MK Ministry and Importance of MK Education

My name is Jin Soo Park, and I was born in South Korea. When I was 9, my parents were called to be missionary teachers at Rift Valley Academy, an MK boarding school in Kijabe, Kenya. From 3rd grade to senior year, I lived at the school. My parents were the first Korean, non-white Western missionaries at the school. I did not enjoy being an MK. I did not have a fond memory of the place. I faced indirect racism, spiritual attacks, identity crisis, and social ostracism. However, it is my home, where I grew up. My parents were called to serve the MKs in Africa. I did not understand then why my parents had to go. However, later when I became one myself, I realized the need and the importance of MK education. Now, my parents left RVA and went to Tanzania to serve at a local Tanzanian school.

I always wanted to become a teacher. I would pretend to teach in front of stuffed animals, and I was the teacher’s pet. I always enjoyed history and social studies. I would memorize all the countries and capitals of Europe in 4th grade, and I knew more about American history than American students. I loved reading history books and my childhood memories are filled with flipping through history textbooks for fun. I knew from early on that I would be a history teacher. I went to Calvin University with a secondary history and social studies education. However, I did not know where I would teach. I knew it would be an international school somewhere around the world. Then, when I visited Jordan, Israel, Palestine, and Turkey, I knew that I wanted to be in the Middle East to teach. It was not until my junior year of college that I went to the Urbana Missions Conference in St. Louis, MO, where God called me to be a missionary in the Middle East. I did not know why or how. I did not have any connections in the Middle East. Then, one day my university had an International School Fair. There, one school from the Middle East came to recruit teachers, and that was the school I went to and taught for the past four years.

The school I taught was a Christian school in an Islamic country. The students are all Christians, but they are not all MKs. The teachers are mostly local Arabs, and few are foreigners like me. 30% of the students were Korean students. It was a day school and the school itself was not big: about 120 students from KG through 12th grade. I taught 7-8th grade US History, 9-10th grade Modern World History, and 11-12th grade Government and Economics for one year, 8th-grade Geography, 9-10th grade Ancient World History, and 11-12th grade US History the other year. Since it was a small school, I was the only history teacher. I was overwhelmed and did not know much about teaching history, creating a curriculum, and making my lesson plans. However, I did it with God’s grace and wisdom.

The hardest part of teaching at an MK school is the spiritual aspect of it. I did not go to North Africa to just teach history. I went there to serve and minister to the students there. I would spend time with the students listening to their stories, their hurt, their sorrows, their pain, their daily lives, their jokes, and their joys. I loved listening to their stories because I understood them. I began my presentation by sharing how I did not enjoy my upbringing. When I was a student, I always wanted someone to be there to listen to my struggles, but there weren’t any. I couldn’t go up to my parents to talk about it, because they were too busy with their ministry. Therefore, I promised myself that I would be a teacher who would listen and be there for my students. Then lo and behold, God led me back to an MK school. God wanted me to go back for me to heal. Heal from the hurt that I faced growing up, the pain I endured from the teachers, the administrators, and the students. Now I realized why my parents went to RVA. They left everything in Korea to serve, love, and listen to the stories of the MKs. When I left my school after four years of serving there, a student spoke in front of everyone, “Mr. Park listened to our stories, and we felt as if we were listened to for the first time.” This is a testimony of how God led me through fire and rain. I had to go through my time at RVA for me to go to North Africa to teach, serve, love, and listen to my students.

When KWMC asked me to speak for the conference, I asked myself, what does it mean to be an MK educator? Then a verse from Romans 12:12 came up, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer.” I met and taught around 100+ MKs and TCKs. Not everyone is a Christian. Many do not have Christ in them. They are culturally Christian. One time, I asked my 9 and 10th-grade students to write an essay regarding their faith, and many replied by saying, “I am not sure. I know I am Christian, but I did not experience Christ in me.” After living, breathing, eating, talking, laughing, and spending time with them, I realized there is still hope when I see them. Even if they might not be a follower of Jesus Christ right now, they are asking. They know there is truth out there. They are the next generation of this society but also the next generation of Korean and world missions and the global church. They are the next generation of Kingdom citizens bringing light to every corner of this earth. Yes, there were times I felt like when will they ever mature? When will they finally realize their purpose in God? However, I noticed, that there is hope in their lives. God is working slowly but surely. I noticed this through the changes I saw in my students’ lives. They began to ask the hard questions about faith, life, purpose, and God’s plan in their lives. This is the small, tiny step of hope I see in my students.

There were some painful moments. As I mentioned before, teaching in a mission field, especially in the Islamic world means constant spiritual warfare. Christians are minorities, we cannot freely share our faith and express it with passion. We must be careful in what we say, do, and teach. I met students with severe psychological traumas, schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and immense grief. Sometimes being there with them hurts me because of the amount of bondage they go through. I had to be patient knowing that they must go through this affliction for God to show them His plans for their lives. There were so many times I wanted to leave the mission field. I was fed up with the amount of cultural, social, spiritual, and physical struggles. However, God kept me there and led me through the trials. Even when no one noticed or appreciated my teaching and my service, God saw it and called it beautiful.

Therefore, I pray because prayer is the only way I was able to live and continue my service. I did devotions every Monday with my homeroom students, and one student said, “Mr. Park, are you brainwashing us to believe in Christianity?” To that, I replied, “Yes, you might think that. However, I pray every day that one day the Holy Spirit will reveal Himself to you in a very personal way so that you may believe.” Prayer is the only way that distinguishes us from the non-Christian teachers. We pray to God Almighty who gives us wisdom and understanding. He grants us peace and allows us to speak with confidence. He is the one who can change the students’ lives. I have seen it happen with my own eyes. One Korean student was always focused on academics and did not care at all about faith and spirituality. Through many hoops and turns, talking with him, listening to his story, mentoring him, and praying for him, I saw a small change within him. It was not me. God was working in his life, and he became more open to learning, was not afraid to make mistakes, and changed how he spoke. The Spirit was working within him.

After teaching for four years, I became restless and exhausted. I need to take a Sabbatical. It was too much for me to serve and teach. I cannot do this by myself. Thankfully, I was connected with a Korean mission organization called MK Beam where the purpose is to recruit MK educators and send them to MK schools around the world. MK Beam was created by longtime MK missionaries: Esther Hur and Ruth Baek to bridge and empower adult MKs to become MK teachers. The organization also trains and financially supports MK educators and teachers to go to MK schools. I thought I was the only one walking this path. However, others were walking on the same path. They were also others who are joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer.

A few years ago, as I was taking a break in my parents’ home, I read a book about the history of RVA, the MK school I grew up in. I want to share a quote from the book that surprised me about the school’s mission. According to Phil Dow, the author of *School in the Clouds*, says, “The school had a dual purpose. One purpose was to allow missionaries with children to remain in Africa working with the Kenyan people, and the second was to help develop a new generation of missionaries to one day continue the work of their parents.”[[1]](#footnote-1) RVA is a 116-year-old MK school created by American and British missionaries to nurture and educate second, third, and fourth generations of missionaries in the continent of Africa. This is the legacy of RVA. From the beginning of the Protestant mission movement, Western missionaries went to the mission field understanding the need to educate their children so that they too one day would return to the continent to spread the gospel. We not only see this in Kenya, but also in China, Korea, and elsewhere. Hudson Taylor and Horace Underwood, the famous missionaries that came to East Asia, their children and grandchildren came back as missionaries to the country their parents and grandparents served.

There are many reasons why the MKs came back to be missionaries. However, as we look at the example of RVA, the school's mission and vision shift the focus on training the MKs so that they may one day return to continue the service their parents left off. I am not here to say every MK should go back to the mission field. However, the Korean church and missions are at a point where we see a tiny percentage of second-generation MKs who are interested in going back and wanting to go back. We are at a crucial moment in Korean mission history where we see the MKs realizing the need to continue the service their parents left off. One way we see this happening is the growing number of Korean MK educators. We do not have hundreds, but they are out there. Joining MK Beam allowed me to see fellow adult MKs who are going out to the mission field to the MK schools.

I remember when I finished my first year of teaching, one of the Korean students came and told me, “Mr. Park, all my life, I have only seen and was taught by foreign teachers. For the first time in my life, I had a teacher from my own country, I learned about my history and government, and I did a presentation of Korea in front of others. Thank you.” Unless you went to a Korean school, most of us, who went to an international school or MK school, or American school did not have Korean teachers teaching the main subjects like English, Science, Math, and History. However, we see a change in the education field. We have enough Korean teachers who are more than capable to teach the major subjects. I already know so many Korean MKs who have an education major. Many are in Korea, US, or Indonesia working at an international school. I hope and pray that more adult MKs will take the Call to go back to MK schools at least for 2 years to serve and teach fellow MKs.

I understand that not everyone is meant to go. However, if God has touched you through this presentation, do not hesitate to take the leap of faith and go to an MK school. It is time for us to give back what we have received from the MK schools. It is time for us to go back and heal and listen to the stories of the next generation of MKs. Korean students are a huge percentage of the MK school population. However, we still do not have enough Korean teachers serving and teaching in those schools. MK Beam will financially support you, and they will help train you to go. The importance of MK education is to further His Kingdom here on earth by educating, serving, listening, loving, and caring for the next generation of MKs in truth. Hopefully, through Christ in us, they will be healed from the pain they experienced growing up in a third-cultural world and find the purpose in their lives by loving God and loving others with the fullness of joy.

1. Phil Dow, School in the Clouds (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2003), 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)