

## Woman Joongang, December 2014

### From the much-talked-about scene of trans-disciplinary education

#### The “five-year-old” Chadwick International

With the conclusion of the war-like university entrance exam season, the parents of examinees may feel relieved, but other parents look back on their children’s education and are concerned about the exam worries that will soon approach. We found the solution to be a better education at Chadwick International.

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It has already been five years since Chadwick International, the second campus of America’s prestigious Chadwick School, opened in Songdo, Incheon. Chadwick has become a special feature of Songdo, admired by parents throughout the country. Chadwick’s popularity is evidenced by attrition rate of less than 10%, which is lower than other international schools and one that indicates that the students are satisfied with the school. The university entrance season is attracting greater attention to education these days, and we visited Chadwick International to discover the secrets of a school that students enjoy. Our first impression was that it was much livelier than it was during our visit in 2010 when the school first opened. The school currently has 870 students, from pre-kindergarten to grade 11. There are no 12<sup>th</sup> graders yet, and Chadwick International will celebrate the school’s first graduation ceremony in 2016. Approximately 20% of the students are of foreign nationality, and unlike schools that are international in name only, there are students and teachers from a diverse range of cultures from 28 different countries.

#### **Themed classes with a hands-on focus**

Classes at Chadwick International are uniquely structured. They broaden the learning scope according to core units based on the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, an internationally recognized education program. Middle school (grades 6 to 8) covers subjects such as English, social studies, mathematics, science, second languages, physical education, performing arts, art, and music. The Upper School (grades 9 to 12) curriculum also consists of subject-linked courses that each student chooses according to their abilities and preferences instead of organizing the same subjects and lessons for each class.

We first entered a grade 2 class where students were in the middle of a class titled, “How we organize ourselves.” It was a hands-on class about the process through which the food on our tables reaches the supermarket from farms. Children were investigating the topic “rice” in terms of the growth process, appearance, purpose of use, and in various other ways in preparation for a rice harvesting session in the afternoon. Chickens were hatching in an incubator in one corner of the classroom. The children boasted that 11 chickens had already hatched, and there was another one coming. “We hold an annual farmers’ market for parents. This year, the children will sell eggs and vegetables they grew themselves, and they are going to use the profit to build a greenhouse,” explains teacher Mark Potter, looking at the children with delight. “The objective of this class is to learn about how products arrive at easily accessible markets and how they can be processed to achieve higher sales.” Even the rice they were harvesting in the afternoon had been planted by the students themselves in spring.

Next we visited a classroom called “Makers Space.” Other 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students were concentrating on drawing design plans. On closer inspection, one child was designing an automatic chicken feeder that dispensed food at set times, and another child was designing a machine that adjusts the amount of sunlight according to plant preferences. “Makers Space is a place where children can make practical things that we can actually use. The teacher signs the plans they are making, then the children make the things,” explains teacher Gary Donahue.

The things that the children were making were again related to agriculture. The theme of this class was also “How we organize ourselves.” The children were learning about the same chapter as the first grade 2 class, but using a different method. “We teach students to develop a comprehensive understanding of different subjects under the same unit,” explains PR Director Lee Hye-yeong.

“Students can expand their knowledge based on core concepts through this unit-based method,” she adds.

### **‘True’ global talent is about ‘sharing’**

We went past the hallway in front of the entrance, where older students were giving a performance, and reached the office of Assistant Head of School Shelly Luke Wille, who is also the Village School principal. As we stepped inside her office, the first things we noticed were toys and books scattered throughout the room. There were even empty PET bottles and boxes stacked in one corner. “I spend more time with the children than sitting at my desk,” says Wille, noticing my puzzled expression. “These things are for our Creative Design in Inquiry Cycle,” she explains.

A class called “Tree House Design” was taking place when we visited. Wille said that the class was not simply a craft session.

The school places an emphasis on the process of “Empathize or Tune in” – “Find out and Research” – “Sort out and Plan” – “Go further and make Tests and Take action,” which involves understanding a problem, making a plan, resolving the problem, and extending the solution to other problems. On examining a Korean student’s worksheet, we discovered that the English was not perfect, but for the question, “What type of space is needed?” the student had answered, “not so big not so small, they will sleep, eat, have fun,” indicating the student had full understanding of the process. The global era values creativity, to create something from nothing, and convergence to cross over between different fields. The teaching method that Chadwick uses is a perfect fit for the global era. However, some may question whether this unfamiliar, play-like convergence education is actually more effective than the standardized, textbook-based Korean curriculum. Wille understands that Korean parents may be apprehensive.

“Through the ‘Design in Inquiry Cycle,’ children generate ideas, solve problems, and use this as a basis to create something else. This means they need creativity, math skills, and design skills. Chadwick focuses on developing these skills. This also helps to increase academic achievement. In education, what should come first before short-term growth is to consider how much children understand and whether they have developed the skills to use information. We need to look at the big picture.”

Chadwick does also have a standardized assessment system, and the level of each year requires a certain amount of learning and studying. Upper school students have a particularly large workload with university entrance just ahead. About 80% of Chadwick’s Upper School students wish to attend university in North America and are offered a short-term stay in the United States, attending classes at the main campus of Chadwick School and even taking the SAT. This is perfect for students who intend to study abroad. With the belief that “education is more than just getting good grades,” Chadwick explains its educational philosophy to parents before describing its educational environment. The children we saw during our visit were not afraid to ask questions, and I think the educational purpose of Chadwick is all about ‘student-centered’ approach. The children do not go to Chadwick to learn English. It is only that English is used to discover their potential and further their understanding of the world.

## **Encouraging self-initiative in students is key to education**

*Interview with Shelly Luke Wille, Assistant Head of School and Village School Principal*

Assistant Head of School Shelly Luke Wille was the principal of California's private Hillbrook School for six years, leading the development and execution of the elementary school curriculum there. Wille also led the design of the Village School curriculum at Chadwick. "All we expect from the learning process at Chadwick is for students to think about what they can do for society with what they have learned through their own studies, and putting this into action," she pointed out.

### **Q: What is the most notable aspect of the educational system at Chadwick International?**

Chadwick is a student-centered school where children start off and develop as students. We try to identify the talents and interests of each student. A particularly notable aspect is the "Design in Inquiry Cycle," which I designed by incorporating aspects of the IB curriculum. Let me use the soccer ball we made in class as an example. This soccer ball has a battery inside that recharges and lights up when you kick it. It may help villages that suffer from shortages of electricity. We lead children to not only come up with ideas, but create things that society needs. These lessons embody Chadwick's core values of compassion and responsibility.

### **Q. Why do you focus on creativity and character-development education?**

These values are highlighted by the basis of education throughout the entire world. Above all, I believe human nature contains the desire to make positive changes in the society that we live in. So schools must become a place where these wishes can be fulfilled. Learning should not be for its own sake, but it must be able to produce something based on creativity and contribute to society.

### **Q. It has already been five years since the school opened in 2010. What has the school achieved during these five years, and where will it be in five years' time?**

What I am most proud of from the past five years is that we have maintained sustainable learning. We have created a reliable and systematic program that can support children for the 14 years from four years of age until upper school, and children develop a world view through this program. One other thing I am proud of is that Chadwick supports children as well as their families. We communicate with parents about whether their children need help with language or making friends. Over years, we are developing into a tight-knit community, like an extended family. We will continue to do what we are doing. Externally, we would like to do our best to contribute to the community outside the school through internships, partnership programs with local schools, and Ministry of Education seminars.

### **Q. New student enrolments are now open. Do you have any advice for success?**

I have two tips. We are looking for inquisitive children who will make the world a better place and who have good social skills. Who are they? They are the ones who can really play well. We only have three kinds of homework during summer vacation: reading, writing, and play. We believe children learn to be creative, free, and independent through play. The second tip is to read a lot of books. I am also a parent with school-aged children. I read with my children every night. Practicing asking and answering questions in English will also be helpful.

### **Q. How competitive is admission?**

The situation changes each year so it is difficult to give an exact figure (the Ministry of Education and Science Technology has approved a capacity of 2,080 students, up to 40% of which may be Korean students). There are many academies that aim to prepare students for Chadwick, but do not have the golden key to a successful admission. If parents want to make their children become fluent in English or prepare for overseas study, I must say that Chadwick may not be the place for that. Education is not about speed, but in-depth and abundant learning experiences at each step. What is important is to enjoy the journey and work things out. This is the way we should encourage students, not by demanding them to be non-existent "perfect" children.