



A BRIEF HISTORY OF ECLC INTERNATIONAL KINDERGARTEN

It began, as many good ideas do, over a casual cup of coffee. The year was 1969 and in attendance were six expatriate mothers discussing the work of Italian child developmentalist Maria Montessori. How can we, they wondered, provide experiences to our young children like those outlined in Montessori's book? From this discussion was born the idea of setting up a preschool for young foreign children residing in Seoul. One couple, David and Millie Willison, offered part of their home in Sanjik-dong to be used for this purpose. The Willisons, American missionaries working in Korea, graciously hosted the first iteration of what was to become, in later years, ECLC International Kindergarten. But what existed in 1969 was a far cry from the school as it exists today. Starting out, the Seoul International Nursery School initially enrolled 8 children of five different nationalities. It ran on a tight budget with limited materials.

The school quickly caught on in the community and by January of 1970 a directress was appointed. Anne Casey had a rich background in teaching the Montessori method. It was under her leadership that the idea to include local Korean children in the school began. Scholarships were established to allow low income Korean students from the neighborhood to attend the school as well. The goal was to enroll one Korean child for every expatriate student. The tuition at that time was only KW 3,000 per month!

By May of 1970 the Willisons were due to leave Seoul so efforts were made to find an alternative site. The Seoul Methodist Seminary agreed to lease land to the school and ground was broken at the end of May to build a new school – at a price of US\$5000. Construction progressed rapidly and on July 12, 1970, a mere 6 weeks later, the school held an Open House. The new and improved Seoul International Nursery School opened its doors for the new school year in September of that year. There were now 18 tuition paying students and 16 on scholarship. The ages ranged from 2 ½ to 6 years. In keeping with the Montessori-style approach students of all ages were mixed together in one class.

Over the following decade the number of students fluctuated and many teachers came and went. The school generally flourished and by 1980 there were 48 students. Constant fundraising was required in order to pay for the lease of the land where the school was located. By 1981 the financial challenges were too great and the school had to relocate. A house was located in Itaewon that suited the school's needs and over the next 4 years student numbers grew from 48 to 80. The school was now renamed Montessori International School in order to reflect the learning program that was used at the school.

In 1985, with further increases in enrollment, the school decided to move once again to the Hilltop Treasure building located in UN Village, Hannam-dong. To accommodate the number of students wishing to attend, classes were now divided into morning and afternoon sessions. Additional Toddler classes were added and the school now employed 6 full time teachers. The school generated so much interest from the local community that a satellite school was set up in Seoungbuk-dong in 1992.

The school stabilized during this time but by 1999 demand for admissions once again required a move to the "Treetops" Campus – a site just opposite the Grand Hyatt in Itaewon. Now known as ECLC (Early Childhood Learning Center), student numbers increased to 120 with 12 teachers.

In 2006 an additional nearby location, dubbed "Garden House", was added as a second campus to accommodate student numbers that was now approaching 200 students. During this time the school decided to re-evaluate its learning program to allow for a somewhat broader approach. The Montessori approach was de-emphasized and the school moved toward adoption of the International Primary Curriculum - a more international oriented learning program for the students. Students were placed in classes according to their age and Grades 1 and 2 were added. To reflect the expansion of the program the school's name was modified to "ECLC International School".

The final move was made in March of 2008 to the current location in Hannam-dong. Space limitations as well as financial, demographic and philosophic variables dictated that the school re-configure itself to a place for young learners only. To that end, with its move to the new location the two elementary classes were eliminated and the school became what it is today – ECLC International Kindergarten. It currently serves 170 students from 25 nationalities. It has an administrative and teaching staff of 25 professionals along with a local support staff of 14.

The journey from a small 8-student school that was started 40 years ago to the first class facility that exists today has been a long one. It is testament to dedication and desire of many people to provide young children with a quality learning environment of international standard here in Seoul. Those involved with ECLC today – whether it be parents, teachers or students – owe a great deal gratitude to those in the past who had the vision and energy to follow their dreams.