

## **PIEC: MORE THAN EDUCATION**

It was the 1<sup>st</sup> of February. I stepped into a class and saw 24 new faces. I was thrilled! There were at least 7 different nationalities! There were people from Belgium, Spain, Montenegro, Cameroon, Nigeria, Morocco and Ireland. And everyone greeted me with a huge smile. I knew this was going to be the course which I had been looking for!

About a year ago, I started thinking about returning to school, but at that time, I didn't know what to do. But I knew one thing I knew for sure – it should be a course that would connect my classroom to the world. Having already completed my Masters, I was looking for something that would go beyond a certified course. I was looking for a life experience that would offer more than just something about 'education' or 'teaching'. I wanted a programme that would give me a chance to work with people from all over the world. A space where learning from one another and from one's own experiences was given importance. That is exactly what the Postgraduate International Educating Class offered!

Propounding UNESCO's 4 pillars of Education, we learned how education progresses from the classroom to the world. With the perfect balance between classroom teaching and self-learning, the 2 pillars 'learning to know' and 'learning to do' were nurtured through group and individual assignments as well as classroom discussions. Furthermore, the assignments were not imposed as we worked on most projects in groups. For the pillars 'learn to live together' and 'learn to be', through a process of self-reflection, we worked individually on our weaknesses and combined our strengths to gain learnings that positively changed us. As we discovered the many differences, but also similarities between us, the multiculturalism in the class helped each one of us to mature and grow. From workshops on tackling bullying in school to initiating a 'free hugs campaign' on the streets, the PIEC modules moulded our inherent capacities. To stand in front of top delegates of the OECD, UNESCO and IIEP in Paris and present one's stance on an issue in education is an opportunity that not many programmes offer. Additionally, to participate in the Model United Nations programme at a University level, and to attend a conference at the Peace Palace in The Hague provided us with new perspectives on peace education. We made short videos, conducted workshops in schools, did innumerable presentations, attended prestigious conferences and, of course, had loads of parties! PIEC empowered each one of us as entrepreneurs, educators, students and individuals. The holistic approach of the course ensures that each student gains a broader perspective on the future of education and what ideal education could become.

The lecturers and the university are very supportive of its multicultural student crowd. Leuven is a small student city and I would often meet my teachers and friends on the streets - even after class. The small homey city is perfect for such learning; there are small restaurants, ancient buildings and shops scattered throughout. There are plenty of opportunities to meet young people everywhere. This city is a haven for students. Once a student comes to Leuven, you make it your home!

I know for sure that I will return to complete the second half of this course. When a person travels miles away from home, they miss the support of their friends and family, but this course surely gave me both new friends and another family. I learned, I laughed, I grew. And yes, I can surely say that the Postgraduate International Educating Class gave me far more than 'education'.

- **Aarthi Srinivasan**

**PIEC, UCLL (2016)**