

# **“EDUCATION IS THE MEANING OF LIFE”**

**- CONFUCIUS**

**GRADES:** 9-12

**AUTHOR:** Joan M. Brylski

**SUBJECT:** Social Studies, Geography, Sociology

**TIME REQUIRED:** Five class periods

## **OBJECTIVES:**

- To compare and contrast students' own educational experiences with those of their Korean counterparts.
- To apply the ancient teachings of Confucius to present day attitudes towards Asian education.
- To understand how different cultures work to achieve the same goals.

## **MATERIALS REQUIRED:**

- A&E Biography Series: *Confucius: Words of Wisdom*, DVD. A&E Home Video, 2005. DVD. (50 minutes)
- Handout 1: Typical High School Student's Schedule (all handouts attached)
- Handout 2: "Examination Day" by Elisa Joy Holland
- Handout 3: "Contemporary Youth Culture in Korea" by Eun Mee Kim, Inhae Chon and friends
- Handout 4: "South Korean Education Focusing on the Future: An Update" by Richard Diem, Tedd Levy and Ronald VanSickle

## **BACKGROUND:**

Education is an institution found in every culture on earth; however, the importance placed on education and the ways used to instill knowledge in the young are very different around the globe. For generations, East Asian educational policy has been influenced by the ancient philosopher Confucius. The importance that he placed on an educated society is still evident in many East Asian cultures today. For example, Confucius stated, "When people are educated, the distinction between classes disappears;" and "Learning only stops when the last nail is placed in the coffin." Asian culture has embraced these ideas by placing great importance on the education of their young and also on lifelong learning.

Asian students consistently score at the top of international standardized tests and as a rule spend more time in the classroom per year than their Western counterparts. Attitudes of parents, teachers and students towards learning and the school environment can also be found to be very different from East to West. Is one system better than the other? What can the West learn from the East and vice versa?

The purpose of this lesson is to highlight for students some of these differences in the educational experience, but at the same time show them that there are some distinct similarities

as well. By understanding how other cultures approach education, students will reflect on their own attitudes towards learning.

In preparation for this lesson, teachers should familiarize themselves with the philosophy of Confucius and research the educational system of Korea.

### **PROCEDURE:**

1. Period 1: Begin with a brief explanation of Confucius, the teacher and philosopher, and the time period in which he lived. Locate China, Korea and Japan on a map as a reference for students. Explain to students that they will be watching the biography of Confucius. Instruct students to listen for and identify any teachings that Confucius might have regarding education. (Quotations used in this lesson plan have been taken from the *A&E Biography*.) Have students write them down in their notebooks. Allow time for discussion at the end of the class period as students share their quotes.
2. Period 2: Complete the biography of Confucius and again solicit students' responses to the teachings related to education. Do they agree or disagree with his statements? Do they think their teachers and parents would agree or disagree with his statements? Do they know of anyone personally who embraces Confucian philosophies?
3. Period 3: Explain to students that they are now going to examine modern day attitudes towards education in East Asian culture using the Korean educational system as an example. Can they identify some of the Confucian ideas in today's educational experiences? How do these experiences compare to their own? How is the American experience different or the same? Have students reflect on their own daily schedules. What subjects would they define as important to the curriculum? What classes do they like the best? How is their time after school and on weekends spent? Distribute Handout 1: Typical High School Student's Schedule; allow students time to examine a Korean student's schedule. In small groups have students discuss similarities and differences; some examples might be: meeting with the principal, different classes each day, military exercises, the length of the school day, classroom cleaning time, etc. Assign readings from handouts "Examination Day" and/or "Contemporary Youth Culture in Korea."
4. Period 4: Together as a class read Handout 4: "South Korean Education Focusing on the Future: an Update." With a partner, have students create a Venn diagram in their notebooks outlining some basic differences and similarities between their own experiences and that of the Korean student. Allow students to use the diagram during assessment.
5. Period 5: Assessment: Essay Question (see Evaluation)

### **EVALUATION:**

Instruct students to independently write a three- to five-paragraph essay answering the following questions:

- Compare and contrast the Korean educational system with that of the United States. What are some of the similarities? What are some of the differences? Use details and examples to support your ideas.
- What can the United States learn from Korea in regards to education and what can Korea learn from the United States?

Students should be evaluated on how well they can identify and support their ideas, as well as coherent their essay is.

**ENRICHMENT:** What philosophies have influenced the American educational system?

- Have students research developments in educational philosophies promoted by school districts and politicians in the United States. How have these ideas set policy? How have they changed the way we look at education in the U.S.? Some examples might be: The launching of Sputnik satellite by the Soviet Union, the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the passing of the No Child Left Behind legislation, etc.
- Have students research individuals who have influenced educational policy. What were their ideas about educating the youth? How were their ideas turned into policy? Some examples might be: Socrates, Rousseau, John Dewey, Jerome Bruner, etc.

## HANDOUT 1: TYPICAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT'S SCHEDULE

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6:30 a.m.	wake up					
7:30	school begins					
7:40–8:20	morning meeting with principal	self-study or supplementary lessons (e.g., English, Korean, or Math)				
8:30–8:40		morning meeting				
9:00	Korean	English	Math	Military Exercises	Korean	Korean History
10:00	Foreign Language	Korean	Korean History	English	Earth Science	Music
11:00	Math	Music	English	Math	English	Chemistry
12:00 p.m.	English	World History	Korean	Physical Education	Physics	
12:50–1:30	lunch					
1:30	Physical Education	Biology	Art	Korean	Math	
2:30	Domestic Science	Math	Art	Physics	Chemistry	
3:30–4:20	World History	Korean Literature	Club Activities	Class Meeting	Music	
4:20–4:30	an evening meeting  classroom cleaning time					hagwon (a special study, or "cram" school) and/or self-study in the school library
4:30–4:50	classroom cleaning time					
5–11 p.m.	hagwon (a special study, or "cram" school) and/or self-study in the school library					

### Monday Morning Meeting

On Mondays, the entire school gathers for an hour-long address by the principal. The principal's remarks are meant to inspire and encourage students to achieve their educational goals. Occasionally, awards will be given out to meritorious students. Nowadays, the Monday morning meeting is on the decline, gradually being replaced by more self-directed study. (This system was borrowed from Japan after the colonial period.)

### 8:30–8:40 Morning Meeting

Every morning, each class meets with their teacher. The teacher will explain what must be done during the day, or announce upcoming events, such as class picnics.

**Military Exercises**

Like students in countries such as Italy and China, South Korean high school students receive some basic military training.

**Club Activities**

Every student belongs to some kind of club. There are many kinds of clubs based on interests such as photography, music, animation and cooking. Clubs meet once a week at a fixed time and will sometimes meet beyond this schedule to carry out their activities. Clubs also have a festival in the spring or fall, when they may create an exhibition, a show or open a one-day restaurant.

**4:20–4:30 Evening Meeting**

Every evening, each class meets with their teacher to discuss what has happened during the day, and what is coming up the next.

**4:30–4:50 Classroom Cleaning Time**

Every day, students are responsible for straightening the classroom and cleaning the chalkboard.

***Hagwon***

While in middle school, many students study an elective after school, such as speech, piano, art, or Taekwondo. In high school, however, most students drop elective courses to study for the college entrance examination. A *hagwon* is a special school that prepares students for this important examination.

## **HANDOUT 2: EXAMINATION DAY**

In Korea, the college entrance examination is very important. Most high school students prepare for their examination for three years, and some prepare longer. Many prepare so intensely that they cannot enjoy their life fully during this period.

### **Structure of the Examination**

Students who want to enter university all take the same, big examination, conducted by the government. This examination, known as the college entrance exam, is administered just once each year, usually during late fall.

The first section of the examination is “Korean Language.” It is divided into two subsections. In the first subsection, “Listening Comprehension,” students hear a dialogue, article or other short piece, then answer questions based on what they have heard. In the second subsection, “Reading Comprehension,” students read poetry, ancient writings or articles, then answer questions related to what they have read. They are allowed 90 minutes to complete the Korean language section, which is worth 120 points.

The second section is “Mathematical Comprehension.” Students are not allowed to use calculators. They have 60 minutes to calculate all of the answers in their heads. The math section is worth 80 points.

The third section, “Mathematical Comprehension II,” weaves together different fields and topics. The first of its two subsections is “Science,” which includes biology, earth science, chemistry, and physical science. The second subsection, “Social Studies,” includes domestic science, world history, Korean history and ethics. This broad-ranging section of the examination lasts for 90 minutes, and is worth 120 points.

“English Language” is the fourth section of the examination. The English language section is structured similarly to the Korean language section. It is taken for 60 minutes, and is worth 80 points.

Today, there are new sections for second languages, such as Japanese, French, Chinese, German.

### **Examination Day**

All schools are closed across the country on Examination Day. The examination begins at 9:00 AM sharp. It is administered in students’ usual school buildings.

If there is too much traffic, students can be delayed or miss their once-a-year chance to take the test. To ease the usual traffic congestion, businesses typically open one or two hours late. Police will sometimes escort late-comers to the examination sites.

Planes are prohibited from flying during the examination, because their sound could disrupt student concentration during the listening components. Students at any school near an airport would be grateful.

In the early morning, many students, parents, and teachers congregate in front of the school to rally for and encourage the exam-takers. Junior students prepare tea, coffee, rice cake, and wheat gluten for their senior schoolmates. Rice cakes and wheat gluten are symbolic, suggesting success in the examination, while the warm beverages help to prepare the students mentally. Some parents may pray for their children, and some will stay outside the school all day, until the examination is finished.

The examination concludes at 5:00 PM. Most students head home for a rest. Later in the evening, a special television program comes on that reviews the day's examination.

### **College Entrance**

Most universities have their own standards for selecting freshmen. Throughout the year, universities recruit freshmen without college entrance exam results. Students can apply to their favorite university, which evaluates them according to its own standards. Later, the university will review the student's college entrance exam results. This type of college entrance can happen at any time during the year.

One month after the examination, students receive their scores. Students submit their exam results and school records as they apply to universities. The universities evaluate the students based on their submissions, though some may administer their own written examinations (usually on current events) or conduct interviews (an English interview, for example). As opposed to the "anytime" method, this type of entrance is scheduled, based on the receipt of examination scores.

The examination system changes slightly every year. The current system has shown numerous problems. A downward trend in students' achievement (suggested by declining examination scores) has led universities to demand the right to screen entrants, and so many universities now use their own examinations, in addition to the government-administered college entrance exam, to screen students. But some people think that the national examination does a poor job of representing students' abilities. Also, the additional costs of *hagwon* tuition are burdensome to many families and produce questionable results. Many feel that, under the current system, students endure too much stress and pressure to study.

## **HANDOUT 3: CONTEMPORARY YOUTH CULTURE IN KOREA**

**BY EUN MEE KIM AND INHAE CHON**

Twenty-five years separate me from my daughter, Inhae, who is now 15-years old. Our experiences in junior high and high school are similar in some ways but surprisingly different in many others. Writing this essay was a great excuse to peer into the lives of 15-year olds, no doubt a challenging task for anyone in any culture at any time—especially when the person under consideration happens to be your own child!

The most important source of hope, anxiety, and frustration is the college entrance exam. Entering the college of your, and more importantly, your parent's choice, appears to be the most stressful event in many Korean youths' lives. Their whole education since junior high school is oriented toward the college entrance exam. Evening newscasts devote a great deal of time and attention to the general college entrance exam (equivalent to the SAT exam), which takes place only one day each year in early winter. In-depth coverage and analysis about such factors as the difficulty, content and evaluation of the exam is the main focus of the news. It seems like the whole country comes to a standstill on the day of the exam: many schools are closed to become exam sites, office hours for major governmental offices and other public institutions are pushed back one or two hours in order to ease traffic congestion, and major newspaper and television stations send their crews to the exam sites for breaking stories. It is not uncommon to see a desperate student arriving at the last minute on the back of a volunteer's motorcycle, having been rescued from a car or bus breakdown on the way to the exam. Mothers wait outside the gates the whole day, praying that their daughters and sons will do well. Sticky rice cakes and Korean taffy are stuck to the gates, which represent the parents' wish that their children "stick" to college.

Preparing for college starts early for Korean students. Inhae and many of her friends have been going to cram schools since junior high. After coming home from a long day at school, Inhae eats dinner at five o'clock and, on three days each week, heads to her cram school. Cram school begins at six and ends at ten minutes past eleven. It is almost 11:30 when she gets home.

When students fail to enter the college of their and their parent's choice, many spend the entire next year at a cram school preparing for the next college entrance exam. Since the exam is given only once a year, students must wait a whole year to try again. Some students try to get into college three years in a row. Being admitted to the "right college" is the most important goal in life. It is a major battle for many students and their parents.

During their precious spare time, Inhae and her friends watch television and go to movies. Entertainers and news about them are probably one of the most important items of gossip for teenagers. They are extremely interested in the lives of singers, television stars, and actors and actresses. They learn about the latest fashion trends, hit songs and popular shows by observing these entertainers. This isn't so different from our day. We used to spend a lot of time in front of the television set, wondering who and what was "in."

Other things have changed, though. The most important equipment for Inhae and her friends in the summer of 2000 is a cell phone, which fits into the palm of one's hand. The cell phone seems



to be the thing that no high school or junior high school kid must be seen without in Seoul! It has become indispensable, allowing them to communicate with friends at any time in any place, beyond the scrutiny of their parents. It quickly replaced the beeper, which was very popular only a year and a half ago. According to Inhae and her friends, over half of their classmates have cell phones.

The favorite pastime of Inhae and her friends is taking “joy photos” in small photo booths, found on almost every corner. These photo booths produce pictures with various frames and inscriptions printed on glossy stickers. Inhae and her friends all carry photo books, containing literally hundreds of these small joy photos taken with different people. They also enjoy window shopping at clothing stores, cosmetic stores, and music stores. After school and on weekends, they like to walk along streets filled with trendy shops.

When I was growing up, my friends wanted to become teachers, nurses, and “good mothers and wise wives.” Becoming a professional was hardly mentioned, since there were few role models. Luckily, things have changed for Inhae. When I asked Inhae and two of her friends about their aspirations, only one answered that she wanted to become a teacher. Although a teacher is no doubt an important occupation, it is heartwarming to know that this generation sees opportunities that appeared closed to mine. Inhae wants to become a graphic designer, and her friend Hana wants to become an anchorwoman. Although they have aspirations for professional careers, and are committed to having a job even after marriage, they are still somewhat bound by gender discrimination. They mentioned that certain jobs are more “amenable” to women, while others are not. I was surprised to find out that members of my daughter’s generation are still given the impression by their peers and teachers that they can’t do something because of their gender. Unlike myself, Inhae and her friends do not find discrimination particularly alarming. They seem to take it as a given and as a boundary with which they have to work. I hope their ideas will change over time, and they will become more active in breaking the gender barrier, which is still very firm in Korea.

## **HANDOUT 4: SOUTH KOREAN EDUCATION FOCUSING ON THE FUTURE: AN UPDATE**

**BY RICHARD DIEM, TEDD LEVY AND RONALD VANSICKLE**

Our bus wound its way uphill along a narrow, crowded street toward Shinn II Boys High School, and one could only imagine the excitement and disruption we were about to bring to its staff and students. Hanging over the school's entrance was a banner welcoming our group of 19 Americans and more than 40 other educators from Australia, Canada and New Zealand. We could see dozens of faces peering at us through the windows of the four-story building.

Our visit to this school was one of several we would make during the Summer 1996 Korean Studies Program sponsored by The Korea Society, an organization dedicated to academic and cultural exchanges to promote greater understanding of Korea and its people. Our visits and talks with teachers, students, and school officials allowed for some preliminary impressions and observations about education in Korea.

Since that visit, much has changed throughout Korea. Economic and political upheavals have shifted both personal and institutional outlooks. As with other societal constructs, Korean schools have been part of the process.

### **The Education System**

The Korean public education structure is divided into three parts: six years of primary school, followed by three years of middle school and then three years of high school. In 1996 only about five-percent of Korea's high schools were coeducational. The proportion of coeducational schools has increased by almost ten-percent. However, classes in many coeducational high schools are still divided along gender lines. The curriculum is standardized so now both boys and girls study technology and domestic science.

The primary curriculum consists of nine principal subjects: moral education, Korean language, social studies, mathematics, science, physical education, music, fine arts and practical arts. English-language instruction now begins in the third grade, so that children can start learning English in a relaxed atmosphere through conversational exchange, rather than through rote learning of grammatical rules as is still the practice in many middle and high schools. The major objectives, as stated in a 1996 background report by the Ministry of Education, are "to improve basic abilities, skills and attitudes; to develop language ability and civic morality needed to live in society; to increase the spirit of cooperation; to foster basic arithmetic skills and scientific observation skills; and to promote the understanding of healthy life and the harmonious development of body and mind." The seventh annual curriculum, which began implementation in March 2000, kept these basic goals but updated many elements to reflect changes in Korean society.

Upon completion of primary school, students advance to middle school, which comprises grades seven through nine. The curriculum consists of 12 basic or required subjects, electives and

extracurricular activities. While elementary school instructors teach all subjects, middle school teachers, like their colleagues in the United States, are content specialists.

High schools are divided into academic and vocational schools. In 1995, some 62-percent of students were enrolled in academic high schools and 38-percent in vocational high schools. A small number attended specialized high schools concentrating in science, the arts, foreign languages, and other specialized fields. This is still the case.

The aims of education at the high school level are "to foster each student's personality and ability needed to preserve and strengthen the backbone of the nation; to develop students' knowledge and skills to prepare them for jobs needed in society; to promote each student's autonomy, emotional development, and critical thinking abilities to be brought to bear in and out of school; and to improve physical strength and foster a sound mind."

### **The School Calendar and School Days**

The Korean school calendar has two semesters, the first extending from March through July and the second from September through February. There are summer and winter breaks, but 10 optional half days at the beginning and end of each break—which are attended by practically all students—reduce each of these biennial vacations to the remaining 10 days.

A typical day finds high schoolers studying before school begins at about 8:00 AM. Classes run for 50 minutes each, with a morning break and a 50-minute lunch period. The afternoon session resumes at about 1:00 PM, and classes continue until about 4:00 or 4:30, followed by the cleaning of the classroom. Students may then take a short dinner break at home, or they may eat at school. Teachers typically move from room to room, while students stay in one place.

Students return to the school library to study or attend private schools or tutoring sessions until between 10:00 PM and midnight. They return home where they may have a snack, listen to music or watch television before going to bed. Elementary and middle school students have similar but somewhat less rigorous days with shorter hours and more recreational activities.

Attendance requirements call for a minimum of 220 days at all three levels. The curriculum is prescribed by law, as are the criteria for the development of textbooks and instructional materials. There have been periodic curriculum revisions, most recently in March 2000, and the trend is definitely toward decentralization in determining, diversifying and implementing the curriculum.

The well-educated person, according to the curriculum and perhaps shedding further light on what is valued in Korean society, is healthy, independent, creative and moral.

### **Visiting a High School**

The high schools that we saw were large and rather barren in appearance. Invariably, a large grassless area in front of the school serves as the playing field as well as accommodates schoolwide assemblies and other meetings. Inside, classrooms line the straight, sparsely furnished halls and are typically filled with 50 or 60 uniformed students and an instructor.

Most instruction we observed consisted of teacher lectures, with only rare interruptions for questions. If students had questions, they might speak to the teacher after class. There is considerable interest in computers. At the end of 1999 there was about 1 computer per every 23.8 primary and secondary school student and 1 per every 1.4 primary and secondary school teachers. The Ministry of Education planned to raise the ratio to 1 computer per 17.4 students and 1 per every teacher by the end of 2000. The computer laboratory we visited was equipped with about 50 terminals meant to serve 3,000 students, but at the time only teachers were in the room.

As we noted, discipline problems were infrequent, and great respect for teachers was evident. Students bowed, as is the custom, when passing teachers in the halls and appeared hesitant to enter faculty offices. We learned that discipline cases are generally referred to the student's homeroom teacher, who then talks with the student and his or her family. In addition to administering discipline, which may but infrequently includes corporal punishment, homeroom teachers offer counseling, help students with college applications, and maintain contact with parents.

We were told in 1996 that in years past when teachers informed parents of discipline problems, parents responded by sending the teacher either a small amount of rice as an apology for having caused the teacher worry and trouble or a switch for the teacher to discipline the child. Since 1999, teachers no longer have the legal authority to administer corporal punishment. This change has created some confusion as to the extent of teachers' authority.

Despite these differences, Korean teachers still have more responsibility for counseling students and controlling their behavior than do teachers in the United States. Korean culture grants teachers the same authority as parents and attributes them even greater responsibility for children's moral and academic development.

### **One Teacher's Day**

One teacher we met was a Korean American from Maryland who teaches conversational English. As he explained, students are rarely assigned written work either in class or as homework. His regular workload consists of five classes that meet four times each week, with an additional 20 classes that meet once a week. With a typical class size of 50 or more students, this teacher would have 1,000 papers to review weekly. He, of course, could not evaluate them and handle all his other responsibilities.

This teacher's workday extends from 7:30 AM to about 5:00 PM, with an additional half day on Saturday. Although a relatively long day by American standards, it leaves him with considerable free time and few responsibilities other than teaching. While he reported that teachers' salaries are relatively high by Korean standards of living, we learned that teachers throughout the country have expressed dissatisfaction with their pay.

This teacher confessed that he did not know if his students actually were learning English. There are no failing grades, but there are remedial classes, and students may attend supplemental education centers if they or their parents feel there is a need. Most schools give trial achievement

tests twice a year to prepare students for college entrance examinations. In addition, multiple Internet Web sites offer the same services, helping students to gauge their own progress.

Regarding instructional methods, this teacher has tried small groups and other nontraditional approaches to teaching but felt his students did not respond well, being unfamiliar with such methods and uncertain about how they were expected to perform. He therefore returned to lecturing, which he attempts to enliven with frequent questions. His many students seem amazingly cooperative, good-natured, and enthusiastic. A lively question-and-answer session directed by the teacher about students' images of the United States took place during our visit. As one might expect, they were most aware of international sports and celebrity figures, such as Michael Jordan and Michael Jackson. However, when asked what came to mind when they thought of the United States, many answered "freedom" or "the Statue of Liberty." But they also asked about drugs, and if it was true that police patrol American high schools.

### **Visiting an Elementary School**

We also visited an elementary school of 700 students. Located in Ch'unchon, a "small" city of 200,000, northeast of Seoul, the school had the familiar large, bare playground and meeting space, along with typical class sizes of approximately 50 students.

In contrast to the high schools we visited, this school's halls were decorated with bulletin board displays, banners, photographs, trophy cases, historical exhibits, and examples of student work. Similarly, the classrooms in this worn but well-kept building were covered with displays of children's work. The school is famous for its speed skaters, and many alumni who have gained prominence in sports have given their trophies to the school to encourage today's students.

The music teacher has more than 50 violins to be used by students in a challenging classical music program. One room stocked with stringed and percussion instruments is devoted to traditional Korean music. Students begin studying science in the second grade, and the school's science laboratory has several student workstations. A large computer lab is available for classes, and new computers with Pentium processors had just arrived to replace the machines currently in use.

The school library, according to the principal, needs more books, given the size of the student body. He suggested, however, that this school was fairly representative of Korean elementary schools, except for its well-equipped television studio, which students use to produce school programs.

School tradition and achievement is very important to Korea's principals. One high school has a large stone marker engraved with its motto, "Diligence and Wisdom," and statues adorn the school grounds. One depicts a standing young student looking intently into the eyes of a seated female teacher. The other is of Admiral Sun-shin Yi, the heroic sixteenth-century warrior who designed and built a fleet of iron-plated "turtle boats" that were instrumental in the defeat of a Japanese invasion. In the principal's office, one wall has photographs and statements noting the qualifications of the staff. The entrance to the school is lined with pictures of past principals and the large inscription, "Teachers create the future."

Elementary schools put more emphasis on art, music and physical education than secondary schools do. In addition, at this level more time—roughly the same amount that a Korean high school student spends preparing for college entrance tests—is devoted to extracurricular activities.

### **Social Studies and the Curriculum**

Social studies education begins in the first and second grades with a course combined with science and titled “Intelligent Life.” During their 34 weeks of schooling, first-grade students receive 120 hours, and second-grade students 136 hours, of this instruction. Third- and fourth-grade students receive 102 hours of social studies instruction and fifth- and sixth-graders are given 136 hours per year. At the middle school level, seventh-grade students have 102 hours, and eighth- and ninth-graders receive 136 hours of social studies instruction. In high school, first-year students take a program of required courses. By their second year, students can select from among three tracks: humanities and social studies, a natural science track and a vocational track. However, this is likely to change. The social studies track includes courses in Korean history, politics, economics, society, and culture as well as world history, world geography and social studies.

Korea has a national curriculum developed and monitored by the Ministry of Education. It is revised every five to ten years; implementation of the seventh national curriculum began in 2000. This curriculum seeks to develop democratic citizens who have strong moral and civic convictions.

### **Humanities Education**

There have been proposals to change the nature of the educational process—from focusing on preparation for college and entrance into schools that will ensure economic success and intellectual development, towards focusing on the cultivation of attitudes and abilities needed to become responsible citizens. Toward this end a practice-based approach to humanities education has been implemented, with the goals of instilling values of etiquette, public order and democratic citizenship through experiential activities.

Elements of this curriculum are introduced throughout the school program. From kindergarten through third grade, the focus is on etiquette, the observing of social rules, and the development of a sense of community. Fourth through ninth grade emphasizes democratic citizenship, including rules, processes, and reasonable decision-making. At the high school level, attention is given to global citizenship, including understanding other cultures and peace education.

A 1995 government report on Korean education, titled “Korea’s Vision for the Twenty-First Century,” stated that the curriculum must encourage students “to be global citizens, which includes openness to diversity, broad perspectives, an understanding of the various traditions and cultures of other countries, and sensitivity to environmental issues and conflicts among regions and races. Accordingly, there should be greater emphasis on tolerant and open-minded attitudes toward diversity and differences.” The seventh curriculum builds on this document and fosters the development of character education as well as community service.

### **Looking Toward the Future**

Along with their strong belief in the family and cultural traditions, Koreans value education and are willing to make significant personal sacrifices to ensure that their children are afforded the best available learning opportunities. No nation has a higher degree of enthusiasm for education than Korea, and nowhere are children more pressured to study. Evidence of major educational accomplishments, such as degrees from prestigious colleges and universities, strongly influence a person's suitability for employment, marriage and everyday interpersonal relations.

In 1996 Moo-Sub Kang, director general of the Korean Educational Development Institute, noted that education administration was gradually moving from the national Ministry of Education to individual schools. In 1998 a Presidential Commission for a New Education Community was established to encourage further reform. More recent educational policy encourages a modest degree of curriculum decentralization. Local boards of education, similar to those in the United States but covering larger geographic areas, now have the requisite degree of autonomy to interpret the national curriculum in terms of local needs. For example, some schools now offer more computer, art, music, and writing courses, eliminating the need for their extracurricular study. Principals now can work with social studies teachers in developing aspects of the curriculum that reflect local needs, such as character education and community service programs. However, the issue that continues to receive the most attention is the need to reform the school system. Many Koreans believe that the mass education of the industrial era is not appropriate to an era of high technology and globalization. In practical terms, large lecture classes of 50 or 60 students with an emphasis on rote learning will not produce creative or morally sensitive graduates.

In response to a changing society, the Korean government established a new vision for education. Unveiled by the Presidential Commission on Educational Reform in May 1995, this vision projected open, lifelong education that would provide individuals with equal and easy access to education at any time and place. Further, the Commission felt that education suitable for the twenty-first century would be achieved through technology. The long-range goal was to raise the quality of education to a world-standard level of excellence.

Critics point out that in the ensuing five years most classroom practices have remained unchanged. In addition, policy is still set through a four-tiered hierarchical model that is heavily weighted against parental and teacher input, despite locally elected boards of education.

### **Some Tentative Conclusions**

Education has contributed to the growth of Korea's democratic government. It has produced hardworking, skilled employees who have brought about an economic miracle within a single generation. It has reaffirmed traditional values while maintaining its commitment to modernization, citizenship and global involvement. The ambitious and comprehensive reform plans developed in 1995 by the Ministry of Education still appear to enjoy widespread public and professional support. A broad spectrum of the society recognizes the need for lifelong learning as a precept for social and economic improvement.

**Authors' Note:** Based on various reports and discussions with Korean educators, we've attempted to update our previous work and place it within these new concepts. We would like to thank Dr. Tae-Hoon Kim, professor of ethics education at Kong-Ju National University of

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