

PEP Talks: Episode 9_2020-2021

TOPIC: Broadening Horizons

[00:00:00] **Olivia Haas:** [00:00:00] In our last episode of PEP Talks, we turned the lens inward to speak with several NCGS trustees about elevating women's leadership worldwide and how global programming is a significant focus of girls' schools. In today's episode, we'll turn the lens once again back onto the strategic, trail blazing work happening in girls' schools. We'll be taking a close look at two schools that have developed a truly innovative global programming approach to opening girls' minds and broadening their horizons.

[00:00:36] Branksome Hall in Toronto and Branksome Hall Asia in Jeju Island, South Korea. These sister schools offer globally focused curricula, student exchanges, a roster of international faculty, and a shared believe in educating girls to be globally minded leaders who will thrive and solve problems in our complex, changing world.

[00:00:58] Hello, and thanks for tuning in to PEP Talks: Podcast on Educational Possibilities produced by the National Coalition of Girls' Schools. I'm your host, Olivia Haas. I'm looking forward to speaking with Karen Jurjevich, Principal of Branksome Hall and a member of the NCGS Board of Trustees, and Cinde Lock, Principal of Branksome Hall Asia. Branksome Hall was invited by the Korean government to establish a campus within the Global Education City on the UNESCO World Heritage Island of Jeju, South Korea. Branksome Hall Asia opened just three years later in 2012. Though located in vastly different regions of the world, the schools have shared philosophies and offer the International Baccalaureate program starting in Junior Kindergarten through to grade 12 as well as a boarding option starting in grade 7.

Before Karen and Cinde join me, a description of two terms mentioned during this episode:

- **International Baccalaureate program:** Known as IB, the International Baccalaureate program is a rigorous curriculum with an emphasis on the student's personal development. The program is designed to develop inquiring, caring young people by building their critical thinking skills and nurturing their curiosity and ability to solve complex problems. Grounded in the liberal arts tradition, a few of the specific aspects of the IB Program include:
 - Use of differentiation techniques in teaching to ensure each student is challenged
 - Instruction with real-world applications
 - Teaching and learning with interconnectedness of subject disciplines
 - Involvement in programs that focus on creativity, action, and service

[00:02:39] You may have noted me saying Branksome Hall Asia is located within the **Global Education City** on Jeju Island in South Korea, but what exactly does this mean? The Global Education City was started as a national project in 2008 by the Korean government in response to a high number of families sending their children abroad for school. The goal was

to establish an international education hub that would provide English-language education services as a viable alternative to overseas study. The city was developed to host commercial, residential, and public facilities with renowned replicated school models from English-speaking countries at the very center.

[00:03:21] Karen and Cinde. Thank you for joining me on pep talks. Karen, let's start with you. This is such a fascinating model. Bring some, some vision and mission is to be a community of globally-minded learners and leaders. And to challenge and inspire girls to love learning and to shape a better world. I, to bring some hall to side, it would be integral to its mission to open a second campus in South Korea.

[00:03:45] **Karen Jurjevich:** [00:03:45] Well opening a second campus on Jeju island and South Korea really aligned beautifully with our IB approach to global engagement, which in an IB school is commonly referred to as international mindedness. [00:04:00] And we really strive for our students to have a view of a world in which they see themselves connected globally.

[00:04:07] And we desire for our students to appreciate the value of diverse cultures and intercultural understanding. So with a sister school in Korea, our girls have the genuine opportunity. To learn from their Korean sisters and understand a culture which they may not be familiar with. In the end we really want our students to think beyond their immediate environment and value the world as their contexts for learning.

[00:04:35] So this just opened up a whole world of opportunity for us once this project was, uh, able to be launched.

[00:04:43] **Olivia Haas:** [00:04:43] So how did it Branksome go about getting its community behind the idea of the second school?

[00:04:48] **Karen Jurjevich:** [00:04:48] Well, we went right to our Branksome Hall mission and vision, which reflects really the outcomes that are aligned with the benefits of establishing a global footprint.

[00:04:57] For example, phrases [00:05:00] such as globally minded learners and leaders. Um, I exist in our vision, our mission statement each day, we challenge and inspire girls to love learning and shape a better world, really aligned with the ideal of this project. Secondly, we knew there'd be something for everyone in this project.

[00:05:22] For example, all students who benefit from the project, it also means faculty are benefiting and the opportunities for learning and exchange exists, both for adults and our school, as well as for the students. And then the chance to reputationally established yourself beyond Canada was just another great benefit.

[00:05:43] But finally, you know, we really, the team that worked with me in the early stages, we joined together in a really thoughtful and pretty much time consuming yet very deliberate manner to reach out to the Canadian stakeholders that's really see themselves as part of [00:06:00] Branksome hall. We wanted to explain the project. We wanted to answer questions and, um, You know, Olivia, this was no small feat given the multiple constituencies that comprise Branksome Hall Canada, a school that opened in 1903, all of a sudden expanding to South Korea. So that first year was really a wonderful opportunity to meet with

everybody and be assured that the school leadership in Canada, um, had the capacity to take this on.

[00:06:31] That we had 100% board of governors support and that my attention as the principal would not be so dramatically diverted that, um, I couldn't operate well with this launch of a new school.

[00:06:45] So then

[00:06:45] **Olivia Haas:** [00:06:45] how did Branksome navigate opening a second school in a vastly different culture from the location of the first campus?

[00:06:52] **Karen Jurjevich:** [00:06:52] So, uh, number one, we hired people who had a strong background in international schools, as well as experience in [00:07:00] startup. And this really proved to be invaluable. We also started small. We had a little office in Seoul with just four people while we were under construction. We hired a wonderful Korean who had worked in marketing internationally and opened many doors for us.

[00:07:19] We also learned as much as we could about our host country. Uh, we wanted to ensure that everything from the construction and the look of our new campus, to the focus on how we could best align Korean culture within the framework of an all-girls North American school, these were all important considerations.

[00:07:39] Now, Cinde can tell you about the rest because that's an important piece as well over to you, Cinde.

[00:07:45] **Cinde Lock:** [00:07:45] Thanks Karen. Well, one of the things that remains today of focus is the cultural differences and what it means to empower women and power girls in the South Korean context, which is slightly different than the North American context.

[00:07:58] Um, as [00:08:00] you will know, Karen and, and many of our listeners will as well, South Korea is a very patriarchal society and has a very competitive landscape as well. And although we share the same mission and vision as Branksome Canada, um, and we're sister schools and in every way, uh, We in Asia put a tremendous focus, perhaps more than in the Canadian context on collaboration, rather than competition because of the setting here.

[00:08:28] So we want our girls to see themselves as building relationships with each other. Um, their classmates today will be their future collaborators, their business partners, their support network, not their competitors. And that actually was a shift in mindset for the girls. Um, so. Really we focus on helping our girls develop their confidence, find their voice, and explicitly we teach them how to be respected and respectful.

[00:08:51] Perhaps that's a little bit more explicitly done than it is in the Canadian context where our girls are already coming with their own sense of [00:09:00] independence and unique voice from day one.

[00:09:03] **Olivia Haas:** [00:09:03] Thank you, Cinde and Karen. So Karen, how does governance of the two schools work? Is there any shared oversight?

[00:09:11] **Karen Jurjevich:** [00:09:11] Yes. Uh, shared oversight comes in the form of a management company that exists in Toronto Canada with its own chairman and managing

director. The governance, uh, really sits within the two schools, um, and it's separate, uh, each school has its own board and its own governance.

[00:09:31] **Olivia Haas:** [00:09:31] So Cinde, tell me then a little bit about the business and financial implications of having two schools located in two different countries.

[00:09:39] **Cinde Lock:** [00:09:39] Well, we are sister schools and we share the same mission and vision, but financially we're quite independent. The structure of the financial and business model lies primarily in the creation of the corporate venture agreement that was drawn up at the time that the school project was negotiated. And there are multiple entities involved in the project.

[00:09:56] We have Korean investors, the South Korean Government, [00:10:00] uh, Branksome Canada is a school. And, uh, the management company that's located in Toronto, quite a complex structure. In terms of school operations, though, it's not much different than any other independent or international school where school management works with the operating budget and the board has oversight.

[00:10:16] **Olivia Haas:** [00:10:16] So any, um, challenges that either of you would note with having the two school campuses?

[00:10:21] **Karen Jurjevich:** [00:10:21] Well, uh, well, I don't mind going first on that one. And, uh, Olivia, to be honest, I only see the benefits. And in fact, some of these challenges, I actually think they've been the best learning opportunities in my entire career.

[00:10:37] **Cinde Lock:** [00:10:37] Mine too. I agree with you, Karen, but I will say the time difference can be really tricky.

[00:10:41] **Olivia Haas:** [00:10:41] Well, I appreciate that. Just having to have to, uh, have set up this interview and how challenging that must be for you all on a regular basis, that time difference for sure.

[00:10:50] Let's take a brief break from our interview to check in with executive director, Megan Murphy. About what's happening at NCGS.

[00:10:58] **Megan Murphy:** [00:10:58] Thanks, Olivia, I'm really [00:11:00] excited to share with everyone that NCGS just launched a new database for the global action research collaborative on girls' education. The pilot program cohort made up of teacher researcher, fellows from seven different countries. Presented their findings at our recent virtual conference, uh, videos of those presentations along with their final reports are available via a dedicated database that's on the NCGS website@ncgs.org. And you can find that under the research tab.

[00:11:32] The overarching theme for this first group of action research findings is "feedback to move forward, thrive and grow". These research fellows took various approaches to looking at what feedback strategies, both in the classroom and outside of the classroom positively impact resilience and success in girls. And the Global Action Research Collaborative, I think [00:12:00] is really the world's first action research program that's dedicated to the education and to the healthy development of girls. Uh, participants. Um, all of the teachers who are involved as participants are equipped with the training to evaluate their teaching and in turn contribute to building to this lexicon of classroom and program

best practices to advance girls schools. And all of those findings are archived in this new database. Meanwhile, the next 2021, 2022 cohort of fellows, they're already off and running. They are prepping to conduct action research on the topic of building problem solving capacity, confidence and skills in girls. And this group, Olivia is going to report on their findings next June at the Global Forum on Girls Education Three. So I want to be sure to invite all of our listeners who are girls school [00:13:00] educators from anywhere in the world to apply for the 2022, 2023 cohort of teacher fellows.

[00:13:08] The applications are open right now and they are not due until October 8th. The theme for this next group of researchers is entitled "the Global Reset, New Opportunities for Educating Girls". And I want to add that this program is really designed as an entry level introduction to action research. So I think it's really accessible to all teachers, regardless of their formal training in research.

[00:13:38] Um, and as I noted, uh, NCGS does provide what I think is a really comprehensive training program. Uh, also our fellows have an assigned researcher advisor to them. So I think that there's some really good guidance throughout the duration of the program. I really look forward to meeting this next cohort of talented girls school [00:14:00] educators who are excited about this professional growth opportunities, certainly for their own practice, also for the benefit of their students and their schools.

[00:14:09] **Olivia Haas:** [00:14:09] Thank you, Megan. I know the Global Girls School Community will really benefit from this database of action research findings, dedicated to girls learning and development. Now for the conclusion of my conversation with Karen and Cinde.

[00:14:24] So we've covered a lot of the logistics of your unique to school model Cinde year. And let's switch gears just a little bit and talk about the student and faculty experiences between the two schools. What exchange opportunities exist?

[00:14:38] **Cinde Lock:** [00:14:38] Well, we have our grade nine exchange project brings some ex. We call it the study abroad program, and really it's more than an exchange in so many ways. It's unique because every student in both countries is a part of the program. And each year I send all of my grade nine girls to Canada and they have an experience there. And then in the spring, [00:15:00] Karen sends all of hers to Jeju.

[00:15:03] **Olivia Haas:** [00:15:03] So Karen, how do faculty and students from the two campuses connect and collaborate with one another?

[00:15:07] **Karen Jurjevich:** [00:15:07] Well, thanks to technology. And may I say the resilience of our faculties, meaning the time zone change, um, it's really quite smooth and, and frequent. Uh, you know, we also have not only technology. We have the opportunity usually once a year for the purposes of curriculum planning. Where the, uh, faculty from Canada will, uh, fly over to South Korea, spend a week.

[00:15:33] And, uh, the two teams just, um, get together for a solid week for the arrival in anticipation of the arrival of the students. And the fact we're joined by a common curriculum. I mean, the IB, the International Baccalaureate Program, it really makes all of this quite smooth because we're speaking the same language.

[00:15:53] And the learning and the teaching is very similar and aligned

[00:15:57] **Olivia Haas:** [00:15:57] Cinde, anything that you would like to add?

[00:16:00] [00:16:00] **Cinde Lock:** [00:16:00] Well, it's not unusual for Karen and I to begin our calls at seven in the morning or at seven in the evening. And it works. What's really special about the project too, is the curriculum and the interdisciplinary units that have been developed at each site, which are quite unique, but collaboratively created. It's a very exciting project in many ways.

[00:16:19] **Olivia Haas:** [00:16:19] So Karen then what do you see as some of the outcomes of these different exchanges and you know, how do they influence the faculty teaching and the student learning?

[00:16:26] **Karen Jurjevich:** [00:16:26] Yeah, it's a great question. Olivia, the study abroad program is really what we call the exchange and it's a part of delivering on the International Baccalaureate Middle years Program. And that's the interdisciplinary units of study. So, uh, teachers in each country plan the units together, and sometimes they're in person often through the technology that's available and each unit of study builds on the strength of what I would say is the unique environment of the city or the country [00:17:00] or Jeju Island or the city of Toronto.

[00:17:03] For example, we do a fabulous stem unit on Jeju Island on wind. And Jeju is a very windy island and the wind farms are, um, massive. So it's terrific experiential learning. Uh, when the girls come to Toronto, our focuses around culture, people and cities. Toronto is an extraordinarily multicultural city. So we build on that and develop the units of study.

[00:17:32] **Olivia Haas:** [00:17:32] So what the listeners couldn't see was Cinde's head enthusiastically nodding up and down. When Karen was talking about how Jeju was a very windy island. So, um, you know, this question is, is, is for, for both of you, uh, we'll start with you, Cinde. you know, both of your schools have creativity, action and service as a fundamental part of the curriculum, which I know is part of the International Baccalaureate Program.

[00:17:57] Cinde, would you please just explain a little bit about what [00:18:00] this means specifically?

[00:18:01] **Cinde Lock:** [00:18:01] So as many of our listeners will know, CAS is a part of every IB school in the world. What makes CAS particularly dear to our hearts at Branksome is our mission, uh, to shape a better world and the clear link between this.

[00:18:15] Uh, CAS and service learning, which is obviously a fundamental component of the creativity activity and service piece of CAS.

[00:18:23] **Olivia Haas:** [00:18:23] Karen, what does CAS look like at Branksome Hall?

[00:18:26] **Karen Jurjevich:** [00:18:26] We actually have a vision for a new summer program as part of our study abroad next year. And that will have a strong service and action component, um, in both continents.

[00:18:40] **Olivia Haas:** [00:18:40] So one final question for both of you. The past 18 months living during this time of a pandemic has really taught all of us many ways to connect and collaborate virtually, which I know that Branksome Hall and Branksome Hall Asia have been doing actually for, for a long time. But are there any virtual experiences, um, that came out of the past [00:19:00] 18 months between your faculty and students that you foresee adopting permanently? Cinde, let's start with you.

[00:19:06] **Cinde Lock:** [00:19:06] We've been actually quite fortunate because we've been able to be open more than, uh, open on campus that is more than virtually, uh, throughout this school year, especially. So we thank our lucky stars for the Korean government and their response to the pandemic, which has been tremendous.

[00:19:23] Um, but there's been a lot of learning as well. Uh, one of the things for us is that we, you know, just as Branksome Canada Branksome , Malaysia is a very tech savvy school. We have approximately 30 to 40% of our graduates that select to study STEM subjects and their university of choice after leaving us. So in terms of the technology components, um, you know, maybe there isn't much that we'd continue on with, uh, differently than what we were already doing.

[00:19:49] But I would say there was a tremendous learning for us, for our teachers, because when you teach online, it's easy for your students to kind of float away because you know, it's [00:20:00] harder to engage them in the lesson. And especially if the lessons are lengthy. And when we were online, we followed the regular school day here in Branksome hall, Asia.

[00:20:08] So, you know, 75, 80 minute periods, it's a long time to engage students lesson by lesson. And I think it actually made our teachers even stronger as teachers because they would focus on each individual child and ensuring that at the end of each lesson, uh, you know, the child was leaving with, um, you know, increased knowledge and understanding and, uh, collaborative interaction and ensuring that that happens student by student, um, was.

[00:20:36] You know, even more challenging to do online. So I think it made them more focused and intent on that, that part of their practice.

[00:20:44] **Olivia Haas:** [00:20:44] Karen, what about at Branksome hall? From your perspective?

[00:20:49] **Karen Jurjevich:** [00:20:49] Let me take a bit of a different slant on that. Uh, as a result of the pandemic, like many schools in north America or around the world, you [00:21:00] find yourself reaching out to your colleagues.

[00:21:02] And Cinde and I shared probably more experiences around the challenges for students, staff, and faculty to keep morale up during the pandemic and how tough that was. And I believe we both learned from each other on how to support our community. And I don't think those lessons will ever be lost.

[00:21:25] **Olivia Haas:** [00:21:25] Anything that either of you would like the listeners to make sure that, that they know that, that I didn't think to ask about, Branksome Hall or Branksome Hall Asia.

[00:21:35] **Cinde Lock:** [00:21:35] I guess I just say it's been a really amazing journey and I feel so grateful to have had, uh, Karen as a partner through this project, um, in this very special sister, uh, sisterhood school structure. I haven't said that very well, but it really is. Uh, we are truly sister schools and it's such a rare thing to, to have, um, an international school [00:22:00] set up with the same mission and vision and, you know, the same sense of curricular alignment and purpose.

[00:22:09] **Olivia Haas:** [00:22:09] And I love them model of the, of this, the sister schools, because it's so much the, of a reflection of, of what the girls are experiencing too, in terms of just to seeing that the support and the way that the two schools support each other and lift each other up. Um, Karen, any, any final thoughts from you?

[00:22:27] **Karen Jurjevich:** [00:22:27] Listen to embark on a project like this is not for the faint of heart. And you need to make sure you've got the right people around the table and really strong buy-in from your board as well as your community, but like Cinde, the rewards are incredible. And the sense of pride, I think that we have in each other's school and particularly with Branksome Hall Asia, having just opened in 2012 and seeing its growth and how it's flourished the success of the graduates. [00:23:00] Is, um, probably one of the most incredible experiences of my professional career.

[00:23:06] **Olivia Haas:** [00:23:06] Well, thank you both so much for taking the time to speak with me. Um, one of you very late at night and the other very early the next morning. I really appreciate it.

[00:23:17] Thanks for listening! Like what you heard? Be sure to subscribe to PEP Talks: Podcast on Educational Possibilities and leave a rating and a review.

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