

International PIF

What does an International PIF offer?

When another degree is not your desire, and you are looking for an opportunity to learn experientially without the confines of a university program, the International PIF program offers teaching professionals a viable option to consider. The International Professional Improvement Fellowship has personally given me the opportunity to experience life in another culture, Seoul Korea. I had never dreamt of working or living in Korea and here I am living, working, socializing, falling asleep on the subway (waking to remind myself I am in Seoul), and researching in this dynamic advancing global city. The Calgary Board of Education Professional Improvement Fellowship has allowed me the opportunity to fulfill one of my professional and personal objectives and dreams of teaching abroad without any financial risk or loss of job security. Through the support of the International Bureau and Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education (SMOE) I have been given the opportunity to teach English in Seoul, and conduct a professional development independent research project exploring the needs of the 21st century learner from a global perspective. The International PIF has enabled me to live in a vibrant city of over 10 million people, and explore the education system from a global context.



Hanging wire sculpture at Seoul Tower.



I have been placed at Seoul Jamhyun Elementary School 서울잠현초등학교.

<http://www.jamhyun.es.kr>

It is a beautiful facility that will celebrate its 1st anniversary in October. My teaching assignment consists of teaching grade 5 & 6 English with a co-teacher for approximately 4 hours a day. I see each class for 40 minutes twice a week. The rest of my day is spent researching and preparing lessons.

It is comforting to know and personally observe that children are naturally global citizens, smiling and inviting you into their world of learning as you step outside of your comfort zone to live and work in a different culture and country. The education system in Seoul has many differences from our system in Calgary. Culturally, the structures and ways of being in school are different. For example I learned that you have to take your shoes off before going into the library after I had been stomping around setting up for my class, in the new shoes I had just bought in the shopping Mecca of Seoul.



Bike garage to lock your bike in when you go on the subway.

As I explore the needs of the 21st century learner, the educational dichotomies continually cause me to reflect and further develop my own beliefs about teaching and learning. As a non-native technologist I see some of the amazing advancements of technologies all around me in Seoul, yet wonder how this is reflected in the life of schools in Seoul, Calgary and the world?

After teaching for 24 years in Canada, my understandings and beliefs about teaching and learning are strongly rooted and engrained. In the International PIF program my assumptions, beliefs and understandings about teaching are constantly in question, as they do not fit the way of life at school that I have become so familiar and accustomed to. These educational dichotomies cause me to reflect and reconnect to what it is that I truly believe about teaching and learning with a new global perspective. It is the barriers, obstacles and challenges of educating in a foreign culture, with a foreign language that re-affirms my deep beliefs for inquiry based, student centered, and socially constructed knowledge.

Stepping outside of my comfort zone to experience a different global perspective and context has challenged me both personally and professionally and is proving to be an experience of a lifetime. The successes, mishaps, new friendships made and many stories along the way, in my International PIF journey are all contributing to enriching my personal and professional life.



Warren Johnson