

## **International Response Essay** **Reflections to Jean-Marie, Normore, and Brooks' Article within the Context of Korean Education**

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### **Introduction**

With respect to leadership for social justice in education, Korea needs to take a proactive approach to support the development of an educational infrastructure for a multicultural society. The testing culture of education within Korea also needs to be considered with social justice consequences in mind. Through these measures, Korea can facilitate the integration process in a more equitable and multicultural society of the future.

Schools serve a wide variety of purposes in society. If the purpose were merely preparing the next workforce, schools could be narrowly defined. But, schools provide both the means for societies to operate good democracies and the assurance that social values such as citizenship, collective needs, and social behavior are part of their residents skill set. Societies also need residents to be able to contribute to their society through productive use of their

time and energy, through participation in collective events such as voting and immunizations and through building social structures that sustain communities outside of government such as churches, volunteer organizations, campaigns and collective action. These goals explain why societies provide schooling from public monies rather than leaving schooling entirely to private markets.

### **Confucian Values and Testing Culture**

Confucius tradition has a strong influence on Korean education. For instance, education has been recognized as the major channel to achieving social success. Thus parents are enthusiastic about educating their children. This has a dual influence on Korean education. The enthusiasm has meant rapid expansion of access to education during the last four decades. This same enthusiasm has resulted in serious social problems such as private tutoring and

classes after school, conflicts between social classes, and a cultural of test-score domination. The test-score dominated culture is quite different from the traditional ideal of Korean education which calls for educating the *whole person*—a combination of head, heart and hand. Thus, the difference between the ideal and practice, educating the whole person and a test-dominated culture, are in conflict. This conflict represents a dilemma for educational leaders.

When schooling is defined simply as getting high test scores for the fewest dollars, then school leaders become merely managers who find it easy to define efficiency in narrow terms. Management, in this vein, takes its lead from industry which needs to maximize one thing—profits. In this narrow view of school leadership, schools are thought to have a similar goal—maximize test scores given various constraints such as participation, budgets, and personnel skills. But, when schooling is seen as educating a whole person and providing community building, then leadership works only when social justice is an explicit goal.

While the notions of educating the whole person and test-score orientation are intertwined, the orientation towards test scores dominates in schools. Recently, this test orientation has gained supporters from the OECD which emphasizes standardized-test based accountability. For instance, Korean students have been very successful in the international achievement test of PISA and TIMSS. Policymakers were encouraged by these

results and thus introduced test-based accountability in 2008. Thus, the enhancement of test scores is a priority for school leaderships. In contrast to this trend, a new initiative began in the mid-1990s when a group of scholars and practitioners began to build alternative schools similar to the charter schools in the U.S. The alternative schooling emphasizes human values and social justice, which contradicts the test-dominated culture of many schools in Korea.

### **Multicultural Adaptation**

There is no question that Korea's rapid transition into a multicultural society poses great challenges for the Korean people: it will require social investments in materials and time. Korea needs a nationwide effort to establish the infrastructure required to support the multicultural society that is rapidly approaching. The infrastructure should cover a wide range of social services, including education, medical services, welfare, and legal support. In addition, Korea needs to build an organic cooperation network that connects the central government to educational and training institutions, as well as local bodies which deal with multiculturalism. Korea has a long history of homogeneity which poses special challenges in adapting to a multicultural society. According to a recent poll conducted by the EBS education channel (May 2008) and a survey on public perception toward multiculturalism conducted by the Center for Multicultural Education of Seoul National University, a significant

number of Korean citizens consider the increase of migrant workers and multiethnic families as a risk to national identity (Seong, 2008). Equally, 'Korean ethnicity' is viewed as a primary determinant of 'being Korean.' Given the outcome of this poll, there is certainly a need for multicultural education for the public.

On the other hand, children from migrant families are often low performers in Korean language development and adaptation. They are often raised in families with a foreign-born parent who also lacks fluency in Korean language. Naturally, many of these students have difficulties studying

in Korean schools because they lack language skills. They also suffer from excessive emotional negativism, and even show "signs of violence and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder" (ADHD). A 2005 survey of the Ministry of Health & Welfare (Education Support, 2006) indicates that 17.6 percent of school children from international marriages felt bullied by classmates for reasons as simple as "because he or she has a foreign mother" (34.1%: refer to chart below). In comparison, the dominant reason Korean students were socially isolated in primary schools was the perception that they put on airs (29.4%).

**Reasons a primary student of multiethnic background is socially isolated by classmates**

Reason	Rate(%)
The mother is of a different nationality	34.1
Difficulty of communication	20.7
No special reason	15.9
Different attitude and behavior	13.4
Different looks	4.9
Others	22.0

These primary school-aged children of international marriages tend to be ashamed of their foreign-born parents. The problem can escalate to the point where they refuse to approve of their foreign-born parents even though the parents are part of their own identities. When these children grow into emotionally sensitive teenagers,

they sometimes have difficulty enduring the prejudice and discrimination of fellow students and consequently give up secondary school studies.

This is further exacerbated because more than half of the families with immigrant spouses are living below the minimum cost of living. This decreases the opportunities for their

children to receive better education including being able to afford private educational assistance which is often necessary for doing well on national tests. This situation can, in turn, give rise to future structural class conflict. Thus, this inherited poverty is a serious concern for a globalizing Korean society which is becoming multicultural.

School leadership training for principals focuses on management skills to enhance student achievement and efficiency of schooling. The school leaders have been trained as managers and public officials through their training programs rather than as educators or educational leaders. Thus, most of training programs for school principals are focused on management and leadership itself and does not emphasize humanity and social justice related topics.

This is changing slowly since 2000. For instance, the homogeneous Korean society is transforming into a heterogeneous society with increasing interracial marriages and with the growing number of foreign workers since the mid-1990s. As of June 2008, the number of foreigners residing in South Korea surpassed 1.1 million, comprising two percent of the entire population. Now that multiethnic families are on the rise, Korean society will have to deal directly with the various conflicts and cultural differences that will arise.

### **Policy and Leadership**

Given this recent change in the social climate, concerns of multiethnic, low socio-economic class was prominent in the last presidential period.

Beginning in 2006, the Korean government began to support multicultural education and afterschool programs for low socio-economic background students. The policy shift has affected the pre- and in-service teacher training programs and the school leaders training programs. This shift was especially evident in pre-and in-service training programs for subject teachers. For instance, Seoul National University has inaugurated the Center for Multicultural Education Research (CMER) and installed a new nationwide in-service teacher training programs for multicultural education in 2007. (Enrollment doubled in 2008.) The Korean government supports various multicultural in-service teacher training programs and school leaders training programs. Many elementary schools have cross-cultural awareness programs. It is expected that these programs will spread to middle and high school levels as well.

In view of the social justice issues facing its schools, Korea needs to enhance educational leadership by putting in place the educational infrastructure needed for a multicultural society. Through these measures, Korea can facilitate integration of a multicultural society of the future.

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