Skills to enjoy diversity through citizenship education in Korea

I had a chance to watch a documentary film about international marriage family titled “Black Pearl Children”. In the film, son of the family, who was born between ethnic Korean father and immigrant mother from Ghana, said he was often asked where he or his parents are from and gets comments on his fluent Korean. Even though Korean is his mother tongue and only language he can speak, he was considered as a foreigner in Korean society because of his dark skin and curly hair. At the end of the interview, the boy said he wants to live in a country where stereotypes and prejudices do not exist. I wonder why the boy was treated as an alien in Korean society.

Due to 21st century globalization, Korean society has transformed outwardly and inwardly. While Korea develops economically and more Koreans get involved in international activities in business, education and other sectors outwardly, inner Korean society has become diversified with immigrant population. In order to prepare people to be competitive in a global context, so-called “Global education” was actively implemented even though it only focused on English language education and studies of western countries. Compared to this, Korean society has ignored inner diversity with assimilation policy based on monoethnicity and Korean society was not able to reach unity and provide equal opportunities by ignoring inner diversity. I suggest here how Korean citizenship education should be changed so that students can have skills to enjoy diversity.

First of all, the definition of Korean should be changed. As Moon (2012) explains, it has been believed that Korea has consisted with homogeneous population based on the ideology “Danilminjok” assuming Korea with one language, ethnicity and race. As a result, the Korean citizenship has been decided based on Korean ethnicity rather than fluent Korean or cultural practices. However, it is impossible to apply the traditional Korean citizenship
considering an increasing number of immigrants and the reality that millions of people across borders and belong to multiple places as Castle (2007) points out. By delivering lessons with current diversity not only in Korea, but also in the world and discussing how Korean society will be like in the future, students can be able to come up with new ideas of being Korean. Also, instead of focusing on what immigrants are deficient in and encouraging only patriotism of Korea, citizenship education should be put more emphasis on a membership of global community which ethnic Koreans and immigrants can share in common. Banks (2007) argues that “the purpose of citizenship education should teach student to have a reflective attachment to global community to take actions to solve the world’s problems such as AIDS, racism, poverty and wars” (p.9). By teaching students to have a global citizenship, Korean society can reach unity with diversity.

Secondly, students should be able to practice critical thinking in classrooms. In order to do it, citizenship education should teach students to be able to examine knowledge with diverse perspectives. Instead of memorizing only right answers given by teachers, they should be able to analyze information and draw reflective conclusions. Banks (2007) says, “Citizenship education has as main goals helping students to develop understanding of interdependence among nations in the modern world, clarified attitudes toward other nations and peoples and effective identities with world community”(p.8). Due to the legacy of Japanese colonization, Koreans tent to consider Japan as antagonist. This is because Korean history education has only focused on how severely Koreans were treated by Japanese. Instead of only focusing on the past hardship, students should be able to learn historical events from the past to nowadays, what allowed Japanese to control Korean peninsula and the lessons both countries and the world can learn through the history. This can be applied to other countries and other cultures. By critically analyzing the information and knowledge and making their own reflective conclusions, students can be able to learn how to enjoy diversity.
Also, citizenship education should teach how to recognize and tolerate cultural diversity. According to Gutmann (2007), recognition and toleration of cultural differences should be implemented aiming for civic equality. To be more specific, school curriculum should identify cultural diversity so that students can learn how different cultures have contributed to the entire society. For example, the boy mentioned at the beginning should be able to learn about his ethnic cultures so that his being can be meaningful and important in the society. In addition to this, cultural toleration should be practiced through citizenship education. As Gutmann (2007) argues, it does not mean the every cultural aspect should be implemented. Rather, any cultural practices against civic equality should be prevented. In order to teach toleration in Korean society, most of all, the meaning of culture should be expanded. In Korean society, culture has been limited to different races, ethnicity and nationality which make the boy at the meaning to be considered as a foreigner. However, even in a homogeneous country like Korea, individuals can have different cultures based on family background, religion and region. In this way, students can aware themselves and others as unique cultural beings and learn why and how cultural diversity should be recognized and tolerated.

Since Korea had been a homogeneous society for a long time, it is impossible to change it in a day. However, as Moon(2012) says, Korea has national foundation ideology of “Hongikingan” which promises everyone to enjoy equal opportunities. Based on that, how immigrants can be included in the category of “everyone” can be a starting point. In order to do it, citizenship education should teach students about how to enjoy diversity in Korea. In that way, the boy in a documentary film can be recognized as a member of Korean society and global community.
References


