

Confronting Conflict in Korea

For EMI — To Teach is To Learn

EMI Certified Trainer Mary Lynne Rapien stood in front of the group of Korean adults at the Business Eagle Discipleship Training School in Seoul, Korea and held up a picture of a possum. Because of the language and culture differences, not everything she and Pat Scholz had presented in the Equipping Ministries International *Confronting Conflict* seminar had gone over smoothly. But because Mary Lynne had pictures to illustrate what she was saying, she felt confident that this point would be easy to get across.

She explained through Minhee Kim, their translator, that the possum in the picture represents one type of response to conflict. "As we all know, possums freeze when confronted with danger or conflict." The blank faces slowly turned to frowns. Mary Lynne didn't have to guess--it was clear that they were not only not getting it, they were a little upset. One student finally said in Korean, "Excuse me but that is not how mice act." Now it was Mary Lynne's turn not to get it. She glanced quickly at Pat. Pat shrugged her shoulders. Neither could figure out what the Koreans were stuck on. It was clear that Mary Lynne held up a picture of a possum and everyone knows how possums act.

Except to the Koreans, Mary Lynne wasn't holding up a picture of a possum. To all of them it looked like a mouse. They spent the next ten minutes trying to convince each other that the picture showed the animal they saw.

Welcome to teaching/training in another culture. As Mary Lynne and Pat learned, almost everything about us--our language, our signs and symbols, even our pictures--is inextricably bound to our culture and world view.



Mary Lynne, Pat, and Chung Sook Noh, Acting Director

Mary Lynne found this out another way. She and Pat told the Korean adults that they were going to do the Fishbowl Exercise... two volunteers stand in the middle of a circle of the other students and act out a scenario that the leaders give them. The exercise is a way for teachers to model appropriate responses to conflict and for students to practice the techniques they've learned. It's usually a highlight of many EMI seminars.

It wasn't this time, however. Koreans are unfailingly polite--individually and in groups. It isn't in their cultural DNA to openly criticize or confront one another. So imagine what happened when Pat asked the two volunteers in the center of the circle to act out a scene where a wife confronts her husband about his irresponsible use of money and how that causes her stress not knowing how much they have in the family budget. The Koreans hated to show disrespect to their American teachers, but it was almost impossible for them to confront one another, even when playacting.



Pat with translator MinHee Kim

Mary Lynne and Pat realized that if they were going to be effective, they had to change tactics. Instead of the usual teach-then-practice model, they changed to a lecture-then wait-and-ask-them-later style. Although Mary Lynne and Pat struggled with the lack of interaction, they realized that Koreans like to be lectured to and then be given time to process the information on their own. They adapted to the communication style of the Koreans. Thinking about it later, Mary Lynne and Pat realized that the Koreans learned the *Confronting Conflict* material, they just learned it differently. The biggest thing Mary Lynne and Pat learned was not to put any individual at risk of public humiliation. So they stopped asking individuals to respond and instead gave the group more time to respond as a whole.

Mary Lynne and Pat went to South Korea as EMI Instructors. But while there, they became students as well. "The moment we first met," Mary Lynne said, "they sang a beautiful prayer of blessing over us. We felt waves and waves of love wash over us."

Love, Mary Lynne and Pat discovered, is a universal language.