

Educating for Peace on the Korean Peninsula

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For most scholars, non-government organizations (NGOs), and educators, “peace education” generally refers to providing education *about* peace—teaching, writing, and talking about various aspects of promoting, achieving, and maintaining peace. In my presentation today, I would like to talk instead about “educating *for* peace.” By educating for peace, I refer to the use of diverse educational programs in order to advance the cause of peace. I believe that education can be one of the most powerful ways to promote peace on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia. In particular, educational programs can be very effective in building ties of cooperation across dangerous divisions and in reaching out to North Korea. I believe that educational programs have perhaps the greatest potential to bring about the kinds of mutual understanding, personal friendship, cooperation, and confidence at the personal, institutional, and national levels which are necessary for the transition to a more peaceful and prosperous region.

I should first define what I mean here by education. I am referring to all types of education and training, including capacity-building projects, exposure study tours, educational exchanges, as well as more traditional classroom education and professional training programs. Educational programs which are done with the goal of helping other people, without personal benefit, are uniquely suited to building interpersonal trust and mutual assistance. Education can strengthen mutual understanding and bolster the confidence and capacity of all participants. As anyone who has ever been a teacher understands, in any good educational setting, the teachers learn as much as the students, if not more. Such education which is given without prejudice, with respect and with sincerity, can be transformative for everyone involved. Education, if we understand it broadly enough, can be a powerful force for peace. But it is necessary that we design and implement educational programs with a clear sense of what are the obstacles to peace in this particular situation, and an understanding of how an educational program will help contribute to transforming the situation into a more peaceful one.

My presentation will proceed in three parts. First, I will define the current political situation in relations with North Korea, focusing on the roles and involvement of the major political actors in the region, including the United States. Laying out this

groundwork is essential for understanding how education can play a role in this particular situation. Then, I will talk about the potential for educational and training programs to address some of these divisions and problems, focusing particularly on engagement with North Korea. I will give some examples of the kinds of programs that I believe to be particularly important, and talk about the obstacles and potentials that these programs may face in the future. Finally, I will explain how this approach of “educating for peace” can help to broaden and deepen our understanding of peace education.

I. Situational Analysis

To reach peace in Northeast Asia is a long and difficult journey. The memories of the Japanese invasion and colonial era, the cold war ideological division, and the different social political systems have influenced generations of people in different countries. The polarization along different economic systems among these countries has magnified the fault line. These multi-layered deep conflicts can not be solved in a short time or by one document. Patience and forgiveness is the only way to help us work toward peace.

At the present time, the situation in the region is still extremely tense. The North Korean nuclear test poses powerful challenges on many levels. At the global level, it challenges and could further undermine the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty as well as international norms established to contain and ultimately eliminate the catastrophic dangers posed by nuclear weapons. At the regional level, the nuclear test exacerbates anxieties among North Korea’s neighbors about their own national security and could in time generate a regional nuclear arms race. The nuclear test also tears open one of Northeast Asia’s deepest wounds - the Korea War.

The Korean War is not over. Fighting ceased with an armistice, not a peace treaty, and US troops remain in South Korea. For many in the North, the presence of the world’s most powerful military on their southern border is a vivid reminder of their continued vulnerability to powerful external actors. The fact that the United States forces fought under the United Nations flag in Korea undermines North Korean trust of the UN even today. The US invasion of Iraq has further eroded North Korea’s confidence in relying upon the international system to ensure its national security.

The nuclear test signals, in part, a declaration by the government of North Korea to their own citizens that, with or without foreign assistance or cooperation, they will defend themselves. The world should not underestimate or ignore this sentiment, just as we cannot pursue policies of non-proliferation without considering the security environment which leads states to pursue nuclear weapons capabilities. The security concerns of North Korea must be taken seriously. Isolating or ignoring North Korea is not only unrealistic; it is dangerous.

After the second nuclear test, the United Nations member states have increased sanctions towards DPR Korea. As a result, the situation around the Korean Peninsula has been getting more complicated. Political changes and tensions within key countries which relate to the DPRK have greatly increased uncertainty over the future direction of the Korean Peninsula. While the new Obama administration in the United States has not yet clearly laid out its policy toward Northeast Asia, South

Korea's president has turned his more hard-line DPRK policy into a domestic political struggle with groups who are less critical of the North. Adding even more uncertainty to the situation is the concern over Kim Jong Il's health, the transition to the next generation of DPRK leadership, and questions about DPRK domestic stability.

Since President Lee Myong Pak took office early last year, the denouncing of the Sunshine policy developed by former President Kim Dae-jung has turned into a total reversal of the ROK's policy toward DPRK over the past decade. All major inter-governmental projects between the North and South have either totally stopped or been severely damaged. To echo the ROK's denunciation of the Sunshine policy and the related joint declarations, DPRK has announced its intent to abolish all agreements with the ROK, including the peninsular peace treaty. The results of this hard landing in response to the ROK's policy change were not expected by either the ROK or the DPRK. They seem to have both miscalculated the other's response, due perhaps to a failure to acknowledge the hard realities of each other's domestic environment. For the DPRK, it has lost millions of dollars of income generated by inter-Korean cooperation. For the ROK, it has lost immeasurable value in its soft power gained by Kim Dae-jung's Sunshine Policy.

In February 2009, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited three Northeast Asia countries: Japan, South Korea and China. Clinton's visit has shown that the Obama administration has chosen a practical and limited approach toward Northeast Asia and the DPRK issue. For the Obama administration, the first and most important issue is the financial crisis and global economic recession. The second set of issues is related to the Iraq war and Middle East issues including Iran. Within Northeast Asia, the North Korea issue is not very closely linked to the US's domestic economic concerns, and therefore has not been particularly high on the foreign policy agenda.

From the perspective of costs and benefits, this approach to the DPRK is a logical choice for the Obama administration. Fully 'solving' the Korea Peninsular issue is an ambitious goal which would require that the DPRK to give up all nuclear weapons and sign a peace treaty with the US. This would ultimately mean that the US has to restructure its entire Asia-Pacific security structure, including the alliances and military bases in Japan and South Korea. At this stage, given the US's current political and economic priorities, it is not possible for the new administration to take on such a shift. The new administration's approach may disappoint the wish of some in the DPRK to resolve the nuclear issue and advance diplomatic relations as soon as possible both for domestic political reasons and financial reasons. However, the DPRK may have very little leverage on the negotiations with the US since the pros of solving the issue do not exceed the cons, at least in the US's point of view. If the DPRK misunderstands the viewpoint of the US government, it may take other extreme steps to attract attention, as it has in the past.

Finally, this year marks 60 years of Sino-DPRK diplomatic relations. Premier Wen Jiabao's trip to Pyongyang to commemorate the 'year of friendship' reiterated the alliance ties, and also may have provided some stimulus to re-start diplomatic talks in the region. Kim Jong Il's trip to the airport to receive Wen was a clear signal of the importance that relations with China hold for the DPRK. Even though these high level exchanges did signal some warmth in Sino-DPRK friendship, they did not change the fundamental nature of the Sino-DPRK relationship.

In sum, regardless of the conflict at the moment, without bring a society to a sustainable economic level, all conflict will continue to worsen. On both the economic and diplomatic fronts, the DPRK still faces many obstacles. It lacks the political and economic structures to effectively deal with the outside world, and lacks personnel to carry out long-term, extensive exchanges. Officials persistently underestimate the time and changes needed to fulfil their own domestic needs, much less to address the necessary changes in the international political environment. The political and economic situations are closely related: both demonstrate the scarcity of human expertise to devise and carry out successful policies of economic reforms and political engagement. After half a century of a command economy, knowledge of how to conduct profit-oriented business and administer a modern market economy is extremely scarce within the DPRK. North Korean institutions pursuing important reform initiatives lack access to information, international resources, networks, and innovative concepts. Without any comparative context, it is difficult for North Korean officials and experts to evaluate their own economic situation or develop new strategies. Developing such “human capital” is essential for sustainable, equitable economic development in North Korea and for moving toward a more peaceful Northeast Asia region.

II. Role of ‘Educating for Peace’ with North Korea

In this difficult environment, educational programs can help to build the human capacity necessary within North Korea to support sustainable engagement with the outside world and to support its domestic economic change and development. I will just list a few of such typical programs:

1. Long-term educational programs

Projects which bring North Korean experts and students out to China and other neighboring countries for extended study programs can provide a number of important benefits for peace. First, they give an opportunity for individual exchanges and first-hand experience of life in a very different society. Building such ties of personal trust and familiarity with the outside world will be critical in fostering the level of confidence that is necessary for the DPRK to make successful transitions to a more open economy and society. Second, such programs can work with a younger generation of DPRK experts and students—ideally people in the 20s and early 30s. This provides an invaluable opportunity to influence their life-views for decades to come. Sociologists have found that formative experiences in these younger years have a profound impact upon people’s life choices and values for the rest of their life. Finally, such programs build institutional ties between North Korean institutions and their partner institutions in the region. This provides a long-term foundation for further engagement and cooperation as the political environment improves.

2. Short-term study tours

For higher-level DPRK officials, it is more valuable to have brief study tours to neighboring countries in Asia. These programs can provide an invaluable ‘eye-opening’ opportunity for influential individuals to learn about institutions, policies, and experiences in critical areas of economic development for other similar countries.

Learning from others' experiences provides a valuable comparative context for DPRK officials and experts who will have to develop their own, unique path forward, based on their specific context, strengths, and limitations. These study tours and other exposure programs can have more direct or immediate impact, as influential officials have the resources and opportunity to direct resources and make policy decisions within the DPRK.

3. Workshops and Conferences

Multilateral gatherings which bring together experts, officials, and other organizational representatives can provide an important opportunity for people to build ties of personal trust, to exchange information and experiences, and to plan joint programs together. Such workshops with the DPRK are generally most productive if they are conducted in a quiet, 'off-the-record' format, and are oriented toward the discussion of practical issues. They work best if they are oriented toward a collective program or issue, rather than everyone focusing on North Korea or prescribing a certain solution for the DPRK. If it is a truly equal and open gathering, with everyone moving together toward a common goal which has clear and obvious benefits for the participants, then such workshops can be a productive venue for collaboration, trust-building, and future cooperation.

In sum, all of these programs are examples of how "educating for peace" can play an important role in promoting peace on the Korean peninsula. There are several common factors which must be remembered, however. First, all such programs should be practical, oriented toward delivering real, specific benefits for the DPRK. Rather than talking about abstract ideas or vague concepts, it is better to have a focused, technically-oriented program which meets the real and pressing needs of DPRK participants today. Secondly, the programs should always be sensitive to the very real and pressing limitations imposed on DPRK participants by their domestic environment. An unrealistic expectation of what DPRK participants might be able to say or do once they leave the country temporarily can damage long-term cooperation and harm fragile trust. A sophisticated understanding of the complex realities of North Korean politics, society, and economy is essential. Finally, as all good educational programs, these should never be seen as 'preaching' or prescribing a given answer or approach. Only educational programs which are truly designed and implemented with an approach of sincere respect and equality can be effective contributors to peace.

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that we should broaden our understanding from "peace education" to "education for peace." I believe that we should broaden our understandings in several ways. First, we should adopt a broader definition of what we consider as education, to include a wide variety of exposure visits, study tours, short-term training programs. Second, we should broaden the focus and content of these programs. Paradoxically, simply talking about "peace" will not bring peace. Instead, we need to recognize in each particular situation, what are the obstacles to peace and how can we use a diverse range of educational programs in order to advance toward a real and sustainable peace. Finally, we should expand beyond the traditional focus just on youth in doing education for peace. We are never too old to learn. The definition of what we teach, who we teach, and how and where we teach

should be driving our activities in the area of education for peace. Only then will we bring the full power and potential of education to our work for peace, in Korea and around the world.