

## THE SCHOOL OF VALUE CREATION

AS we celebrate November 18, the sixty-eighth anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding in 1930, I can't help but reflect on the life and mission of our founder, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. For starters, he was a man with a brilliant mind. Professor Dayle M. Bethel writes that Mr. Makiguchi was one of Japan's most significant educators: "Makiguchi was saying and expressing many of the same criticisms and ideas about education that John Dewey was expressing at roughly the same period" (*Makiguchi the Value Creator*, p. 152).

Which is to say that the roots of our organization lay in pedagogy or the art and science of education. It is here where SGIPresident Daisaku Ikeda places utmost value. In fact, in a 1996 lecture delivered at the Teacher's College of Columbia University, where John Dewey once taught, he said: "Education must be the propelling force for an eternally unfolding humanitarian quest. It is for this reason that I consider education the final and most crucially important undertaking of my life" (August 1996 *Seikyo Times*, p. 8).

Personally, I am no expert on education. I certainly wasn't a top student. As an elementary student, I preferred to spend my time reading cartoons which I enjoyed a great deal, as I enjoyed reading in general. I was totally indifferent to math and science. Those subjects left me cold. But if it had anything at all to do with what we now call the humanities—language, sociology, the liberal arts—those classes, much to the surprise of my teachers, I found easy. So how did I manage to get a college education? I attribute it to the teachers who encouraged me. It was during those years that I learned how important a role the teacher can play in shaping a young person's future. That's probably why I will always remember the junior high school teacher who inspired and helped me gain the confidence to continue even though I was a poor student. To me that's the kind of humanistic education Mr. Makiguchi and Josei Toda advocated. Another aspect of humanistic education is the role our friends can play. In my day in Japan, we began learning English after we got to junior high school. While I was still in elementary school, I had a close friend already in junior high school who taught me the basics of English. Needless to say, his help went a long way as I studied English in junior high school. My teachers helped me as did my friends, not by imposing their authority, but by sharing their wisdom with me. Bethel highlighted the difference when he wrote:

In the traditional, or dialectical, model the learner is perceived as empty, a passive recipient who must be filled up by one who has been previously filled and who is in possession of knowledge. The key element in this model is authority. However, in the open, or dialogical, model the learner is perceived as a dynamic organism interacting with his environment and being changed in significant ways by that interaction. (*Makiguchi the Value Creator*, p. 18)

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When I think about teachers and schools, I never cease to be troubled by the state of education today. Teachers are underpaid while trying to do their work in overcrowded classrooms with inadequate facilities. I've read of some school districts that lack even books. And where there are books in some of our poorer communities, many are so outdated as to be irrelevant to the education process. Politicians squabble about what language children should be taught in, and who should or should not get help in getting into the best schools. As I think about Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda this November, it occurs to me that we can all play a role in the important task of educating our youth. As President Ikeda said at Columbia University: "Education is a uniquely human privilege. It is the source of inspiration that enables us to become fully and truly human, to fulfill a constructive mission in life, with composure and confidence" (August 1996 *Seikyo Times*, p. 8).

By way of analogy, just as my friend helped me get a head start in my language studies, discussion meetings held throughout the SGI-USA are a perfect venue to carry out this important task of humanistic education. When you think about it, the structure of the discussion meeting isn't much different from any place of learning. People come together with an open mind to learn something more about life. We learn not necessarily from a lecturer, but from the experiences we share with one another, from presentations and through open-hearted discussion. Like a school, we also have our textbooks—the *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism*—our textbooks of faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. And like a school, we have our seniors to learn from as well, as we form relationships with one another that can last a lifetime. It is where we can create value, which, "put simply, ... is the capacity to find meaning, to enhance one's own existence and contribute to the well-being of others, under any circumstance" (Ibid., p. 9). With that I express my eternal gratitude to Mr. Makiguchi, Mr. Toda and Mr. Ikeda—educators, men of faith, and value creators.

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