

# **Teaching toward free being: a self biographical insight concerning what education is for**

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## **Abstract**

In retrospect of speaker's own life having observed Korean society since the early 1950s from one of the poorest country in the world into an affluent one called the Korean miracle, and considering the stern reality that the people in the North and the South Korea, even they have shared the same flesh and blood, language and cultural root, are living in completely different worlds each other today, what the education is for has been a striking question to speaker's mind from time to time not only for the maximum development of human potential but also for the quality of collective human life.

It is speaker's conviction that our education can differ relative to our choice how much we can help people learn to be free being. One of critical traits of free being is the capacity to choose to achieve own human potential toward self-identity in society. The choice will affect our educational process such as goal setting, curriculum structure, selection of criteria, etc and finally in its long term consequence related to the social integrity capable of enhancing human dignity. This is evidently related to what value choice teachers should make.

## **Introduction**

It is my great honor having opportunity to convey my idea on education at this Educational Research Association of Singapore (ERAS) Conference. I have some good experiences with Singaporean educationists almost thirty years ago sharing common interest and friendship, which happened at an international conference in Tokyo. They were very smart in exploring educational ideas and very humane in taking care of attending colleagues. Later on I had an opportunity to visit the Singaporean National Institute of Education and met some scholars. Since then from time to time good memories with Singaporean educators come up to my mind. It is my impression that Singapore is one of the most integral societies in the world where multicultural ingredients are well harmonized with each other through powerful education. Thus, people with different ethnic and cultural background are respected and cared, that is a vital factor for the community becoming more complicated and diversified today to move forward trust, solidarity and regimentation for prosperity.

Singaporean Education is noted in Korea for its competitiveness in consecutive comparative students' achievement tests like OECD Program for International Student Achievement (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The scores of Singapore students have been ranked on the top among the participating countries. I am sure that your high standard in your teaching profession makes difference in such international students' achievement tests.

Here in this room you are educationists for this or other reasons. I would like to believe that all educationists share a common interest, that is, the interest on desirable human being in an abroad sense. That interest is concern about helping people, through the teaching and learning, the field of your profession, become desirable human being as constructive constituents of community whatever they are. We believe that good teaching and learning can change the behavior of learners and in turn the learned people are able to change their own way of life and the fate of community as well.

My topic today is “**Teaching toward free being from a self autobiographical insight concerning what education is for.**” As the title implies, it is a topic about an educational ideal, on what kind of person education should strive for as an ultimate goal of education. My presentation may not be a specific solution for daily practice in the classroom, but rather a general question to scrutinize the nature of education in whatever specific profession you are involved. I hope you to reflect your daily practice in line with my general question on what education is for, in other words what really education is.

Why I bring this title with me here? I would like to share my experiences and insight on the title with you because I think it is very important for educationists and educators as well that what educational orientation you have can make difference as a whole not only in educational process itself but also in its consequence on students. Its impact certainly can be related to the future of community in long term perspective. I have confirmed this stance again and again through my whole life that only the education relevant to free being can bring hope for human dignity and can contribute to the sustainability of society in a positive way.

Speaking conclusion first, if we want our life in society with human dignity, the educators should help individual student become free being. In an old East Asian proverb, education has been said as a centennial policy implying that education is a long range project entailing positive future by nurturing desirable person. This proverb assumes that education is the valuable task raising boys and girls, through which young generations become the capable talents to discipline themselves and direct their own community in a better way.

Yes, education can and has to play such positive role. Then, can any teaching and learning in the name of education do so?

It is my conviction that any teaching and learning under the name of education does not bring constructive consequence on the learners and on their society as well. Only in the condition that the teaching and learning is linked for individual learners to become independent person with open-mindedness, the whole process of teaching and learning can bring positive consequence as the old East Asian proverb. Such teaching and learning programs should be designed and offered with communal deliberation in the way that learners see themselves, the surrounding world and its interrelationship in a wider and deeper way and so that they are stimulated to be wise and responsible constituents of community.

Especially when it comes to the task building sustainable community, we can identify salient historical facts from the collapsed cases of Eastern European regimes during 1980s-1990s. The people in the region nurtured by strong state’s educational policy even in a very systemic way failed not only in making their social system work, but also in defending their existing social structure from its disruption.

Even today, the people in the North and South Korea are living in completely different worlds each other, although they share same language, historical and cultural root. Of course, the social and political system of the two parts differ each other, and in the same line the goal and process of education also differs too. What will be the future of two Korean people with

these two different systems? As far as, there is no dramatic turn to cooperate with each other toward mutual trust, it is inevitable for the both to compete for superiority over the other side.

Which side will win and which will lose? Already there has been widening gap between the two parts almost in every sector, caused mainly by political ideology. It is out of question that education in each side is reinforcing that schism. As futurologists suggested, the future is already here and now in our choice and action today. For me as an educationist it is a critical problem of Korean education. Nevertheless, it can be a subject of your interest because you do certainly not want to be educationists or educators failing in preparing your young generation for the future. In a comparative perspective, the different educational choices between the North and South Korea can be interesting educational experiments that signify the relationship between the way of education and its impact on society.

In this vein, I think it is useful for us for a while to reexamine the meaning of education on what true education really is in regard to its consequence on the qualification of educated people and the entailing impact on community. There must be many essential elements associated in this reexamination for us to account. Here in this limited time constraint, I would like to pick up only one thing among many plausible elements, which is the teaching toward free being. My attachment to this idea is drawn from the experiences of my own whole life almost 70 years.

My assertion here today mostly comes from my own biographic life history. Fortunately, recent studies and writings somewhere have shed a light on the new possibility in deepening our understanding in education through biographical approach, that is, we can achieve meaningful learning from our lives.<sup>1</sup>

Of course a single life history is personal and subjective, which therefore lacks sound basis for sharing as rational account on educational quests. In spite of the fact that ‘we are quite different as human beings in our varied cultural contexts, the solutions we find for the main conflicts of our lives have similarities’.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, a unique life story can be meaningful if it is related to the problems which are shared by a group of people interested in similar quest. The inevitable subjectivity in autobiographic description in educational perspective can be a concrete case drawing a common interpretation and gaining an insight on issues concerned.

Our unique individual life is part of a cultural network, that’s why a biographic story can be related to the understanding of wider society. In a sense individual autobiography can become a microcosmic reflection of big universal story of human struggle for progress.

Actually, I have not written any biographic writing so far. By the term ‘autobiography’ I mean that I will rely on my personal experience in justifying my assertion.

### **My Life, My Interest in Educational Thought**

I was born in a suburb of Moodianjang, a city of China in northern part in 1942 when the Japanese colonial empire controlled the region. My grandfather emigrated there from Korea during 1920s. Upon the surrender of the colonial regime to the Allies in 1945, the territory returned to China. My grandfather and parents could have stayed there as many other Korean immigrants who are still living as Chinese Korean citizen. However, my family returned back to Korea in January 1946 five month after the liberation. I was told that it was very cold

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Erben ed. (1998). *Biography and Education*. Routledge, London and New York

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Dominice (2000). *Learning from Our Lives*. Jossey-Bass a Wiley Company, San Francisco. Xviii.

winter season when our family crossed over the Amnokgang (the Yalu River) that is flowing through the border between Korea and China. The Korea was already divided into the North and South along with the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel by the two super powers, the U.S.A and the U.S.S.R. There is a city, Sinwijoo, relatively a big border city located in the Amnokgang mouth between Korea and China, where the parents, sisters and brothers of my mother were living in its suburb. My mother wanted to visit her home village for a moment, but the immigration team had to rush to move that's why they had no time to drop by on her behalf. It was the last chance for my mother to pass by her home village. Since then, she could never go there again to meet her relatives. The division between the North and South Korea at the time already made the people separate because the North was controlled by socialist group of people. My family were directly headed to the South Korea crossing over the 37<sup>th</sup> parallel and settled down at a remote rural area.

Why did our family depart China and the North Korea and chose the South Korea for permanent residence right after the liberation? Well, back to the homeland might be one reason. In that case our parents could stay in the North Korea because my mother's native home was there. However, they did not so. Their final destination was somewhere in the South Korea unknown to them. The answer was that my parents wanted the space where they were able to go to church with their own free will. They wanted the country allowing religious freedom. That is my early story how I became a citizen of the South Korea as a man born in China.

When I was a second grade student of elementary school in 1950, the Korean War was broken which lasted three years. Until I was 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I was grown in the remote rural area in a deep mountain village where my family moved first. During 1950-60s we were very hungry for the shortage of food. How much hungry was I at the time?

In one day morning in early summer when I was 5<sup>th</sup> grade student, I found my parents had gone out for farming early in the morning without preparing any meal for breakfast. I went the school without food. On the way back home from school, I picked up unripe wild pitches in the woods, and masticated them again and again only hoping not trouble with my stomach. Fortunately it was only one day for me without meal at that time; it is a symbolic memory for me to prove how poor it was in my early days. The season just before the barley harvest was the period of extreme difficulties of farm life in a year during 1950s. Food aids from the world was a big help for the country to relieve from hunger during the period of poverty.

The rural mountain village was too far from secondary schools so that my parents moved to a middle town where teacher training high school (normal school) was running in provincial capital city nearby. After middle school, I entered the normal high school which was a national elementary school teacher training institution. After three years pre-service teacher training program, I was appointed as an elementary school teacher at 20 years old. After one year teaching, I was enlisted in the army for three years service as man's duty for the country. And then I started my undergraduate study in education at the Seoul National University (SNU). During my graduate study at the SNU, I taught lower secondary students for three years. Since I had a Master degree in education in 1973, I had joined the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) as a researcher, a government funded institute for educational policy studies. KEDI had been my work field for 30 years until I left there nine years ago.

My first trip abroad was made in 1974 in the U.S.A. for several months training program and in 1977, I went to the States again for my PhD program in education. It was not comparable between Korea and the States in its living standards amongst. Even when I came

back in 1980, I never imagined that Korea would be able to become a country of my car society like other western countries.

Since then 30 years passed and I find myself living in the country which is the first case in the world from a country being aided to aiding one. The divided South Korea, once a poor country in the world stricken by foreign colonial power until 1945 and by the world scale Korean War during early in 1950s now transformed into a country of global competitiveness not only in economic sector but also other areas too. Korea's products such as smart phone, car, ship, electric equipment, etc are competing for cutting edge at global market.

Also, Korea is the country achieving democratization along with economic success. Even its constitution sets a liberal democracy as the foundation of national politics; the reality was far from its ideal from its beginning to 1980s. From the outset to the end of 1950s, the society was unstable and not ready for matured democracy. A foreign newspaper reporter criticized that expecting democracy in Korea is like expecting rose in garbage can. In 1960 the government was overthrown by student revolt and then one year later military took over the power which lasted 18 years until 1979. Another military authoritarian regime ruled over the country for seven years and in 1986 there was a sharp turn toward full democracy by adopting a direct popular selection system for president.

As far as economic development is concerned, Korea is not unique country. Rapid economic development has taken place in Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong too during past several decades. Relatively in a short period of time, how this kind transformation took place in these countries altogether? In a relative sense, the so called Asia's four tigers, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and the South Korea share a common societal trait that they have moved further toward open society comparing to other countries in the region.

Among Koreans who had ever lived in the Korean Peninsula in history so far, I dare say that my generation is the most blessed generation almost in the world because my generation has only such remarkable collective experience watching that the hopeless country when they were born rise up as a developed country when they old. They experienced the severity of famine during 1950-60s and were in despair for lack of natural resources with high density of population. However, they have built up the country as a sophisticated country which has enjoyed being affluent. In the meantime all of sudden, the country has suffered from symptoms of developed societies such as the lowest birthrate in the world, advent of aged society, influx of foreign workers for the shortage of lower skill labor force as unexpected side effects. I think this kind of social transformation in a country only during the period of one generation has never happened in the world history. In that sense, my whole living story is interfaced with the grand story of panorama what happened in Korea dramatically. It is really lucky for me to have lived in the only space where a rise of society takes place like a miracle during life time which might has never happened in human history.

How I become educationist among many other alternatives in choosing my career? Perhaps, the influence of my father's expectation seems to play an influential role. My father himself wanted to enter a teacher training school in his adolescent years in colonial era, but in vain due to the incumbent mission for him to care his old father (my grandfather) at home. When I grew up at the age of upper secondary school, he wanted me to realize his unaccomplished dream for being an educator. Educator had been one of preferred job in Korea's tradition even its status is not favored today as before. Certainly my father's recommendation was a decisive motive for me to enter the world of education.

When I was elementary school years, I had blurred idea about teaching job. My own justification to work in education has been formulated throughout from secondary school years in such a way that education is the most important area in the world because the future of a society -whatever it is a family, a local community or a nation- is absolutely dependent on what the nurtured qualification of its constituents is. Its basic notion is that men and women decide their future including their own quality of life as well as the betterment of their community. Especially in national development, there is nothing important than human factor. All those elements important for nation building such as social integrity, progress of new technology, agricultural innovation, national security, etc are rested on the hand and brain of constituent member of the nation.

In this context, I have had a keen interest on the relationship between the way of education and its impact on human traits and on national development as well. In other words, in education what is the most important factor associating with sustainable development of a country? It cannot be a concrete research question being explored for a lucid answer, but rather a perplexing one reflecting wider cases throughout the world history and taking comprehensive outlook into consideration for sound stance. Thank to my involvement in research work at the KEDI, I had opportunities to visit other countries around the world, and observe their unique educational situation, problems and policies intact. The visited countries include China, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Philippine, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Israel, Egypt, Namibia, United States, Canada, Mexico, England, Germany, France, Sweden, Norway, the USSR, Rumania, Bulgaria, Australia, New Zealand, and Papua New Guinea.

As an educationist interested in finding grounded solution on educational issues, I had paid keen attention on the relationship between educational choice and national progress at the national level whenever I had visited other countries. In relation to national division between the North and South Korea which had imposed a fatal situation to all Korean, I have been interested in what educational traits make difference in national development from country to country. As mentioned above, the North and South Korea, along with political ideology, each side has made different choice in educational policy, which has brought different impact on the destiny of the respective Korean people in turn. How the future of two Korea will be is the serious problem not only for Korean but also for the people interested in education in the world because what consequence the two different systems shall bring can be a very meaningful implication for choosing alternatives in education and politics as well.

### **What I learned from other countries**

As matter of fact, educational status differs from country to country in its system, goal, content structure, teacher training system, etc. However, recognition on educational importance has shared among countries, and without exception they have tried their best for expanding educational opportunity and for enhancing educational quality.

In relation to my topic today, I would like to mention about a striking and joyful experience in a country. It happened 30 years ago when I found a national curriculum document, in which an educational purpose was set in the following way,

“Help individual student to be him/her self.”

This expression gave me freshness because I had accustomed to curriculum documents setting educational goal toward personal being around prescribed unified direction. I met an educational officer of the Ministry of Education of the country in order to exchange ideas

concerning the document. I remember some account of the officer which is meaningful to me at the time. He mentioned such things as; 1) their ministry never issued instruction directly to schools but only delivers recommendations that matter to the teaching and learning, 2) their country is small but they intend to encompass all intellectual assets of the world as much as possible, and 3) in this vein they respect diverse need of individual students and school programs in a variety.

This experience was contrasted when I made a visit other country almost 10 years later, where an elementary school principal expressed her educational thought against individual diversity in order to stimulate creativity in view that if individual students are allowed to pursue their own aim respectively, then the learning process can be easily chaotic so there will be no direction in teaching for common goal. She assumed that learning without prescribed same direction may lead students to be disordered, which is harmful to attain common goal of society.

After three years since then Eastern European countries underwent a series of transformation through which they drastically departed from the existed system. In a larger sense, the educated population in those countries had failed in buttressing their existing social system, which is one of important social role of education. This implies that the education in those countries did not play socialization role. The nurtured constituents throughout their education system did not succeed to make their system more valuable and aspiring one. The collapse of total social system brought not only breakdown of existing social structure but also downgrade of quality of people's life as well. It signifies the fact that the educated people as the constituent of those systems did not function well as active agents to keep up their system. In this connection, a presumption can be drawn that any teaching and learning in the name of education does not bring positive consequence on the progress of community unless it help students to grow ability to go beyond boundaries. That is, if a society is rigid and closed in their operating process and thus their constituents tend to be inactive in wrestling with social problems, then the society can fall in critical crisis. Vice versa, a society where there are active constituents participating in solving problems of community voluntarily can be sustainable and promising.

The transformation of Eastern Europe countries made me confirm my tenacious perspective on the relationship between educational choice and survival of community. That is, only education which is viable to build human qualification moving forward to freer and responsible way can be justified not only for its own sake but also for its instrumental role for good life of human being.

### **Why is free being meaningful in education?**

Education can be defined in many ways from different perspectives. However, its basic nature cannot be different in its indivisible relation to human life. For me, it is the reconstructing process for human quality as an expressional mode of human life for enhancing the value of human being. Life and education is going together. It is an essential and inevitable process promoting human dignity. The human condition for dignity has evolved in progressive way in a variety throughout various modes of human expression. Among them, education has played central role by strengthening human capability. In reality, education is the intentional and collective effort to equip qualification with the constituents of community concerning about value of human life, through which individual constituents becomes a valuable being for him/her self and for the community.

In its history long trace, education has been the most influential human endeavor to raise growing generations to be capable of improving their living condition. The central element of education is to help individual person understand self, the surrounding, and the relationship between them in connection to his/her own life. The more people can see the world in a broader and deeper level, the more people can stand up for their own way from the situation given to them. In history human being has moved toward freer and more dignified direction by expanding and deepening their understanding from the situation of uncertainty, ignorance, prejudice, superstition, oppression, disease, fear, disaster, etc. An essential nature of education is for learners to gain power for deep understanding, from which the learned minds are able to be in the position to take wider choices for themselves. Human understanding and being free is interrelated by nature.

However, as I mentioned above, any learning in the name of education cannot do so. Only the learning relevant to the wider and deeper understanding can support students' growth toward free being. Otherwise, it may rather hamper students by indoctrinating them into prescribed direction that makes the subjects rigid in the way of thinking. Here, there is the moral and professional responsibility for educators to design and practice learning process that is effective and pertinent for students to grow as free being.

Free being means the independent person who is able to decide what matters to his/her life for him/her self. Free being rules him/her self, not ruled by others. Free being is the person who is aware that he himself/she herself is unique as a small universe in the whole universe and owner of his/her own universe. Free being is the person who is aware human life should be respected and protected at any circumstance. Free being is the person who has high self-esteem. Free being is the person who opens up his/her mind to others for better understanding and for living together in community. Free being is the person who recognizes responsibility accompanied with freedom.

Being free is an essential condition for human dignity. The key concept is that the utmost importance of human being is ensured only when men and women in their concrete life are in the condition of freedom. As far as men and women are in the subservient condition to other object in any form, they are likely to be dependent and less important than the object. That's why, it is said, poverty in freedom is better than wealth in serfdom.<sup>3</sup>

Human as free being is the constituent subject of society who is voluntarily participating in private and public life in a responsible way. He/she develops his/her own identity with a sense of self esteem and likewise he/she respect others too. By nature self esteem and the spirit of human dignity can be enhanced more favorably in the social climate of mutual respect and interdependence each other. Right and responsibility go together.

The human as free being are the men and women who continuously expand the space of freedom through heightened consciousness where they can deny any wall containing their lives in a restricted way and overcome sufferings not only from outer sources but also from inner ones such as self-delusion. The human history in general shows us that heightened consciousness group of people with rational, imaginative and creative mind around the world have contributed to the extension of freer condition of human being. In order to be in heightened consciousness, they have to struggle not only for sound meaning but also against self-delusion which confines them into the web they spun. Man is a creator of meanings but also an animal suspended in the webs of significance he himself has spun.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Its origin is from Democritus in Greek era.

<sup>4</sup> Recited from Michael Stanford (1986). *The Nature of Historical Knowledge*. Basil Blackwell, 188.

Humans are paradoxical and complicated beings according to contextual circumstances. They look rational being, but some other time they can be arbitrary depending on the situation. Some people struggle for freedom, while some others fear it. Sometimes humans are being escaping from freedom to avoid the burden attended with it.<sup>5</sup> In order for humans to become free being, they need to discipline themselves not only for gaining freedom but also for fulfilling obligation accompanying it.

### **What educational strategies for teaching toward free being?**

I see myself blessed that I have lived in the country where civil freedom is guaranteed. When I came back home thirty years ago after three years study for my degree program in the United States, I had wished to bring US made electric home appliances such as TV set or refrigerator with me for its quality. Nowadays it is hardly imagined that there are Koreans interested in foreign made electric products whatever they are. Rather products made in Korea attract foreign buyers.

Until the mid of 1980s, Korea's political power structure underwent a series of tension between grass root demanding for full democracy and power groups insisting gradual approach in democratization. Since 1986 Korea has transformed into a full democratization society, transition of political power has been stabilized. Through this improvement of political system, Korea has been propelled in a balanced way by two robust wings, one is the economic development wing and the other one is the democratization wing.

What makes this Korea's transformation possible? It is not easy question to answer. Most of people interested in this query agreed that education has played a key role in Korea's rise. For example, the President Obama of the United States has quoted Korean education frequently in public as a success case. World organizations such as OCED, World Bank, UNESCO, etc have issued comparative reports showing positive relationship between educational investment and economic progress in Korea. Foreign experts not only from developing countries but from developed countries frequently visit Korea for exploring secrecy of Korea's rise.

As a Korean educationist, I would like to speak up with a strong emphasis that Korea's prosperity today is only possible due to the contribution of Korean education. However, it is not easy to prove it with solid evidence or to explain whole thing so that anybody can agree with. By and large, I can say in confidence that the educational choice for Korean people was right in the nature of education, and the choice has brought very positive consequence on the country as manifested today. The choice has been practiced in such a way that teaching toward free being has been aspired the even it has struggled against its unique chronic problems such as cramming and over learning.

From the outset, the value of freedom was included as a fundamental virtue for Korean citizenship education. I remember that principles of liberal democracy such as check and balance, the unalienable human rights, people sovereignty in power, etc were taught from my lower secondary school years. Without such systematic public instruction for democracy, the democratization of Korean society might not be possible as it is today.

In other hand, throughout the Korean War and continued security tension with the North Korea, the South Korean people have implicitly perceived the country in the world front for freedom. The fact that the defectors seeking freedom from the North Korea into the South

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<sup>5</sup> Eric Fromm (1955), *Escape from Freedom*. NY: Farrar and Rinehart.

detouring through third countries are sharply increasing in recent years signifies that there are people in the North Korea who see they living in a choked system and some of them are becoming active in escaping at the risk of their lives.

Freedom does not grow for itself. It needs our commitment and deliberate communal effort to keep up its value and guiding principles for ever day life. In a sense the human history is a history fighting for freedom. In this cultured world today, one of important mission of education is teaching toward free being. Here I would like to suggest some ideas in teaching toward free being based on my understanding.

First, contextual aspect has to be taken into consideration as a precept. People differ on the issue of freedom from community to community even in a country according to cultural and historical context such as ethnic origin, religious bound, cultural tradition, etc. Therefore there cannot be one penetrating interpretation and explanation about human freedom and free being applicable to all communities in the world. The approach for teaching toward free being has to be aligned with the social norm and context given. If there is any contextual barrier irrelevant to teaching for freedom, the educationist has to try to revise it through social process.

This implies that social system is a critical factor for educators to practice teaching toward free being. If the social system compels educators to comply with the existing norms and value system in a narrow interpretation and does not allow criticism and alternatives, the educational process tends to be mere conforming process for growing generations to have single minded beings. A society which can facilitate teaching and learning toward free being is basically the open society. What is open society was well discussed by Popper almost seven decades ago. In spite of that, there are still societies far from being open society in the world today.

Second, learning environment designed in such a way that every effort for individual learners to be wise and responsible should be tried at full stretch. Cultivating individual learner to be well informed and responsible citizen is the utmost goal in teaching and learning toward free being. Ignorant people cannot be free; in the same token, ignorant community cannot be so in dealing with challenges emerging from inner contradictions or from outer forces threatening their very existence.

Perhaps, the most important thing we have to take into consideration is to help our growing generations gain knowledge and wisdom through intellectual earnest. Our students should have learning experiences to reach grounded knowledge, to build up consensus on conflicting issues, and to make choice among competing values. When students accept any claims, information, or knowledge as true, they should be trained to be aware what ground they accept them as they are. They should learn that they do not accept any claims as true only because they are told from existing authorities whatever they are. "Why do I believe your claims true?" "What ground is your claim right?" This kind of questions has to be raised as a basic to think for students in learning new things or getting access to new information.

The more students learn, the more they rely rather on evidence, logic, coherence and integrity than on mere existing texts and authority in decision whether they accept or reject claims. If the more our students are able to strengthen their reasoning power, the more students lead themselves in the position that they can make choice for themselves. They should learn to respect abstract principle of intellectual earnest in data analysis and to oppose falsehood like distortion, bias, fallacy, etc.

The essential ground for students to accept or reject claims of others, whoever they are, has to be intellectual standards classifying sound claims from improper ones. We have to teach students to use reasoning capacity such as careful usage of language, earnest examination about evidence, coherence between claims, and significance of claims in its possible consequence.

Third, civic virtues such as human dignity, freedom, justice, equality, due process, responsibility, law and order, etc should be included as a core of curriculum content structure across subject areas and non subject-specific programs too. Enhancing intellectual ability is one of important goals in education, but it is not enough for teaching toward free being. Intellectual competence can be used for good or for bad. That's why we must help our learners equip with value and attitude relevant to human dignity. In this vein, I think we define education in the way that its meaning must be related to the ethical orientation toward human value.

In this connection, the philosophical thoughts that human being is the purpose for its own sake and cannot be instrument to any objects in any circumstance must be learnt as the grounding belief system of students. Human are greater than anything else in the universe. Nothing important than human is. Learning experiences for cultivating self esteem and caring for others should be designed. In any societies in our world, there were stories about people who lived for the progress of human dignity. The stories of such people as role model can be used in the teaching and learning process.

In relation to teaching toward human dignity, it is a central task for educators to help students develop their own self identity from early ages to adult years in relation to wider society. Perhaps, it may be a long process through early ages to adult to explore answer to the question "who am I in the world?"

Forth, open-mindedness should be a backbone in teaching and learning process. Open-mindedness encompasses many implications according to context, however its central idea cannot be different in view that any thought and system, as far as they are products of human mind and there is no thought and system without human involvement, can be incomplete, thus they can be subject to examination, revision, and abolishment. It is that as much as we recognize human limitations, we should be humble to ourselves in our thought and action. Open-mindedness hardly co-exists with dogmatic approach or indoctrination. It accepts that we human can be wrong or make mistakes, that's why we need to open ourselves toward more valid and righteousness choice from alternatives.

People with open-mindedness accept human diversity. They recognize that human can differ with each other in the way of thinking and living style. They are aware that attention to the differing people in society is necessary for the harmony and co-existence. This conception rejects any claims as absolutely right in relation to the ideal of human being. In history, human tragedies had brought from time to time by those who were prepared ready to die for certain single belief system or idea. In a sense they were not free being, rather being apprehended to the belief system, because they did not see or ignore the other sides of human thought. In this respect, people with open-mindedness perceive the importance of tolerance on others who are different from them.

People with open-mindedness need courage to accept error, criticism, and revision of existing solution. The fact that in a large sense we either as any human being or as any institutional system may make mistakes due to our limitations in our thought, choice and deed is the premise of open-mindedness. That there is no absolute right thing is perhaps

absolute right. We can only try to do our best to proceed toward more deep understanding and righteous choice than ever. Through this continuum, we human have moved forward freer position so far, and can do so in the future.

In this sense, teaching toward open-mindedness gives emphasis on discovery, debate, problem solving, etc as learning process as much as on the acquisition of concept and knowledge framework as the result. In the process of knowing, students are provided with learning experiences such as raising questions, developing hypothesis, collecting and analyzing data, comparing the result of analysis with existing concept, and reflecting whether there is any critical ground to believe or to revise it.

Fifth, teaching for higher order thinking ability such as creativity, critical thinking, and imagination is recommended. Higher order thinking ability makes learners to go beyond existing boundaries whether it is intellectual domain and practical problems. Human freedom has progressed by series of breakthrough crossing over limitations of human mind. Free being and this higher order thinking ability is reinforcing each other reciprocally. This higher order thinking ability is also close relation with open-mindedness. This higher order thinking processes are facilitated through adequate learning climate rather direct instruction on the content what such higher order thinking ability is. For example, teacher's permissive and positive attitude toward students' voluntary participation in the process of problem solving can enhance students' own thinking ability.

Sixth, learner-centered approach is recommended. Learner-centered approach is an approach for teachers to help individual learner to be active agent in the process of learning. In many ways students at school tend to be passive only for reciting what teachers present for memorization. Learner-centered approach is an approach for students to lead their own learning by making choice about the goal and method of learning. Learner-centered classroom is the classroom where individual difference is accounted as much as possible through which individual learner has a sense of satisfaction and achievement by his / her own initiation in learning process. As the ages going up, students may have opportunity in a larger degree to make choice about what subject matters for study according to respective hope and dream for their future.

It is reported that when teachers allow students to have voice and make choices about their own learning, some amazing things happen (McCombs and Whisler, 1977).<sup>6</sup> Students become empowered and feel ownership over their own learning by virtue of having voice and choice, they are more willing to learn and be involved in their own learning.

Perhaps, in the climate of open-mindedness and learner-centered approach, one salient trait of educators' behavior is to refrain from the impatience and temptation to influence learner with vested authority to follow educator's her direction. It is not easy for educators to be patient until individual learners develop their own ideas and make decision for themselves. It needs for educators to have big courage not to manipulate learners into his/her favored direction.

## **Closing**

So far I discussed the topic about teaching toward free being based on my own personal life experiences. Actually there is no new finding or idea. In many ways it is commonsense in

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<sup>6</sup> Barbara L. McCombs and Jo Sue Whisler (1977). *The Learner-Centered Classroom and School*. Jossey-Bass Publishers. San Francisco. p 48.

the world of education. In spite of that, it is still coming to me in a new sense that there is space in the world where the spoken idea is far from the reality. As I mentioned, my divided country, the North and South Korea has made different choice in teaching toward free being, and this different choice already has brought impact on respective side with widening gap. If my parents did not immigrate to the South Korea when I was an infant, what would my whole life be like? I do not want to imagine. It is a lucky for me to live in the free space where I am enjoying now. It was only possible by the decisive choice of my grandfather and parents toward freedom. In this respect, the question, “Where is my place in the world?”<sup>7</sup>, seems meaningful not only for me but also for anybody.

I think any teaching and learning in the name of education cannot bring positive consequence on individual growth and the fate of community as well. By nature, education is the reconstructing process of human quality as an expression mode of human life to enhance the value of human being at the highest. Only when we are in the situation of self determination concerning on our life, we can be dignified. Otherwise we tend to be subservient to other object. That is why the teaching and learning is basically toward free being.

Helping students to be free being needs deliberate design and intensive care in the teaching and learning which is relevant to the nurturing of independent and responsible constituents.

Contextual circumstance should be conducive to open-mindedness. Intellectual earnest should be learnt as the fundamental principle in the way of understanding. I am sure the teaching and learning toward open-mindedness is a critical point to bring up young generation to the educated being who lead their own life in dignity. With open-mindedness we can be in flexible position in coping with problem solving. We can be more disciplined in distinction of valid and righteous stance from alternatives, can revise existing solution according to new findings, or even can change the direction in the value system through open discussion and mutual understanding. Higher order thinking ability like creativity, critical thinking, and imagination is important factor for us to gain new understanding, to explore new possibility, and to discern wiser choice for harmony and coexistence. I think there is upward tendency in reciprocal way between higher order thinking ability and becoming free being.

Teaching toward free being is the utmost goal of education. It is to nurture individual learners to be wiser and responsible citizen. It is to help individual learners become agent and shaper of the freer world.

I am sure if our educational strife is related to this ideal, it will bring positive consequence on the well being individual constituent and the community as well.

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<sup>7</sup> William Ayers (2004). *Teaching Toward Freedom*. Beacon Press, Boston, p 84.