



DAMUNWHA **Learning Circles** Expanding **Multicultural Education** **Beyond Schools** **to Empower** **Multicultural Students**

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Introduction

Historically, American public schools played an important role in assimilating immigrants with different cultures into the mainstream. This process is currently occurring in other parts of the world that are undergoing demographic changes due to immigration. Some of these countries have turned to multicultural education as a tool to respond to increasing diversity by helping the newcomers adjust to the host country.

South Korea, or Korea for short, is one of those countries where multicultural education targets newcomers as primary recipients to be taught its culture and language. At the same time, it seeks to foster understanding of other cultures among the majority. This article takes a critical look at Korea's multicultural education, or *damunwha* education, to problematize its lack of critical perspectives in locating cultural differences of the newcomers as the main problem facing Korea.

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Our main critique of *damunwha* education is informed by two theoretical frameworks developed in the United States: critical multiculturalism and segmented assimilation of immigrants. *Critical multiculturalism* identifies the goal of multicultural education as promoting social justice by empowering the marginalized both in and out of schools (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; May, 2012; McLaren, 1995a). In promoting social justice as the main goal, seeking to smoothly integrate cultural others into the Korean mainstream would be of secondary concern.

Korean scholars like S. W. Kang (2010) have seemed to agree with this, as he argued that *damunwha* education is a mere collection of supplementary programs that falls short in addressing the real problem: the forces that marginalize newcomers in Korean schools. Others like Lim (2010) and Choi (2010) have been more specific by pointing to the construction of real Koreans that invalidates non-Korean ethnic residents as authentic Koreans.

Related to this is the argument that the Americanization process is a *segmented* one where non-White immigrants are assimilated away from the American mainstream as American racial minorities (G. Park, 2011; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Tuan, 1999). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) identified other explanations, including rapid assimilation into nonmainstream

and oppositional cultures of inner cities and slow assimilation of immigrants.

In the American context, they argue that "race is a paramount criterion of social acceptance that can overwhelm the influences of class background, religion, or language" (p. 47) in leading to either a smooth or difficult incorporation into the American mainstream. For instance, G. Park's (2011) study found that skin color itself can be a criterion in one's authenticity as Americans. Park wrote that a group of Korean immigrants in the United States felt that authentic American identity was unachievable because they were not White. Adapting this to the Korean context, cultural forces that narrowly define authentic Korean to mean ethnicity may lead the newcomers' Koreanization process away from the Korean mainstream, and this is an important problem facing both newcomers to Korean society and Korean society itself.

These two theories pose a serious challenge to the uncritical assumption in *damunwha* education that teaching Korean language and culture, while promoting multicultural appreciation, would lead to the meaningful incorporation of the newcomer population. With this in mind, we fear that the lack of a critical perspective may cause *damunwha* education to fall short in meeting its goal of meaningfully integrating newcomers and their children into the Korean mainstream.

Our main recommendation is to supplement *damunwha* education with learning circles to empower newcomers to criticize and challenge the forces that marginalize them as inauthentic Koreans. The primary goal is to suggest practical ways to empower the subjects of *damunwha* education to become the decision makers in *damunwha* education.

Additionally, this article seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding multicultural education as a response to increasing diversity. To accomplish these goals, this article first describes *damunwha* education as South Korea's response to reducing cultural differences caused by the sudden increase in diversity. This is followed by the argument that *damunwha* education should reorient its current focus on power relations that marginalize multicultural students.

Lastly, we suggest supplementing *damunwha* education with *damunwha* learning circles as a way to empower the marginalized to critique and challenge the forces that invalidate the authenticity of their Korean identity. As authentic Korean identity becomes achievable through *damunwha* learning circles, we argue that *damunwha* education would be better situated to meet the goal of meaningfully integrating newcomers into the Korean mainstream.

Locating Difference as the Problem

Increasing diversity has presented some challenges which Korea has not dealt with directly in the recent past. Among these is a concern regarding the ability of newcomers to become productive members of Korean society. *Damunwha* education, as a set of educational policies, was introduced in response to this concern to facilitate the incorporation of multicultural students, *damunwha haksang*, or students from families with at least one foreign-born caregiver.

To achieve this goal, *damunwha* education identifies the cultural differences of multicultural students as the problem. Identified as the problem, *damunwha* education became a tool to reduce the cultural differences through teaching Korean language and improving academic resources both in and out of schools.

Increasing Diversity in South Korea

For a very long time, Korean identity was clearly defined because of perceived cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and racial homogeneity, where homogeneity itself

became the main criterion for being a Korean person (Hong, 2010). This perception of homogeneity remains largely unchallenged even today, despite a significantly noticeable diversity, according to the Central Intelligence Agency (2017), in the category of religion, with over 57% of Koreans claiming not to follow a religion, followed by Christians (28%) and Buddhists (16%).

In recent years, however, Korean identity is becoming less clear with the sudden increase in the number of immigrants seeking better lives, coupled with declining fertility rates, thus challenging this notion of cultural uniformity in South Korea. To illustrate, the number of foreign-born persons and their children increased to almost 2 million in 2015 from fewer than 10,000 foreigners in the early 1990s.

The Ministry of Education's (2016) report on the number of non-Korean-born residents is presented here as Table 1. J. Hwang (2014) identifies the three top reasons for the sudden increase: the demand for cheap labor by the Korean labor market, the need for female spouses in rural Korea, and the desire of younger people in Southeast Asia to seek more opportunities in Korea. The increased diversity is most visible in Korean schools, according to Hwang (2014), which have experienced more than a 300% increase in the number of multicultural students from 2009 to 2014.

With the rapid growth of cultural and ethnic diversity in South Korean schools, the schools' ability to meet the needs of multicultural students has been questioned by concerned citizens and scholars. For instance, Oh, Lee, Chang, Goo, and Kim (2013) reported that multicultural students, as a group, have a lower attendance rate, at 87%, compared to 96% for all Korean students. Also notable is the decreasing attendance

rate of these students as they move through the academic ladder and the low achievement in core subjects when compared to students in Korea in general.

Beyond academics, multicultural students often experience discrimination in terms of bullying, teasing, and being disparaged about their limited proficiency in Korean and/or their different skin color (Oh et al., 2013; Yang, 2007). Like many countries dealing with diversity, the South Korean government has turned to multicultural education to address these concerns.

Korean multicultural education, *damunwha* education, seeks to address these concerns in two ways. First, it seeks to provide resources and services, such as Korean-language instruction and tutoring, to help these students succeed academically. Second, *damunwha* education aims to promote social harmony and unity among the increasingly diverse students in Korea as a way to reduce biases against them. In the process, *damunwha* education is a response of the government to promote meaningful incorporation of multicultural students into the Korean mainstream by focusing on the eradication of differences.

Reducing Differences by Integration

By identifying differences as the problem that leads to academic and social marginalization, *damunwha* education seeks to provide necessary resources to multicultural students while promoting cultural appreciation among the mainstream students. Since 2006, the South Korean government has been financially supporting multicultural education policy research, Korean-language textbooks and programs, and teacher-training programs. Different branches of the government have

Table 1
Foreign Residents in Korea, January 1, 2015

	Total	Male, n (%)	Female, n (%)
Foreign residents			
Migrant workers	608,116	442,616 (72.8)	165,500 (27.2)
Marriage migrants	147,382	22,209 (15.1)	125,073 (84.9)
Foreign students	84,329	38,116 (45.2)	46,213 (54.8)
Overseas Koreans	286,414	141,559 (49.4)	144,855 (50.6)
Other	249,921	124,915 (50.0)	125,006 (50.0)
Naturalized residents			
Based on marriage	92,316	4,563 (4.9)	87,753 (95.1)
Other	65,748	24,783 (37.7)	40,965 (62.3)
Children with migrant background	207,693	106,077 (51.1)	101,616 (48.9)
Total	1,741,919	904,938 (52.0)	836,981 (48.0)

instituted a network of local community centers to provide mentoring, multicultural understanding camps, international education, aptitude classes, and school entrance counseling as well as Korean-language instruction for the targeted multicultural students and their families.

Also, professional development for educators is held regularly, and more teaching materials have become available to better serve multicultural students. In 2008, as an example, a number of universities were funded to engage in policy research and develop learning materials and programs. Working with local governments, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology rolled out school-oriented and customizable education support campaigns in 2009 that focused on programs in Korean-language improvement, self-identity establishment, and improving cultural understanding among general public students.

To enhance self-capacity for their children's education, non-Korean parents of multicultural families were to be provided with instruction in the Korean language and computer literacy, in addition to counseling and interpretation services. Furthermore, teacher education program curricula were modified to include more courses designed to raise awareness of and appreciation for different cultures (Chang, 2012; S. Moon, 2010).

The Social Welfare Policy Division (SWPD; 2014) has reported that many of these efforts are bearing fruit. First, more multicultural students are remaining in schools. The retention rates of multicultural students in K–12 schools improved to 87.3% from 79%. SWPD credits this improvement to a series of registrations that made it easier for immigrant children to transfer into Korean schools, increased academic support for Korean-born multicultural students, and a new information packet regarding the educational system in seven different languages for non-Korean-born parents.

Second, more multicultural students are receiving instruction in Korean as a second language (KSL) courses with standardized evaluation of students' Korean proficiency and standardized curriculum. Fifty-two schools had a KSL course offering in 2014—an improvement from no government-approved KSL courses prior to 2006 (SWPD, 2014).

Third, a couple of pilot projects to develop multicultural students' talents are poised to expand. As an example, the Global Bridge Project has trained 370 multicultural students for careers in ad-

ditional bilingual education in 2013. Also, 10 multicultural students were admitted to two different teacher-training programs on a special admissions criterion (similar to affirmative action in the United States) that year.

Fourth, more resources are being made available to multicultural students. To list some, many districts have designated a school to serve as a focal point to provide after-school services to students who are scattered in the area, and four additional alternative schools have been established for multicultural students. Also, representatives from local multicultural centers are visiting local schools to promote acceptance and understanding among mainstream Korean students. Moreover, professional development for current teachers in multicultural education served 31,000 teachers in 2013 alone, and more multicultural-friendly literature has been made available in K–2 classrooms.

Lastly, multicultural education has become more coordinated: Previously, similar services and programs were administered by different departments and ministries; these have now been consolidated into five ministries to make the effort more efficient. For instance, the Ministry of Education will oversee school-related matters, the Ministry of Women and Family will support non-Korean-born wives, the Ministry of Justice will administer to legal issues facing multicultural families, and the Ministry of Safety and Administration will focus on social issues related to non-Korean-born persons (SWPD, 2014).

Despite these efforts, J. W. Hwang (2016) commented in his report on the status of multicultural students that “cultural differences and social biases still hinder multicultural students from being meaningfully integrated into our [Korean] schools” (p. 5). He then suggested the need for Korean schools to “change the attitudes toward differences through promoting appreciation for different cultures” (p. 5). We disagree, as we locate the problem facing multicultural students away from insufficient appreciation of cultural differences. Instead, we argue that the lack of critical perspective in *damunwha* education is the main problem.

Limits of Uncritical *Damunwha* Education

The self-reported progress of the government mentioned earlier does show that the Korean government is playing an important role to improve the lives of

multicultural students and their families through *damunwha* education. We do not intend to discredit *damunwha* education but rather would like to see continuation of its efforts to provide necessary services and resources to multicultural students and their families.

However, we argue that the lack of a critical perspective in *damunwha* education shifts attention away from the cultural and institutional oppressive forces. With these forces remaining unchallenged, *damunwha* education in its current form leads to segmented assimilation and falls short in achieving its goal of fully incorporating multicultural students into the Korean mainstream. More specifically, we argue that current *damunwha* education does not challenge the forces that invalidate multicultural students as authentic Koreans by situating them as the objects of learning in isolation from mainstream Korean experiences.

“Not So Critical” *Damunwha* Education

Our main critique of *damunwha* education is its inability or unwillingness to focus on power relations as the main problem. Our understanding of multicultural education is informed by critical multiculturalists like Carl Grant (1994), who defined multicultural education as “an educational process that seeks to achieve the philosophical concept of equity and justice both in and out of school” (p. 4).

The goal of multicultural education is not limited to fostering academic success or social harmony but also promotes a sense of fairness and justice for the members of a given society, including students and their educators. It identifies both individual and institutional oppressions as the problem and, as Berlack and Moyenda (2001) posit, seeks to challenge racism and other forms of injustice instead of simply recognizing and celebrating differences. From this perspective, *damunwha* education's goal of meaningfully integrating multicultural students by providing resources and promoting cultural appreciation is overly optimistic.

The supporters of *damunwha* education are relatively silent about describing the desired *damunwha* Korea in which the newcomers would be meaningfully integrated into the mainstream. With this, we found Goodin's (2006) description of polyglot multicultural society useful in imagining the desired end goal of *damunwha* education. In *damunwha* Korea, its members are not “limited to one or two cultural groups but multicultural groups,

thereby blurring the significance of culture as the tool of oppression.

Using a multilingual or multicultural individual as an example, Goodin (2006) explains that the end goal is autonomous citizenship with a full range of Korean identities because “bits of different cultures become incorporated into the overall polyglot mix” (p. 296). It is a society in which an ethnic Korean could worship at a mosque and a foreign-born could freely celebrate his or her culture without having his or her Korean identity challenged. To get to this point, we argue that the lack of a critical view of cultural difference is the problem.

To illustrate, a critical approach would start with the power relations that validate dominant culture as the norm, thereby invalidating those of non-Korean origin as abnormalities. Also, this approach to *damunwha* education would problematize the current promotion of national unity at the expense of requiring minorities to give up their language and culture (Hong, 2010; H. J. Kim, 2004).

Moreover, a critical approach to *damunwha* education would not individualize the issue of bullying by fostering cultural appreciation among the bullies. Instead, it would engage the entire school community, including bully and bullied, in meaningful critiques on the power relations where cultural differences become the reason for bullying of over 30% of multicultural students (Sul, Han, & Lee, 2003).

A critical approach to *damunwha* education would seek to overcome insufficient training of teachers by asking them to critically examine their current role as a tool for oppression or liberation (Mo & Hwang, 2007; G. Park & Watson, 2011). While celebrating the progress made, critical approaches to *damunwha* education would acknowledge that previously mentioned gains are less than complete in the face of the fact, as S. W. Kang (2010) found, that the dropout rate is still three times higher for multicultural students and they are more likely to be labeled as learning disabled if they remain in schools.

Shortcomings of Damunwha Education

We agree with critical multiculturalists (Bishop, 2010; Formosinho, Jesus, & Reis, 2016; Gorski, 2006; Kanpol & McLaren, 1995; McLaren, 1995a; Pepi, 2002; Sehr, 1997) who argue that the problems facing multicultural students in schools and society are rooted in unequal power relations instead of their cultural differences. In the case of South Korea, it is the invalidation of multicultural students as

authentic Koreans who are less deserving of equal rights (S. W. Kang, 2010; Lim, 2009; G. Park & Watson, 2011).

One example is the generally accepted notion of *Danil Minjok* (One-Blood Ethnicity), which narrowly defines authentic Koreans to be the descendants of a mythical person named Dangoon. This works to point to ethnic and cultural homogeneity as an important characteristic of authentic Korean identity. Leaving this notion unchallenged, *damunwha* education repudiates its own goal of meaningful integration because authentic Korean identity and membership in Korean society become unachievable to multicultural students who cannot claim the mythical lineage from Dangoon. With this in mind, we argue that *damunwha* education shifts attention away from systematically and historically rooted marginalization against those who are different, thereby impeding its goal of facilitating meaningful integration of multicultural students.

Related to this is the argument that *damunwha* education falls short in empowering the marginalized to transform their own lives, schools, and communities. This is the case because *damunwha* education locates the multicultural students as the topic of learning for the mainstream Korean students and expects them to be grateful recipients of resources and services from sympathetic Korea (Watson, 2010).

Moreover, *damunwha* education fails to locate the struggles of multicultural students in the Korean tradition of resistance, thereby further invalidating their experiences as authentic Korean experiences. Korea has a long and documented history of resistance against political domination of dictators, economic domination of select family-owned corporations, and cultural dominance of heterosexual men, to name a few (G. Park & Watson, 2011).

Instead of analyzing different expressions of the oppression facing different groups to promote a sense of solidarity among the marginalized, *damunwha* education's insistence on cultural difference situates multicultural students and families in a position to compete for recognition and resources with other marginalized groups. Such competition among the marginalized leaves them divided and the unequal power relations unchallenged (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1995b).

In the case of Korea, the challenges facing multicultural students are often irrelevant to Korean struggles for democracy, equity, and social justice. *Damunwha* education's failure to promote solidarity

building across marginalized communities in Korea may portray the struggles of multicultural students as of secondary importance to the struggles of authentic Koreans. Located as a secondary struggle, the challenges facing multicultural students are then often dismissed or trivialized. At other times, these families and students are often pitted against other marginalized groups in South Korea to compete for attention and resources.

Similarly, *damunwha* education gets overlooked in South Korea's heavily centralized public education system with a very rigid curriculum, pedagogy, and structure that aims to prepare students for college entrance. In this environment, there is very little room for genuine cultural appreciation of others, especially after the primary school years. Consequently, *damunwha* education has come to comprise extracurricular activities for the mainstream students and special educational services for multicultural students.

We agree with May and Sleeter (2010), who argue that multicultural education without a critical perspective is unable to “tackle seriously and systematically these structural inequalities such as racism, institutionalized poverty, and discrimination” (p. 3). When unchallenged, *damunwha* education finds it difficult to “tackle” more serious problems like equating the authenticity of Korean identity with Korean ethnicity, in which non-Korean ethnics are viewed as inauthentic Koreans.

As less than authentic Koreans, multicultural students and their families are considered less deserving of the privileges and rights enjoyed by mainstream Koreans, both in schools and in society. More importantly, the absence of the marginalized in the decision-making process has allowed *damunwha* education to become an easy-to-implement program that falls short in effectively challenging institutionalized power relations.

Possibilities With Damunwha Learning Circles

To overcome the lack of a critical perspective in *damunwha* education, we argue for orienting *damunwha* education toward critical multiculturalism. This orientation would treat *damunwha* education as an educational philosophy to address injustices in both teaching and learning as well as structural and political organizations in schools and society. Moreover, critical *damunwha* education does not confine multicultural education to the walls of

schools but also involves members of the community and the larger society.

This approach understands the need, May (2012) posited, to work with and across different axes of oppression in any given context (e.g., racism, sexism, classism) “to understand how power is used and institutionalized, and take collective actions to bring about changes” (p. 475). This starts with a critical analysis of power relations in wider discourses and reflection on one’s location within these. The goal is then fostering ally-building across the multiple axes of oppression by promoting the identification of the individual and collective selves as oppressed (Apple, 1992).

We feel that the proposed *damunwha* learning circles are best positioned to supplement current approaches to foster critical analysis of and challenge the power relations that marginalize multicultural students. The desired result is advancing the notion of equity and justice in both Korean schools and society.

Exploring Learning Circles for *Damunwha* Education

The proposed *damunwha* learning circle is an extension of *Hakseub-dongahri*, or “learning circle,” in Korea. Over some decades, learning circles have played an important role in expanding democratic ways of life both in work and in social spaces through the free flow of communication and interaction between social justice-oriented citizens (Han, 2001; S. Park, 2001).

Some of these were led by high school students who traveled to distant rural places to teach locals how to read and write in the first half of the 1900s. Others were factory workers who organized themselves to teach and learn about the rights of workers at night during the industrial development in the 1960s and 1970s. Still others were college students sharing literature and debating ways to resist military dictators in the 1970s and 1980s.

More recently, learning circles began to be more formalized with the introduction of study circles in Sweden and the United States, and in Korea following the fall of dictators since the 1990s (Lee, Hong, Lee, Park, & Park, 2002). Recently, the Ministry of Education and National Institute for Lifelong Education (2014) reported that more than 40 learning circles in each municipal district regularly meet to learn and engage in various community activities. We feel that these learning circles can fill the gap between the limits of current *damunwha* education and the need for em-

powering multicultural students and their families to claim authentic membership in Korean society.

Han (2001) explained that the “study circle” of Sweden, with its roots in civil activism, has shaped today’s orientation of learning circles toward advancing democracy. Study circles in Sweden have come into being as like-minded citizens have come together to form a community of learners. Traditionally, such communities have served as a place for citizens to share their thoughts and ideas on social and political issues facing their members both as individuals and as a group. What has been emphasized in study circles is collaborative learning, interacting democratically, respecting one another, and sharing wisdom. While communal action based on learning was not the desired goal of study circles, political actions of its members as a group often followed (Oliver, 1987).

Similarly, S. Park, Lee, Hong, and Park (2014) have defined learning circles as

... voluntarily formed local learning communities that are made up of participants of equal relations for learning as the main purpose. . . . [Learning circles] seek to empower both individual members and their communities as active participants of their community affairs through a variety of practical activities and regular dialogue with one another. (p. 1)

Typically, Korean learning circles would start with a gathering of citizens who are struggling with a similar challenge. Other times, an activist as an outsider would organize and facilitate the learning. At times, local government through a “lifelong educator” (a certified adult educator in Korea) would invite citizens to form such groups. These learning circles, however, share an emphasis on network building through mutual support and seek to help members to actively participate in educating others, challenging dominant ideologies, and offering critical perspectives in both cultural and political arenas.

Unlike Swedish study circles, however, many learning circles aim toward actions for change as the desired result of learning activities (Y. Moon & Park, 2015; S. Park, 2008). With actions as a desired outcome, learning circles depend on developing a consciousness of the oppressed for liberation through critical conversations, as explained by Freire (1999). This is reinforced by Welton’s (1995) goal of learning circles as communities of individuals in resistance against institutional oppression.

As an example, a group of factory

workers would gather together to form a learning circle to critically analyze and improve their working conditions. They would conduct research as individuals or in small groups and share their learning with others. Based on these, they would decide on specific strategies to improve their working conditions and take action accordingly.

In addition to fostering meaningful political engagement, learning circles have the potential to promote social justice beyond the specific interests of its members. S. Park et al. (2014) explained that three main characteristics of learning circles are: (a) democratic learning conditions, (b) learning processes based on shared experiences and practices, and (c) learning outcomes for transformation. Democratic learning conditions include voluntary and proactive participation of the concerned citizens who meet as equals, as both learners and instructors.

As a group, the members would share their own knowledge, skills, opinions, and experiences with one another in a true “dialogue” in which each would meaningfully contribute to the learning of the circle. Such learning is then contextualized in the everyday lives of the participants to foster personal and lasting meanings. This is further enhanced as the members apply their new knowledge in their lives and share their lives with other members.

Lastly, the learning outcome of transformation refers to both individual and group empowerment to demand and make changes. Through sharing and reflections, the life experiences and understandings of the world around the members can be validated. This would then lead to consolidation of common experiences regarding the issue at hand, serving to foster goal setting and a vision for the circle and the individuals involved. Empowered, they may be mobilized to seek to educate other members of the community, thereby transforming the community (S. Park et al., 2014).

Although learning circles have taken place outside of schools historically, we feel that they may be a useful tool for *damunwha* education in meeting its goal of meaningful integration both in schools and in society. Proposed *damunwha* learning circles would be made up of multicultural students, their families, and educators, along with other activists, to form a community of active participants. These *damunwha* learning circles would help to reorient current *damunwha* education to (a) foster political engagement for the multicultural students and their families and (b) focus on social justice as the main

goal instead of mere integration. In the process, *damunwha* learning circles can contribute to overcoming the limits of uncritical *damunwha* education.

Damunwha Learning Circles to Empower Multicultural Others

Damunwha learning circles can empower multicultural students to become the subjects of teaching and learning through an emphasis on collective learning among equal participants for transformation. This allows multicultural students to actively critique and challenge multiple forms of inequality and injustice, beyond respecting cultural differences, and to confront cultural and societal biases. In a collaborative and democratic environment of learning, *damunwha* learning circles are better positioned to explore the occurrences of complex relationships, spacing, disagreements, and differences between ethnic and cultural identities of self and others in the framework of power relations (May, 2012). This may start with the process of critical examination of the assumptions, beliefs, value systems, and perspectives of the selves and others within the framework of power relations.

Damunwha learning circles require what Castro (2010) has called conscious reflection. The members would critically reflect on their own worldviews to recognize the influence of their own life experiences. The activists, as the facilitators of learning, would challenge the members to problematize the universality of the “right” way to live and foster an appreciation for diversity around their own lives. Critical reflections must be coupled with Freire’s (1999) notion of critical consciousness, where teaching and learning are viewed as a political act so that the members of the learning circle would locate their own experiences in relation to power.

The assertion is that learning and teaching are political in nature, as these can serve as tools of the oppressors to facilitate their dominance. At the same time, learning and teaching can also empower the oppressed to resist the oppression as the members of the learning circle work together to transform society toward social justice. This orientation of *damunwha* education resists viewing multicultural students as “receiving objects” of learning but instead demands active participation in learning and teaching.

In this context, the activists and other members of the circle learn from and teach one another as a learning community.

It also critiques and challenges Freire’s (1999) culture of silence, which instills negative and suppressed self-images of the oppressed that work to allow social injustices in schools and society. The activists play an important role in this process as they scaffold their own positionalities with respect to the power relations of other group members.

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) have called this process transformative learning, where “reflecting on the relationship between the objective conditions of reality and the oppressed selves leads to critically reflecting on the various oppressive forces in their lives towards conscientization and empowerment” (p. 140). Transformative learning, then, consciously works to convert perspectives or worldviews through critical reflection that analyzes the individuals’ own meaning structures (Merriam et al., 2007; Mezirow, 1991).

Through dialogue, members of the *damunwha* learning circles would critically reflect on their own meaning schemes and perspectives, review different perspectives, and eventually form a new and critical perspective. Because *damunwha* education currently falls short in transformative learning, we argue that learning circles would supplement it to facilitate the process of critical reflection and dialogue regarding the challenges facing multicultural students (Y. Moon & Park, 2015).

Damunwha learning circles would serve as a forum for critical reflections on power relations in the society that may lead to identification and sharing of a common struggle, experience, and worldview as “marginalized.” Coupled with democratic decision-making and communication skills, *damunwha* learning circles would prepare multicultural students, parents, educators, and other concerned citizens to expand the commonly held and limiting ethnic Korean identity to include multicultural students and validate them as authentic Koreans.

Active participation in learning circles would foster a stronger sense of belonging to the group and Korean society. This increased sense of belonging could foster solidarity with other marginalized communities, which in turn would reinforce a stronger sense of ownership of an expanded view of Korean identity (S. Park, 2015; S. Park et al., 2014).

A stronger sense of Korean identity as legitimate members of Korean society may position multicultural students as agents of change in the community. As members of a *damunwha* learning circle, the activists, multicultural students and their fami-

lies, along with educators, would become what J. Kim and Park (2013) have called learning managers. They become active participants of the relevant policy-making process, from planning to realization, instead of just passive objects of the policy.

This is when multicultural students and their families are meaningfully integrated into Korea as authentic Koreans who actively participate in transforming their own schools and communities toward a democratic way of life for all, in both school and society. This would perhaps bring Korea a step closer to a polyglot multicultural Korea in which autonomous individuals can freely choose a cultural identity from a range of diverse Korean cultures (Goodin, 2006).

Discussion

In sum, this article took a critical look at *damunwha* education as a way to underline the need to foster meaningful political engagement of multicultural students in Korean schools and society. We argue that the lack of critical perspective in current *damunwha* education locates multicultural students and their cultural differences as the problem, thereby shifting attention away from the forces that invalidate them as authentic Koreans.

As a result, *damunwha* education leads to segmented assimilation and falls short in meeting its goal of meaningful integration of multicultural students into the Korean mainstream. To overcome this, we suggested supplementing current *damunwha* education with *damunwha* learning circles to empower multicultural others to become active and authentic members of Korean society.

Through critical dialogues on the world around them and their place in it, the learning circles would provide an opportunity for transformation of multicultural students from mere recipients of *damunwha* education to activists who promote democratic ways of life for all individuals in South Korean schools and society. This is the setting where multicultural students, formerly at the mercy of the dominant group’s sympathy for resources and services, become advocates of their own rights as Korean citizens. Aligning with other marginalized groups, *damunwha* learning circles may become a source of political empowerment whereby multicultural students can claim authentic Korean identity.

While the proposed *damunwha* learning circles present an important opportunity,

there are issues to be considered. The first is to provide resources to enable multicultural students to meaningfully participate in learning circles. This is a challenge, because many of them struggle economically, and the time and energy required for participating in the circles would be scarce. Also, many multicultural students are isolated from one another. Bringing them to one location may prove to be a challenge.

Additionally, the cultural and linguistic diversity within *damunwha* learning circles may make it difficult for critical dialogue to take place. While these challenges are real, it is important not to lose sight of the possibilities *damunwha* learning circles could offer. People will find ways when presented with a challenge. Perhaps it would come through social media, as both wired and unwired communication are very advanced in South Korea.

Most important is establishing a way for multicultural others to have a say in their own lives in a form that matters to them. As decision makers, the multicultural students in *damunwha* learning circles would be empowered to become full participants in the community, not just the recipients of assistance. Their differences would no longer be seen as challenges to overcome but as assets that help them to understand the world around them.

In this way multicultural students would become endowed with critical perspectives through the sharing of differences, development of democratic communication skills, and participation in community and school affairs as authentic Koreans. We argue that *damunwha* learning circles may present this unique opportunity to help *damunwha* education to meet its goal of meaningfully integrating marginalized multicultural students and promoting social harmony and unity among South Korea's increasingly diverse population.

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