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ABSTRACT

The Korean kindergarten curriculum involves a mixture of Japanese, American, and Korean methods. The Japanese influence is reflected in the use of large group instruction and an expectation of uniformity from the children, influences from the United States include a consideration for children's individual interests, and the Korean influence is seen in a focus on self-esteem, Korean culture, and a strong Korean identity. Korea has two kinds of kindergarten, public and private, both of which are regulated by the Ministry of Education. The curriculum focuses on physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and language development. Day care is available for prekindergarten children through day care centers, Semaul Head Start (a program for low-income children), and infant schools. Teacher training for early childhood education relies heavily on vocational training colleges. Three major cultural factors which contribute to the character of Korean children are Confucian ideology, Korea's history as an agricultural country, and the value Korean culture places on the group. Korean children express their love and respect for teachers differently than do American children, and are taught to be quiet and obedient. It is important for Americans who teach Korean children to be sensitive to these cultural differences. (MM)

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Early Childhood Education In Korea  
by  
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## Early Childhood Education in Korea

### I. Introduction

The Korean Kindergarten curriculum is a mixture of Japanese, American, and Korean methods. The history of kindergarten in Korea accounts for the impact of each country's methods in uniquely forming the modern kindergarten in Korea today.

The first kindergarten in Korea began in 1897 in a city called Pusan. The city of Pusan at that time was a unique city. It allowed Japanese residents to live in a section of the city. The first kindergarten in Korea was actually for Japanese children taught by a Japanese teacher. Kindergarten for Korean children began in 1909. The Na-Nam kindergarten was established by Koreans but the teacher was Japanese. A Japanese teacher was required because at that time Korea did not have a Kindergarten teacher training program. Koreans believed strongly in the necessity of appropriate teacher training, then and now, and refused to educate their children with people who were not trained to do so.

In 1910 Korea lost their independence to Japan as well as became open to Western colonization. This opened the door for many Christian missionaries as well as the downfall of Korean culture.

In 1914, Ms. Brownlee, at the age of 37, went to Korea as a Christian missionary to open and teach at the EWha kindergarten. The EWha kindergarten was located at the present day EWha Women's University. Today the EWha University is the largest Woman's University in the world. Ms. Brownlee graduated from Cincinnati Ohio kindergarten training school. She was a professional expert who supported the progressive kindergarten educational philosophy which was pervasive in the United States in the 1910's. Ms. Brownlee dedicated her missionary work to Korean Kindergarten and in 1915 started the first Korea Kindergarten Teacher Training Course. Both the Japanese occupiers and the American missionaries brought Friedrich Froebel's philosophies, theories and methods to the kindergartens they established. However, the Japanese Froebelian kindergarten emphasized group activity, regulation, and uniformity while Brownlee's version of Froebel emphasized the interest and everyday activities of the child.

In 1916, Chung Ang kindergarten was established utilizing only Korean teachers for Korean children. The purpose of the kindergarten was to improve the Korean identity and esteem of the children. The goal was to instill in the children a knowledge and love of their Korean heritage.

Kindergarten in Korea has three cultural roots: Korean, Japanese,

and the United States. The Japanese influence is for large group instruction and uniformity from the children. The United States contributed a more individual approach to education considering the child's interest. The Korean's contributed the focus on self esteem, Korean culture, and strong Korean Identity.

## II. Early Childhood Education

### 1. Kindergarten

Korea has two types of kindergarten, public and private. Public kindergarten are government owned and private kindergarten are run as private businesses. Both kindergartens are regulated by the Ministry of Education and have the same curriculum and the same school hours (3-4 hours a day). The Ministry of Education insures both public and private kindergartens are administering the curriculum appropriately, have quality environments, and the teachers are using developmentally appropriate teaching methods.

The school year begins in March. Four and five year old children can apply for either private or public kindergarten. Public kindergarten is generally located in the country and contained within the elementary school. The number of children in a public kindergarten class depends on the population in the county. The classes can vary from 5-7 members up

to 18-25 children.

Private kindergarten is located in the city and the quality of the educational services is generally higher than in the public kindergartens. The number of children in a private kindergarten class is over 30.

In Korea, kindergarten education is not compulsory so the parents must pay for their child's education. The payment for public school kindergarten is \$15.00 per month while the cost of private kindergarten is approximately \$65.00 per month. Despite the expense of private kindergarten, the environments vary depending on the location in the city. For example, some kindergartens have spacious playgrounds and the buildings are specially designed for children. Some other kindergartens have lots of noise and no playground.

## 2. Day Care

The Korean War resulted in over 200,000 orphans. The economic situation following the war was dismal. Korean religious leaders sought assistance from other countries to construct buildings to house and care for the orphans. Eventually all the orphans became self-sufficient adults. The orphanages became vacant.

In 1957 day care centers were opened in the vacant orphanages. Health and Social affairs regulated the day care centers. Day care centers

are open from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and serve children 3-5 years of age. Between the years of 1957 and 1978 the service was provided for a minimal charge or free. In 1978 the price was increased to \$50.00 per month for middle class parents and remained free to low income families. The number of children in a class varies depending on the child's age. Some classes have 15 children while others may have as many as 25 children.

### 3. Semaull Head Start

In 1981, the Korean Government established the Semaull school for the low-income children who lived in the cities or rural farm and fishing areas. The Semaull is regulated by the Ministry of Home Affairs yet the program is established by and monitored by the Ministry of Education. The curriculum for Semaull is the same as for Kindergarten and Day Care. Day care and Semaull programs are so similar that in 1988 both of them became called by the same name, *YouaWon*.

When the Semaull schools began the goals and philosophy was similar to that of the United States Head Start Program. All children ages 3 to five years can apply to the program. Preference is given to children with working mothers. The cost of the program varies depending on the location of the school. Some counties are more expensive than others;

however, the average is \$50.00 per month.

All teachers at the Semaul school must hold a kindergarten teaching license. Presently in Korea, early childhood educational services are spread throughout all of the small counties. As a result, 70% of all children apply to elementary school have finished a kindergarten program.

#### 4. Infants

Since the 1970's, Korea industry has grown, so that more laborers were needed. Lots of women participated in the industrial growth. Before the industrialization, mothers or near relatives of working women were rearing the children. This was possible because the traditional Korean family consisted of three generations. The grandparents, parents and children all lived together under the same roof. As industrial growth continued the need for infant care became greater and the Infant school was established in 1988.

The Infant school is regulated by the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the schools are more autonomous than other early childhood educational programs. The schools are generally located in the apartment houses or near the factories. Infants 18 months to three years can attend the school from the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Some Infant schools are open 24 hours to accommodate parents who work on shifts. There is no fixed



formal curriculum. The day consist of such things as storytelling, watching T.V., nap, lunch, snack time, and walking.

A baby (from birth to 18 months of age) are reared in the home by a middle aged woman who is employed by the mother. This care is expensive and some women choose to give up their jobs temporarily.

In 1982, research oriented family day care programs for working mothers was established in major cities. The Korean Women's Development Institute offered training for mothers interested in becoming family day care providers. One-year training programs for day care providers have been offered by the Christian Broadcasting Station and the YWCA since 1986.

### III. Early Childhood Education Teacher Training Systems

Early Childhood Education teacher training is conducted both as a four year curriculum and a two year curriculum. Ten percent of all kindergarten teachers complete the four year degree program, while the two year training program provides the training for ninety percent of all the teachers. Training of early childhood education teachers in Korea, therefore, relies on the heavily on the vocational training colleges. Post graduate degrees are also available. Training for teachers includes educational foundation courses as well as specialization courses in early

childhood education. The courses presented in this paper only include the early childhood specialization courses. The training of early childhood education teachers is represented in the table below:

Table 1 Early Childhood Education : Teacher Training System

Type of Early Childhood Program	Training Facility	Teacher's Qualifications	Gov't Agency	Remarks
<b>Educational Services</b>				
Kindergarten	4 years National & Private Univ.	Teaching License	Ministry of Ed.	Salary varies between Univ & College
Day Care Center				
Head Start	2 years Private Vocat. College			
Infant School				
<b>Social Services</b>				
Day Care Center	National Social Welfare Institute and Regional training	None Training	Ministry Of Home Affairs	3-month or 6-month training after H.S.
Infant School				

### University Curriculum

University curriculum varies to some degree from school to school, however, the general curriculum is shown in the table below:

Table II University Curriculum

Subject	Credit Hours
Psychology of Child Development	3
Introduction to Early Childhood Education	3
Theory and Practice of Play	2
Guidance in Early Childhood Education	3
Musical Performance	4
Language Development and Education	3
Emotional Development of the Young Child	3
Mathematics Education for the Young Child	3
Social Education for the Young Child	3
Theory and Practice of Child-Rearing	3
Curriculum for Early Childhood Education	3
Dancing education for the Young Child	4
Art Education for the Young Child	4
Physical education for the Young Child	3
History of Early Childhood Education	3
Actual Practice of Teaching	3
Comparative research in early childhood education	3
Computer education for the Young Child	3
Philosophy of early childhood education	3
Language Education for the Young Child	3
Science Education for Young Children	3
Counseling Education for Young Children	3
Writing Thesis	2
Management of Early Childhood Institutions	3
Parent Education	3
Education of Exceptional Children	3

The Junior College Vocational Training Curriculum is presented in table III.

Table III Junior College Vocational Training Curriculum

Subject	Credit Hours
Introduction to Early Childhood Education	2
Creative arts for the Young Child	2
Music and Movement for the Young Child	2
Musical Performance	4
Curriculum for Early Childhood Education	3
Children's literature	2
Child Development	4
Children's Art Practice	2
Children's Science	2
Children's Play Practice	2
Children's Social Development	2
Management of early childhood educational Institutions	3
Child Welfare	2
Parent Education	2
Education of Exceptional Children	2
Child Health	2

#### IV. Curriculum

##### 1. Program Philosophy

In 1945, Korea had regained its independence from Japan. The economy was poor and the society was chaotic, the government could not focus on early childhood education amidst the greater concerns facing the nation. To make matters worse, in 1950 Korean civil war produced an increased sense of despair throughout the country. It was not until 1969 that a kindergarten program was established by the Ministry of Education.

This first curriculum was an imitation of the Japanese kindergarten program taught by Japanese teachers. Very few Koreans had the expertise and knowledge to create a good kindergarten program. As the Korean economy continued to recover from the Korean War, more and more Koreans were being trained as experts in the field of early childhood education. From this emerged a distinctive kindergarten curriculum. The curriculum was reformed by the Ministry of Education three times, in 1979, 1982, and 1987.

In 1987, the curriculum was organized for active learning around the domains of development, physical, cognitive, emotional, social and language. The goals of the curriculum for each domain are as follows:

- (i) **Physical Development:** To develop motor skills and coordination
- (ii) **Language Development:** To develop pronunciation, vocabulary and meaning, communication, and an understanding of the basis of the Korean alphabet.
- (iii) **Cognitive Development:** To develop an understanding of natural phenomenon and society as well as mathematical logical thought.
- (iv) **Emotional Development:** To develop positive thinking habits, a sense of accomplishment, and eye for the beautiful and the expression of an original idea through artist forms.

(v) **Social Development:** To develop an understanding and respect for personal life, family group and the national living.

## 2. Suggested Daily Schedule

Minutes	Activity
20	Pledge to the country(Monday's only), attendance, calendar, plans for the day
50 - 60	Center time: physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and language development
15	Clean-up and prepare for circle time
20 - 30	Circle time: talking about the subject or theme of the day
20	Snack and toileting
30 - 40	Playground: Gross motor learning environment
20	Circle time: storytelling, moving with music, children's verse
10	Prepare for dismissal

## 3. Suggested Themes for the Year

<u>Month</u>	<u>Theme</u>
March	School Orientation: Explore my school, my class, my friends, my teacher
April	Spring: flower garden, vegetation, animals and insects
May	Home environment: body, family, house, weather

	Holidays include Buddha's birthday and Children's Day
June	The neighborhood: The farm and fishing villages, the city, the Mass media (newspaper, T.V. radio), health. Holidays include memorial day.
July	Fun Summer: Change of season and summer safety
August	Summer Vacation
September	Transportation: land, marine, air transportation
October	My Country: Dan Koun (Founder of Korea), Harvest Moonday Festival (Traditional Korean Thanksgiving Holiday), Fall, Other countries
November	Space: Earth, space, resources, preparation for winter
December	Winter: animals and plants in winter; energy; Christmas Holiday
January	Winter Vacation
February	Saying Goodbye; leaving Kindergarten, Korean New Year Holiday

#### 4. Daily Program Example

**Theme: Fall**

Educational Goal: To enhance the development within children their interest in natural phenomenon and be able to express their feelings about the events.

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Time and Activity	Contents of Activity
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9:00 - 9:20 Plans for the Day	Attendance, Calendar, children make their plans for the centers
9:20 -10:20 Center time	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Match Card Game - Children match a letter with a picture of fall fruits, vegetables or grains.</li> <li>2. Sewing - children sew the letters associated with fall in the felt</li> <li>3. Leaf prints art activity</li> <li>4. Making a scarecrow - Using diverse materials children design and create their own scarecrow</li> </ol>
10:20 - 10:35 Clean up	Teacher transitions with singing to clean-up and toileting
10:35 - 11:10 Circle time	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conversations about Autumn leaves Why the leaves change and fall</li> <li>2. Expressions about Autumn leaves Children dramatize falling leaves</li> </ol>
11:10 - 11:30	Prepare for snack and eat
11:30 - 12:20 Playground	Children create fall garden in sand Run, jump, swing etc.
12:20 - 12:30 Prepare for Dismissal	Discuss what happened during the day; resolve any left over conflicts between children; say goodbye and make a bow to the teacher
12:30-12:40 Ending the day	Prepare the shoes. Children remove inside shoes and place them in their cubby and put on their outside shoes.



## V. Child Rearing Patterns

Contributing to the calm demeanor of Korea children is the strong secure base of love given the first five years of life. As a culture, Koreans value children and their education. To insure healthy babies parents must know before they become pregnant, what is required of them pre and post natally to raise healthy children with a solid foundation for education. Prenatal education is required for all parents. Pregnant mothers are exposed to a variety of educational experiences such as listening to good music, reading good literature, and developing a good attitudes and habits toward others. It is believed that if a mother treats others with respect and kindness, the unborn baby will be born with good health and temperment. Koreans believe strongly that the educational process begins prenatally.

When the new baby is born the infant and the mother enjoy relaxed times of breast feeding, bathing and toilet training. These nurturing life-sustaining activities become the basis of the mother child bond. The first five years of life, a traditional Korean child in constant contact with his or her mother. The infant is carried in a sling on the mother's back where ever the mother goes, sleeps beside the mother, and bathes with the mother. Every need of the child is met and emotional discomfort

is relieved as soon as the child relates the displeasure to the mother. This same child rearing pattern holds for high and low status families. The result of these child rearing patterns is a strong attachment with the mother creating security and sometimes dependency. The mothers give lots of love, care, and sense of trust to their children. Historically large families were valued, however, presently, most families limit the number of children they have to two.

Korean mothers have a strong desire for high achievement for their children. The educational system does not guarantee access to education through the university level to all Koreans. Students must compete with test scores to enter universities. Those top ten percent of the population who qualify for university studies are guaranteed higher paying jobs and status. Mothers are responsible for preparing their children for the competition and rigor of the educational system. They devote a significant amount of time to their children's studies. Korean children generally can count, read, and write before they enter kindergarten or first grade.

This secure base of trust in the world, created by the mother, is transferred to the teacher when the child enters school. The children before entering school have experienced a consistent and predictable

world. Their calm behavior exhibited in school is an outward expression of their internal sense of security. Children therefore enter school with a sense of trust and a strong desire to please the family. This translate for the child into a desire to please the teacher and perform well in school.

## VI. Characteristics of Korean Children

Three major factors contribute to the character of Korean children. These are 1) Confucian ideology, 2) Korean's history as an agricultural country, and 3) the Korean value on the group as opposed to the individual. Each of these factors are explained in the following paragraphs.

Traditionally Korea was controlled by Confucian ideology. This philosophy stressed the moral relationship between older and younger generations. A belief in the "order conception" is at the basis of confucius. This order conception views people in a hierarchical fashion based on superior and inferior positions. One's individual status was determined by his or her age, gender, and blood line. Older males from elite families are the highest status people in the country. According to a person's "rank", their society role was fixed. Therefore, the higher the status of a person the more power and authority they possess. Each person had to obey those people of higher rank. New ideas from lower status people are not accepted. These people were considered inferior and

must do as they are told by the superior class of people. These beliefs were instilled by the family from generation to generation and maintained in the educational system.

Beginning in the 1960's, the Korean society began to change. However; it was still a virtue to respect your superior and everyone had a polite and courtly attitude for those who are older and higher in status. There was a tendency to flow with the general idea rather than to think as individuals. These ideas instilled in the children were carried into the classroom, where the teacher was of high status. Currently, the hierarchical structure of society is still a prevalent factor in day to day living.

Korea has a long history as an agricultural country. The country consisted of small villages. The inhabitants of each village had the same family name. This occurred as generations after generations of people married and lived in the same location. The villages worked cooperatively together each year in the rice planting, harvesting and with other farm activities. This occurred despite the fact each farmer had his own farm. A cooperative communal atmosphere prevailed. People living in the villages were unaware of what was happening in other locations in the country or throughout the world. Many of the people were afraid to leave

the village. Instead of journeys out through the country to explore other villages, the people preferred to stay home and enjoyed making handicraft articles. As a result, the children, sometimes were afraid of challenges and taking risk. They preferred to channel their creative energy into making things by hand and were rewarded by the family and the village because of their skills. Even though the country is changing from an agricultural country to an industrial country, many of the above character traits are still apparent.

Traditionally, Korean culture was based upon close interpersonal relationships with an extended family orientation. Each member of the family functions as a part of the whole with specified roles within the hierarchical family structure. The culture placed great value on propriety, honor, and appearance. This placed great emphasis on the education of adults and children to defer to authority, maintain emotional restraint, live within specified roles, and understand the hierarchical structure of society and families. Such training involves rules such as never raise your voice when speaking to others, acting in a formal manner with verbal and nonverbal language, and not openly revealing one's emotions. Even though, in present time, cultural changes are taking place, the people still try to maintain their propriety, honor and appearances just as were taught

in earlier times.

## VII. Suggestions for U.S. teachers who teach Korean and other Oriental Children.

1) Korean children will have respect and love for the teacher. This love and respect will be expressed in a different format than what American teachers are accustomed to from young children. American children may express their love for the teacher by talking, hugging, staying close to the teacher during class time, and maybe pushing other children away from "my teacher". These children show their emotions of joy with the teacher through laughter and movement (i.e jumping up and down). Korean custom dictates that children show love and respect by exhibiting the following behaviors:

- a) slightly smiling and bowing
- b) quietly obeying the teacher at all times
- c) always sitting still and listening when the teacher speaks.

Quiet obedient Korean children are showing their love and respect for the teacher not being shy and withdraw. American teachers must acknowledge the child's loving ways and be appreciative of these gifts.

2) Korean children have highly developed fine motor skills and generally focus on the details of their work. Young Korean children begin learning to

use chop sticks at around three years of age. This delicate fine motor patterning transfers to other activities such as drawing, writing, and small craft handiwork. The culture values the handiwork exhibited in crafts so as children develop and focus on the fine details of their own creative ability, their actions are rewarded through family praise. Children therefore, come to school with a fine motor gift for details which needs to be nurtured, valued and encouraged by American teachers. Oriental children may be advanced in their fine motor skills when compared to American children. Teachers must be prepared to meet the children's needs at these advanced levels and challenge them to continue on their developmental journey.

3) Korean culture socializes children not to express their thoughts through their facial expressions. It is no secret when American children are sad, happy or angry, their nonverbal language of emotional expression is encouraged. In Korea, children are taught not to use nonverbal emotional expressions as a language tool. Even though emotions are not readily expressed the feelings within the Korean child are the same as would be for the American child. Korean children are very sensitive to reprimands, negativity, embarrassment, and humiliation. The American teacher must not assume that if the child does not facially express their

emotions that the feelings do not exist within the child. The United States teachers must be careful at all times not to impair the dignity of the child. If a teachers hurts the American child, the child may misbehave or show their pain through nonverbal emotional expressions. If the Korean child is hurt by the teacher the feelings are the same, but the reaction is different. They will remain obedient and at most hold their head down. If the child makes a mistake in the classroom, the teacher must teach the child how to behave or complete the task correctly. Shame and humiliation techniques of discipline, sometimes used in U.S. classroom, should not be used with Korean children.

4) When the teacher is working with Korean parents it is important to have some understanding of the Korean culture. Korean children are viewed as extensions of their families dignity. If a child makes a mistake the entire family feels shame. Therefore, in parent teacher conferences, Korean mothers will only speak of their child's good habits. If the teacher tries to speak of a problem the child may be having in the classroom, the parent will generally deny a problem exist at home, even if one does. Family affairs are a very private matter and will not be discussed in public. Korean mothers will not disagree with the teacher who is of high status in the minds of the mother. The parent will agree to all that the



teacher says, yet the parent may disagree in their own minds. For a teacher to truly know the thoughts of the individual Korea mother is not possible, the teacher must rely on his or her knowledge of the culture.

Korean mothers are interested in the intellectual development of their child above all else. They want proof their child is advancing intellectually, and they want homework to come home with the child. As Korean families come to America, the children will learn English fairly rapidly and forget their native language to some degree. The parents will learn English slowly. As the years in American increase, the ability for the children to communicate with their parents decreases. It is important for American teachers to encourage the children to use and maintain their native language and culture.