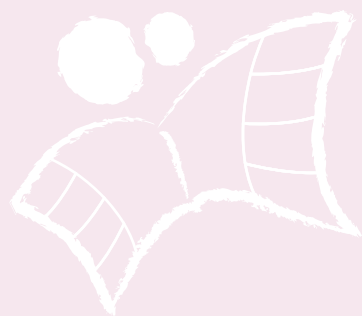


원어민 장학생 수기

Overseas TaLK Scholar Essays





My days at Hanjae as happy Miss Sarah

Grand
Prize

Sarah Baik
Canada
Hanjae Elementary School(Jeonnam)

“Good bye good bye see you again...” I hear my students’ voices fade away as they walk out of the classroom. They tell me they don’t like my good-bye song, and yet I always hear them singing it in the hallways. It makes me smile.

Yes, I am a teacher. A brand new teacher, in fact. It’s been two months since I started being called Miss Sarah by my sometimes-angelic students at Hanjae Elementary School in Damyang, Jeollanamdo. As inexperienced as I may be as a teacher, however, I do feel a lot more like a teacher now than I did when I filled out my passenger arrival card and put “English teacher” as my occupation upon landing at Jeju airport for the national TaLK orientation back in July.

Three months since I arrived in Korea and two months into teaching. It surely hasn’t been a long time and I’m certainly grateful that I still have plenty of opportunity to improve as a teacher, immerse myself in the Korean culture and explore this beautiful country, and learn and grow as a person throughout this journey of being a TaLK scholar. However, what I can say at this point is that being a TaLK scholar truly has been an extraordinary experience for me in so many ways.

Most days, the start of my day at school looks fairly peaceful. I would enter the school gate and exchange greetings with the security ahjussis, who seem to think I never dress warm enough for the weather. And then I would pass by the teachers’ office and greet my principal and vice principal, on my way to English room on the second floor. I like to come into school a little bit early, to get ready for the day’s lessons and have lunch with my students at the school cafeteria, but no less importantly, because I have grown to love the feeling of having the classroom all to myself before it becomes the most frantic place





in the world again. The calm before the storm, if you would like.

Oh, please don't get me wrong. That is not to say that I prefer an empty classroom over a classroom full of little monsters. No, not at all. For it is when my students come marching in, with such energy that I fear might break the class door one day, that my day as Miss Sarah really begins. Before I even have a chance to say hi to them and ask how they are doing, they would start demanding that I play their favourite English songs on youtube. Two or three of the girls might come to my desk and shyly ask: "Miss Sarah, what are we doing today?" or show me what they made in art class.

My elementary school being a research school for English education, or a "model school" as it is often called, I am fortunate to have access to an abundance of classroom supplies and learning resources. Costumes and props for role plays, board games, flashcard sets, supplies for art projects, and, a colourful English room equipped with two computers for the teacher, a huge touch screen display, and a fancy VTR used specially for role plays. If I was surprised by how well the classroom was equipped when I first visited my elementary school with my mentor teacher to meet the staff and take a look around, I was astonished when the students approached me and started bombarding me with questions such as "where are you from?" and "what's your name?" without a moment's hesitation once they found out that I was their new English teacher. During my first week of teaching, I also learned that the average level of fluency in English for my students was a lot higher than I had originally expected from elementary school children of rural South Korea. I could really see that it was the product of the efforts of dedicated teachers and a well-supported environment where students are encouraged to practice English, in a school that puts its focus heavily on improving English education for its students.

It is worth mentioning, however, that by no means does this pleasant surprise reflect the case for every TaLK scholar. I have heard from a number of fellow TaLK scholars who had major difficulties communicating with their students, especially during their first few weeks. Moreover, even at my school, the level of interest and communication ability in English vary considerably from one student to another, and this continues to be a challenge when it comes to coming up with lesson topics and activities for my classes.

There's a girl in my fourth grade class who speaks English/ no less fluently than a fourth grade student back in Canada, and then there's a sixth grade boy who would give me a "I'm thirteen years old!" when asked "How are you?"

One of the things I have come to learn and accept as a teacher is that not every student is overwhelmingly excited about learning English. Nor is it realistic to expect that by the time I leave this school every single one of my students will say English is their favourite subject. What my students may not know is that it was not too long ago that I have been in their shoes. Ten years ago, I would have been sitting in a classroom among them, ranting about the uselessness of learning math. Seeing students whose English ability is less strong relative to some of their peers, however, only motivates me to make my classes more fun and interactive, rather than discouraging me. For I believe that the helping students realize that learning English can be fun is far more important of a role as a TaLK scholar than teaching them a few new words. Seeing some of my students whose forte clearly isn't English actively participate in class is incredibly rewarding as a teacher.

I like to slide in a couple of pictures of myself with my friends in my power point where relevant, and whenever I get a chance I like to tell them about my life back in Canada, and share stories from my trips to different parts of the world with them. I do so not only because I know it grabs the students' attention instantly, but in hopes that it may inspire them to want to do the same. They may live in a small town with few foreigners around, but I would like them to feel better connected to the world outside. What I want them to take away from my lessons and stories is that there are cultures out there that celebrate different holidays, play sports that they may not be familiar with, dress in a certain way, and have different values and lifestyles. I may not be their typical native English teacher with, say, blue eyes and blonde hair and a family name they can't pronounce, but I want them to think that if Miss Sarah, who looks like she could easily be one of their sister, gets to study, work and travel over the world, they surely can, too. And I hope this little idea, rather than the pressure from their parents or the upcoming final exam, will serve as the driving force that encourages them to learn English. It's a little secret from my students that their Miss Sarah from Canada understands them





completely when they whisper to each other in Korean about the lack of makeup I have on my face one day, or that they're surprised that I know their names, but yes, I have indeed been there too, in a Korean elementary school classroom, a decade ago.

I find it very heart-warming when I see my students so eager to talk to me outside of class. When I step into the cafeteria, I would be instantly welcomed with a hug from one or three of the kindergarteners, followed by greetings from my students. Some of the students would come into class early and chat with me in English. Occasionally I get to ride the bus back home with a couple of my students. Those rides are always enjoyable. Other times, my students would see me waiting for the bus and share with me the street food they just bought across the road, and explain to me what it is.

The first Monday of September was my first day of teaching. I had been to the school twice prior to that day, but only a handful of students had seen me before the first class. To my surprise, when I nervously watched the students come in for my very first class, and went ahead to introduce myself, I found out that everyone knew my name already! Not only that, when I had them guess where I was from, the entire class shouted: "Canada!" It was this moment that I realized that the students were very interested about me. In the weeks that followed, I got to learn more about each student, little by little. Sohee likes to draw, Jung-Hun is the class clown, and Se-Eun is the loudest kid in the entire school. The twin brothers like to play soccer and Hayool is the baby in her class. I also learned that some classes run effortlessly smooth, and others are rougher to manage. I have now seen one of the most well-behaved girl in my third grade class get hysterical, and I have also had days where my biggest troublemakers followed me amazingly well from beginning to end of the class period.

Every week, new challenges arise. The students might get bored of my class routine one week and I would need to come up with new ideas to keep them interested and motivated. A change in one student's behaviour might affect the class dynamics as a whole. Even after the repeated lectures on the Korean culture at the national and provincial TaLK orientations, miscommunication with co-teacher, mentor teacher or other school staff may not be entirely avoidable. A lesson that took a significant amount of time and effort to prepare might go disastrously, and I might feel discouraged.

But I have learned that sometimes, all it takes to get through the challenges is a little extra attention, patience, and open-mindedness. Being a teacher for the first time, and being five thousand miles away from home and clearly outside of my comfort zone, I know I will continue to find myself with the most confused look on my face from time to time, and make small and big mistakes as I move forward. But I also know that through these mistakes, I will learn and grow. Adapt to the culture a little more each time, and slowly but surely, develop the necessary qualities as a teacher.

It goes without saying that I feel extremely privileged to have this great experience as a TaLK scholar. Through TaLK, I'm living my childhood dream of being an elementary school teacher that I have long forgotten about. So far, I have been immensely enjoying working with my students. Singing, dancing, drawing, talking, playing, and learning with them Through TaLK, I have been given the chance to rediscover Korea, a country that I always thought I knew well, but didn't. Traveling around the country, engaging with the school staff and neighbours, and making Korean friends, are helping me learn new things about Korea and the Korean culture every day. Through TaLK, I have met many incredibly bright and talented individuals with a warm heart, most of whom are currently teaching all over South Korea as TaLK scholars. I'm lucky that I get to count them as good friends and be a part of this TaLK community that is fun, supportive, and diverse.

I am grateful for a job that I love and for the students that make my days a joy. It's been three months since I arrived in Korea, but the number of sunny days here still continues to amaze me. Every day, truly is a blessing. And I'm excited for tomorrow, next week, next month, and the months to come. For I know that it is the adventures, challenges, surprises, and lessons that each passing day brings that make this experience so precious.



Gr 3-4 class dancing to their favourite English song





📍 Photobooth session before class!



📍 Yes, I get so much love from my students!



📍 Trying on hanbok during orientation



📍 Craft activity for Halloween!



📍 Watching my first baseball game during the Jeollanamdo POE orientation!



📍 Having fun in Jeju with my fellow TaLK scholars!

My Indescribable TaLK Experience

Gold Prize

**Sylvia Jiwon Moon
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Jeonju Dong Elementary School(Jeonbuk)

(Disclaimer: “indescribable” will be used quite often)

Before diving into my TaLK experience, I would like to introduce myself. Hello! My name is Sylvia Moon and I am a 13th generation TaLK scholar. I was born in Jeonju, Korea and immigrated to the United States as a young infant. I have lived in New York for the past 18 years but am, coincidentally, now placed in Jeonju as an English teacher at Jeonju Dong Elementary School.

The day I arrived in Jeonju after our Jeju and Jeonbuk Province orientation was indescribable. I sat down, alone, in my apartment the very first night and felt a sudden chill. The last time I was here in this city was when I was born. I frankly did not know what to make of this feeling except that I knew my new journey starts now, in the city of my birthplace and at this very moment.

I can distinctly remember the very first day at Jeonju Dong. My mentor teacher and I walked around the entire school to introduce myself. The facial reactions from teachers and students alike were, as I'd like to put it, confuzzled (confused + puzzled). I could not blame them; here was this person who looked like a native-Korean claiming to be their foreign English teacher for the next year! Even till today I constantly hear students whispering to their friends, “그분이 우리 원어민선생님이야?” (“She is our native-English teacher?!”) and witness their eyes open wide when I respond to their greeting-bows with a “hi!” or “hello!” While my school has had several TaLK teachers in the past, I am the first Korean-American to be teaching here.

The students and teachers at Jeonju Dong were not the only people who were in for a surprise. After arriving to South Korea, one concern that even took me aback was the confusion in my own identity. As a Korean-American, I feel glued in the middle of being





categorized as a native Korean or as a foreigner. I am commonly not seen as a foreigner (for I look Korean), but am not considered a native Korean because frankly, I am not. I myself struggle with the language as well and have yet to entirely adapt to the culture differences. Therefore, like the first day of school, I completely understood the teachers/students' confusions of having an ethnic Korean English teacher. for I was as just confused as they were.

Everyone automatically assumes it is much easier being Korean while teaching English here in Korea. It definitely gives me an upper hand knowing a proficient amount of Korean as well (a big thanks to my mother for making me attend Korean school as a kid!) but I consider being Korean-American English teacher in Korea has struggles of its own. For example, one of the very first things a teacher at my school told me was to avoid speaking any Korean to the students. This is probably one of the most difficult, yet understanding parts about my job. Because I look Korean, students will always speak to me in Korean before anything else (even if they know I am their English teacher). However, I must put on a puzzled face and act as if I have no idea what they are saying (though of course if they begin talking faster and longer, I end up actually having no clue what they are talking about). There are often moments where I wish I could speak a few words here and there in Korean during class; however, I bite my tongue and hold it in for the fear that the instant I open my mouth and speak Korean, students will unveil my identity and become acclimated to communicating with me solely in Korean.

In this perspective, every day is a new beginning. It is another day where I come to learn more of my students' personalities, more of my own teaching abilities, and more about myself. When I tell friends and family that I teach 15 hours a week to a total of 30 students, they assume it is a piece of cake. But imagine that cake being an extremely large one, and in an unreachable distance. It will be challenging, but with enough determination and persistence, you will soon enough satisfy that sweet tooth. I would be lying if I did not say that there are days where they either want to put their head down for the entire class or gather an enormous amount of energy to scream on top of their lungs or stand up on tables and chairs. While these kinds of days leave me completely drained, I am always powered back up with full fuel from the other days where my students

unexpectedly appear as though they have descended from heaven as perfect, well-behaved angels. When it comes to class time, a big struggle with my students is motivation, or the lack thereof. They are just like us in middle school when we had to begin learning a foreign language except they are learning at a way earlier age. Desperate to find a better arrangement with these students, I went from routinely creating PowerPoints of various lessons to substituting more and more hands-on activities. This change in my teaching approach made all the difference; my students became much more receptive to what we were learning along with revealing their true personas. My first and second graders are the entertainers. They love to sing, dance, and do the occasional acting when I read aloud a story (my female students always fight for the Goldilocks role when we read Goldilocks and the Three Bears). My third and fourth graders are the artists. Buying crafts materials (scissors, construction paper, stickers, etc.) was one of the best investments for they love to color, draw, and create crafts for whatever lesson plan we are doing (a lesson on our future dreams also became an activity where we created dream catchers). Lastly, my fifth and sixth graders are the comedians - they are difficult to please and often prefer just sitting and talking; but once they talk, the funniest comments come out of their mouths. On a lesson of "If I were a teacher..." some of the responses were "If I were a teacher, I would go to school" and "If I were a teacher, I would set iPads and Playstation in the classroom". Not the ideal answers I hoped for but definitely provided a good laugh.

Being a teacher at Jeonju Dong Elementary for these past three months have been fulfilling in so many ways. In a sense, because many students come from middle-class family backgrounds, they are so humble and grateful. The technology in my classroom is a bit outdated so there are frequent days where my projector and printer decide to take a vacation and leave me deserted. During one of these particular days with my first and second graders, I did not have any other materials or a plan B. I decided to wing it and create a short, simple game with a small ball that was just gathering dust in the closet. The students would throw the ball to each other while calling out the alphabet and a word that began with that letter. I merely wanted to use this plain game to pass time until the end of class but it turns out my kids were having the times of their lives. They would





throw it high in the air and far away, all while giggling and laughing their behinds off; they found much more joy utilizing one play ball than with any other piece of technology I ever used. On this particular day, I was especially grateful to my students. Their participation and enthusiasm saved a disastrous lesson plan to an enjoyable one. They were the heroes that day.

My heart melts every time a student high-fives me in the hallways, generously shares a piece of his/her candy or bread, or says a simple “thank you” after class ends. There is one particular female student, Irene, who I often give the “angry teacher” look to for acting out all the time in class. But the next day comes, I see her in the school cafeteria and she has the widest smile on her face while waving hi to me as I pass. At the end of every day, it is impossible to hold any sort of spite against these students. Every morning, I commute the 20-minutes walk to school not knowing what to expect that day. But every afternoon, I commute the 20-minutes walk back home fully content because I love what I do and being able to teach the students at Jeonju Dong has provided me a new kind of joy I never experienced with any prior commitment I’ve had.

For this reason, participating in the TaLK program this far has been indescribable.

I say indescribable because it is a combination of many feelings. Gratitude, happiness, fascination, and wealth.

Gratitude - Not only am I gaining the teaching experience I desired in determining if graduate school for education is right for me, but also becoming exposed to so much more of my own culture than I could have imagined. Since my time here, I met family members who I have never met before, visited my grandfather’s grave for the first time, saw the beauty of Jeju Island during our TaLK orientation (where my parents spent their honeymoon), and tried a mountainous amount of authentic Korean dishes which I have to admit, topples my parents’ cooking only by a slight point.

Happiness - I thought the happiest moment of my life was that last final exam of my undergraduate career, but in fact I experienced an equal amount of happiness while living in Korea whether it be the moment where my student, Elsa, who consistently struggled with the alphabet was able to read her very first word without any assistance, or the day my students gave me birthday hugs and cards when I never recalled telling them my

birthday; these moments brought me just as much bliss as that day I stepped out of that lecture hall after finishing my last final as a college student.

Fascination - To keep it short, Korea’s efficient transportation system, fitness gyms with saunas, extremely fast delivery, a massive bibimbap bowl during Jeonju’s Bibimbap Festival that feeds over 300 people, and my students’ abilities to memorize the names of over 30 idol groups by heart. If that isn’t fascinating, I don’t know what is!

Wealth - Not the wealth you find in your bank account on the 25th of every month, but rather physical and inner wealth. Seeing the stunning views of Haeundae beach in Busan, Seongsan Ilchulbong Peak in Jeju Island, Gyeongbokgung Palace, and walking through the Hanok villages in Bukchon and Jeonju amongst many more left me completely infatuated with Korea. I feel as though I gained an abundant amount of wealth for being exposed to the gems of another country after being hemmed inside New York City for the past 18 years.

Although it has only been three months, I am confident to say that day-by-day, the confusion I have felt when I first arrived to my school is being waned down. As I help my students unearth their fullest potential in learning a foreign language, they are, in return, enhancing my eagerness to work harder in providing more efficient, enjoyable lessons and providing the perspective of how school life would have been for me 15 years ago if I never left Jeonju. When the time comes for me to leave Korea and return back home, friends and family members will without a doubt ask how my experience was teaching in Korea. Contemplating on what to say, you and I both know what the response will be: indescribable! Being a TaLK scholar is difficult to express purely through words because the opportunity to experience it in person is what makes it so grand. Before I left for Korea to embark on this teaching journey, I wrote in my journal:

“I know there will be days where I feel lost, confused, and lonely. I believe these are a few consequences of entering a new country and becoming independent.

But I hope and pray in return that there will be equal days of happiness where I am able to meet great people and make treasurable memories with my students.”





I have never written such truer words-being a part of the TaLK program is one of the greatest milestones in my life and one that I am fondly proud of. With the remaining months that only seem to be flying by, I hope to continue exploring more of Korea's culture, festivals, and attractions as well as continue encouraging my students' interests in learning English. I want to provide them as much excitement and happiness as I received since the first day I arrived here.



💡 Dream catchers made by 3rd and 4th graders.

💡 Making our very own Jeonju Bibimbap during Jeonbuk Province orientation



💡 My first field trip with the fifth grade class. Students' parents generously provided the teachers with lunch. Kimbap heaven!

💡 Halloween Day, also my birthday! My 1st and 2nd graders posing with their Halloween masks and candy




💡 Two 4th graders staying after class to perform "Let It Go" on the recorder.



💡 After our very first practicum lesson plan during Jeju orientation. Group G!





**Silver
Prize**

The End of One Journey...

Joseph Whang
USA
Songra Elementary School(Gyeongbuk)

Gently now, everyone will get a turn. 10...9...8...7...

I keep my eyes on the clock, counting down the seconds, making sure every student gets their precious 10-second moment. The students are all anxious and excited, some rubbing their hands in anticipation while others shift uneasily in their chairs. It's been two weeks since they saw the mystery item but they were never permitted to hold it in their hands, like fine silverware or china to be used only during the holidays. But finally, their long wait has ended; after crowding around their new English teacher, they were seated in a circle and, one by one, were permitted to hold the class mascot in their shaking hands for a short but exciting few seconds. I watch as the yellow doll is quietly passed from child to child, grateful for the effect that it's had on my class. Maybe this won't be so difficult after all, I ponder as I continue to watch the time.

That was me, nearly three years ago and just starting my time with TaLK. I arrived at Incheon International Airport on a cold, February evening not knowing exactly what to expect but nonetheless enthusiastic to finish orientation and begin teaching at my school in early March. Like most of my 8th Generation colleagues, we knew very little about our respective areas: I was placed in Pohang, the largest and most populated city in Gyeongsangbuk-do; other than POSCO steel mill and numerous beaches, Pohang largely remained a mystery to me, although I vowed to change that in the year I was to live there.

Regional orientation soon ended and I was escorted out of the English Village in Chilgok by my Head Teacher and we began the journey to Pohang. Along the way, we

exchanged short remarks about our respective lives and what I could expect out of the small school and community at which I would be staying and teaching. We had a quick lunch then arrived at a local coffee shop where I met the Vice Principal. It was at this meeting when a small and simple request was made of me: to never speak Korean directly to the students while teaching. According to him, the whole point of participating in the TaLK program and inviting native English speakers to teach at the school was to enhance the conversational skills of the students; this could not be possible if the teacher spoke Korean in the classroom, as the students would become complacent (even indolent) and gradually lose motivation to learn English. It was a sentiment that I shared so I promptly agreed to those terms.

The first few weeks were interesting, to say the least. While my Mentor Teacher and the rest of the staff at Songra Elementary were helpful and accommodating, I was teaching alone in the classroom. The planning and execution of each lesson was left entirely up to me and the great majority of the students' English education became my responsibility. In addition to, I was trying to swiftly learn their Korean names as to establish good rapport, as my previously prescribed agreement would prohibit me from speaking any Korean to them. The students for the most part were responsive and cooperative, yet intrigued that their 'foreign' English teacher looked nothing like a foreigner; rather he appeared to be a native Korean who happened to have mastered the English language. After about three weeks of teaching, my status as the newcomer faded and the students' minds started to drift during my lessons. I had to come up with a new approach.

I cannot recall the exact moment when I wanted to utilize a class mascot but I think the idea started forming around the middle of national orientation. After one of the lectures, I was anticipating the behavior of my future students and wanted to find a way to motivate them. Perhaps a stuffed animal of some sort or a robot, I thought. Toward the end of orientation, a group of us went bowling and one of my friends in the group had purchased a stuffed Pikachu doll. Immediately, I was drawn to it and decided to buy one





myself. Upon moving to my apartment in north Pohang, however, the doll was pushed aside and left sitting on my bookshelf, still wrapped and unopened. I suppose I was having second thoughts on the idea altogether and doubting its overall effectiveness. However, after three week's time, I knew I had to give it a try if I was to regain some control over my classes.

Following the advice of some more experienced foreign teachers in my town, I took Pikachu to school in a brown paper bag that was completely sealed and left it at the front of the classroom. As the first students of the day marched in, they took notice and immediately asked what the mystery item was. I simply shrugged off the question and continued on with the lesson, occasionally nudging the bag or picking it up and gently shaking it. Eventually, I piqued their interests long enough that I finally revealed the bag's contents. To my pleasant surprise, even the older students were excited and asked if they could hold it even for a few seconds. Only if you're very good and listen to me, I would say. This continued for a few weeks until I finally sat the students down in a circle and gave them each 10 seconds to hold the doll.

From that day on, we officially adopted Pikachu as our class mascot; we then moved forward with that same concept, designating yellow (then blue) as our official class colors; finally, we ended with the selection of Yellow Submarine as our official English class song. What began as a simple attempt to reignite interest in my class eventually led to a plethora of other ideas that successfully helped me to regain control of my students and stimulate growing interest in English lessons.

I won't pretend that every day since then has been easy. Even now, nearly three years later, I still face obstacles and challenges: occasionally I will need to sit out a disruptive student, or call one of the teachers down to explain or possibly translate the logistics of a game, or spend the evenings after teaching wondering what activities to include in my next lesson. But I also realize that these are merely part of the teaching process and I choose to gladly embrace them. The spontaneity of my students as well as their energy

and enthusiasm keep me on my toes and motivate me to work harder to produce more interactive and creative lessons.

As I look back on my three-year experience with TaLK, I am overwhelmed by a series of memories and emotions. Starting with my school, I think back to that first day, when I stood in front of the student body with the rest of the staff, wondering how my first year would turn out. I recall that first lesson with my combined third and fourth grade classes, teaching them about the United States and whether it was near or far from Korea. I recall my tumultuous second graders and their frequent infighting in my classroom. I recall my first open class with fifth grade, a lesson on different modes of transportation that I had spent the entire previous night preparing. I recall the doughnut party I threw for my first graders and how they thoroughly enjoyed an after-school snack with their teacher. I recall watching the sixth graders at graduation and remembering my first year with both positive and negative experiences.

My time at Songra Elementary has been nothing but eventful. I see the students every day and consider myself blessed to have taught them for as long as I have. I see them march into the classroom, notebooks and pencils at the ready, with bright shining eyes and it encourages me to teach them to the best of my ability. With each lesson, my students learn a new phrase or word and continue to enrich their knowledge of English. Seeing them grow every day is a testament to my contributions and efforts, and it is a satisfying feeling to know that I made a difference in this community.

Outside of my school, I've taken advantage of every opportunity to learn, explore, and travel around Korea as much as possible. I recall my temple stay where I participated in the evening and morning rituals, learning about the rituals and customs of Buddhism. I recall the countless festivals I've attended: from admiring the beautiful cherry blossoms of Jinhae, to making my own portion of kimchi in Gwangju, to embracing the history and culture of Mungyeong (as well as sampling omija), to plunging myself into an icy pool to catch a fish with my bare hands in Hwacheon, to exploring the traditions and secrets of Andong, to marching alongside a procession of monks in Seoul.





I recall the frequent visits to museums and parks, as well as conquering Jirisan and thoroughly exploring Geoje and Oedo with three of my closest friends. I recall an unforgettable trip to Ulleungdo during Chuseok, also being able to step foot in Dokdo. I recall my two trips to the DMZ (and JSA) and crossing over the Military Demarcation Line. I recall my trips to Jeju-do and seeing the wonders it has to offer. I recall my visits to the House of Sharing, relearning the tragic pains of history but also leaving empowered, strengthened, and encouraged. From these experiences, I have not only taught my students to the best of my ability but I have also learned a great deal about Korea. I believe I have grown and changed for the better, and I wholeheartedly embrace my three-year journey with TaLK.

As the saying goes, all good things must come to an end, and soon I must depart for my home country. Saying farewell to a program that has given me so much is bittersweet: while I know I must continue with the next chapter in my life, it is difficult to leave behind a beautiful country so rich in history and culture, and that has also been my home for three years. I must leave Pohang and Songra Elementary, where 60-some students have been my own to nurture and educate. As hard as it may be, I understand that a farewell is also the beginning of a new journey and that greater things are in store for both me and the students. While the rest of our time together is limited, I am nonetheless grateful to have had the experience and will always look back on it with fond memories.

I suppose I never expected to stay in Korea as long as I did, but in the three years I have served as an English teacher for TaLK, I have not regretted my decision. The Teach and Learn in Korea program has been nothing but supportive and a blessing for me; I sincerely thank the TaLK program for providing me with the chance to teach and inspire my students as well as offering me numerous opportunities to learn about, explore, and embrace the mysteries of Korea. I encourage all prospective Scholars to take advantage of every opportunity they may encounter with the program and to strive for excellence in providing their students the same opportunity to make a difference in the world.



Taken during my Ulleungdo/Dokdo trip for Chuseok 2012. I'm standing on Dokdo. I was there for approximately 20 minutes.



Taken in spring of 2012, just after I introduced Pikachu as the class mascot. These were my first graders (now third). After the lesson, and before lunch, these three begged me to take a picture of them with the mascot.



Temple stay at Bogyeongsa, just 10 minutes from my school. Fall of 2012.



Fall of 2013. These were my third graders, now fourth. This was taken after my open class with them (theme was directions and money, with a review of numbers).



Taken atop Jirisan. Three of my closest friends and I hiked up the mountain to the very top. Fall 2013.





My TaLK Life: A Short Story

Danielle Veal
USA
Tosan Elementary School(Jeju)



Part I

“Hey! Let’s Skype soon. I’m celebrating my birthday in Seoul this weekend with some friends I met at orientation, so let’s catch up next week sometime. Can’t wait to hear about what’s going on in Atlanta!” It was an email from my friend, Mo. I’d known him since those awkward puberty years in high school, and though time and distance sometimes separated us, we always remained good friends. He had been in Korea for almost two months now with a program called TaLK, Teach and Learn in Korea. I still remember our phone conversation a year earlier when he told me he wanted to teach in Korea, and I couldn’t believe he actually did it. I also remember the voice that went off in my head during that conversation that said “Hey, maybe you should go teach in Korea too!” I quickly dismissed it. After all, I was already teaching in Houston during that time, having joined a program called Teach for America just a couple years earlier. Little did I know, it would only be a matter of time before I was meeting Mo at the airport in Korea.

“So, what do you eat there? What are your students like? Do you have a co-teacher? Does it get cold there? What do you do for fun? What is your work week like?” Mo was a good friend in that he always put up with my incessant questioning about life in Korea. This was one of our many Skype sessions in which I basically interviewed him about every detail of the TaLK program and Korea.

“So basically, you make fun activities centered on topics of English, like English vocabulary and conversational phrases,” he said, trying his best to summarize the job description for a teacher in the TaLK program. “We play a lot of games, learn songs and make arts and crafts.”

“Okay, cool. That sounds like a good time.” By this point, I was already daydreaming about what topics and fun crafts I’d implement in my future classroom if I got accepted into the program.

“Yeah, it’s cool. I teach three classes on Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays and help out the homeroom teachers during their scheduled English classes. I also have Mondays off,” he said with a smile.

“So what do you do on the weekends?” I asked, as if Korea were another planet where people choose other activities besides shopping, going to the movies and hanging out with friends for recreation.

“I usually try to travel to other cities to meet up with people I met at orientation. I’m also in a basketball league with a bunch of Korean guys out here so I spend a lot of time at the gym.”

By the end of our conversation, I was well convinced that teaching in Korea would be a great opportunity for me to experience another culture, to meet new people and to expand my idea of what it means to be an educator. I completed the application and submitted all the materials within the next few weeks. I got accepted! I was more excited than a kid on Christmas Eve.



Part II

“*I got placed in Jeju. That’s good, right?*” I sent Mo an email as soon as I received notification of my TaLK placement. I didn’t know anything about Jeju so I immediately logged onto Google Images. Jeju Island, South Korea...ENTER.

“Wow! This place is beautiful,” my mom said, peering over my shoulder as I scrolled through the pictures. “That’s where you’re going to be living?”

“Yep,” I said with a smile on my face. “I’m moving to Jeju!”

I sent Mo a second email before he even replied to the previous one with a subject line that read, “Questions for Mo”. I needed to know what to pack, what the weather was like, how much money to bring, etc. He gave a detailed reply and asked me to bring him some oatmeal cookies from home in return, his favorite. “*I’ll meet you at the airport when you*





get here. I'll bring you a converter too cause you're gonna need it. Don't forget my oatmeal cookies!"

After one of the best international flights I've been on, I arrived at Incheon International Airport with a mixture of excitement and anxiety. When I arrived at the TaLK booth, there were several people already there, some of them looking like they'd been waiting for hours. It was clear I was one of the last to arrive before the shuttle bus to orientation would depart. But wait...where is Mo?! Luckily there was free WIFI in the airport, and I'd taken his advice and downloaded Korea's must-have chat app called Kakao before I arrived.

Danielle1913: *Where are you?*

KING_MO: *I'm still on the train. I'll be there in like an hour.*

Danielle1913: *Oh no! I think we're going to leave soon.*

KING_MO: *Really?? Dang.*

Danielle1913: *But there's some TaLK staff here, I think they're staying behind.*

I'll leave your cookies with them

KING_MO: *Okay cool, thanks. And I'll leave the converter and your name with them and ask them to give it to you.*

Danielle1913: *I was really looking forward to seeing you.*

KING_MO: *I know, me too. We'll get together soon. Welcome to Korea!*

Danielle1913: *Thanks Mo! Be safe. Talk to you soon!*

Orientation reminded me a lot of college, except this time I absolutely loved my roommate, Helen from Australia. The food was interesting but good, something like a Western/Korean hybrid. I loved the introductory Korean classes, though I realized I had a lot to learn if I wanted to survive. I met some really great people and even won first place at the Talent Show with my spoken word poetry. I couldn't have asked for a better introduction to Korea.



Part III

"Do you like Lil' Wayne?" It was my first day of school at Tosan Elementary School, in between classes and my co-teacher Psy pulled out his iPhone to show me several pictures he took during his semester abroad in the US.

"Yes! I love Lil' Wayne!" I was surprised at first, were we talking about the same person? In my head I was thinking, 'he must be thinking of someone else'.

"I went to his concert," he says, flipping through pictures and videos. "Have you been to Las Vegas? I went there. What about the Grand Canyon?" Wow. This guy had been more places in the US than me and I've lived there my whole life. I was relieved in a sense. We had a few things in common and building a friendship was easier than I'd expected. In the coming months, I'd be a regular third wheel on hikes, festivals, and Friday night meals with him and his girlfriend.

It took a few weeks for my students to warm up to me, and vice versa, but once they did, we were like a small family, with my big afro hair being the family pet. The kids, both boys and girls, became fascinated with all the tricks my hair could do, and I surely enjoyed showing them.

"This is for you!" It was one of my fourth graders, You Min, holding out a small piece of candy.

"For me?!" I said with the biggest, brightest smile on my face. This became a regular routine, my students bringing me small gifts, sometimes handmade flowers or stickers or some sweet that I'm sure was hard for them to part with. She nodded.

"Awwwww! Thank you! Gam-sam-ni-da!" She laughed a big laugh, which is what they all did whenever I attempted any Korean at all. I usually laughed right behind them. On the days when my co-teacher was not available, we would communicate via Google translator, taking turns typing messages into the box to be translated, often misconstruing the details but not to the point where we didn't understand each other. They really loved it and would crowd around my desk, taking turns typing Hangul into the box, then waiting for my reaction.

I loved being at school, interacting with my students. Sports Day made me feel special.





All of the students' parents were present for a day of fun and physical activity. I even got to play in a few of the games and embarrass myself in front of the entire school.

"Who is she?" I asked my student Jae In, pointing to who I clearly knew to be his mother. We had just wrapped up our unit on the family and students learned how to introduce their family to others. I always loved the opportunity for real world application of classroom learning.

"She is my mom." He said it with somewhat of a smirk, fully recognizing my intent. 'Yes, correct!' I thought in my head. At that moment, I was a proud teacher. He looked up at his mom, pointed at me, and said something in Korean. In my head he said, 'This is the best teacher I've ever had!', though I'm sure it was closer to 'This lady with the big hair is my English teacher'. I replayed this scenario several times throughout the day, administering field tests to all my students, most of them passing with flying colors.



Part IV

It was my first time on a ferry and I was particularly excited. A bunch of us Jeju TaLKers were headed to the Jindo Miracle Sea-Parting Festival, a once a year opportunity to see the seas mysteriously part. Visitors of the festival would be able to physically walk from the mainland directly across to the water to a nearby island. Cool, right?

"How long is it going to take to get there?" I asked Yoora, a Korean Talk Scholar and native Jeju-er who had served as our tour guide/translator/directory/chauffeur since we arrived in Jeju.

"Maybe it will take 3 hours on the ferry, and then 2 hours by bus." She said with a faint smile, hoping to lighten the mood.

"I have cards! Who wants to play cards?" That was Valmir, a TaLK Scholar who was always the life of the party. "C'mon guys. You know you wanna play!"

So a bunch of us sat around, snacked on bread from the local bakery and apples that Yoora so kindly supplied for us and played some confusing but fun card game that Valmir taught us. I looked around on the ferry. Everyone was pretty much doing the same

thing-groups of Korean locals, sitting on the floor in circles with their shoes off, playing games, eating, laughing and being merry. Camaraderie was all over the place and I loved it.

When we arrived at the bus terminal we were greeted by a swarm of other TaLK scholars from other regions. Apparently this festival was the place to be.

"Helen! What are you doing here?" I was so happy to see my roommate from orientation. You would think that we'd known each other for years the way my face lit up with excitement

"The same thing you're doing here girl!" She said, with a smile and energy to match mine. It had only been a couple of months since we had seen each other.

We spent the hour long bus ride catching up, discussing similarities and differences of our respective TaLK lives. There were other friends from orientation on the bus as well, and we all exchanged laughs and smiles. Although it was cold and rainy outside, there was a warm energy in the air.

"Okay, so the sea will part at 4:00am. You need to purchase boots so your pants won't get wet. The opening ceremony starts at 9:00pm tonight so meet in the lobby then." Yoora was a lifesaver, always making sure the group was prepared and informed, always two steps ahead of us.

When 4:00am came around, all that could be seen around the festival site was swarms of visitors, including lots of foreigners, with their neon orange plastic boots, rain ponchos and hats, walking towards to coast. It was dark and cold so some people bought the lighted torches sold by the vendors. Looking out in the distance at the dark ocean dotted with small flames and hundreds of eager festival goers, it was a sight like nothing I've ever seen.

"This is crazy! I can't believe we're about to do this!" I said to Ashley, a fellow Jeju TaLK scholar who had, like me, just woken up from the 3 hour nap we managed to get amongst a night full of reunion conversations and card games.

"I know right! But look, it doesn't even look like the ocean is parting." She pointed to the water. I really couldn't see much but nodded and agreed.

Once we started the trek, I became even more excited, following the path of those in front of me I made each step through the water cautiously, making sure to avoid any big





rocks or sharp objects as best I could. My neon orange boots were great for keeping the water out but not so great for protecting my soles. We made it about half way through the water before a festival official came on the loud speakers and told everyone to turn around-the tide was beginning to rise and it wasn't safe. Even though we didn't make it to the island, I'm so glad that I went. Getting the opportunity to see everyone from orientation was definitely worth the trip.



Part V

"That woman over there is the one who came up with the idea for the Olle Trails. They call her Olle Mama."

It was my second Olle Trail in Jeju. I was immediately hooked after one of the TaLK scholars from a previous generation, Natalie, took a bunch of us rookies out for a day of hiking. She explained the basic structure of the Olle Trails in Jeju and how it's become a major object for tourism on the island. I did my own research and stumbled upon a blog about a group that does monthly Olle Walks together, both foreigners and locals. Perfect! I signed up and committed to the next meeting. I was now listening to the author of the blog talk to the group foreigners before we began our hike for the day.

"Today's Olle has two peaks and it should take about 4-5 hours to do. The buses will be waiting for you at the end and they will leave around 4:00," he said, looking down at his watch. I made conversation with a few other foreigners on the bus ride down and decided to make the hike with them. Two of them were somewhat of an Olle Couple, equipped with the finest hiking gear and stories of their many Olle adventures. I was inspired.

During the warm-up dance routine that was custom for every Walk Together Event, I looked over and saw a petite woman who closely resembled my Vice Principal. 'That's probably just someone who looks like her,' I thought, and continued to shuffle and shake with all the other walkers. As I was leaving to start the trail, I got a closer look and was pleasantly surprised to see my Vice Principal standing amongst a few other women. I immediately approached her with the biggest smile.

"Annyeonghaseyo!" I said, making sure to bow exactly how I was taught during my

Korean class at Orientation. She had the same smile on her face that my students have, but she also had an element of surprise.

"Oo! Oo! Hello!" she said, shaking my arm with both of her hands. She pointed to me and said something in Korean to her friends. They all smiled big smiles and nodded. I took that meeting as a sign that it would be a good hike that day, and it surely was.



Part VI

"Nooo! Don't goo!" I was in Ashley's apartment. She lived two doors down from me. Her 6-month contract with the TaLK program was ending in a matter of hours and I found myself in her room staking claim to all the stuff she was leaving behind.

"I know! I can't believe I'm going home already. That was the fastest 6 months ever!" She said smiling, looking around the empty apartment and two open suitcases on the floor.

"Man. We had some good times though, didn't we? Remember the Jindo Festival?!" We both laughed a good laugh as scenes from that early morning in the middle of the ocean passed through both our minds.

"Yeah, we did. This was such a great experience. I'm gonna miss everyone. We have to come back and have a reunion or something." She said excitedly. "Maybe we can all come back for the winter Olympics when they host them here."

"Oh heck yeah! I'm so down for that." I agreed, thinking about the reality of how amazing that would be.

Ashley left the next morning, Valmir a couple of days after her. Then Jansen, Thao, Helena and Daniel. Many of the friends I made here in Korea were each headed back to their respective hometowns, eager to begin new chapters in their lives, cherishing the memories and experiences they had during their time in Korea.

A couple weeks later, I got a text from Josh. He was a TaLK alumni who had just served as a coordinator at orientation for the incoming generation of TaLK scholars and was by far the most popular guy in TaLK Jeju. "Hey, I'm going to take some of the new





TaLKers on an Olle Trail tomorrow morning. You should come! Meet downstairs at 9:00am.”

“Hi, I’m Danielle!” I introduced myself to the 13th generation TaLK Scholars bright and early the next morning, ready to go with my hiking books, 2 liter bottle of water and chamchi kimbap for nourishment. “Are y’all ready to see the beautiful island of Jeju?” I asked.

“Yes! It’s such a nice day out too,” one replied. On the walk to the bus terminal, I told a few of the new scholars my story of when I first arrived in Jeju and someone from an older generation took me on an Olle Trail.

“When the next group comes, you all will have to take them on a trail, and tell the same story, so it can continue forever. It can be like the Jeju TaLK Tradition,” I said with a smile. I was almost jealous of them, they were only at beginning of the wonderful journey in front of them, with mine nearing the end. Nonetheless, the trail that day turned out to be the most beautiful one yet and I gained a new group of friends.

This is my story, only one out of the many people whose lives were changed because of the TaLK program. There’s so much more to tell, and so many more memories to be made. Years from now, I will be able to look back on this time and think about all the wonderful experiences and amazing people I met, and when I’m really missing Korea, I’ll be able to pick up this story and relive the good times all over again.

Written By: Danielle Veal (12th Generation TaLK Scholar)



Students in formation for opening ceremonies at Sports Day, October 2014.



Mo & I in Seoul - February 2014



Grade 1 and 2 After School TaLK class



TaLKers on the ferry headed to the Jindo Sea Festival; March 2014 (pictured: Valmir and Yoora)



A group of TaLKers on an Olle Trail in Jeju, April 2014 (Olle 7)



Eight Months TaLKing

Ian Kenneth-Hill Oates
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So what now? Where are you going? What's next? Questions every college graduate hears incessantly upon taking off their cap and gown. Fortunately, I was one who had an answer; however, it was not an answer most people could wrap their head's around. So what now? "I'm off to Korea to teach English," I would say. Of course, responses to that would vary from the painful "North or South?" to actual inquiries of how the decision came about. A multitude of reasons brought me to this wonderful country, but none of those motives or thoughts that I had could have truly prepared me for how incredible an experience this whole journey has been and continues to be.

"Ever been to Korea?"

"Yeah, I'm an EPIK teacher. I've been here for about 4 years now."

Talk about a first impression. The plane I was on from San Francisco to Incheon hosted a cornucopia of people. Koreans going back home, military personnel, business people, TaLK and EPIK teachers, both new and old, plus a menagerie of others making their way to Korea for one reason or another. Walking around the cabin of the plane I had a short conversation with an EPIK teacher who made the above statement. Hearing that he had wanted to stay in Korea for so long with no interest in leaving really gave me an interesting perspective as to what I might be getting myself into; maybe I'd be here for 4 years or even longer, I hadn't clue.

After one of the lengthier flights of my life, a tidal wave of new faces appeared. Names are not something I come by easily, but the people one meets through TaLK are such exceptional individuals that becoming familiar with them was not the daunting task it had originally seemed to be. Everyone I met had a different story. There were those like me, just out of school, looking for new horizons, people still in the midst of their studies who

wanted more travel in their lives, but one thing everyone shared in common was a sense of adventure. Why else would you board a plane to Korea with a head full of ideas trying to conquer this thing called "teaching?"

Orientation seems like little more than a dream now, but the time in Jochiwon was amazing. Yes, we were babied, had curfews, were lectured at day-in and day-out, but the relationships that developed from being confined to that frigid, hilltop campus are bonds that I wouldn't sacrifice for anything. The friendships made in Jochiwon are some that I will eternally cherish. They have been my life line, my family. We have been through instances of absolute madness together just to come out laughing on the other side.

Life in Jochiwon came to a rather abrupt end. We were brought together not one month before, and then the separation began. Provincial Orientation, the last leg of the journey towards teaching. Here I met people deeply affiliated with the regional education system under which I would be working for the next year. They all had pieces of wisdom to impart unto me that I have kept in my thinking throughout this experience. I have spent well over 100 hours on buses in Korea, but there is one particular stretch of highway heading east into Gwangju that I will forever remember. Every time I pass along this piece of road, I simply look up and spy the little complex where Provincial Orientation was held. This place is so ingrained in my mind, because it represents my departure into the world of teaching.

Where many scholars are taken to their placements by mentor teachers or principals, my story was a bit different. I was picked up by the head of the 4th grade and one of the fine gentlemen from administration. The two of them made an excellent impression on me and gave solid insight into what life at Haenam-Seo Elementary may be like. After a quick stop in Mokpo to sort out some residency business, we arrived in Haenam. Following a very brief tour of the school's location, I was dropped at my apartment to prepare for class over the weekend. I come from a very small town of around 20,000 people, so the bustling metropolis of Haenam, a city of only 90,000 people, is a fine fit for me. After unpacking my things, I remember looking around my would-be home for the next year and thinking that recurring question: "So what now?" My answer exploded into life not two days later.





School, the real deal, 700 students strong, full of excitement for the new school year. I can remember the film of sweat on my palms accompanying the sound of my heart pounding like a locomotive climbing the Alps as I walked onto campus for the first time. What a blur that day was. Meeting so many teachers, staff, and kids had me reeling within minutes, but I loved it. The exhilaration I felt realizing that I was to be joining this amazing school's family was incredible. Upon meeting my Mentor Teacher, I knew I was in good hands. She became my champion; whenever there was any haze clouding school life, she would clear the smoke. With her as one of my co-teachers and the 6th grade English teacher as my other, the intimidating task of molding the young minds sent to my classroom lost all of its rancor.

Months began to fly by. I had been traveling each weekend, went through a move into a new apartment, and school was flowing rather smoothly. My co-teachers and I had become fast friends; however, I did not quite feel like a real member of the teaching body. That was all about to change. Open Class, the dreaded words TaLK scholars and curriculum teachers alike loathe. This was the real test of my abilities that I had been honing for the past 3 months. The subject: colors, the class: second grade, the format: lead co-teaching in front of the entire school staff. Terrifying? Slightly. Confident? You bet. Prepared? Undoubtedly. After 40 minutes of songs, games, guitar playing, and dancing, a round of applause went up around the room. There's the feeling I had been yearning for, respect. The rest of the staff was now certain I wasn't just some obtuse, foreign joke; I could actually teach. Now the academic team atmosphere was complete.

July was a bittersweet month. I had been keeping up with traveling every weekend to wherever the wind would take me, so life was never dull; however, July represented the parting of good friends and displayed how short-lived this experience may prove to be. Seeing friendly faces depart on their next adventures was difficult, but nothing as emotionally straining as something I was to experience at school. Friday's round of classes starts with my second graders. They are one of my favorite groups of kids whom I see 3 times a week. It began as a Friday like any other until the last 10 minutes of class.

"Today is Dong Hyuk's last day."

Now, teachers are never supposed to pick favorites, and certainly not show any hints of

favoritism, but as that sentence left my Mentor Teacher's lips, my heart dropped. Park Dong Hyuk proved to be the most driven little kid I had ever met in my life. Every piece of knowledge I would send his way cemented itself firmly in his mind. He came into my classroom knowing absolutely no English, but by his final day he would stop me whenever he saw me just to say something he had learned in my class, even something as simple as: "Ian Sunsaengnim, purple shirt." While shaking his hand, it took every fiber of my being not to blink out a tear as I wished him good luck.

I hadn't realized how much I had come to care about these kids until Dong Hyuk left school. The amount of influence they have had on me is unimaginable. I came into TaLK thinking solely on changing my students' lives. Oh how silly I was for not considering their effect on me.

Summer Camp was an absolute blast. Two weeks of class with my fourth graders for 4 hours a day originally sounded rough; however, it ended up being my favorite period of teaching to date. The amount of material we covered while "traveling" around the world was outstanding. The amount of time we had together promoted far more possibilities for different levels of education, both in English and in other subjects. I was able to cook dishes from various cultures for the kids in an attempt to broaden their horizons. Summer camp did come with some negative connotation as well. My mentor teacher was going into retirement. I was losing one of my best day-to-day allies. Back in March I was informed this day would eventually arise, but it was a difficult pill to swallow. Fortunately, my new mentor teacher, whom I had met with briefly through the first semester, is a lovely woman who is more than capable of the new role hoisted onto her shoulders.

After a brief, yet fantastic, trip to Japan, I was called back to Gwangju to assist in the 13th Generation's session of Provincial Orientation. The ability to give to TaLK in this way was perfect. It allowed me to vocalize much of what being a part of TaLK really is. Meeting more friendly faces and seeing the next bright-eyed batch of teachers had me harkening back to my own beginnings here in Korea.

8 months, not the longest stretch of time, but it's stunning how much this journey called TaLK can evolve one's mentality in such a small span. The experience of it all is





positively sublime. One crafts new friendships, aids in the future of bright young minds from an entirely different culture, leaps forth into the unknown, and arises changed for the better. Although there is sadness resting on the idea of the TaLK journey coming to an end, preparation for what's to come, altered by these past months, is ready to blossom; however, in the back of my mind, I can still hear the ever lingering question: "So what now?"



Teacher's Day gifts from my students



Haenam in the spring.



Anapji Pond in Gyeongju.



Some of my wonderful first graders.



6th grade play practices



Jinhae Cherry Blossom Festival.

내국인 장학생 수기

Korean TaLK Scholar Essays

