

# Opening Cultural Equity, Diversity & Privilege Borders: Korea & Beyond

Design Brief

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## Problem/Need

With increasingly diverse student backgrounds and diverse language speakers in our classrooms in the United States, there is a need for understanding on how to create equitable learning experiences for all students. With varying degrees of student abilities, from speaking English to being E.S.L. (English as a Second Language) learners, in addition to different socio-economic backgrounds, it is necessary for teachers, schools and classmates to be open-minded and welcoming to differences. Through understanding, and practicing patience in understanding each other's differences, we can learn from each other and form deeper connections in the classroom and beyond. If students with cultural differences are not effectively taught and incorporated into classrooms, then the chance to learn from each other fails.

## Learning Objectives

Through viewing and listening to the video presentation, learners will be able:

- To understand cultural difference between South Korea and the United States and approach different cultures openly.
- To learn about the expatriate teaching opportunities granted in South Korea from a personal perspective.
- To understand and to be aware of difficulties for students learning a second language.

## Learning Activities

Learners will independently guide themselves by watching the Adobe Spark video and reflecting on cultural differences from incidents that are discussed in the video and questions asked throughout.

## Tools/Media/Resources

I utilized personal photos and events that occurred during my years teaching English Abroad in Seosan, South Korea and Seoul, South Korea during 2009 through 2013. My personal accounts were retold using Adobe Spark's video and audio creation tools.

## Assessment

There is no formal use for the Adobe Spark video. However, it will be assessed for use in the INTE 6750 Equity week 10 evaluation by the instructor and peer review through written discussions. The video presentation may also be used for my personal ILT program portfolio and shared informally to open discussion amongst the academic community on bridging the cultural differences gap.

## **Reflection/Evaluation**

I believe that the Adobe Spark video presentation offered me a chance to combine knowledge acquired thus far in the INTE 6750 course on accessibility, equity and social impact. In addition, I was able to tie in past experiences teaching abroad to my current learning in the Instructional Design and Adult Learning ILT program with the aim of creating fair, accessible and open E-learning experiences for all learners. Although I have just begun the ILT program, I have been passionate about teaching and training for almost a decade now. My past personal experiences of struggling to learn a new culture in a foreign country and the path to learning how to communicate effectively, will help me to be aware of the efforts of other's who speak English as a second language or come from a different background. This will assist me as a lifelong learner and teacher in perfecting my patience, extra understanding and equity regardless of someone's background.

## **Audio Transcript**

Hello, Hola, Bonjour, Konnichiwa, Anyeonghaseyo. How can you learn when you're being taught in a language that you don't know?

After growing up in a predominantly white suburban neighborhood outside of Denver, CO, I made the leap in 2009 to teach English in the small, countryside town of Seosan, South Korea. I had never been to Asia before I packed my bags and made it to the northwest coast of the country in a rural town where you could walk from one end of town to the other in 30 minutes. I was unprepared for the different cultural experience, to say the least. In Seosan, you would not see English written or overhear someone speaking in English at all. Because of this, I was often approached by locals with surprise and awe with the color of my "pale skin", "blue eyes" and "long nose". But, the locals were generous and welcoming for the most part, and they would often approach me to say "thank you" for coming to Korea and teaching their children. I found it surprising to deal with squatter toilets and 100 square foot apartments with the shower over the toilet where everything would become soaked. It was forbidden to wear your outdoor shoes inside and you would promptly change into your indoor slippers once you were inside a building. Not to mention, being a millionaire in Korean Won, meant that you had more like \$1,000 USD to your name.

But, with new experiences, my mind was truly expanding and opening itself to how different this part of the world is. I traveled around Korea, to cities big and small, seeking out the gorgeous and intricately designed temples, and experiencing the lush mountains to the cold beaches. The summers in Korea proved to be scorching hot and the winters froze you to the bone. Truthfully, it was fascinating seeing such a different way of life, with mask dance festivals and Buddhist monks scattered throughout your daily day-to-day activities. And, the food was one of the most splendidly joyful surprises of all. I tried everything that I could pronounce well-enough to order....samgyupsal or pork belly, doenjang jigae or soybean paste stew, and galbi or beef short ribs.

But, the true reason why I had decided to go to Korea was to teach and hopefully help some students learn at the private English academy, KNC Language School, where I mostly taught third and fourth graders. I quickly found out how difficult it is to teach students who do not speak English when you also do not speak Korean. There was no language crossover and each class was difficult to teach by the textbook when my students and I couldn't communicate with each other. I resorted to playing charades with body movements and drawing pictures on the chalkboard to make connections to the English language for my students. I struggled with this method for several months. But, the person who helped change my teaching methods in a difficult situation was my Korean co-teacher, Eunmi Kim, who preferred to be addressed by her English name, Teresa, in class. Teresa, showed me patience and kindness when there was no reason for her to treat me like a surrogate daughter. She took me under her wing, helping me to learn the Korean or "Hangul" alphabet, painstakingly sounding out consonants and vowels while I would diligently record phonetic sounds in English to memorize later. She introduced me to different Korean foods and would often insist on taking me out to dinner where she would feed me food, a sign of endearment in Korea when taking care of those junior to you. There were also cultural nuances that I wouldn't understand from dealings with a parent or taxi driver or restaurant owner. Teresa would patiently talk out a situation, teach me the Korean phrase and explain to me what had happened due to the Korean relationship hierarchy based on age and gender or due to the language barrier.

From Teresa, I was now able to fully immerse myself in the Korean culture and through my learning of the Korean language, I was able to translate lessons to my students more often than not. However, the difficulty of adapting taught me patience and understanding when I'm in situations where I may not understand each individual's point of view. It also taught me how to be understanding of complex cultures different than my own and how you learn the most from those that differ from your background and way of thought. Every student deserves an education, regardless of their background, income, gender, skin color or cultural beliefs. English is considered especially important to Koreans to learn as it's the language of business, language of travel and considered the gateway for their children to be able to explore the world effectively, and represent South Korea with pride.

Because of Teresa's openness, I traveled to over 20 cities throughout Korea and then throughout Asia, even returning to Korea to teach a second time in the city of Seoul. I was able to incorporate my previous knowledge that I had learned in Seosan to my classes at Dongil Girls' High School. My goal of being equitable with all students, regardless of their background, has followed me throughout my career in multiple industries. From private, non-teaching industries to my current career in higher education, my experiences in Korea have led me to the desire to become an instructional designer and trainer for adult learners. I am always consciously thinking of my privilege of teaching in Korea as a white American, informing students of American culture, and how my Korean students taught me to be fair and to be open to diverse backgrounds. I really learned more from my students and my friend, Teresa, than I could ever have dreamed of. I am excited to continue learning and teaching students from different backgrounds. The purpose of E-learning is to welcome a plethora of different learners and teachers for the most equitable and most robust experience as possible. If everyone can be as welcoming to each other as Teresa was to me, then what a beautiful world we will live in.

I'll end my story with a quote from Carol Ann Tomlinson, "If I were an English language learner, I'd want to be in a class where the teacher put himself in my shoes, imagined the challenges I faced, and did something concrete to help me find my way."

Kamasa Hamnida. Thank you for listening to my story. Through differences, we learn from each other.