

Rewarding work of 37 years as guardian of Korean language Cho Young-ae, principal of Waverley Hangeul School in Australia

**‘Immigration began with love; Hangeul school has become my life’
‘Hangeul school is cradle of education about roots; I’m proud of my students who have
become teachers’**



Principal Cho Young-ae of Waverley Hangeul School in Australia

“It’s difficult to single out the most rewarding moment from my time at the Hangeul school. Every moment has been rewarding, which is why I’ve been able to continue steadfast on this path for 37 years.”

At the opening ceremony of the Hangeul School Teacher Training Program hosted by the Overseas Koreans Agency at Songdo Convensia in Incheon on July 14, Cho Young-ae (61), principal of Waverley Hangeul School in Australia, spoke these words as she reflected on the past 37 years in an interview with Yonhap News.

Principal Cho, who holds the longest tenure among overseas Hangeul school teachers, has journeyed far

and wide in pursuit of love, establishing herself as a “guardian of the Korean language.”

In her youth she chose Australia over Austria to study abroad.

During her college years, she experienced an unexpected breakup when her boyfriend emigrated to Australia with his family. A chance reunion led her to decide to immigrate to Australia upon graduation.

“I gave up my dream of studying abroad in Vienna, Austria, and boarded a plane to Australia at a young age with tears in my eyes. Adapting to a new environment wasn’t easy, but now, my life is all about my work at the Hangeul school.”

After settling in Melbourne, Australia, she began teaching at a Korean language school in 1988. In 1991, she founded Waverley Korean School to serve around 20 students. Since then, the school has grown into one of Australia’s leading Korean language schools, with over 300 students.

“The Hangeul school is not simply a place to teach letters but a cradle of education in our roots that fosters identity,” Cho said. “I gain energy and a deep sense of accomplishment from seeing children learn about history and culture and develop a sense of pride. It’s a source of pride to see my students become Hangeul School teachers.”

‘Teachers teach with their eyes’: Cho’s philosophy

As president of the Australian Korean Musicians Association, she utilizes her major in composition to conduct the school’s children’s choir. Last year, the choir donated \$6,000 in proceeds from a concert to help Ukrainian children.

“Although the school’s finances are limited, the children were excited to participate in the cause of helping their peers suffering from war,” Cho said.

She is also planning a concert for July 27 for veterans at the Australian War Memorial to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Korean War.

“For 37 years, I’ve never missed a Sunday class, so I haven’t been able to take a family trip on the weekend,” she said with a laugh. “It got to the point where my husband said, ‘You’ve gone crazy about weekend school.’”

She emphasized that the most important thing in running a Korean language school is “making students love the school and teachers so that they want to attend.”



Principal Cho Young-ae delivers a welcome speech on behalf of the participants at the opening ceremony of the Hangeul School Teacher Invitational Training hosted by the Overseas Koreans Agency at Songdo Convensia in Incheon on July 14.

“Don’t try too hard to be perfect. Creating a school where children enjoy coming to school is more important than outstanding classes. That’s the starting point in the role of a teacher,” she said.

Waverley Korean Language School encourages voluntary participation from students by offering extracurricular activities like taekwondo, football, K-pop dance and choir.

“It’s heartwarming to see even children who once hated learning Korean arrive early because of their extracurricular activities,” she said.

“A Hangeul school is a space created by teachers,” Cho said. “What’s more important than the classroom environment is the teacher’s gaze and sincerity. Except for the COVID-19 pandemic, the past 37 years have been precious times full of gratitude. The trust of parents who entrusted their children to us and the dedicated efforts of our teachers have been a huge driving force.”


Using her background in composition to conduct children’s choir.

Her life, embarking on the path of immigration in pursuit of love and then

dedicating her life to teaching Korean, demonstrates how Korean as a language plays a vital role in connecting the Korean people’s soul and identity in the overseas Korean community.

She actively utilizes the “Study Korean” content on the OKA website in her classes, and she also noted that the many teaching materials available for children were a great help to her.

Finally, the principal left a message for Korean youth around the world: “No matter where you live, you are precious beings with Korean blood. Be proud of who you are. I hope you will never be discouraged and, with your passion for learning, become people who create a better world.”

Thanks to dedicated overseas Korean teachers like principal Cho Young-ae, Hangeul is taking root firmly in many places around the world. 



The Waverley Hangeul School Choir performs the Korean and Australian national anthems under the direction of principal Cho Young-ae at the Korea Festival at Federation Square in Melbourne, Australia, on May 25.