

Wonders of the World

Education alumni reflect on how working around the globe changed their way of thinking about education



David Darts, BEd '96, MEd '02, PhD '04

NEW YORK, USA

Assistant Professor, New York University

Working abroad in the United States has been a wonderful experience for me. I am surrounded by talented and thoughtful colleagues and students and feel privileged to have the chance to immerse myself in the rich social and cultural fabrics of the southwest while working at the University of Arizona School of Art. Working in one of the top ten art education programs on the continent has provided me with opportunities to develop innovative curriculum and conduct cutting edge research. It has also reinforced my belief in the importance of investing (both philosophically and fiscally) in public education. My experiences within the Arizona educational system suggest that the quality of K–12 education varies significantly based on location, school district, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and so forth. Canadian educators, policy makers, scholars and parents would do well to take note of the educational/social experiment via the No Child Left Behind Act being conducted across the United States.

Jacyntha England, MA '04

ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN

Coordinator, UNESCO-sponsored teacher education project

All my experiences in Kazakhstan have made me realize that teaching must come first from the heart: if the heart is willing, then any obstacle can be negotiated. Kazakhstan is a developing country, so many of the resources and technologies available in western countries do not exist here. Instead, my Kazakh students and colleagues have learned to use their imagination and creativity in ways schools in the west may have lost. After years of Soviet repression, independent Kazakhstan is beginning to flourish and open itself up to the world. In my work, this means I have found in my students and colleagues an eagerness to learn and a willingness to be open to new ideas and perspectives that has completely re-energized my own approach to teaching and collaboration. I have learned that educators from completely different backgrounds and parts of the world can still connect through the common ground of believing in the value of our work and our students—and in this one small way we can bring positive changes both at home and abroad.

Winnie Lee, BEd '05

HONG KONG

Teacher, Sung Tak Wong Kin Sheung Memorial School

Most of what I have learned in my teacher education program at UBC, in terms of learning theories, teaching strategies, and classroom management, can be applied and practised here in Hong Kong. However, I've had to be flexible as well, in order to adjust to the education system here, as well as the cultural differences. It's been a great learning experience for me so far, to work abroad as a new teacher. I would encourage others to try it out if they are interested in being a little adventurous and doing something different!



Bonnie Soroke, MA '04
BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

Development Worker, Literacy & Equality in Irish Society Project (LEIS),
Queen's University

I am new to experiencing a culture where the churches still have much control over education—the primary and secondary schools here are still mainly segregated into Catholic schools and Protestant schools, and it has been extremely interesting to talk with people who have come through that system and continue to work within that system, especially in a troubled society where sectarian flare-ups still occur quite often. In the LEIS project, we have been using creative methodologies as tools to create spaces where these issues can be explored and voiced. It is very powerful work. In Canada, in the field of adult literacy education, we take a much more proactive, advocacy stance than in Northern Ireland, so part of my agenda has been to politicize the work of adult literacy tutors. My manager asked me: "Do you want to start a revolution?" I replied, "Yes, doesn't everybody?"

Working abroad has also affected my view of education in regards to the importance of international networks to share ideas and give support, as well as the fact that the challenges of working/functioning within the world of academia are similar in western countries.

For more info on LEIS: www.leis.ac.uk



Ashifa Patni, BEd '03
DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA, EAST AFRICA

Teacher, Aga Khan Primary School

Teaching in a foreign country and system, every day has been a new and unfamiliar adventure. The sun shines daily for thirteen hours, often creating droughts and power rationing, students come to school with properly suited uniforms, and teachers prepare lessons with limited resources. Part of my experience here has been to witness the change of a national curriculum to an international one. The school is now a candidate to deliver the Primary Years Programme of the IB Programme (International Baccalaureate) and so I have been able to be a part of the exciting change and development of a new school. My students have taught me so much. They are my inspiration and motivation. Every day they come to school with an eagerness to learn. I love my job. There hasn't been a day that I've woken up and not wanted to go to work.



Sarah Bird, BEd '03
QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

Teacher, Kumbari Avenue School, Special Education Unit

Working overseas has reinforced my belief that a school is not a classroom, it is a community. Many of us spend more time with our students and colleagues than we do with our own families, and therefore not only do we have a significant responsibility as educators but also as caregivers. Just as our students turn to us for support, I find myself turning to my students and peers for support. We all have something to offer, whether it is a lesson in astrophysics, coaching the basketball team, a warm cheese sandwich from our lunchboxes, a life story, or simply a smile. In a community of learners, the best teacher is the community!

