

Yangpyoung Steiner School: a seed sown for the Camphill movement in Korea

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"The quality of education cannot surpass the quality of teachers", wrote Rudolf Steiner. This is true for any school, but especially in a Waldorf School where interaction between the teachers and students is most lively. Our Steiner school was built in February 2009 in Yangpyoung, based on the Waldorf educational philosophy of Rudolf Steiner. Two years before the school was born, we had started a Waldorf special education training programme for teachers and people who were interested in Waldorf education. We carefully prepared the training of the teachers who would devote themselves to our school.

The first seed was planted in YongCheon-Li, Okcheon-Myon, Yangpyoung-gun, which has an attractive view of a creek to the front and a beautiful mountain with the numerous blossoms of azaleas and cherry trees behind it. This historically significant Waldorf School was finally built through the combined efforts of parents and the special education teachers who had gone through the Waldorf teacher training programme.

The teachers gave their own money to pay for the rent of the land for the school. They also worked hard to make beautiful the school environment, painting the walls, planting the flowers. My book <The letters from Camphill> which came out at this time also made many people interested in the establishment of our school. Our aim was not just to build a simple alternative school but to create history by establishing the first Camphill School in Korea.

Receiving the new friends

On March 2009, an opening ceremony was held with five students with special needs and three special education teachers. Many people attended this ceremony. After the teachers had played the welcoming music, students wearing the corolla crossed the rainbow bridge - the symbolic threshold into the school. At this ceremony the students showed their gratitude for the precious time they would be spending with their teachers, whilst for their part the teachers were happy to express their pleasure at having these special children as their students.

Overcoming the time of hardship

Initially it was not easy for the school to stand alone economically without any public support with only five students. In order to generate some income, the teachers ran a Waldorf education experience programme for a public school special needs class. Sometimes at weekends, we let out some of our classrooms to people who came for camping in the district. During the vacation, we also ran Waldorf teacher training programmes with different education agencies. Through a series of different conferences and seminars, we were able to emphasize the importance of the Camphill movement and Waldorf education, as well as making a profit! Whilst it was a hard time, we experienced the joys and rewards of being successful pioneers. After only one semester, the number of students increased and we started our second class. Whilst some teachers left, those remaining carefully worked at the many problems that a newly built school presents; this involved not a little multi-tasking!

The most important development was the change in the students. The children at the school were becoming more responsive each day and their attitudes more positive. The children started to love coming to school and were able to overcome some of the psychological problems they had had in public education. I believe this is because of a number of factors; the natural environment in which the school is set which embraces them emotionally, the use of organic foods, and finally the big efforts made by the teachers. For example, one boy who had a serious seizure disorder was miraculously restored to full health. I think this was partly through the Waldorf education model which lets the children be themselves as precious human beings and partly through the quality of medical services received. It was such a joy to all to see his change. Many other students who had had difficulties with low self esteem in the public school system also, within a short time, changed showing both a willingness and an enthusiasm to learn.

What has happened since?

In the summer of 2009 on the summer solstice, the first *Bichnoori* (meaning 'sharing light' or 'enjoying light') *Festival* was held. Students showed what they had learned through the semester to the visitors, whilst the teachers performed the puppet show <Red Riding Hood> which they had prepared during the semester. Parents held a bazaar displaying items they had made and shared these with visitors. The children played in the school playground and swam in the creek in front of the school. We all had a happy day.

On the winter solstice, we held *Lantern Festival*. This is where children are believed to come down to earth from their own stars and find their parents. The climax of this festival was when the children walked through the whole village with their lantern and sang. On the way, they found their parents and the parents joined them. This was an occasion when many of the parents were emotionally moved. Also at this time the teachers performed a puppet show <Lantern Girl>.

In the Spring of 2010, the number of the students increased further with three more classes opened. The school became very lively, especially during the recess time.

Each year, Dorothea Schmitz, a famous German illustrator, stayed in our school for a month and taught the children, teachers and parents water colour painting. She also helped with shadow play in our second *Bitnoori Festival* which proved very successful. The hall was packed with people and the students were very confident with their artistic performance which was much improved on the first year. The scale of the bazaar was also bigger involving an increased number of students and parents.

Before the second summer vacation, the whole school went on a field trip for four days to Jungnamjin, Jangheung and Junlanam-do in the far south of Korea. Parents were concerned for their children who had never left them before and who usually needed help in their daily life. But we managed our schedule without any problems. This included climbing Cheongwan Mountain which is 753m above sea level. Everyone managed it. It was 8.30 pm by the time we came down from the mountain when it was already dark. But the children were full of enthusiasm; proud with what they had accomplished. On the way back to the school, the students started to sing the school song "The Steiner School is the learning place of our dreams." They sang louder and louder, clapping hard. The parents with tears in their eyes also clapped as they saw their children coming out of the bus one by one.

In the Fall, three teachers joined the conference for curative educators and social therapists which is held every other year in Dornach, Switzerland. There we introduced our school and shared the news about the Camphill movement in Korea.

In December, our second *Lantern Festival* was held which was more accomplished than the first. We also had a night for sponsors. Students prepared the gifts for them, making Advent candles. Parents participated alongside teachers in the festival performance. All the events were so warmly received that no-one was aware of the coldness of the night.

As our school is becoming more well-known, the number of visitors is increasing. Many people throughout Korea come and visit us in order to confirm the possibility of finding ways to practise Waldorf education. Though the school has had only a short history, it has received good feedback because of our balanced curriculum and trust-worthy school administration.

Towards a Camphill Movement in Korea

Many people in Korea have asked if a Steiner school could include a residential house for students. There are many who think that it would be better for some students to have consistent education and care through living in a residential setting rather than be confused by returning to possibly inconsistent ways of education and care within the family. Also some students at our school have to commute for about one and half hours. One way of overcoming this problem is through providing a residential community for the students.

Further, by the time our seventh graders graduate from the school, we will need a Camphill community for young adults. Many people in Korea are looking forward to seeing the establishment of Camphill communities. Both families and students strongly wish to have a safe place where they may live and work as human beings. So I believe we will start a Camphill community soon. It is not just a matter of having the physical space for if a Camphill community does not have a clear philosophy, it will never survive. The purpose of a Camphill community is clear: it views human beings as living in and with nature. The kind of life provided in a Camphill Community should be the goal not only for people with special needs but for all people. Through Camphill, we can learn that normal people and people with special needs are capable of leading their lives interdependently.

The building of our Steiner school has been a starting point for the Camphill movement in Korea. Before long, this place for learning will expand to include a place for work and a place to live. While this will not be an easy process, I believe that we will make it, as this is the path along which all people who believe in the value and philosophy of Camphill can go together.

Acknowledgement

It is 70 years since Karl Koenig, who was influenced by Rudolf Steiner, started Camphill in Aberdeen, Scotland. Now there are about 100 Camphill communities throughout the world. Camphill has become famous as an ideal community for people with special needs.

This book shows the real life of Camphill as it was written by people who live and work in the community; coworkers, therapists, doctors, teachers, children and parents. The very fact it has been written by people who decided to live their lives with people with special needs, makes the book even more truthful and touching.

This book's original title is <*Holistic Special Education*> and was compiled and edited by Robin Jackson. Originally it had twenty chapters but in this Korean version, I have divided the chapters into three sections. The first section looks at the history of Camphill and provides an introduction to the Camphill School and the life stories of Camphill residential students. In this part, readers will notice how the values and ideals of Camphill influence people with special needs. The second section introduces the education and the various therapies provided by Camphill (e.g., art; music; horseback riding; speech; therapeutic eurythmy). It is interesting here to compare these approaches to the ones in Korea. The third section describes the experiences of Camphill by co-workers, seminarists and parents. Finally, there is a critical exploration of the policy of inclusion.

The Camphill community, which this book describes, is an ideal community for the welfare of people with special needs. There are many different Camphill communities with people of different ages and each one of them is seeking to solve the problems of education and welfare. Though each Camphill community may look similar, each has its own unique way of management.

Through reading this book over and over again for the purpose of this translation, I have been deeply touched and truly believe that the philosophy and practices described are the best for our children with special needs. I have tried to finish my translation as quickly as possible in the hope of sharing it with as many people as possible who are concerned with special needs children. However, this process has taken time as I have been busy with the creation of a new school - *Yangpyoung Steiner School!*