Changes to
Korean Education
- selected journal entries from SMOE
(Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education)
high school teachers. (2007)
What change do you want to see in our education?

A month ago I was deeply moved by French President, Nicolas Sarkozy who sent a long letter to all teachers across France. His main idea is about the restoration of teacher’s authority. He said that teaching used to be a finest occupation but since classrooms became violent, it has become a difficult job and teachers have felt wretched. He added students have to show their respect to their teachers by standing up when they come into the classroom, and schools should become places where students can learn “politeness, open-mindedness and tolerance, which are all forms of respect.

After reading Sarkozy’s letter, I thought the crisis in education is a universal phenomenon and France is facing a crisis very similar to Korea’s. And I became envious that the French have a president who has the courage to seek educational reform. I totally agree with his idea of restoration of teacher’s authority and student’s politeness. Korea needs that kind of educational reform and reasonable ideas.

Korean teachers are stressed out by problems such as their relationships with students and parents. And demands from their schools prohibit teachers from doing well in teaching and student guidance. Some parents don’t trust teacher’s guidance. When bad students make troubles, they don’t care about their children’s behaviors. The demands of some parents are so selfish and crucial that teachers cannot control the situation. If parents show respect to the teacher, the mischievous students follow their parents. When parents trust teachers, the troublesome students will learn to obey teachers and change their bad attitudes. We must create an atmosphere where teachers can be firm in their convictions as far as education is concerned. In a social atmosphere where parents trust the teachers, students can get a suitable education to their abilities.

In my opinion, the restoration of teacher’s authority and the trust between parents and teachers are the beginning of good educational reform. To accomplish good educational effects, a teacher has to love students first and students and parents have to trust and follow the teacher’s guidance. Of course the quality of a teacher is very important to be trusted by parents and students. That’s why the government should make a good criteria to choose a good teacher. Nowadays teachers in public schools have no more sufficient effects on students than teachers in private academy.

When teachers recover the original role as an educator, the national competitiveness will be increased. The core of national competitiveness lies in educational competitiveness. The key problem of our education is that schools don’t prepare effective teaching methods and skills. That is caused by educational uniformity. Schools stick only to students’ human rights and equal education. I think equal opportunities in education are quite different from standardization. Imposing uniformity of public education on the students make our education fail to get success of education. We must put general knowledge back at the centre of our education stressing the recover of teachers’ authority and politeness and tolerance of students.
The Changes I Would Like to See in Korean Education

It is not easy to define what "education" is, for it is not a simple work but a very complicated process with important roles. So, I want to regard it as a great work through which man can have ability to deal with problems in society and can be a person with proper human nature. Almost all the people seem to be professionals in education because they are related to education directly or indirectly. They easily enjoy talking about educational problems, but it's not still easy to find out the right solution to fulfill "good education". The education in Korea is not an exception. Quick changes in its system and social needs make all of us not to be professionals in education. Therefore, as a teacher with long experiences, I want to insist that a few things in Korean education be changed for teachers to perform our work more effectively.

Firstly, self-determination of teachers should be enlarged within the nation-based educational philosophy. The larger the organization is getting, the weaker its efficiency is getting. So, the teachers' opinions need to be accepted appropriately in the school field to raise the effects of the education.

Secondly, the number of the students in each class should be under 30 for teachers to have closer relationship with students. It will help us focus on the original aim of education rather than pursue its display effects.

Thirdly, academic and career counseling should be strengthened. Nowadays students are apt to study only to enter a good university, not considering their own aptitude. However, it can be more important to find out what kinds of jobs will be most suitable to them than to study hard without knowing their interests and abilities.

Lastly, the school facilities should be built more and more. Above all, I hope every teacher can have his or her own classroom where various kinds of teaching materials are equipped properly. It will surely help us teach students better. High quality multi-media systems should be furnished in the classroom. Small theaters, auditoriums, and gymnasiums are also necessary. Also, the facilities like day care center and fitness lounge should be made for teachers' welfare.

In conclusion, even though some big changes will be done in Korean education, its effects cannot be achieved in a short time as the proverb says "Rome was not built in a day". Therefore, we teachers are just doing our best in teaching our students in our educational situation, looking forward to our bright future.
What changes in Korean education would you like to see!

I reflect the ages that we have learned and taught all things through schooling as well as homes and other educational institutes. I've never been taught nearly all scientific knowledge or subjects that needed lots of experiments. Also, even in the English classes we didn't have any chances to listen to native speaker's sounds by the audio tape recorder. Anyway, time passed. Now Korean educational reality has changed a lot, improved better than before enormously.

However we need more and more changes in educational fields in many ways. First of all as an English teacher would like to mention about English Education in Korea. When I was a student of secondary school, I have learned English by the grammar-translation method. We didn't have any chance to speak and listen to native speaker's pronunciation. Teacher's teaching method was mostly reading, translating, and writing. Through these activities students could get only that ability itself.

I remembered the day when a foreigner visited our school which I worked as a teacher who passed one of the most difficult examination to be a teacher, selected total 15 teachers only at that time –in 1977, in Seoul. To be a teacher was an honorable thing to everybody. So I was very proud of myself, having confidence a lot. But when a foreigner came to school, I was very embarrassed, I finally didn't attend the meeting which included the guest and a few English teachers. How shameful it was!

Because of first son's illness, I quit the job and raised two sons for almost 9 years. After that I felt, experienced and knew some frustration already in the field of English Education. So I made up my mind not to make my two sons as "a person like English dumb". I hired a good, warmhearted, decent American to teach English conversation to them every twice for a week. Such a kind of English conversation teaching kept for 6 years as well as reading comprehension also by a English literature professor who is my best friend. By chance I could get my job again. I sometimes think this is my destiny to be a teacher again.

Now I and my two sons can communicate in English with English speaking people. I realize that it is more important for the students to have good teachers as well as useful teaching methods.

Finally I recommend more opportunities to get learning chances abroad for English teachers and also have foreign quailed teachers for the amazing English future in our country.
Oct. 15th

What changes would you like to see in Korean education?

If I was asked same question ten or fifteen years ago, I would respond I would like to see some changes such as fewer students in a class, having fewer classes a day and not more extra works as a teacher than I have now. They are, of course, very important issues but I cannot help thinking more seriously.

In Korea most people want to have jobs that guarantee high salaries and can ensure wealthy lives of their declining ages. so many people want to go to good universities and have good professional jobs. Those who want their sons and daughters to go to good universities make their kids study hard not only at school but also in private institutes for hours almost everyday even though they are very young. Most of my students are always tired and they do not show spontaneous attitudes. They are compelled to obey and follow the schedules their parents made for them. But it is impossible for all students to have good grades at school. Some of my students sometimes look unhappy and seem to lose desire to learn new things. I can find some students don’t know what they want to be or don’t have their own dreams. Therefore, first of all our Korean society should be changed and people can enjoy their lives whatever they do for livings. Then parents will not have to push their kids only to study and my students will be happier.

Secondly, I’d like to teach in small classes, less than 25 students in a class. I cannot pay attention to every student and cannot correct their mistakes in details. I want to try many interesting and effective activities with my students for developing their speaking abilities but I can’t do that in a large class, more than 35 students.

And I want to concentrate to teach my students, to try to find good ways to teach my students effectively and to spend much time with my homeroom students after school. I have a great deal of extra work at school, so I can’t concentrate my job as a teacher. Sometimes I think I’m not a teacher but an officer. I must deal with many paper works from SMOE or the branch office of education and other organizations. I suggest we need more school officers
and they should do those kind of jobs.

Last but not least, teachers should change their minds. I think teaching is one of service industries. I mean teachers should do their best in teaching their students and try to do good ways of teaching. And managing officers such as principals, vice principals, supervisors and other officers of MOE and SMOE should have different thinking about teachers and innovation of education. Many of them think teachers are the target that they should reform, but I don't think so. Teachers and managing officers should try to find out good ways that we can solve many problems of schools all together.
3rd Journal

What Changes Would You Like to See in Korean Education?

It is true that, economically and politically, Korea has achieved a great development during a relatively short period. It sets an good model for developing countries in the world. However, compared with it, Korean education, I think, seems to have made slow progress. It has much room for improvement.

First of all, I think the current egalitarian school system has to be changed. In the system, all students are put together in the same classes as well as in the same schools regardless of their previous academic achievements. This has been effectively dumbing them down, and so weakening Korean international competitiveness. People say that everyone has the right to learn, but nobody has the right to disturb somebody’s study. Also, there is no minimum criterion for graduation from schools. However bad a student’s achievements may be, he or she can finish the work. That’s incredible.

Second, there are too many colleges and universities in Korea, one of the countries that keep the greatest percentage of students who are admitted to colleges or universities. That’s because, in Korea, a person’s educational background is all-important. Also, that’s why specialized high schools and technical high schools don’t do all their roles. Almost all of them are trying to make students go on to college or university.

Finally, the change I would like to see in Korean education is to improve the way teachers serve. In fact, to teach someone means to give knowledge to someone, but to educate someone means to give intellectual and moral training to someone or to train and teach someone. Most of teachers are interested in only teaching. They are inclined to avoid important things for students as well as teaching because it is so hard. Also, although some teachers look at students to do incorrectly or violate some regulation, they never discipline them and pretend not to be indifferent. So many people claims that teachers should be evaluated.
Writing Assignment 3

What should be changed?

I always wonder why Korean parents are eager to educate their children that much. They push their children to study hard at school and even after school they provide lots of private lessons such as private tutoring or cram school lessons. When it comes to English, the situation is worse.

Because of this overheating English education, we English teachers have difficulty in teaching students at school. Many of them don’t have trust in school teachers and don’t care much about what they learn at school. What is worse is students’ individual differences in English ability is so big, almost all the students are not satisfied with English class. Everything looks terrible and disappointing. I sometimes want to give up teaching students.

However, things can be changed if some measures are taken. First, school curriculum should have level-specific supplementary class. In order to satisfy the demand for more lessons for the high-level students, schools should have various special programs after school. Second, the government should secure excellent teachers to raise trust in school teachers. Third, the college entrance system should be improved to normalize school education. These measures are not easy to be taken. But if they take places step by step, the teaching and learning English at school will be better.
What Changes in Korean Education Would You Like to See

The other day I read the article in the newspaper the title of it was Who is the Boss?" He mentioned every area is upside down, such as the barber shop, in school, in the country, even at home.

One of his examples is like this.

One day he went to the barber shop to have his hair cut. Then the barber arrogantly cut his hair. That means he is the artist and don't bother him when he is working on his masterpiece. Here is one more. He is a father at home and he is the only person who manages to his home financial problems and support his all family members but his wife usually treats him as a servant not a boss. His children usually the boss of the family. He didn't have any right to watch TV. When he wants to watch a sport game, his wife is nagging all the time like this. His children are studying now and don't make noises. At home, he doesn't have any room to have rest.

Some years ago, I joined the long term English teachers training course. At that moment one of my instructors said like this about Korean Education system. In Korea most people cannot speak English fluently not because teachers are bad or students are lazy but because the policy is really poor. To enter the universities, students have to memorize simple things. They don't have to speak fluently. They just answer some simple questions. They only pick correct answers among five choices. That system is not related with speaking abilities.

And also the government authorities don't want to change the education system because most of them are rich, so they can send their children abroad and pay foreign countries a lot of money. But when their children come back to Korea, they can get a good job. That's their good advantages.

Another thing I want to change is that teachers have the right to discipline the students. These days the teachers don't have any right to control the students. Korean society emphasize freedom. But the students are not trained to be treated like that. They are not matured. They are only a child.

Finally I would like the educational system to be changed then the teachers and students' attitudes will be changed automatically.

Thank you for reading my paper.
What changes would you like to see in Korean education?

In Korean education, there are 3 things which the government has taken measures to abolish: stratified high school structure, university entrance examination, and entering schools through donation. Officials say the measures are for normalization of formal education, equity of educational opportunity, and for solving the problem of overheated private education.

But abolishing the entrance examination altogether does not seem to be a solution. Overheated private education still exists. Downward equalization is considered severe. So, I insist that Korean education should be changed. One of the changes should be reviving high school and university exams.

First of all, we need elite education for national competitiveness. In the current school system where students don't choose schools, there exists a general drop in quality. We cannot create a ruling class effectively unless we provide an education of high quality. And our national competitiveness cannot be guaranteed.

Second, students could be more motivated and study more effectively. If gifted students and slower learners are in average classes, they easily lose interest in learning and lose motivation. It is more effective to study with children of same intellectual abilities.

Third, motivated students are not only interested in learning for getting a good grade, but also participate in cultural curriculum like music and sports more actively. Then, we can cultivate a moral being even in the exam-driven society.

Lastly, we can guarantee the equity of educational opportunity. Korean government officials say that eliminating elite education is to guarantee the equality for students from poor families. They say it's unfair for students from poor families, who cannot go to a private academy because of a high tuition. But I don't think making students with different abilities study in one classroom is good for them. That's not to guarantee the equality. To give opportunity to choose schools according to their abilities is more important.

Government officials are afraid that public education will be endangered to collapse. They say that more students could go to a private academy. But students could use internet for study. If public education is better than private education, students will not go to a private academy. Formal schools should not be afraid of competing with a private academy.
The changes I'd like to see in Korean education.

There are a lot of changes I'd like to see in Korean education. However, I'd like to say four things among them.

First, class size is too big. Usually, the average class size is from 35 to 40. Under this circumstance, it is almost impossible to teach students English speaking. For example, the class size is so big that it is almost impossible for me to monitor if my students are doing their speaking activities well when they are given a task to do in pairs or groups. Thus, I'd like to recommend that when we teach students English speaking, the class should be split in two.

Secondly, we need freedom for testing students. Korean education authorities have recommended high schools to introduce basic, intermediate, advanced level classes in English and math. As a result, most high schools adopted the system in freshman classes. However, we feel frustrated because we have no freedom for testing students. We should give students the same exams regardless of what level class they belong to. In turn, when we teach students in different level classes, our syllabus is almost the same.

Thirdly, Korean SAT should be changed. The current Korean SAT doesn't include an English essay test, much less, an English speaking test. As a result, even if we teachers want and try to teach them English speaking and writing, students are not motivated to learn them. Therefore, I'd like to recommend that Korean SAT should include an English essay test and an English speaking test.

Finally, we teachers don't have any effective measures to discipline the students who don't study at all or who even obstruct and spoil classes. There is no failing system in junior high or high schools in Korea. What makes matters worse, there is no suspension or expulsion system in junior high or high school.

Consequently, even if a student doesn't study at all, he or she can be promoted to a next grade. In addition, even if a student obstructs or spoils our classes on purpose and continuously, we have no choice but to persuade him or her not to do that again, give him or her a physical punishment (which has strict guidelines), give him or her a community