

A SUMMARY OF SGI PRESIDENT DAISAKU IKEDA'S PROPOSAL ON EDUCATION BUILDING A SOCIETY SERVING THE ESSENTIAL NEEDS OF EDUCATION: MY VIEWS ON EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Toward a Grand Current of Humanistic Education

Malfunctioning of the Educational System

It is the overall decline of the educational functions that should be inherent not only in schools but in our communities, families and society as a whole that lies behind our children's pathology of absenteeism, delinquency and the so-called "flight from education," which are rampant in contemporary society.

I believe that, unless adults possess a kind of self-reflective attitude to correct in themselves that which is mirrored back to them by their children, attempts to reform the system, however well intentioned, may ultimately end as stopgap or temporary measures that merely work around the edges with the system.

Review of the Fundamentals of Education Act Requires Care

With the decline of morals in adults casting a dark shadow in the hearts of our children, there has been a series of moves toward educational reform, including review and possible amendment of the Fundamentals of Education Act. This law has been the mainstay of the post-war education system in Japan and as such I believe that any revision should be undertaken only after careful thought and review; hasty revision is to be avoided.

More fundamental is the urgent need is for a paradigm shift from looking at "education for society's sake" to building "a society conducive to education."

The Modern Tragedy Resulting from Seeing Education as a Means to an End

Education is the very purpose of human life, the primary factor in character building: that which makes human beings truly human. Nevertheless, education has consistently been reduced to a subordinate position and been viewed as a means to other ends. This view has prevailed not only in Japan, but can be seen worldwide. This has reduced the educational system to a mere mechanism that serves national objectives, be they political, militaristic, economic or ideological. A certain type of personality, not the total development of character, has been sought, as if to cast individuals from a uniform mold. Treating education as a means rather than an end is ultimately related to and reinforces a utilitarian view of human life itself.

Children's Happiness Is the First Priority

In contrast, the first president of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, never ceased to stress that the purpose of education is ensuring children's happiness.

While Makiguchi's pedagogy is gaining recognition today, it was originally conceived under the pre-war militarist regime in Japan, which mobilized every educational institution to foster obedient imperial subjects. It was against this process that Makiguchi resisted, asserting that education's true aim should be the life-long well-being of children. In other words, he was a farsighted individual who, during a period of fanatical militarism, held fast to the belief that society should serve the authentic needs of education and that education must not be sacrificed to nationalist goals.

Restoring the Bonds Between Human Beings

Happiness, however, must not be confused with mere pleasure. Mistaking momentary pleasure for a life of genuine satisfaction and happiness exemplifies the skewing of values that in my opinion has been at the root of the distortions of post-war Japanese society, especially in its educational system.

The experience of a truly humane life—genuine happiness—can only be realized in the bonds and interactions between people. Herein lies the essence of the Buddhist perspective on human life and happiness. While enmity, contradiction, and discord may seem to be an unavoidable aspect of relations between humans, our individuality and character will shine with a brighter beauty to the extent we persevere and transform these conflicts. It is through this process of forging our own character that the bonds between people can be restored and rejuvenated.

Creative coexistence is clearly one of the keywords for the 21st century. To build a society that serves the essential needs of education in the 21st century, we must build human bonds that transcend race and nationality. Highest priority must be given to cultivating in young people the strength of character and values that will enable them to take the lead in building of world of creative coexistence.

Makiguchi's Foresighted Proposal

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the publication of Makiguchi's *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*. Challenging the myopic and superficial nature of contemporary Japanese attempts at educational reform, he proposed that two new institutions be established to develop an educational vision for a new era, namely an “educational headquarters” to act as a supervising council body and a “national institute for educational research” to assist it. The latter was indeed founded soon after the war, but an educational council as he envisaged has yet to be realized.

Based on Makiguchi's far-sighted vision and practice, I would like now to propose the establishment of an educational center—a permanent educational council committed to the long-term reconstruction of the entire framework of the educational system. This should be started as an independent agency that is institutionally insulated from all political influence.

The Independence of Education

I have in the past called for the principle of the separation of powers to be expanded to give education a status and independence coequal to that accorded the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. Because education is a grand endeavor that shapes the individuals of future generations, it should be completely independent of political interference.

It is international exchange and cooperation in the educational arena, transcending national interests, that will serve as a foundation for world peace. For this reason I have been promoting a vision conceived over 20 years ago, for a “United Nations for Education,” that would make education independent of political interference throughout the world.

The Need for New Types of Schools

In Japan, various reform plans to improve the quality of education in the classroom have been discussed. However, as Makiguchi emphasized, methodological reforms must be

preceded by unambiguously defining the purpose of education in terms of the happiness of students. Institutional changes that are not guided by clearly defined goals and principles could—and in the past have—easily backfire.

In this context, I would like to propose that new and different types of schools be officially accredited and “experimental classes” be promoted—a shift to decentralization for the genuine, internal transformation of school education in Japan by encouraging educators’ creative energy.

Amid growing concern about the “flight from learning,” it is now the vital role of education to strive to create a kind of school where children can always find the joy of learning and living.

Fundamental Reform of Universities for the 21st Century

Promoting Diversification of Admission Processes

The university entrance examination system is considered one of the focal points of educational reform in Japan. With smaller families, Japanese society is presented with a good opportunity to review this system and renew it to become one that is truly beneficial to both students and colleges.

The method of university admission should not be limited to written entrance examinations. Through diversified processes such as admission on grounds of recommendation and special talents and merit, broader opportunities should be opened up; all these efforts should respect and encourage the applicants’ will to learn. The beginning of the university academic year should also be moved to September both to accommodate exchange students and those returning from studies overseas as well as to provide graduates of Japanese high schools time and various opportunities after graduation.

In a rapidly changing society, academic disciplines are likely to become further subdivided and highly specialized, reducing the weight of basic liberal arts subjects in college curricula. This will limit the scope of education a student can receive. Liberal arts at universities are lacking a clear-cut goal or principle. I would therefore like to stress that liberal arts education be reexamined. Simultaneously, the quality of professional education should be enhanced in conjunction with graduate school.

The Goals of Soka University of America and the Efforts of Soka University, Japan

It is vital that we define the ideal direction for humanistic education and create a new current of education for the 21st Century. Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo, will open in 2001 as a liberal arts college focusing on a well-rounded general education while preparing students for the world of work as well as graduate studies.

It is probably universities that are facing the most serious stalemate in terms of the quality of education, yet are receiving least attention. In Japan, Soka University established a Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in 2000 in an effort to support the faculty in various projects to develop innovative teaching methods and provide learning assistance services. The purpose of these is to help students gain the ability to resolve learning difficulties on their own.

Revitalizing Universities Through International Exchange

Another task that universities should address, I believe, is to open their doors to

international exchange. The excellence of American universities' educational standards in comparison to those of Japanese universities is often mentioned here in Japan. I am convinced that the wellspring of the vigor of American colleges lies in the country's spiritual climate that respects diversity and freedom, and welcomes educators and students of many different nationalities.

Lastly, I would like to reemphasize the global challenge that faces us: the need for a human society conducive to education. When defined as those activities that foster the talents and character of human beings, "education" is in no way limited to classrooms but is a mission that must be undertaken and realized by human society as a whole.

We must now go back to the original purpose of education—children's happiness—and reflect upon the state of our respective societies and our ways of living. Education separated from society can have no vital force; likewise, there is no future for a society that has lost sight of the fact that education is its true mission. Education is not a mere right or obligation, but the mission of every individual. To awaken this awareness throughout society must be the starting point of all our endeavors.