do the paperwork. This paradox creates unavoidable resentment.

Co-Teachers: One of school's KETs will be elected or appointed to be your liaison with the school. There is no extra pay or training for this responsibility, or any lessening of other responsibilities at the school for the "lucky" individual. This person will be very important for your connection to school life, and to help you make sense of various aspects of Korea. However, as this person is not trained in assisting foreigners, and is often pressed for time with other school or personal duties, his or her help may vary in timeliness and usefulness. As well, there may be some resistance and resentment toward this duty, perhaps for internal political reasons that are not personally directed at you.

Some aspects of school life may be taken for granted by the liaison person; important details may therefore be omitted or not explained beforehand. As you become more familiar with the school's routine, you may be able to take a more pro-active role in ensuring that you are well informed. For instance, if you notice something being written

on the schedule board, ask if any of the schedule changes affect you. I found this helped to remove some of the pressure on the liaison person, and helped me to feel less reactive to the unknowns.

Curriculum: In Korea, there is a move away from the traditional grammar-translation methodology, at least as far as the Ministry of Education is concerned. Teachers are now facing large, multilevel classes, with an incredible range in the level of knowledge of English in their classrooms. English teaching materials such as supplementary texts or cassettes are supported at the individual school level. This ultimately means that the amount of support that a school will offer its English teachers depends on how pro-English the upper administrators are and how much funding is available at the school. As well, course curricula are oriented towards training students to pass the regional and provincial exams which are closely tied to the famous university entrance exams. Until the university entrance exams are modified or, even more unlikely, abolished, parents and students alike would probably resent any changes which may jeopardize students' later exam success.

Having said this, the NETs soon realize that they are facing a dilemma. Students may be hoping for more speaking opportunities, more "real" input, perhaps more personal attention, even though there are between 30 and 50 students per class on average. Administrators may enjoy the prestige and honour of having a NET placed in their school without necessarily having any training in intercultural issues or experiences of living

abroad or even any ability to speak English. Teachers in the school may be curious or hostile to the NET. This could be due to the attention directed at the NET, their own levels of confidence in speaking or working with a NET, or even the sharing of power in the classroom.

At the original orientation at Chungju, various presenters and materials stressed that the NETs were to focus on communicative methodology and team teaching. Unfortunately, the only reference book available to the NETs on team teaching was designed for Korean teachers of English; more than three-quarters of the publication was written in Korean. As I did not know what topics were covered, or in which manner, I was reluctant to share the text with my school. The Korean English teachers were also not given any training or information about team teaching. I strongly feel that better training of both parties would have made the experience much more evenly successful.

The usual scenario is that the NET rotates, like regular teachers, from class to class during the day. I met a few NET who actually were designated a specific room to use in the school, and they were envied by most NETs as those few could personalize the room, and make it a more English-enriched environment. It was also less stressful than making his or her way around the school. As most NETs were either itinerant within the school or the district, lessons became portable, with little time required to set them up so as not to waste limited class time. This included writing posters beforehand and bringing extra tape for hanging them, carrying the cassette player if required, and any handouts or game

pieces. I enjoyed making the posters and used colour for added visual and pedagogical emphasis.

There are various reference and activity resources available for sale at some bookstores in Korea or at regional and national conferences. Bring any game books and other appropriate resources with which you are familiar, but do not panic if you do not have a lot. I noticed that I needed between ten and thirty copies of each activity, and found that this involved a lot of cutting. Delegating this to a responsible student, or as punishment to another, would reduce the preparation time.

The best advice I received while at the training session was from a then-current NET, and echoed by others. It was to prepare one lesson per level and teach it for the whole week, and then design another lesson for the following week, etc. This means that the teachers would not be able to specify individual requirements for each class, and that the NET could focus on the students more than on getting through a different lesson plan every class of the day, every day of the week, potentially. This also makes preparation time more manageable, and gives the NET time to fine-tune the lesson during the course of a week. Remember that according to the contract, NETs could be required to teach 25 hours per week during the five-day work week. Although their schedule is spread out over five-and-one-half days a week, most Korean school teachers teach fewer hours than do the NETs.

I also recommend that students be required to wear an English name tag. There are clips which cost very little and students can write and decorate their name tags as they wish. They used their first name only, or used an English nick-name that they liked or used already. As the remake of the film Romeo and Juliet was very popular in Korea at the time, there were several boys who chose the name "Leonardo." The students may not have noticed, and the KETs may have not seen any purpose or difference other than to create a problem for collecting, storing and then distributing them every class. However, it made a difference to me, because I was not faced with a sea of anonymous faces. The Korean teachers usually teach the same class two or three times a week, so are able to develop a stronger relationship with their students for that reason alone. The name tags were larger and thus easier to read than the Korean name tags stitched onto their uniforms. I felt that the English name tags also allowed each student a separate identity within large group situations. I preferred this system to one of calling each student by his student number.

Dress: Teachers hold a respected social position in Korean society, and, as such, they are expected to uphold a conservative dress code. Jewellery is generally not worn except for very small earrings. This means that you may be discouraged from wearing necklaces, bracelets, pins or big earrings at school. The dress code varies from school to school, but most require dressy casual styles. For female teachers, due to the conservative nature of the country, you will probably be instructed in Chungju not to wear deep vee-necks, tight or sleeveless tops, or very short skirts. This last is very important as young boys at the

end of elementary school and the beginning of middle school have been known to hold a hand mirror in their palms as a skirted female teacher passed by in hopes of catching a glimpse up her skirt. And, as the schools are not heated or cooled, it is a good idea to dress in layers. Undershirts, cardigans and jackets are very useful. I tended to not dress up very much as the rough edges of the students' desks, the chalk ledge and the teacher's podium snagged several good sweaters. However, assemblies are a little more formal, and it is a good idea to be a bit more dressed up for them. For summer, as the weather is rather hot and humid, loose clothing is obviously preferable. Rayon is my summer fabric of choice as it dries quickly, and the styles I choose do not require ironing.

"Minor Technical Details"

Money: Salaries are deposited directly into a Korean bank. If the pay date falls on a holiday, monies are usually deposited on the last banking day before the holiday. Once or twice, my salary was deposited one day later than expected. And a few times it was a day early, due to holidays or the weekend. In Pusan, wages are deposited into Pusan Bank. I found that this bank provided limited international banking services, and did not seem to have the technology found at some national banks.

Korean banks require all new customers for international banking to sign a form (in Korean) which states that no funds may be transferred overseas from another bank in Korea for one year. Unfortunately, soon after I signed this form, I found another bank that provided international money orders which cost considerably less than the Pusan Bank's

international wire transfers. When I used the other bank for international matters, I soon found that Korean financial institutions have the power to actually ban a customer from sending any money out of the country after a warning letter is issued to the said customer. Those who disobey the warning letter and continue to send monies overseas through another bank can be banned from sending funds overseas for a three-month period. Further infractions would lengthen the penalty term until the end of the year from which the original document is dated. I discovered shortly thereafter that there is a form which dissolves this agreement, but is only available if the customer asks for it specifically.

Alien Registration Card: Everyone who resides in Korea has an identification card. For foreign nationals, these cards are arranged through the district immigration office for which you must apply in person within ninety days from your date of arrival in Korea. The office requires a letter and information from your school, so a staff member from your school should accompany you. Two passport-sized photographs are required. There is a form to fill out, a revenue stamp to purchase (usually in the same building), and your fingers and thumbs will be fingerprinted with red ink. There was a bar of soap in the washroom to remove the ink stains at the office in Pusan. To my knowledge, all foreigners residing in Korea must have this card, excluding tourists of course.

Health Insurance: All EPIK teachers are provided with Korean health insurance, and receive a small plastic folder with the document folded into it. Coverage does not begin until approximately one month after you have settled into your placement, for two

reasons. The first is that you become an eligible government employee of a specific province or city only after signing your contract at the end of the Chungju training. Secondly, it takes some time for all the paperwork to be processed in that province or city. It might be prudent to have some insurance coverage from your home country for this period. Although health insurance is offered from the national government, apparently coverage is not national; it is accepted only in the region in which it was issued. Your Korean insurance card or booklet must be shown each time you visit a clinic or hospital, and there is a fee per visit that must be paid before you can see the doctor. If the doctor prescribes medicine for you, you must pay for the prescription before it is filled at the clinic or hospital pharmacy. After you have paid for the prescription at the cashier counter, you take the stamped prescription to the drop-off window. An assistant will give you a plastic tag with a number on it. When it is ready, the same number that is on your tag will be illuminated on a large board over the pharmacy area. There is a waiting area with seats, providing another opportunity to people-watch.

Korean Pharmacies: Several months after I arrived in Korea, I learned that pharmacists in Korea are licensed to prescribe medicine, and that these services were partially subsidized by national health insurance if the patient allows the pharmacist to prescribe appropriate medications (rather than asking for something specifically). For non-emergency health care, dealing with Korean pharmacies may be easier, more economical and somewhat more private than dealing with the chaos and hidden charges of a hospital clinic.

Contract: Initially, when you accept the EPIK position, you will sign a Letter of Intent, a lengthy document which is not the equivalent of a contract. At the end of the two-week orientation session in Chungju, you will receive and be required to sign another document, the contract, which makes the Letter of Intent null and void. My Letter of Intent covered a one-year term. However, the contract I was obliged to sign later in Korea was for a fifty-week term. Subsequently, we learned that the reason our contracts were not for a full year was to circumvent a Korean labour law which states that a worker who completes a one-year contract is entitled to severance pay equivalent to one month's salary. Some provincial Ministries of Education did not desire this additional expenditure.

E-mail: A moderately expensive but fast means of communicating with your family and friends overseas is through e-mail. There are numerous Internet cafes in the major cities with services for a fee, and some computer terminals with free Internet access at either your local city hall or some Korea Telecom (the national telephone company) centres. Keyboards have the Roman alphabet. You can either set up an account at a specific cafe, and compose, send and receive e-mail messages through an address at that cafe, or use one of the free e-mail servers and drop in anywhere for your e-mail communications. Remember to save a copy so that you may easily re-send a message if the original is lost in transmission. Also, it seems that some cafes have a built-in timer that will cause the message to be automatically erased after a certain time period (such as fifteen minutes), so saving your documents regularly is important. Or, you can break your message into several sections which you write and send separately. As censorship is still common in

Korea, be careful of what you write as you would not like to cause difficulties for yourself and others.

Customs and Duty: Many parcels from overseas are opened by Korean Customs, mostly to check for illegal goods. Unless the package contains electronic goods (subject to duty), pornography (illegal) or illicit drugs (illegal), a parcel valued at less than $100 will be sent on to the addressee soon after it has been cleared. Whether the value is in American, Canadian or Australian dollars does not seem to matter; anything over $100 will be charged substantial duty. It can take some time for items to be inspected. I have no personal knowledge of what happens if illegal items are seized, but prefer to assume that you would not be foolish enough to try your luck.

Electronic goods are subject to hefty duty charges, and items may only be cleared after paying the duty, and a *per diem* charge for space. Your passport must also be presented to claim goods. This procedure applies to couriered items as well, and the delay becomes even more annoying when the courier's fees are considered. When a family member sent me an old, used electric typewriter, I was required to send my passport from Pusan to Seoul, and waited more than two weeks for its return. My communications with the American courier's office in Seoul were extremely frustrating as the agents did not speak English well enough to express themselves or to explain the process clearly.

Social and Leisure Activities: Pursuing personal hobbies and interests in your free time will help you deal with everyday stress, culture shock, and give you an opportunity to meet like-minded people and expand your circle of friends and contacts. Not all gymnasiums, pools and other athletic centres will accept foreigners. Perhaps someone at the school or a very advanced-level student will be able to help you find what you are looking for. Staying healthy, active, and physically fit are very helpful strategies for coping with a new culture and lifestyle. Other useful contact numbers would be for foreign clubs, associations, religious organizations, and a complete and up-to-date list of the names, addresses and telephone numbers of other NETs.

Local Transportation: Although a public transportation guide with maps and schedules would be very useful, they do not seem to exist for buses, only for subways. And just in case you are feeling deliberately left out, public bus drivers have a required number of route laps to finish before their shift is considered complete. This may mean not stopping to pick up new passengers if the driver is behind schedule, unless someone on the bus has requested a stop. Passengers pay the fare as they get on the bus at the front door and exit through the door in the middle of the bus. Taxis are plentiful. As pronunciation may be an issue, it is a good idea to bring the destination address in Korean with you. Also, the driver may pick up another passenger if his or her destination is en route to yours. Although you may share a ride, the charge is not divided in half. Both parties pay the full amount.

Now you are familiar with what preparations you can make before your trip begins, and what to expect about life in Korea, and at your new school. And, if you have chosen to supplement this information by reading any of the reputable travel guide books, you have a fair amount of knowledge about Korean culture as well.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the importance of intercultural development and relate some personal experiences.

CHAPTER 3

LENSES FOR REFLECTION

While the previous chapter dealt with many practical considerations, this chapter will be philosophically focussed. Three concepts—world view, societal ranking, and change shock—will provide the lenses through which I will revisit some of my experiences as a NET.

Fantini: The Importance of Recognizing Differing World Views

Regrettably, despite extensive overseas teaching experience, and intercultural training at the School for International Training, I was ultimately unable to develop coping skills that could take me beyond merely enduring the EPIK experience, to actually enjoying teaching in Korea. According to Dr. Alvino Fantini's (1991) world view theory, it is when two world views intersect that "it gets interesting." In my case, keeping "interesting" from becoming overwhelming or destructive was a challenge within the EPIK program. Fantini's theories do, however, provide a useful method to analyze and reflect on the cultural difficulties I encountered in Korea.

Dr. Fantini developed a graphic representation of what is involved in shaping an individual's view of his/her world. He based his theory on the Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis

that no language is neutral and the mother tongue determines the manner in which an individual sees the world. Therefore, according to Fantini, each language provides its speakers with a different world view.

Dr. Fantini proposes that there are three interactive components that make up our world view (WV), represented by a triangle. The first component is the speaker and his/her socio-cultural context, called "usage" or "pragmatics" in linguistics. (Examples relevant to this paper could be a KET buying tomatoes at a market, or a NET attending a school dinner.) The second component is meaning, or semantics, covering word choice and interpretation. The last component, form or symbol system, includes linguistic, para-, extra-, and socio-linguistic components. An individual's world view is depicted in this manner:

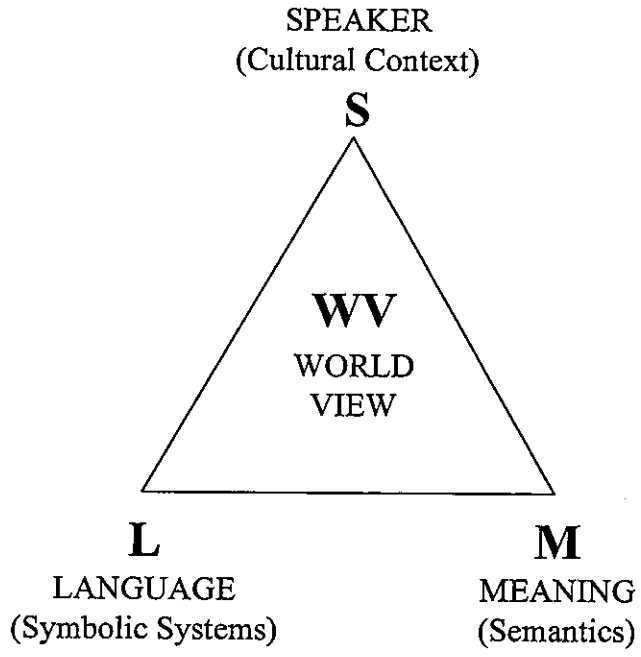

Figure 1: World View Paradigm

Two world views would be illustrated thus: two overlapping triangles

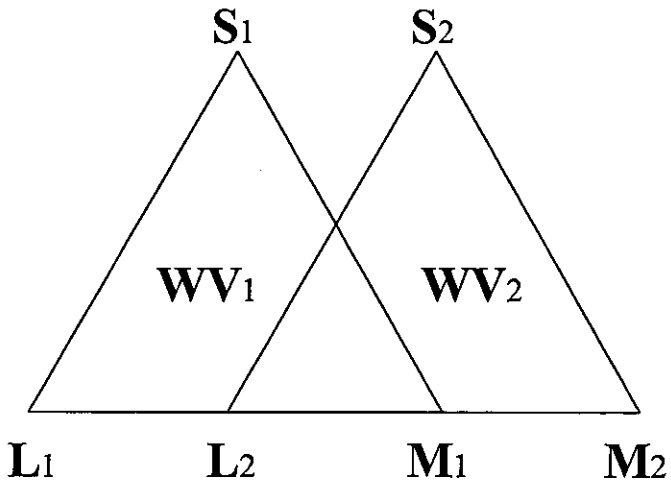

Figure 2: Two World Views

The overlapping areas can be thought of as commonalities. He writes: "what complicates matters at the intercultural level, of course, is that when interacting across cultures, we share less and less commonalities with other individuals while other variables increase" (Fantini 1995: 143).

Host nationals and invited foreigners must recognize and acknowledge these variances, and grapple with "interesting" intercultural experiences before small interactions become serious conflicts. This is especially true at the individual school level where the potential for misunderstanding is on a daily basis. When differences of world views are ignored or downplayed, as was the case in the EPIK program, conflict and resentment by both parties will most surely result.

Attempts to promote better understanding between two different world view cultures include:

- programs to enhance the NETs' mental flexibility and active intercultural skills;
- gestures of acceptance and support by the host community;
- (sufficient) resources by the host organization and community;
- willingness to participate in an ongoing dialogue about communication, education and professional development;
- counselling;
- understanding of culture shock and recovery strategies;
- clear roles and support of professional development for both NETs and KETs;
- host school support through material resources and professional development opportunities;
- arbitration for conflict resolution;
- Korean language support for NETs.

Overseas programs that recognize the importance of compensating for differing world views do exist. I have personal knowledge of several teachers who have worked for the Japanese government or for their original teaching program, Japan Exchange & Teaching, known colloquially as JET. The JET program hires specific personnel to travel throughout Japan training NETs and host organizations. These representatives attempt to personalize the experience as much as possible: in broad ways such as providing informative resource literature, and in small, thoughtful gestures such as telephoning

NETs on their birthdays and coordinating recreational activities. Though the Korean government modelled its EPIK program after JET, it failed to incorporate JET's sensitivity and personal approach into its program, to its detriment. It remains unclear why EPIK chose to omit elements of a system that had been developed over several years' experience and proven to be so effective.

There exist numerous other examples of effective JET techniques that the EPIK program omitted. JET provided supportive teaching material and resources. In addition, JET representatives provide advice and counselling resources, not available in Korea. In Pusan, the NET liaison position was combined with a NET teaching position. This individual was either not mandated to maintain close contact with the NETs in his district, or not inclined to do so. As support duties were assigned in addition to a regular teaching load, it was unrealistic to expect the services to be anything other than they were.

Additionally, there was little understanding of how isolating it can be for foreigners not to be able to function in the host language. My best resource for local and regional events became other NETs who, like me, could not read or speak Korean. This situation resulted in many missed cultural opportunities for all of us. Perhaps a Korean local would have been another resource.

There was no support to help the NETs do anything non-curricular, such as providing information about festivals, films or concerts. Probably one of the greatest advantages to working in Korea is the potential for exposure to its long and interesting cultural heritage. I would have appreciated the option to experience and explore Korea's many traditions more deeply. Such activities would have afforded me a way of supporting the host culture while learning about and appreciating its various facets. A list of concert and cultural halls, museums and art galleries, schedules, and maps, would also have been welcome, but was never provided.

As I was unable to use the Korean language for anything but a few rudimentary interactions, communication in my work environment was in English, my first language, and the KETs' second language. While I could speak English with the KETs (to varying degrees), communication was often unsatisfactory, since few of the KETs or administrators seemed to have a deep socio-cultural understanding of English. We shared neither the same semantics nor the same perspectives.

According to Alvino Fantini, I would never be able to function competently, and on a very practical level, I found even the most basic tasks of shopping, travel, and planning leisure activities extremely challenging. Perhaps having a basic understanding of the host language would have assisted or augmented both my intercultural competence and performance in Korea.

While I believe that it is a good exercise to have my world view shaken up once in a while, living continually from such a position is likely neither adaptive nor healthy. I remain surprised that even with all my overseas experience and varied understanding of five foreign languages, I never felt I could adjust to my new life in Korea. Perhaps I expected others to perceive the experiences as I did. I thought my world view would have been sufficiently stirred and shaken by previous experiences to enable me to weather the storms of this new adventure.

Kohl: Suddenly I'm a Savage?

In his classic work, Survival Kit for Overseas Living, Kohl (1996) resurrects an old construct, Lewis Morgan's Pyramid of Human Development. Morgan's ideas have their roots in Darwinism, applying the concept of physical evolution to societal development in a fascinating, yet by today's standards, thoroughly politically incorrect way. In this very antiquated model, there is a progression up from the lowest level of the pyramid starting with three varieties of savagery, through three levels of barbarism, and culminating in three levels of civilization. The uppermost section is "higher civilization" which Kohl points out, tongue-in-cheek, "Of course, *we're* the ones who are civilized" (Kohl 1996: 18).

However, while he pokes fun at the archaic Western European paradigm of long ago, he also hypothesizes that a patronizing, biased attitude of regarding other world views and cultures as "primitive" may still be subconsciously present in western cultures. I began to

wonder if perhaps this valuing and ranking are common in all cultures in the same way or even more overtly. Certainly there were times in Korea when it seemed to me that the KETs, in particular, viewed my emotional and cultural ways as uncouth while not accepting that adapting to and learning a new culture takes time, and would include the making of mistakes. Their behaviour often suggested I was an ignorant savage, or akin to an untutored child. In fact, at times I felt as if I were both. While it was an ironic inversion, it was not a comfortable position.

One example of feeling less than human appeared within the first month of work at my school. The Korean Ministry of Education abruptly announced that all EPIK teachers were to be tested for AIDS. I was told the testing was the result of an article in a national newspaper in which the author stated that he had seen at least one NET who "looked like he had AIDS." The test became a condition of employment about a month after the NETs had signed the final contract. This created many hard feelings amongst the NETs as trust for the confidentiality and reliability of the Korean medical system was not high. It was unclear if the test results would be recorded in private medical, ministerial, or public documents.

Faced with an unknown medical system, and a change in my signed contract requirements, I refused to have the test done. I held firm to my belief that officials should have planned to allow tests to be performed in Canada, before teachers arrived in Korea. The initial reaction to my defiance was negative; the implication was that all NETs were

to be tested, whether they liked it or not. When I expressed my position that the AIDS test should have been a pre-employment condition, my KET liaison person supported me and argued on my behalf. Through her efforts, and other NETs dealing directly with their district supervisors, the school district accepted letters from our Canadian family doctors stating that we were in good health with no known communicable diseases. However, the feeling that we were somehow lumped together as animals to be tested, remained.

Another personal example of how NETs were treated as "subhuman" occurred on a clear and sunny morning, the day of my school's spring picnic for the second graders. Following a map a KET had drawn for me, I took a bus, then a subway, and walked for over a mile uphill to the picnic site. There were three potential picnic spots on the hill: a small zoo, an amusement park, and a garden. Only the garden had a sign in English. I asked at each site entrance for my school. I showed the paper with the official announcement in Korean to an entrance guard at the zoo who indicated that I should go back to the garden. The guards allowed me to enter the garden without paying to search for the picnickers. I walked through the gardens looking for about 500 boys. How can you hide 500 boys? I became increasingly upset when I could not find them. Did they change the picnic location without telling me? By this point, I had travelled for one hour and walked around for about one and a half hours. I went back the entrance kiosk at the garden, and they agreed that I had the right place. Finally, I called the school; everyone (but me) was still there. The picnic had been rescheduled for the following day, but I had

not been informed. No one at the school had thought to tell me the previous afternoon or evening, or that morning.

When I returned to the school, instead of receiving an apology, I was either laughed at or ignored. Although in Korea, to cause another person to "lose face" is considered rude and cruel, my role as a "child" or "savage" seemed to preclude me from basic Korean courtesy. The KETs behaved as if I was a fool. The students were laughing at my "mistake," too; viewing their teacher as a "clown." This fact was disturbing, for I knew that it represented a loss of respect for me.

It was very clear to me that the school could not comprehend how dependent I was on them to tell me verbally what was or was not happening. It was very frustrating for me to be so dependent on a translator, or, even worse, dependent on someone else's benevolence. Moreover, I felt disappointed that I did not warrant consideration. I also felt somewhat betrayed, and consequently decided that I could not trust the school to look out for me.

In hindsight, Kohl's book, Survival Kit for Overseas Living (1996), might have facilitated a better adjustment by providing me with a means or framework through which to explore Korean culture more positively and independently. Kohl stresses that written resources are important in his work, but goes on to provide systematic exercises to facilitate cultural learning. My experiences in Korea were seldom mediated by explicit

written resources. Rather, my knowledge came from first-hand experience and a few second-hand accounts from other NETs. I am certain that steadily working through even a few of the exercises would have helped me leave my rigid position, allowing me to explore the host culture more openly and increase my intercultural sensitivity.

Anderson: So Much More Than Frustration

I recently rediscovered Linda E. Anderson's article, "A New Look at an Old Construct: Cross-Cultural Adaptation." The article offers an interesting digest of intercultural depictions and explications of culture shock, renamed "Frustration Reaction Syndrome" by Anderson. While I can readily see how it might be called a frustration reaction syndrome, I differ with the opinions she cites of Holmes and Rahe, and Sewell:

> The position of adults sojourning in an alien social system who must learn and adjust to its customs and values is little different from adults experiencing social mobility or encountering disruptive changes in society at large or in their own lives (Anderson 1994: 320).

While this concept interests me on a personal level, I doubt that renaming culture shock or attempting to de-mystify it are sufficient to help individuals develop more or better adaptive mechanisms. I have lived and worked outside Canada for more than six years of my adult life. For me, adjusting to a new culture and language is not getting easier with time. I have become more set in certain ways, and through various overseas and reflective experiences have come to a deeper understanding of myself, which includes a general ennui with setting up a new household again—anywhere—which perhaps manifested itself in some of my feelings.

The basic premise of Anderson's work is that cultural adaptation is a process of reactions that emanate from frustration and its behavioural manifestations. To compare an experience like the EPIK program to "adults experiencing social mobility" seems to me simplistic at best. An adult who travels to a foreign country with little knowledge of the native language undergoes an instant transformation, distinct from disruptive societal changes. The foreign teacher changes from a highly literate being to a virtually illiterate "savage" in nine hours, the length of his/her plane trip. A western-style contract clutched in one's hand may be suddenly worthless and elastic within another culture. Etiquette, emotions, and cultural icons are rendered meaningless, or, perhaps what is even more confusing, they gain new meanings that can be destructive and damaging. Relationships, leisure activities, and even basic thought processes take on confused, transitory or near-impossible connotations.

Fear is also a component that Anderson does not take into account. The severity of punishments meted out to students at school shocked me. I had to leave the teacher's room on one occasion while a student was being beaten with a long, thick stick. I witnessed students having their palms strapped. One student had forgotten his textbook at home and for that, received a palm strapping. I saw students scrub the stairwells (all three floors) with a small brush as punishment, and polish the metal step edgings, crouching for hours with only a supervised break for lunch. I regularly saw boys "duckwalking" through the school, and up and down the stairs, or around the perimeter of the school

field, all the while holding onto their ears. It was difficult for me to witness these events without the power to stop them.

In my first few months at the school, one of the *haksenboo* (disciplinarian) teachers approached me after I witnessed what became a standard sight for me, another student being physically disciplined. He came over to where I was sitting, and through the English teachers, asked me what I thought of discipline in Korea. When I relayed to him that any teacher who hit a student in Canada would probably go to jail and would certainly be suspended from teaching, he laughed, shook his head, and walked away. There was no further discussion. I am not sure that I would have been able to discuss it constructively any further with the teachers at that point, either. Most Korean teachers still feel physical punishment is necessary to retain authority and respect in the school, not only by the teachers, but also by the students and their parents. I learned from discussions with other NETs, especially my Korean-American friends, that physical punishment meant the teacher cared about the well-being of the student. While it was a concept that I could understand, it remained a difficult reality for me to witness.

For me, there was more than "culture shock" involved in these experiences; my entire being was shocked not only at what was happening around me, but also at my own reactions to the violence. I often found myself fearful. I was afraid for those around me, and for my own safety, afraid of new things and sometimes even for my own sanity. My

centre of balance had shifted or was in the process of moving, which meant that I did not feel like I was coming from a stable centre.

In response to the fear, I developed some coping strategies:

- I traveled as often as possible to temples;
- I frequently bought flowers for myself to beautify my surroundings at home;
- I joined KoTESOL, the Korean branch of an international professional teaching organization called TESOL, attended conferences and seminars for professional support and to find like-minded individuals;
- I wrote three articles on classroom activities for a KoTESOL newsletter, which helped me to regain some sense that I was a professional teacher, not a "savage";
- in the summer, I would buy ice cream and eat it at the beach (sitting at the beach and watching the water lap at the shore is an old relaxation standby for me);
- I visited with other NETs who lived in Seoul, which helped me feel connected to people (I was fortunate that two were Korean-Americans, who were very interesting to talk with about NET life, and life in Korea in general);
- I also kept a journal which helped me to be more objective about some situations, or at least allowed me to blow off some steam in private.

In this chapter, I have reflected on a few of my experiences living and working in Korea through three divergent frameworks. These were employed to assist the examination and creation of a more positive understanding of these experiences and my role in them.

While this paper has been limited to only three lenses, they have provided me with a dynamic 'springboard' into the literature of this and related fields. Any of my future sojourns will benefit from these reflections and a deeper understanding of intercultural issues. This is a classic case of hindsight, to be sure.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Although I returned to Canada from my sojourn in Pusan in August of 1997, I have only recently felt ready to return to the classroom. While part of this decision was based on my reaction to the domestic ESL field in Canada, I was also quite aware that I felt disillusioned about teaching and my abilities as a teacher and needed some time away from the classroom. Even now, almost three years to the day since I returned, revisiting my overseas experiences in Pusan can bring up some strong feelings. Time and distance have only started to soften my reflections on them.

Looking back over the many, usually frustrating, experiences I had in the fifty weeks in Pusan, one obvious question arises: Why did I not leave before the end of my contract? My perseverance went beyond professional respect for a legal document. At first, I was optimistic for change. I knew from previous experience that initial challenges and conflicts were to be expected when teaching overseas; they could usually be resolved through better communication and negotiation. I also expected the level of difficulties to be somewhat greater than in other places I had taught, because the Korean program was relatively new. However, by the end of my first term there, I was already feeling bitter

towards the individuals who introduced the EPIK program to Korea. Hopes for developing a constructive dialogue that would lead to improvement of the program faded. It became clear at some point that little would be changed to improve the program, and that ultimately it was a "sink-or-swim" situation for the NETs. I decided to stay, rather than to admit defeat. Perhaps Canadian stubbornness is not always a desirable trait.

While I have pointed out in this paper several areas that could be improved in the EPIK program, ultimately, I can change only myself. My behaviour—in particular, my reactions to the frustrations and some intercultural communication experiences—was not unimpeachable. My learning was great, but so was the personal toll. However, with all this learning is also growing compassion for the hosting community and myself. I would not handle the situation in the same way today, but, of course, I am a different person from one I was then, and obviously I would be starting from a different place.

The original purpose of this paper was to fill in some of the gaps that I noticed while I was a NET and to gain more perspective on my experiences in Korea. Would that I could erase the whole experience and begin again with a copy of Survival Kit for Overseas Living (Kohl 1996) in hand. Korea is a beautiful and complex country with a long and rich cultural heritage. While it is obviously impossible for me to turn back the clock on my own NET experience, my hope is that my hindsight might lead to another's foresight.

An yong hi keseyo. (May you go in peace.)

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IPP FILE ABSTRACT FORM

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Abstract

This paper examines both practical considerations for sojourners who are planning to work overseas in South Korea's English Program in Korea (EPIK) and reflections on the author's experiences with this program. The first section of the paper presents pre-departure, arrival and descriptions of what the school and housing might consist of, followed by reflections on the author's direct experiences through three paradigms: world view, intercultural adjustment, and culture shock. While the main focus of this paper is on native English speakers participating in EPIK, the practical considerations and discussion may also be generally helpful for hosting organizations as well as others who are considering working overseas.