

Dear Angela Perryman,

My name is Vann Hassell and I was a participant in the 2016 TESOL Practicum in South Korea as well as a Freeman Foundation scholarship recipient. I just wanted to take a few moments to share how great of an impact this program has had on my life and some of the things I learned through this experience.

When I discovered that I had been accepted into the practicum, I was ecstatic. Finally, I was going to be able to visit South Korea, a country I had been learning about for the past two years. But with the excitement came a tinge of nervousness. Having never taught in a classroom setting, I was unsure of myself and more than a little anxious. Fortunately, I did not have to fly into the practicum blind. Dr. Hyesun Cho hosted several pre-departure orientations where we were able to discuss vital details like scheduling, dress code, lesson planning, and cultural adaptation. Armed with this knowledge, I was able to plan well for the practicum and although there were still a few surprises, I was not left to my own devices in trying to plan.

At the start of the practicum I had two goals. One was to gain experience teaching English in an EFL (English as a foreign language) classroom. Coming into the practicum, teaching was a field I was considering, but I still didn't know whether or not teaching was a fit for me. The other goal was to experience daily life in South Korea. I am an East Asian Languages and Cultures major with a Korean emphasis here at KU and I had always dreamed of living in South Korea. This was a chance for me to gain that kind of experience and really see what life in South Korea is like. With these goals in mind, I boarded the plane and set out for Gwangju, South Korea.

We hit the ground running on the first day of the practicum, introducing ourselves to the students and getting acquainted with the campus. Having Dr. Cho in South Korea and available for questions was a great help during this transition time. Initially the students were quite shy, but as we warmed to them, they warmed to us. When we began teaching, they had grown accustomed to seeing us around campus and interacting with us and this made the teaching experience that much more enjoyable. Greg, the high school English teacher, was a great mentor and gave us opportunities to observe and practice teaching before implementing our own lesson plans. When people have asked me what my favorite part of my trip was, I have always said that any time I was up at the school with the students was my favorite part. It is because of them that I loved teaching so much and they have had a huge impact on me.

In addition to our time in the classroom, we had numerous cultural experiences and excursions that made me fall in love with South Korea as a country. Dr. Cho arranged several trips for the group including a trip to Seoul where we got to see Namsan Tower, Gyeongbokgung Palace, and the Itaewon market. We also were able to take a trip to Sokcho and hike on Seorak Mountain, which had beautiful scenery. The culture, the people, the places, the food...it was all so unique and yet it felt like I belonged. It is as if I found a home in South Korea even though I was only there for a short time. One of my favorite memories in experiencing Korea outside the classroom was getting to volunteer at a Korean day care center for kids with special needs. Several students invited myself and another colleague of mine to go volunteer with them and I was able to interact with the Korean people who love and cherish these children as well as the children themselves

who loved to play and giggle. It was after this experience that I knew that I wanted to come back to Korea for a much longer stay, and, if possible, live and work there.

The impact this practicum has had on my life is indescribable. Before I had a vague thought of possibly living and working in South Korea. Now, it is a defined goal and I am taking steps to prepare myself for a life and a career in this beautiful country. And I have the practicum to thank. Without having had this experience, I don't think I would have been as passionate or excited about becoming a teacher, much less becoming a teacher abroad. This practicum has taught me a lot about my own development as a student and given me a clear direction for the future. And I am so grateful.

I cannot recommend this practicum highly enough. For any student thinking about becoming a teacher, this is the practicum for them. The whole experience was hands-on and unique and would be a valuable resource (and resume builder) for any up and coming educator. Even for someone vaguely interested in the idea of becoming a teacher, I would highly recommend this practicum. Students who use this opportunity will not only grow as teachers, but as people as well and I can bet that they will learn many valuable things about themselves through their time abroad. My advice: Go!

Sincerely,

Vann Hassell