



Can Korea have academic achievement plus well-being? The case of Hyukshin schools

Stanton Wortham¹ · Clara Shim¹ · Deoksoon Kim¹ · Dennis Shirley¹

Accepted: 27 October 2023 / Published online: 8 December 2023

© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2023, corrected publication 2025

Abstract

Korea is recognized around the world for its performance on international educational assessments and the economic development its educational system has facilitated. However, there is also a deficit in well-being among young Koreans. In response, Korean educators have developed alternative, whole person approaches. This article reports a study of one such approach, the “Hyukshin School” movement. We describe the theory and practice of Hyukshin Schools, drawing on interviews, school observations and artifact collection at 16 schools in Seoul. These schools embody progressive, whole person principles familiar elsewhere, and they integrate these with distinctive Korean ideas. This case of educational change illustrates how one reform movement is engaging the tension between highly competitive academic achievement and well-being.

Keywords Whole person education · Whole child approach · Educational change · Well-being · Hyukshin schools · South Korea

Introduction

Korea is a highly competitive society with a competitive educational system (Kim & Lee, 2010). This has led to remarkable academic and economic success (Cho, 2018). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) ranked Korean students 9th out of 77 countries for reading and 7th out of 76 countries for mathematics in 2018. Unfortunately, this academic success seems to have a high cost. Korean students placed 64th out of 70 countries on life- satisfaction, 61st out of 72 countries on happiness, and 41st out of 84 countries on their sense of meaning in life (OECD, 2018). The high-stress, high-workload academic system threatens young Koreans’ socioemotional well-being (Ahn & Baek, 2012; Shin et al., 2018), their sense of

✉ Stanton Wortham
stanton.wortham@bc.edu

¹ Lynch School of Education and Human Development, Boston College, 140 Commonwealth Ave., Chestnut Hill, MA 02467, USA

meaning and purpose (Yoon & Cho, 2011), and their self-esteem (Lee et al., 2010). This lack of well-being is a national challenge (Choi et al., 2019; Shin et al., 2018; So & Kang, 2014).

In response, the Korean government has started to prioritize whole person education that considers students' well-being, particularly in the 2015 revision of the National Curriculum. A series of national curriculum reforms has presented the government's changing vision of educational change (So, 2020a, 2020b). The national curriculum was first introduced in the 1950s, with little room for school, teacher, and student autonomy. Starting in the 1990s, however, the national curriculum has put less emphasis on knowledge attainment and attended more to whole-person development. The 2015 revision envisions an ideal person living in the twenty-first century as having competencies that go beyond subject matter knowledge to include autonomy, self-esteem, problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, social-emotional well-being, a sense of meaning in life, communication skills, and collaboration skills (Ministry of Education, 2015). Many of these competencies are similar to those that other whole person educational change movements have adopted worldwide (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Miller, 2010; Slade & Griffith, 2013; Wortham et al., 2020).

The Hyukshin School Movement (HSSM) is one Korean educational change movement that has emerged to facilitate Korean students' well-being. It was initially a progressive education reform movement led by teachers and superintendents that started in 2009 with the goal of overcoming the narrow focus on academic achievement (Lee, 2014). HSSM is a community-based educational change movement that encourages collaborative learning, student voice, and democratic practices (Sung et al., 2022). Its advocates believe that the traditional educational system's emphasis on rote memorization and academic outcomes are crucial but insufficient. HSSM has become a decentralized progressive movement that allows schools to provide more autonomy for teachers so that they can employ innovative methods that advance whole person education. It also aspires to create broader educational change in society (Gyeonggi Institute of Education, 2015).

A central goal of Hyukshin schools is to embrace whole-person education, emphasizing student well-being, democratic citizenship, autonomy, creativity, and interpersonal skills (Song, 2018). Through whole-person education, Hyukshin schools aim to expand the meaning of what academic success means. Hyukshin schools enact whole-person values through innovative curriculum, assessments, school management, student guidance and discipline (Song, 2018). Instructionally, Hyukshin schools emphasize collaboration, diversifying curriculum, respecting student voices, and community involvement in learning (Cho, 2018; Park, 2021).

Hyukshin schools are significantly different from typical Korean schools because of their increased autonomy in administration, teaching, learning, and community building and because of how leaders, teachers, parents, and community members collaboratively work toward whole-person development. This movement directly addresses the biggest issue Korean students face, which is the overemphasis on academic achievement (Song, 2018). While other school reform movements are often short-lived, rising and falling with political shifts, Seoul Hyukshin schools continue to grow in number and influence. Hyukshin schools started in 2009 with 13 pilot

schools in Gyeonggi province. Because the schools were perceived as educationally successful, HSSM expanded to Seoul in 2011 with 17 schools. As of 2022, there are over 1400 Hyukshin schools in Gyeonggi province and 250 in Seoul (Na, 2022).

In this article, we explore the successes of and challenges faced by Hyukshin Schools in Korea. This case tells an interesting story about the Korean educational system. It also allows us to engage the question of how the tension between academic achievement and well-being plays out in one context. Hyukshin Schools are in some ways an example of the global movement toward well-being in contemporary educational systems, but they also have distinctly Korean elements.

This article describes how Hyukshin Schools conceptualize and implement whole person education. We draw on qualitative data from a study of 16 Hyukshin middle and high schools in Seoul, in which we gathered data from administrators, teachers, students, and parents. The following questions guided our research:

1. How do Hyukshin school administrators, teachers, and students conceptualize whole person education?
2. How do Hyukshin school administrators, teachers, and students practice whole person education?
3. How do Hyukshin school administrators, teachers, and students navigate the tension between their whole person approach and the widespread societal emphasis on academic achievement?

Literature review

Central theoretical commitments

Our approach to Hyukshin Schools emphasizes the importance of *contradictions* in driving systemic change. Accounts of “systems” are often homeostatic. That is, they presuppose the regular functioning of systems in ways that return to equilibrium and preserve stable structures. In contrast, we follow Engeström’s activity theory (1999), an account that emphasizes contradictions within systems and how these contradictions drive sometimes-unexpected historical change. Engeström’s theory rests on five key principles. First, the prime unit of analysis in the human sciences is a collective, artifact-mediated activity system. The unit of analysis goes beyond the individual and preserves the essential quality of the complex activity. Second, activity systems are multivoiced. An activity system contains multiple perspectives, traditions, and interests. Third, activity systems have historicity—they change over time and across spaces. Transformation occurs over longer periods of time, as potentials and problems emerge. Fourth, contradictions play a central role in change and development. Contradictions are structural tensions that arise within and between activity systems. Fifth, activity systems can transform expansively. Expansive transformation occurs when the object and motive of an activity are restructured to embrace a wider range of possibilities.

We focus on the fourth principle, about contradictions in social systems, to understand educational and social change in Korea. Engeström defines contradictions as “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (1999, p. 137). Activity theory explores both “microsystems” like the engagement of individuals with specific situations and activities that take place among people who are co-present in a site like a classroom, as well as “macrosystems” like socially distributed rules, tools, and division of labor (Bryant et al., 2005). There are contradictions both within and across systems (Engeström, 1999; Kim, 2020). The tension between Korean society’s prioritization of academic performance and the holistic needs of young people is a contradiction acutely felt by students and their parents across society. We do not yet know how this contradiction will be resolved and what kinds of historical change might result, but we describe some of these tensions as they are manifesting in contemporary Korea. Hyukshin schools represent one potential resolution of this tension, a way forward for the society and its educational system.

Global perception of whole person education

Over the past decade or so, there have been many movements around the world advocating for whole person education, for an education less focused on academic standards and more engaged in developing students’ well-being. These movements often include an emphasis on social and emotional learning, character education, democratic education, and finding a sense of purpose in life (Wortham et al., 2020). The Hyukshin School Movement was motivated by some of the same pressures and incorporated some ideas from these other movements.

Social and emotional well-being often plays a central role in global movements of this type, and it has been empirically linked to positive student development (Durlak et al., 2011). This work often draws on emotional intelligence theory, which explores an individual’s ability to overcome social, emotional, and behavioral challenges (Goleman, 1995). Elias et al. (1997) define social-emotional well-being as the ability to manage emotions, achieve positive goals, appreciate other perspectives, maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively. Social-emotional well-being plays a crucial role in helping students develop healthy minds, realize their potential, and maximize their participation in school, work and society (Weissberg et al., 2015).

Character education is another common focus in whole person education movements, fostering ethical, responsible, and empathetic students by modeling good character. Pala (2011), for example, describes honesty, fairness, responsibility, caring, and respect as important virtues for students to develop. Berkowitz and Bustamante’s PRIME model prioritizes character education, positive stakeholder relationships, internalization of values, modeling of character by adults, and a pedagogy of empowerment (2013). Arthur and colleagues (2016) offer a comprehensive, influential model of character education, describing how schools can encourage the development of intellectual, moral, civic, and performance virtues.

Many contemporary whole person educational change movements emphasize democratic education. This focuses on students' development of moral, political and civic dispositions (Lickona & Davidson, 2005), as well as interaction with other constituents in a democratic society where divergent views exist (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Supporters of democratic education argue that the role of education is to develop students as citizens by teaching them how to interact effectively with other stakeholders (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Many democratic education approaches aim for social as well as individual transformation by focusing on both individual development and social ideals (Cole, 1996; Wortham et al., 2020).

Sometimes whole person education movements aim to help students develop a sense of purpose in life. Purpose is the intention to accomplish something that is meaningful to the self and impactful beyond the self (Damon, 2009). Positive psychology also focuses in part on purpose, defined as a commitment to serve something bigger than oneself (Seligman, 2011). Those who advocate helping young people develop a sense of meaning and purpose in life believe that education should provide opportunities for youth to engage with questions about what the world needs them to do and the ways they are called to participate in a larger moral order (Wortham et al., 2020).

Whole person education in the context of Korea

More and more educational change movements around the world have been focusing on social and emotional well-being, character education, democratic education, and the development of a sense of purpose, along with related commitments. Korean educators and policymakers have borrowed from some of these movements, but there are also deep indigenous roots for some of these ideas in Korea. Historically, to describe holistic education in Korea is *jeonin gyoyuk*, (전인교육), a term introduced by King Gojong in 1895 through the *Royal Doctrine for the Establishment of Education* (Kim, 2013). King Gojong was critical of the country's emphasis on rote memorization of Confucian scriptures. He declared instead that the purpose of education is to develop three major characteristics that make a person whole: *ji* (intelligence), *deok* (morality), and *chae* (physical health) (지덕체). It is through the balanced attainment of the three dimensions that students are able to develop holistically.

The importance of whole person education has been emphasized in Korea at various points. The 1980 Education Reform declared the purpose of education to be the development of whole people (Kim, 2002). In the 1990s, the national curriculum went through a series of changes that focused on nurturing global, democratic citizens and increased autonomy for regions, schools, and teachers to make decisions regarding the curriculum. Even with these shifts in the national curriculum, however, the lack of student well-being and life satisfaction was highlighted through PISA results in a way that shocked Korean society. Throughout the 2000s, effort was made to reduce academic pressure on students and help students pursue happier lives (So, 2020a, 2020b). The latest version of whole person education is the 2015 Revision of the National Curriculum, which conceptualizes an ideal person living in

the twenty-first century as developing a sense of socioemotional wellbeing, creativity, cultural literacy, meaning and purpose in life, and democratic citizenship (Ministry of Education, 2015).

Despite this espoused emphasis on whole person education, however, there has been an overemphasis on the intellectual dimension. This is due to Korean society's prioritization of intellectual achievement centered around competitive college admissions and an elitism that values academic credentials as a pathway toward a successful life (Lee & Larson, 2000).

Recently, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in Korea have started to examine more deeply what it means to educate students as whole people. For example, organizations like the Korean Society for Holistic Convergence Education were formed to build a community of scholars who research holistic education (Lee & Lee, 2015). Proponents of whole-person education in Korea have emphasized the importance of treating the learner as a whole human being, with interconnected social, emotional, physical, ethical, and intellectual aspects (Lee & Bong, 2017). Korean educators have begun to think about their responsibility for going beyond students' mastery of academic subject matter to also facilitate social-emotional development and well-being. Hyukshin Schools are a central example of this shifting emphasis and perhaps a harbinger of educational change in Korea (Shirley et al., 2020).

Research methods

This qualitative research study draws on interviews, observations, and secondary materials to conduct a cross-case analysis of Hyukshin Schools. The different types of data allow for triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The descriptive nature of qualitative research allows us to uncover patterns that emerge from the data and were previously unknown (Merriam, 2009). The cross-case analysis allows us to move beyond each individual case and identify common patterns across Hyukshin Schools in Seoul.

Context

12 Hyukshin middle schools and 4 Hyukshin high schools in Seoul participated in the research. We used purposive sampling, collaborating with the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education and Korean university partners from Kyunghee University, Hongik University, and Chosun University to recruit schools that are representative of Hyukshin Schools in the city and serve diverse student populations.

Participants

A total of 27 administrators, 50 teachers, 31 students, and 25 parents from Hyukshin Schools in Seoul participated in the research. From each school, we recruited

between two and eight stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, students, and parents.

Data collection

Data include interviews, school observations, and artifacts. The individual interviews were one hour and conducted in-person. The Boston College research team, which included faculty and students, was divided into two groups, with a minimum of two people involved in every interview. One researcher was not Korean, so a translator accompanied him throughout the interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis using Atlas.ti software. We also analyzed other sources of qualitative data, including observation notes and researchers' reflective journals, as well as school websites and media mentions. These materials were used to triangulate the findings, in order to better ensure the trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Data analysis

Due to the large research team, it was important to establish a rigorous data analysis process. Data analysis involved three stages of coding (Kim, 2019). During "open coding," we used preexisting and emerging codes—for example, creativity, character development, college entrance exams, career planning, happiness, and global citizenship—to code the interviews, observation notes, reflective journals, and artifacts. During "axial coding," the second stage, our codes were sewn together with saturated subcategories to form new thematic categories. Through axial coding, we related codes to each other through "group coding," as it is called in Atlas.ti. For example, we reviewed emerging concepts (e.g., citizenship, meaning and purpose, happiness, and wellbeing) and grouped these patterns into the group code "whole person education." These group codes or thematic categories include: classroom innovation, professional learning community, autonomy, whole person education, and leadership style. At the third stage, we compared themes across the schools to identify similarities and differences.

Findings

Hyukshin school administrators and teachers articulated a vision of whole person education for Korean schools. Whole person education involves both the development of students and also students' interactions with contexts including family, school and the broader society. We will describe Hyukshin schools' vision of whole person education by moving upward, from the individual student and family to classrooms and schools, and then to society, as each of these provides crucial context for education and development.

Table 1 represents the organization of our findings, listing the subsections within each of the levels that we describe.

Table 1 Dimensions of whole person education at Hyukshin schools

Individual and family	Socio-emotional well-being Self-esteem Career development Academic achievement
Classroom and school	A pedagogical shift Interdisciplinary classes Extracurricular activities
Society	Meaning and purpose in life Democratic education Positive contribution to society

Individual and family: Developing the self

At the individual and family level, with respect to systems that touch actual students, Hyukshin School participants used four key concepts in their conceptualization of what whole person education should be.

Social-emotional well-being

As in many other educational change movements around the globe, Hyukshin school participants often emphasized social-emotional well-being. Of the 16 Hyukshin schools participating in the study, participants from 14 emphasized the importance of developing students' social-emotional well-being. Participants believed that students should be able to actively pursue happiness and develop a positive attitude towards life. They emphasized that happiness is more than a fleeting emotion. It requires an approach to life's challenges. Principal Go worked to "develop student attitudes along with the ability to live as a happier individual in society" (Dongseoul M). Teacher Shin described social-emotional well-being as "not just a way to satisfy their desires, but rather, learning how to live a positive life that does not damage or undermine their own emotions" (Chonwol M). Teacher Shin believed that the role of Hyukshin schools is to develop strengths that would allow students to overcome negative attitudes toward life.

Some Hyukshin schools did emphasize the need for a balance between pursuing student social-emotional wellbeing, on the one hand, and maintaining student discipline, on the other. Teachers did not want students to misperceive social-emotional well-being as an opportunity to ignore rules. Teacher Lee emphasized that Hyukshin schools are not a place that "provides unlimited freedom to students." Instead, there should be a balance between freedom and discipline (Bongjoong H). Student Yoon said that, in fact, "there are moments when students mistreat teachers due to increased autonomy" (Jeongseon M). Although student social-emotional well-being is important, it must be balanced with discipline.

Career development

Career development was also a central concern, with 11 out of 16 schools describing the important role schools play in developing student interest in a meaningful career path. Emphasis on student career development aligns with the 2015 National Curriculum Reform, which stipulates the role schools should play in helping students find careers (Ministry of Education, 2015), as well as the national Exam Free Semester, which provides 7th-grade students with up to one year of increased opportunities to explore career options through different extracurricular activities (Baek, 2019). Hyukshin schools fully embraced this national movement towards ensuring all students are exposed to a wide range of career possibilities.

Hyukshin schools think schools should provide student-centered opportunities to explore career options, including a focus on careers that might help students find meaning and purpose in life. Teacher Kim said that schools should “help students find their own paths rather than decide a path for them” (Chumhwa M). Teacher Lee noted that, “once students experience enough in-depth, they may see a connection to a certain career path” (Bongjoong H). Whole person education as defined by Hyukshin schools focuses on developing student autonomy in choosing a direction for their own lives, including the career they want to pursue.

Hyukshin Schools emphasize the need to expand the meaning of a “successful” career. Vice Principal Jin described how Hyukshin teachers put much effort into “providing students with experiences that allow them to understand what they like to do and choose their careers” (Yugok M). Principal Na explained, “One child is good at one thing, and another child is good at something else. We should respect them accordingly” (Waehun H). In a society where the definition of success is more limited, Hyukshin schools emphasize the importance of celebrating careers that reflect individual students’ skills and passion.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem emerged as an important concept in Hyukshin school participants’ vision of how students should become whole, flourishing people. Eight out of 16 Hyukshin schools emphasized the importance of student self-esteem. Many Hyukshin schools have a higher-than-average number of students who struggle academically or financially. Many Hyukshin school students have “a lack of confidence and self-esteem,” said Teacher Yang (Chumhwa M). Teacher Yoo elaborated, “society tells students, ‘since you are not good at studying, you deserve to be mistreated’” (Woolgook M). Students then often live with low levels of confidence or self-love. Hyukshin school teachers work to give students opportunities to develop their self-esteem.

This theme of boosting self-esteem emerged in many interviews. The term for self-esteem was *jajongam* (자존감), which embodies self-esteem and also confidence and self-worth. Teacher Noh stated, “Regardless of whether a student ranks first in their class or not, we need the student to be able to protect his or her own self-esteem” (Moongok M). In addition to *jajongam*, other terms were used that provide further insight into Hyukshin schools’ vision of self-esteem. Teacher Yoo

described it as “the ability to love oneself” (Woolgook M). Teacher Kim defined a student with self-esteem as “a person who knows how to protect themselves” (Chonwol M). Teacher Choi described self-esteem as “the desire to be challenged by a problem” (Hansabong M). Hyukshin Schools aim for their students to be filled with self-respect and confidence, enough to develop a firm sense of self-esteem.

Academic achievement

Participants at 5 out of 16 Hyukshin schools emphasized that academic achievement is also an integral component of whole person education. Principal Lee underlined the importance of academic achievement, saying that school is “fundamentally a place where students complete a curriculum, which includes academic studies” (Chonwol M). Principal Cho added, “we focus on academic achievement but enhance the fundamental function of education through diverse subject curriculums” (Yugok M). Both principals claimed that Hyukshin Schools emphasize academic achievement as much as other whole person dimensions.

While acknowledging the importance of academic performance, many Hyukshin schools pay particular attention to barriers that hinder students from excelling academically and spend significant time on non-academic aspects of student development. In response, some parents avoid sending their children to Hyukshin Schools because of the negative perception that Hyukshin School students do not study hard enough. As teacher Choi said, “excellent students generally move to private or specialized high schools, resulting in Hyukshin school students falling behind academically” (Waehun H). Another reason could be a lack of academic enrichment at home. Teacher Hwang explained, “In this neighborhood ... parents aren’t able to take sufficient care of their children” (Chumhwa M). Due to the lower socioeconomic status of the Hyukshin student population, parents are less able to support their children academically.

Classroom and school: Student-centered education

At the broader classroom and school level, Hyukshin School participants focused on three aspects of these crucial contexts: a shift in default pedagogy, interdisciplinary classes, and extracurricular activities.

A pedagogical shift

Hyukshin schools emphasized the need to shift from teacher-centered pedagogical approaches to student-centered ones that allow students to build on their strengths. Teacher Chang highlighted this shift in Hyukshin schools: “Before, teachers used to lead the class, but as students are increasingly given more autonomy within the classroom, there are opportunities for student-centered learning” (Jeongsun M). Teachers described different aspects of student-centered education. For example, Teacher Ma focused on “situating students in an environment which allows them to solve problems that individual students face” (Hansabong

M). Teacher Lee focused more on “learning-centered, discussion-centered, and participatory teaching” (Dongseoul M). Teacher Jeong emphasized the importance of “asking for student opinions” before teaching (Hyunsa M). These shifts required a redesign of pedagogical practices away from entrenched habits.

Hyukshin school students recognized the teachers’ efforts to implement student-centered pedagogical approaches. Students felt more respected by their teachers, thought that their voices were heard, and enjoyed the learning process more than with traditional pedagogy. Student Park mentioned that teachers “helped students a lot and offered various activities, encouraging active participation” (Chumhwa M). Student Kim added, “teachers do not line us up but create thresholds for each student, and if students surpass the threshold, they pass. Students learn how to pave the way that they want to lead” (Samoon H). Student Lee provided an example:

Our teacher had us put up sticky notes. We were asked to write about good aspects, and aspects that need to be improved about his class. We could post such things as ‘the teacher talks too quickly,’ and ‘we are happy that the teacher lets us do a lot of activities.’ The teacher read our feedback to the class, laminated all of the sticky notes, and placed them on the blackboard. (Ryua M)

Students felt that student-centered learning yielded more positive teacher-student interactions and richer learning experiences that facilitate whole-person development.

Interdisciplinary classes

Interdisciplinary classes were another way that Hyukshin school teachers implemented whole person values, including academic achievement. Teachers from different subject areas collaborated in creating a curriculum, allowing students to integrate what they learned. Teacher Kim described their school’s process for creating an interdisciplinary course:

If we decide to go to Tongyeong [for a field trip], each subject teacher teaches about Tongyeong. In Korean class, the teacher teaches famous local writers from that region. For social studies, the teacher teaches the location of Tongyeong from an international or domestic perspective. And for home-economics, students make traditional dishes from Tongyeong (Woolgook M)

As another example, Teacher Kim, a science teacher, collaborated with the Korean language teacher to ensure students were reading not only fiction but also science books. She said, “I collaborated with the Korean teacher so that students could write book reports in Korean class and take quizzes on what they learned in my class” (Ryua M). Hyukshin schools want students to learn critical thinking and build connections across subjects as one means toward this end.

Extracurricular activities

Many Hyukshin teachers and students said that extracurricular activities were central to developing meaningful career directions. These activities included student clubs, job fairs, guest talks, and field trips. Teacher Choi provided an example: the Reading Café, where “students stayed after school to read, then gather and debate topics in the book” (Waehun H). They would also invite authors to discuss their books. Student Yoo shared his experience attending a career fair, which led him to decide on a prospective major. “When I went to the job fair, college students explained the different departments. I realized that I was most interested in economics” (Dosan H).

Teacher Hwang emphasized the importance of extracurricular activities for students. “[They] provide many opportunities for students to find what they like to do or do well, eventually identifying career goals” (Chumhwa M). Students start to think about what they enjoy doing and what they want to do once they enter society. Students and parents echoed this idea. Student Lee described Hyukshin schools as “a place that helps students find their dreams” (Chomwol M). Parent Suh elaborated, “if you dream of becoming a pro-gamer, teachers acknowledge your dream through making student clubs” (Waehun H). Such opportunities to explore what students enjoy were one platform for students to develop their career directions.

Society: Beyond the self

Hyukshin school participants described students’ interactions with society in terms of three key constructs: meaning and purpose in life, positive contributions to society, and democratic education.

Meaning and purpose in life

Participants from eleven Hyukshin schools in our sample indicated that schools should guide students to find a life path they find meaningful and purposeful, both for themselves and for the benefit of the society. This aligns with Damon’s definition of purpose as the “intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self” (2009, pg. 33).

Hyukshin schools challenged students to think deeply about what it means to live a meaningful and purposeful life. Teacher Choi stated, “our students tend to have a very simple perception of their future career, which is to enter a good college, and get employed...I wish students would think deeper about the future. I hope they sketch out their dreams” (Chumhwa M). Similarly, Principal Na described schools as “a place where individual students discover their strengths, develop their dreams, and start to achieve their dreams” (Waehun H). Hyukshin schools encourage students to form meaningful and purposeful dreams for their future.

Hyukshin schools also emphasized that students should think beyond the self when finding meaning and purpose in life. Teacher Kim said, “through collaborating with other constituents of society, students can find new sides of themselves or

others, which would help them affirm their roles in society” (Dongseoul M). He saw the role of schools as supporting students to develop skills to contribute to society. Teacher Ma added that he wants “students to be of help to the broader community” (Hansabong M). Students should think about what role they can play in society in order to live a meaningful and purposeful life.

Positive contribution to society

Hyukshin School administrators want their students to be positive contributors to society, an idea emphasized by 10 out of the 16 Hyukshin schools. As Principal Cho articulated it, “excellence in academic abilities no longer guarantees student success in society” (Yugok M). Contemporary labor markets require workers to be critical thinkers, effective communicators, and good collaborators. Teacher Choi summarized these new social realities: “Korea has successfully achieved a certain level of industrial development, and now students are required to enter a society in which we respect each other’s life directions” (Hansabong M). With the changing times, it has become important for students to become positive social contributors.

In order for students to grow into contributing adults, Hyukshin schools want students first to learn how to show respect and form healthy relationships with others. Principal Ryu said, “each student has strengths, and schools should teach students how to rely on and complement each other, forming meaningful relationships” (Moongok M). Similarly, Teacher Lee stated, “the way for society to collectively move forward is for individuals in society to learn how to live and grow with each other” (Dosan H). With this long-term vision in mind, Hyukshin schools stressed the importance of students learning how to live alongside each other and develop their complementary talents so that the larger society can benefit.

Democratic education

Participants at 8 of the 16 participating schools emphasized democratic education. Hyukshin Schools’ conceptualization of democratic education centers around interaction, with democratic society as “a space where individuals can act, where they can bring their beginnings into the world, and hence be a subject” (Biesta, 2006, p. 137). Hyukshin Schools encourage healthy relationships among students and teach them how to contribute to society. Teacher Lee said that a school is “a place to learn how to communicate and collaborate well with others” (Bongjoong H). Principal Na expanded by saying that “the goal of Hyukshin School courses is to build student skills in collaboration, which is an important skill in society” (Waehun H). Hyukshin schools emphasize the important role healthy interpersonal relationships play in democratic education.

Hyukshin Schools foreground several characteristics of interpersonal relationships that contribute to democratic education. One is mutual respect. Teacher Nam said, “Students [should] develop the capacity to respect and empathize with others” (Samoon H). Teacher Yang added, “Students know how to support other students who are lagging behind” (Haesung M). In addition to mutual respect, Hyukshin students also learn how to be empathic towards their friends, a foundation for interpersonal

relationships. Teacher Nam described schools as “helping students develop the capacity to respect and empathize with others” (Samoon H). Students learn how to form strong relationships with others in the school community, and these form a basis for adult relationships and mature participation in a democratic society.

Cultural ideologies and values

As described above, Hyukshin schools confront cultural ideologies and values that can undermine whole person education, especially the competitive college admissions process with its inherent elitism and parental pressure on children and schools.

College admissions

Korean society foregrounds the competitive college admissions system, and as a result the society often does not prioritize whole-person values (Ahn & Baek, 2012; Shin et al., 2018). As a result, Hyukshin School participants often must defend Hyukshin values against the ubiquitous presumption that Hyukshin school students are falling academically behind. This struggle is described by Principal Choi:

Hyukshin schools talk about academic achievement as not solely focused on test scores, but incorporating what we consider to be the purpose of education. However, our definition is not currently accepted by society, as it considers academic achievement as whatever score students get on tests. (Hansabong M)

According to the dominant image of a successful student, Hyukshin schools are not faring well in comparison to traditional non-Hyukshin schools. In the face of such perceptions, it is hard to pursue whole-person education aligned with Hyukshin values.

The general society, including the news media, generally assumes that students are successful when they have high academic achievement as measured on conventional assessments and when they pursue high-status careers. The media often evaluate schools based on whether graduates are admitted to the three highest status universities, abbreviated as “SKY” (Seoul National University, Korea University, and Yonsei University). The media and associated school rankings often broadcast that Hyukshin schools are not as “academically rigorous.” Principal Go explained: “because the education curriculum and textbooks are developed in alignment with college admissions, unless we abandon them completely, all schools inevitably prepare for college admissions” (Dongseoul M). Principal Na added, “Hyukshin students can’t escape the college admissions system” (Waehun H). As long as the societal emphasis on college admissions exists, Hyukshin schools will struggle to implement whole-person education fully.

Parental pressure

Hyukshin schools face a tension between the desire to provide whole-person education and parental pressure to focus exclusively on academic achievement. As Vice Principal Nam said, “Parents think Hyukshin schools do not make students study

enough” (Heesung M). A similar opinion was expressed by Principal Na: “Parents think that if students go to our school, they will fail academically” (Waehun H). Parents’ negative perceptions of Hyukshin schools are a huge obstacle to overcome for schools committed to whole-person education.

Consequently, Hyukshin schools must deal every day with the tension between parental pressure to focus on academic achievement and their own emphasis on whole person education. Principal Cho highlighted this tension: “because teachers provide more freedom in learning, students do not tend to strictly follow the textbook...parents see this as less effective for learning” (Yugok M). This clash was mentioned by Principal Lee as well, who stated said parents ask, “aren’t the children playing too much? Once they enter high school, they have to study for the college entrance exams” (Jeongsun M). Even parents drawn to Hyukshin schools’ emphasis on whole-person education are concerned about college admissions and cannot ignore the societal emphasis on conventional success.

Our first research question asks how participants in Hyukshin Schools conceptualize their goals. We have described how participants are drawn to Hyukshin Schools because of their emphasis on fostering social-emotional well-being and self-esteem, and because of their commitment to helping students develop life plans that include a sense of meaning and purpose, positive contributions to society, and democratic participation. Hyukshin Schools also support academic achievement and career development, but only in the context of these other whole person values. Both in their thinking and in their interactions with parents and policymakers, Hyukshin school participants confront a tension between these values and the competitive college admissions process, grounded in credentialing and elitism, together with the pressure that many parents place on children and schools toward conventional academic achievement.

Hyukshin schools’ implementation of whole person education

In order to implement these values, and as they confront this tension, Hyukshin schools use a range of methods to implement whole person education. We summarize three salient strategies mentioned by many of our participants: (1) forming multiple definitions of success; (2) professional learning communities; and (3) establishment of communities of care.

Forming multiple definitions of success

Hyukshin participants are often concerned with developing an alternate definition of a successful student. Korean society defines success mainly in terms of conventional academic achievement. As Principal Lee said, “there’s only one yardstick for evaluating children. In most schools, it is about grades. But in Hyukshin schools, there are many yardsticks for measuring student success” (Jeongsun M). Principal Na developed this idea, saying that “Hyukshin schools are where not just a small number of elite students, but every student can develop their talents and dreams” (Waehun H). Success means more than academic achievement.

Hyukshin school parents also articulated multiple definitions of success, although it was unclear whether they were willing to give up the mainstream view. For example, Parent Kim said, “I really don’t think grades will determine the path my child takes” (Haesung M). But she added, “of course, I am also interested in my child’s grades. I wish my child would study well” (Haesung M). This tension was common among parents, where they agreed about the value of having multiple definitions of success but nonetheless prioritized academic performance.

Students also experienced this tension, but they were more positive. Student Jung stated, “life is not all about studying but about figuring out what I like or enjoy doing” (Dosan H). This sentiment was shared by Student Lee, who said, “Hyukshin schools do not just study but consider students’ future dreams and desires” (Hyunsa M). However, students also struggled with society’s emphasis on academic achievement. Student Kang provided an example, saying “at the end of the day, I have to take tests and need to memorize what I learn” (Waehun H). While students acknowledged Hyukshin schools’ effort to diversify the definition of success, they were also aware of the larger society in which academic achievement could not be avoided.

Professional learning communities

Hyukshin schools’ professional learning communities (PLCs) were integral in implementing whole person education. PLCs have five characteristics that work together toward effective educational change: (1) shared values and vision; (2) collective responsibility; (3) reflective professional inquiry; (4) collaboration; and (5) promotion of group and individual learning (Hord, 2004). Stoll and colleagues argue that, “to be successful in a changing and increasingly complex world, it is suggested that whole school communities need to work and learn together to take charge of change, finding the best ways to enhance young people’s learning” (2006, p. 222).

Hyukshin school PLCs differed from other schools due to their non-hierarchical nature, which enabled the PLCs to exhibit the five characteristics enumerated above. Rather than a top-down approach where school administrators dictate the school’s direction, Teacher Moon explained, “teachers themselves collectively decided on important matters through meetings and respected the consequences that resulted from it” (Dosan H). Teacher Yang highlighted the purpose of PLCs, as “creating a venue for teachers to discuss how to improve courses or better respect student rights” (Haesung M). Teachers worked together in PLCs in order to improve their practice and deliver on the Hyukshin goals for whole person development.

Community of care

Hyukshin Schools want to become communities of care. A community of care is “a school culture in which students always feel safe, included, and accepted based on the principle that no student should be alienated” (Sung et al., 2016, p. 243). A community of care creates an inclusive environment in which students form healthy interpersonal relationships and eventually become positive contributors to society.

Participants emphasized two aspects of communities of care: (1) forming a happy school community and (2) prioritizing student social-emotional well-being.

Happy school community

Hyukshin schools try to make school enjoyable for students. Many Hyukshin schools pride themselves on their students enjoying the Hyukshin learning community. Principal Jung said, “In Hyukshin schools, students enjoy going to school” (Woolgook M). Principal Cho echoed this: “children express great happiness about their school at home.” (Yugok M). By developing a happy school community, Hyukshin schools form a foundation for building a community of care. Teachers create a happy school community in significant part by forming more meaningful relationships with their students. Teachers serve as mentors and guides in areas such as social-emotional well-being and career development.

Students appreciate this type of relationship, one that is less evident in non-Hyukshin schools. Student Lee stated, “we communicate with our teachers a lot,” (Yugok M) and Student Kim said “teachers greet us warmly and form closer relationships with us” (Ryua M). Student Lee described Hyukshin schools as “a place where I can have fun. I don’t mean fun solely because I can play. I can try to find my dream and voice my thoughts here” (Bongjoong H). These relationships with teachers allow students to have positive experiences in the school community.

Social-emotional well-being

Hyukshin teachers prioritize student social-emotional well-being. Teacher Kim said, “When students struggle emotionally or have family problems, teachers should prioritize talking about it and work with the students in addressing such issues” (Woolgook M). Teacher Kim said, “Learning is important, but I think inner support is important too. It is my philosophy that students should have a strong and supportive adult figure in their lives” (Chonwol M). Teachers see their role as not only instilling knowledge but also mentoring students on how to face socioemotional challenges.

Students felt that the less hierarchical, more horizontal relationships with teachers fostered their well-being. Student Kim found that “teachers think of their students as their younger sibling, nephew or niece, or their own children” (Chonwol M). Student Kim added, “there is no sense of hierarchy between teachers and students. Students can confide in their teachers comfortably” (Samoon H). Due to the reduced gap between teachers and students, students felt closer to teachers and built a sense of trust around these adult figures in their lives. As Student Park said, “Before, when I struggled or felt frustrated, I used to handle it on my own. Now, I can talk about it with my teachers and feel better” (Chumhwa M).

In these various ways—by adopting multiple definitions of success, teaching in student-centered ways, creating professional learning communities, and establishing communities of care focused on student happiness and well-being—Hyukshin educators put their vision of whole person education into effect. They encounter tension between social expectations for academic achievement and their more holistic

vision of student development, but they nonetheless create environments that focus in significant part on student well-being.

Discussion

Hyukshin schools advocate for and enact what is, for Korea in particular, an unusual combination of whole person educational values—an emphasis on social and emotional development, an ethos of care, attention to fulfillment and purpose in young people’s lives, and more democratic decision-making. We have described how Hyukshin school participants conceptualize and carry out in practice this version of whole person education. We have also described a central challenge that they confront: the contradiction between mainstream Korean society’s emphasis on academic achievement and the Hyukshin emphasis on whole person development. As Engeström (2001) describes, this kind of tension can generate productive historical change. But it can also lead to backlash or degeneration. In this section, we sketch some possibilities for making this tension a productive one. How it plays out has implications for Korean society, and perhaps also for other educational change movements confronting similar tensions.

Levers for educational change: Developing a new approach

Hyukshin schools are enacting educational change, with teachers leading the way. According to Hargreaves, educational change often occurs “where teachers are supported, encouraged and provided with newly structured opportunities to make improvements of their own, in partnership with parents, principals and students” (1994, p.7). This has been the case with many Hyukshin school teachers. Teachers played a crucial role in: leading the paradigm shift that is diversifying definitions of student success; forming horizontal relationships with students; and establishing a collaborative school community in which multiple stakeholder voices are heard.

Teachers’ efforts to expand the meaning of student success, beyond narrow academic achievement, have been a lever for educational change in Hyukshin School communities. Adopting this new approach to “success” can offer students more meaningful school lives that will increase well-being and facilitate meaningful careers. Many teachers whom we spoke with emphasized the need to recognize individual student strengths. For example, Teacher Jeon said that “I used to tell students they have to study well. Now, I tell them to do what they desire. I encourage them on their strengths” (Hyunsa M). To Hyukshin teachers, successful students uncover what they like to do, what they are good at, and what career paths might match their strengths. Teacher Kim described the teacher’s role as “waiting to see individual students’ strengths and supporting them” (Dongseoul M). This has been a crucial component of whole person education in Hyukshin schools.

Many students understand and appreciate teachers’ efforts to respect their distinctive strengths and help them define their own success. For example, Student Lee described his school as “a place where students are respected and can see potential

career opportunities from a wider perspective” (Bongjoong H). As another student put it, “Hyukshin school teachers help students find their dreams” (Chonwol M). Students identified their teachers’ respect for individual.

students’ strengths as crucial in helping them imagine a meaningful life.

Another important lever for change is the shift from hierarchical to horizontal teacher–student relationships. Many Hyukshin teachers worked to form more horizontal, less hierarchical relationships with students. In a society rooted in Confucian values, schools have long been hierarchical, with a top-down structure moving down from principals, to head teachers, to teachers, to students (Lee et al., 2003). Hyukshin teachers have been changing this, forming less hierarchical student–teacher relationships that can enhance affective learning and whole person development (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Teacher Jeong, for example, said that he used to be “authoritative,” but he now thinks teachers are “on the same level as students” (Hyunsa M). As a result of this change, many students perceive their relationships with teachers more positively. When asked to describe their relationships with their teachers, Hyukshin school students described it as, “comfortable” (Student Chang, Yugok M), “having no hierarchy” (Student Kim, Samoon H), and “mutually respectful” (Student Kim, Ryuah M). Although this horizontal teacher–student relationship requires a significant shift for teachers, it is an effective way to form a mutually respectful relationship that allows students to see their teachers as people whom they can trust and rely on.

A third important lever for change was *dolbom* (돌봄), or a community of care. This is a distinctively Korean concept that presupposes the important role that the school community plays in ensuring the wellbeing of students. Hyukshin Teachers’ care for students, beyond academic performance, showed students that their social-emotional well-being mattered. Student Chang said, “I can comfortably talk about my personal worries with my teachers” (Yugok M). Student Kim, who used to wonder “what is the point of living?” subsequently “enjoys talking with teachers” (Chonwol M). Through relationships with teachers, students learned to understand themselves, what makes them happy, and what they want to do in life. These are foundational dimensions of whole person education that students formed through healthy interactions with their teachers.

Professional learning communities were a fourth and final lever for change. Hyukshin Schools built more democratic school communities that included teachers and administrators working with parents and students as partners (Fullan, 2016). The goal was to build a collective vision about the purposes of education. This incorporation of various stakeholder perspectives was felt and valued by all members of the school community. This happened, for instance, when a teacher invited parents and other teachers to participate in learning and providing feedback. Another example would be an interdisciplinary class where different subject teachers collaborate to create a curriculum around the same topic. Hyukshin school administrators and teachers are also open to incorporating parent and student voices, whether through surveys or inviting them to regular school meetings. Teacher Kim described Hyukshin schools as “having a democratic culture, where the school embraces the opinions of its community members” (Dongseoul M). Student Choi elaborated, “when the school makes a decision, the opinions of teachers, parents, and students are all

considered” (Samoon H). And Parent Lee said, “communication is not led by teachers, students, or parents. Rather, all three entities work together to form the school community” (Ryua M).

Hyukshin educators and other reformers took a practical approach toward educational change. They tried to create new definitions of student success, new types of student–teacher relationships, communities of care, and more democratic governance. Such decentralized policies and reform movements allow increased autonomy for regions, schools, and teachers to make administrative and instructional decisions based on the needs of their students.

Navigating the tension between whole person education and academic achievement

Despite many schools’ successes in making these changes and working toward an alternative model of whole person education, however, they still confronted the pervasive social pressure toward narrow academic achievement. At the same time as Hyukshin schools are moving toward whole person education, Korean society, and particularly parents, push in the opposite direction—overemphasizing academic achievement and narrow professional success. This tension could catalyze change. Engeström argues that contradictions between the old and the new can “escalate into collaborative envisioning and a deliberate collective change effort” (Engeström, 1999, p. 137).

Parents are crucial. According to Fullan, “the closer the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development” (2016, p. 158). Typically, parents in Korea are highly involved in children’s academic studies but less concerned about a collaborative school community that empowers students (Sung et al., 2016). Hyukshin teachers and administrators encouraged parents to break that pattern and be more actively involved in the school community. Successful Hyukshin Schools have reached out to parents to involve them in school-level decisions. Through involvement in the school community, some parents started to see the value in Hyukshin whole person education. Parent Kim said, “I sometimes wonder if my child should be going to more hagwons [after school academic enrichment], but when I realize my child is happy, I take a step back... I am confused at times, but I am glad that my child can have fun and form his own values and voice” (Ryua M). Such a change in parent mindset could support sustainable educational change if enough parents felt this way. In order for this to yield larger scale change, more parents would have to choose election schools for their children, and more of these parents would have to have the same kind of realization as Parent Kim.

Although broader Korean society has recently been acknowledging the need for whole person education to prepare students for the twenty-first century, in reality the society prioritizes academic performance over whole person education. Hyukshin Schools, a bottom-up movement led by teachers and administrators, is making some progress at the margins. But more educators, policymakers, and parents will have to join such movements for broader social change to take hold. In order to make such change, the society must shift its way of defining student success and well-being.

Families, schools, and communities should accept that there is more than one way for a student to be successful and happy. In Korea, and elsewhere around the world, the tension between whole person development and narrow academic achievement will continue to play out.

Funding Fundings were provided by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education and the Academy of Korean Studies.

Competing interests All authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Ethics Approval / Consent All subjects gave their informed consent for inclusion before they participated in the study. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Boston College (IRB Protocol Number: 20.073.01-4).

References

- Ahn, S. Y., & Baek, H. J. (2012). Academic achievement-oriented society and its relationship to the psychological well-being of Korean adolescents. *The psychological well-being of East Asian youth* (pp. 265–279). Dordrecht: Springer.
- An, Y., & Park, S. (2019). Comparative study on the changes in middle school students' academic achievement of innovation schools and general schools: Focusing on Gyeonggi-do innovation schools. *Korean Journal of Educational Research*, 57(1), 81–104.
- Arthur, J., Kristjánsson, K., Harrison, T., Sanderse, W., & Wright, D. (2016). *Teaching character and virtue in schools*. Routledge.
- Baek, C. (2019). Understanding windows for global policy: an examination of the free-semester program in Korea. Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education.
- Berkowitz, M. W., & Bustamante, A. (2013). Using research to set priorities for character education in schools: A global perspective. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 10(3), 7–20.
- Biesta, G. (2006). What's the point of lifelong learning if lifelong learning has no point? On the democratic deficit of policies for lifelong learning. *European Educational Research Journal*, 5(3–4), 169–180.
- Bryant, S. L., Forte, A., & Bruckman, A. (2005). Becoming wikipedian: Transformation of participation in a collaborative online encyclopedia. In *Proceedings of the 2005 ACM international conference on supporting group work* (pp. 1–10).
- Cho, H. (2018). Beyond the authoritarian and statist educational system: Hyukshin school as an experiment in Korean school innovation and a model of East Asian education reform. *Politics and the Practice of School Change: THE Hyukshin School Movement in South Korea*, *Curriculum Inquiry*, 48(2), 238–252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2018.1435976>
- Choi, C., Lee, J., Yoo, M. S., & Ko, E. (2019). South Korean children's academic achievement and subjective well-being: The mediation of academic stress and the moderation of perceived fairness of parents and teachers. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 100, 22–30.
- Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural psychology*. Harvard University Press.
- Damon, W. (2009). *The Path to purpose: How young people find their calling in life*. Simon and Schuster.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405–432.
- Elias, M. J., Zins, J. E., Weissberg, R. P., Frey, K. S., Greenberg, M. T., Haynes, N. M., & Shriver, T. P. (1997). *Promoting social and emotional learning: Guidelines for educators*. Ascd.
- Engeström, Y. (1999). Activity theory and individual and social transformation. *Perspectives on Activity Theory*, 19(38), 19–30.

- Frymier, A. B., & Houser, M. L. (2000). The teacher-student relationship as an interpersonal relationship. *Communication Education*, 49(3), 207–219.
- Fullan, M. (2016). *The NEW meaning of educational change* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Goleman, D. P. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ for character, health and lifelong achievement*. Bantam Books.
- Gutmann, A., & Thompson, D. (2004). *Why deliberative democracy?* Princeton University Press.
- Gyeonggi Institute of Education. (2015). Hyukshin Schools, Let's Work Together. Retrieved from <https://www.ggc.go.kr/get/bbs/30/83/53/1> (In Korean)
- Hargreaves, A. (1994). Restructuring restructuring: Postmodernity and the prospects for educational change. *Journal of Education Policy*, 9(1), 47–65.
- Hargreaves, A. P., & Shirley, D. L. (Eds.). (2009). *The fourth way: The inspiring future for educational change*. Corwin Press.
- Hord, S. (2004). Professional learning communities: An overview. In S. Hord (Ed.), *Learning together, leading together: Changing schools through professional learning communities*. Teachers College Press.
- Kim, G. J. (2002). Education policies and reform in South Korea. Secondary education in Africa: Strategies for renewal, pp. 29–40.
- Kim, D. (2019). Elementary english learners' use of reading strategies with culturally relevant and culturally distant stories. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 18(2), 73–91.
- Kim, D. (2020). Learning language, learning culture: Teaching language to the whole student. *ECNU Review of Education*, 3(3), 519–541. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2096531120936693>
- Kim, H.J. (2013). Modern Korean History Through History Education: From Primary School to History Textbook Wave. With Books (In Korean).
- Kim, S., & Lee, J. (2010). Private tutoring and demand for education in South Korea. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 58(2), 259–296. <https://doi.org/10.1086/648186>
- Lee, J., Puig, A., Kim, Y. B., Shin, H., Lee, J. H., & Lee, S. M. (2010). Academic burnout profiles in Korean adolescents. *Stress and Health*, 26(5), 404–416.
- Lee, K. H., & Lee, B. C. (2015). Re-conceptualizing action research from a holistic perspective. *Holistic Convergence Education Research*, 19(4), 123–139. (In Korean).
- Lee, M., & Larson, R. (2000). The Korean 'examination hell': Long hours of studying, distress, and depression. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 29, 249–272.
- Lee, S. K., & Bong, M. (2017). Social and emotional learning as a solution for adolescent problems in Korea. *Social and Emotional Learning in Australia and the Asia-Pacific* (pp. 233–251). Springer.
- Lee, S. S., Fraser, B. J., & Fisher, D. L. (2003). Teacher–student interactions in Korean high school science classrooms. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, 1(1), 67–85.
- Lee, Y. (2014). Achievements and challenges of Hyukshin schools. *Gyoyook Bipyong*, 33, 12–30. (In Korean).
- Lickona, T., & Davidson, M. (2005). *Smart and good high schools*. Character Education Partnership.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage Publications.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley and Sons.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Miller, J. P. (2010). *Whole child education*. University of Toronto Press.
- Ministry of Education. (1995). *The national curriculum for the primary and secondary schools*. Gyeonggi-do: Author.
- Ministry of Education (2015). Revision of 2015 National Curriculum: General Commentary.
- Mullis, I. V. S., Martin, M. O., Foy, P., Kelly, D. L., & Fishbein, B. (2020). TIMSS 2019. International Results in Mathematics and Science. Retrieved from Boston College, TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center website: <https://timssandpirls.bc.edu/timss2019/international-results/>
- Na, Y.H. (2022). Four changes in the operation strategy of the Seoul Hyukshin Schools. Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education. <https://enews.sen.go.kr/news/view.do?bbsSn=177810#none> (In Korean).
- O'Malley, J. (2015). Jesuit schools and the humanities yesterday and today. *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, 47(1), 1–33.
- OECD. (2015). *Skills for social progress: the power of social and emotional skills*, *OECD Skills Studies*. OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (2018). Education GPS. Retrieved April 2020, from the OECD website: <https://gpseducation.oecd.org>

- Paek, B., & Park, M. (2015). The impact of Hyukshin schools on reducing the achievement gap. *Education Review*, 35, 204–226. (in Korean).
- Pala, A. (2011). The need for character education. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, 3(2), 23–32.
- Park, S. H. (2021). The Report on Hyukshin school performance and development. Seoul Education Research and Information Institute. https://www.serii.re.kr/fus/MI0000000000000000493/board/BO00000222/CD010/view0010v.do?board_id=BO00000222&board_seq=4499&pageIndex=1&searchKeyword= (In Korean).
- Plater, M. (2017). Re-souling spirituality: Redefining the spiritual dimension in schools. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 22, 14–23.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Free Press.
- Shin, D. J. D., Lee, H. J., Ha, J. E., Park, J. H., Son, E., & Bong, M. (2018). Why aren't Korean students happy?: Tracing back to the sources of their academic distress 1. *Asian Education Miracles* (pp. 124–138). Routledge.
- Shirley, D., Wortham, S., & Kim, D. (2020). The quest for a purpose to encompass the highest moral values: Introduction to the special issue. *ECNU Review of Education*, 3(3), 399–405. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2096531120938388>
- Slade, S., & Griffith, D. (2013). A whole child approach to student success. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 10(3).
- So, K. (2020a). Whom is the national curriculum for? Politics in the national curriculum system of South Korea. *Handbook of Education Policy Studies: School/university, Curriculum, and Assessment*, 2, 165–184.
- So, K. (2020b). Whom Is the National Curriculum for? Politics in the National Curriculum System of South Korea. In G. Fan & T. S. Popkewitz (Eds.), *Handbook of education policy studies: School/university, curriculum, and assessment* (Vol. 2, pp. 165–184). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-8343-4_9
- So, K., & Kang, J. (2014). Curriculum reform in Korea: Issues and challenges for twenty-first century learning. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 23(4), 795–803.
- Song, S. J. (2018). The growth and significance of Hyukshin School. Policies and Practices of Hyukshin Schools in Seoul: Selected Writings. Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education.
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*, 7(4), 221–258.
- Sung, Y.-K., Lee, M., Seo, D.-H., Chang, S.-M., & Lee, Y. (2022). Teacher agency and transformation at the crossroads of a diffused school change movement: An empirical typology of the Hyukshin Schools in South Korea. *Journal of Educational Change*, 23(3), 397–419. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-021-09423-5>
- Sung, Y. K., Lee, Y., & Choi, I. S. (2016). Contradiction, mediation, and school change: An analysis of the pedagogical practices in the Hyukshin School in South Korea. *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy*, 13(2).
- Vygotsky, L. (1997). *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky* (Vol. 3). Plenum.
- Weissberg, R. P., Durlak, J. A., Domitrovich, C. E., & Gullotta, T. P. (2015). Social and emotional learning: Past, present, and future.
- Westheimer, J., & Kahne, J. (2004). What kind of citizen? The politics of teaching for democracy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 41(2), 237–269.
- Wortham, S., Love-Jones, R., Peters, W., Morris, S., & García-Huidobro, J. C. (2020). Educating for comprehensive well-being. *ECNU Review of Education*, 3(3), 406–436. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2096531120928448>
- Yoon, Y. M., & Cho, H. H. (2011). Factors influencing meaning of life in adolescents. *Child Health Nursing Research*, 17(1), 31–38.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Springer Nature or its licensor (e.g. a society or other partner) holds exclusive rights to this article under a publishing agreement with the author(s) or other rightsholder(s); author self-archiving of the accepted manuscript version of this article is solely governed by the terms of such publishing agreement and applicable law.