BUILDING A SOCIETY SERVING THE ESSENTIAL NEEDS OF EDUCATION: SOME VIEWS ON EDUCATION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
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Although the following education proposal addresses the Japanese educational system specifically, the themes covered by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda are universal concerns shared by people around the globe. Education has been of central concern to the Soka Gakkai since its inception in 1930. Comprising all levels from pre-school to post-graduate, the Soka school system founded by the SGI president offers an education designed to stimulate wisdom and engagement with society. Soka University opened in Hachioji, Japan in 1971 and Soka University of America was established in Calabasas, California in 1987. The construction of Soka University at Aliso Viejo, California will be finished this year and will open in autumn. Every school is co-educational with the exception of the Soka Women's Junior College. In recent years, Soka Kindergarten schools have been opened in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia.

In this proposal, President Ikeda focuses on the problems facing the Japanese education system and draws conclusions about the fundamental nature and mission of education. He points out that the problems young people face today are primarily caused by the degeneration of the educational function of society as a whole, a phenomenon reflecting a deterioration of the ethics of adult society.

Stressing that it is crucial to reverse our society's tendency to treat education as a means rather than an end, Mr. Ikeda urges that society be reformed to serve the essential needs of the process of education. He calls for the restoration of the bonds between individuals and between humanity and the natural environment for the sake of our children, who are in the midst of a crisis acutely symbolized by a breakdown in communication.

As the founder of Soka University and the Soka school system, he offers several specific proposals for the reform of the Japanese education system.

Education in Crisis

As we enter the twenty-first century, education is once again the focus of considerable discussion. In Japan, this debate has concentrated on educational reform, and I would like to take this opportunity to respond to recent points raised and offer some frank opinions on this debate as well as to make some concrete proposals.

One widespread problem recently has been that of children who for various reasons, particularly bullying, refuse to attend school. It is said this problem could affect almost any child in Japan: the Ministry of Education's annual survey on Japanese schools has revealed that absenteeism in elementary and junior high schools reached the unprecedented number of more than 130,000 students in 1999. This means that, at the elementary-school level, one out of every 290 students is unable or unwilling to attend school, and, at the junior-high level, one out of forty, an average of one student in every class.

In Japan, there has been a terrible series of school suicides and other tragedies resulting from bullying, and the crisis is escalating, while the worldwide problem of drug abuse is gradually

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spreading to Japan as well. In addition, there has been a succession of juvenile crimes in recent years: a series of murders by fourteen- and fifteen-year-olds, and, in just the last year, crimes that have shocked the Japanese public such as the motiveless hijacking of an expressway bus by a 17-year-old, killing one and causing severe traumas for all the other passengers, and a boy who brutally clubbed his mother to death with a baseball bat; crimes that would have been practically unthinkable in Japan just a few years ago.

Professionals in the fields of juvenile psychology and education analyze these issues, looking for solutions. Realistically speaking, however, adult society has still failed to deal with these problems. Shocked at their monstrosity, we feel helpless in the face of such unfathomable trends.

As one individual who aspires to promote the sound growth of the young people who are to shoulder our future, I penned a proposal for a general meeting of the Soka Gakkai's nationwide education division sixteen years ago entitled "Thoughts on the Aims of Education."1 Based on the principle that educational reform should be driven by humanism, not politics, I indicated in that proposal a humanistic ideal imbued with creativity, internationalism, and totality.

I recall that at that time, too, the crisis of education was a matter of major concern, and parents and teachers and many other concerned individuals were deeply worried about the issues of problematic behavior, school violence, and absenteeism. Some fifteen years have passed since then, and sadly, notwithstanding the efforts of those involved, not only has there been no improvement but this situation has now become the norm, and numerous new problems have subsequently emerged.

The Flight from Learning

One of the most serious problems recently has been the breakdown of discipline in schools as classes become uncontrollable due to students' disruptive behavior. This problem was initially marked at the junior high-school level but has been affecting even the lower levels of elementary school in recent years. In the worst cases, children are already undisciplinable by the time they enter elementary school from kindergarten, totally disrupting classes.

There have even been surveys that show that a third of the homeroom teachers whose function is to be responsible for the children report that they are so frustrated that they have considered giving up altogether. If nothing is done, we may see the dysfunction of the entire school system.

Another acute problem is a decline in academic achievement. Students' aversion to study, as seen in their dislike of subjects such as mathematics and science, is becoming a serious problem. Various studies demonstrate how the academic level of Japanese children is deteriorating altogether and that this is now affecting high-school and post-secondary education. There are reports, which would almost be laughable if they were not so shocking, of university students who lack a grasp of even the most basic concepts.

I would refer to this situation as a "flight from learning." I don't think it would be overdramatic to describe this trend as the defeat of education, the failure of our education system to fulfill its essential functions: the provision of spiritual nourishment that enables us to develop our creativity through learning from the wisdom of our predecessors and thus gaining access to the common cultural assets that humankind conveys from generation to generation.

In 2002, Japan will complete the phased reduction of the school week to five days from the traditional six. In tandem with this, the Ministry of Education is introducing a newly revised curriculum aiming to cultivate children's "zest for living" by providing latitude for their growth. This move must, I think, reflect criticism of the conventional cramming method that places too much emphasis on rote learning and furious examination competition and is among the principal

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causes of the "flight from learning."

However, there are many doubts as to whether this change will lead to a genuine revival of learning or a comprehensive improvement of academic ability among students. These concerns are based on the possibility that if the number of classroom hours is reduced as proposed, rather than promoting voluntary study as intended, the extra hours will most probably result in children either spending more time in cramming schools or spending more hours watching television and playing video games and so not necessarily produce the expected results.

I share these anxieties. Although the suffering of children, as symbolized by absenteeism, must be tackled immediately, I cannot possibly believe that the underlying problems can be fixed just by tinkering with the system.

Children Are the Mirror of Society

So what is behind our children's pathology of staying away from school, problematic behavior, and the "flight from learning," which is rampant in contemporary society? I believe the fundamental cause 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.

If it is education in the widest sense that enables human beings to truly express their humanity, then there must be a functional disorder in contemporary Japanese society that prevents individuals from becoming genuinely mature. This breakdown is manifested most acutely in the most fragile and sensitive constituent of our society, that is, the children. At the risk of oversimplification, we must never forget the time-honored saying "children are the mirror of society" when considering the problems of education.

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 up as stopgap or temporary measures that merely work around the edges of the system.

I found the following words in an article on moral education by the writer Taichi Yamada very moving: "Our children need more than empty sermons about virtue. As adults, we must somehow demonstrate to them in practice how to live a better life."2

The truth is, however, that the adult world that has suddenly been revealed after the end of Japan's period of rapid economic growth and in the aftermath of the collapse of the "bubble" economy is in an extremely wretched and gloomy state, approaching the new century with practically no vitality. Be it in politics, the bureaucracy, business, or the media, the elite have behaved shamefully, totally bent on vindicating themselves, evading social responsibility, and protecting their own interests.

Japanese society is rife with materialism and scandalous corruption among adults, a situation symbolized by a spate of insurance-related murder cases that demonstrate our loss of values and sense of purpose. This has definitely cast a dark shadow in the hearts of our children. In a society lacking role models who can inspire the next generation, of course education cannot function properly.

There are doubtless large numbers of individuals who are unaffected by the sensationalism of the media and continue to work sincerely, adhering to a belief that what is essential is, in the words of Mr. Yamada, to "demonstrate in practice how to live a better life." However, even these people are finding it difficult to uphold their principles. The fact that people are increasingly extolling an over-idealized image of "the good old days of the Meiji era"3 perhaps reflects that people feel a spiritual deficiency in contemporary Japanese society.

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Review of the Fundamental Law of Education

I believe these problems are also part of the reason behind calls for a review and possible amendment of the Fundamental Law of Education, the mainstay of the postwar education system, as part of a series of educational reform plans.

The July 2000 report by the prime minister's private advisory board, the National Council on Educational Reform (NCER), stated that the majority view was that an amendment of the Fundamental Law of Education was required, and that "in the preamble and provisions in Article 1, there is an overemphasis on individual and universal humanity and an omission of respect toward the nation, the community, tradition, culture, the home, and nature."

In fact, it is hard to find fault with the principles stated in the preamble and Article 1. Article 1 of the Fundamental Law of Education stipulates the objectives of education as follows:

"Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labor and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with the independent spirit, as builders of the peaceful state and society."4

This is a perfectly acceptable statement of the universal principle of "full development of personality" based on the principle of respect for individual dignity, and is pertinent to peoples of all times and cultures.

However, in applying this universal principle, its relevance must be tested in the social and ethical context. I feel in this sense that those who drafted this law were not specific enough. People failed to delve into what the individual in this context really means. In fact, the individual can only become a fully realized individual in interaction with others, and in order to do this it is necessary to control egotism. This is perhaps so self-evident that the drafters of the law failed to pay enough attention to it. They failed to be adequately aware of the dangers of individualism degenerating into selfish egotism.

Thus, any review or revision of the law proposed by the NCER must be based on a clear understanding of the way in which universal principles find expression within cultural particularities. And I believe that this same concern motivated Tatsuo Morito, the minister of education who was instrumental in drafting the Fundamental Law of Education and who later expressed doubts about its effectiveness.

Although it was not mentioned in the council's report, there is a reactionary mood in the country calling for a return to the spirit of the following section of the Imperial Rescript on Education to correct these deficiencies.

"Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation; extend your benevolence to all;"5

Merely filling the text with references to culture, tradition, and the home will not, I think, produce much effect. Without question, reinstatement of the virtues extolled in the Imperial Rescript on Education would be totally anachronistic when one considers the role the Rescript assumed in Japan's imperial and patriarchal systems before and during the war.6

The Fundamental Law of Education has been the mainstay of the postwar education system in Japan, and for this reason I believe that any revision should be undertaken only after careful thought and review; hasty revision is to be avoided.

A Paradigm Shift

The modern Japanese educational system has reached a critical juncture. We are witnessing the consequences of education being subordinated to various bureaucratic and political agendas

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under the control of the Ministry of Education.

Modern Japan's progress, whether it be the prewar policy of building national prosperity and military strength or the postwar stress on becoming an economic superpower, has been motivated by an unconditional national imperative to catch up with and surpass the advanced countries of the West. At the same time, ever since the Meiji era, education has been coercively positioned as a means to attain these goals. Both of these approaches are now evidently at a stalemate as Japan is compelled to make an orbital change in direction from industrialization to adaptation to the information-oriented era.

Hence, as I consider education in the twenty-first century, I would like to assert that what is most urgently needed is a paradigm shift from looking at "education for society's sake" to building "a society serving the essential needs of education."

In formulating the conceptual paradigm of "a society serving the essential needs of education," I was inspired by Professor Robert Thurman of Columbia University. Each time I have had the chance to meet him, I have been impressed by the depth of his vision. In an interview with the Boston Research Center (BRC),7 he was asked how he viewed the role of education in society. He replied, "I think the question should rather be: What is the role of society in education? Because in my view education is the purpose of human life."

This is indeed a penetrating insight. Professor Thurman says that this view is largely due to influences from the teachings of Shakyamuni, whom he considers one of humanity's first teachers. This resonates with Kant's ethical philosophy, which insists that we respect the autonomy of others and that humans must never be used as a means to an end.

Learning is the very purpose of human life, the primary factor in the development of personality, that which makes human beings truly human. Nevertheless, development of personality has consistently been reduced to a subordinate position and viewed as a means to other ends. This view has prevailed worldwide throughout modern history, particularly in the twentieth century.

The educational system has therefore been reduced to a mere mechanism that serves national objectives, be they political, military, economic, or ideological. A certain type of personality, not the full development of personality, has been sought, as if casting individuals from a uniform mold. Treating education as a means rather than an end reinforces a utilitarian view of human life itself.

It is a terrible tragedy that the twentieth century suffered ceaseless wars and violence and became an unprecedented era of mass killing. Needless to say, this demonstrates an increase in killing power, the negative legacy of technological advance. Furthermore, I feel that it is in large part due to an overturning of values in modern civilization, caused by ceasing to regard human beings as the basis of value and instead assigning merely subordinate roles to education, which should be a fundamental and primary human activity.

In this regard, I feel some anxiety about attitudes toward the IT revolution. As was described in the Okinawa Charter on Global Information Society at the Okinawa-Kyushu Summit this year, "Information and Communication Technology (IT) is one of the most potent forces in shaping the twenty-first century."8 There can be no doubt that the IT revolution will become one of the mega-trends in the forthcoming century, and it is of course important not to be left behind.

University professors and officials have frequently noted that the deterioration of academic ability among Japanese students, especially in mathematics and sciences, if left unsolved, may negatively affect Japan's economy and technological ability and consequently delay Japan in the worldwide race toward the IT revolution. It is only right to be apprehensive in this regard.

While globalization naturally entails both positive and negative aspects, the current toward

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internationalization in the twenty-first century will be unstoppable. No country can remain unaffected.

Yet, my personal uneasiness is about the possibility of retracing the footsteps of the past, that is, returning to the idea of "education for society's sake" in tackling the problem of how to improve the academic level of our students.

Insofar as the IT revolution by nature has the potential to cause a paradigm shift in contemporary society, its influence contains positive and negative potentials. However, my observation of the current state of affairs is that only the optimistic and positive aspects have been stressed.

In the United States, which anticipated the IT revolution first, especially in the financial sector, and sometimes appears to have carved out for itself a monopoly position where materialism and "casino capitalism" thrive, the darkness of the IT revolution undoubtedly casts a growing shadow. If all that the new invention of IT brings to human society is a tendency toward materialism, then what use is this revolution?

A Society That Confuses Happiness with Pleasure

In the face of this tendency, we need to return to the core issue of human values. I believe we need to redefine the crucial concept "development of personality."

People have come to take this phrase, described as the purpose of education in the Fundamental Law of Education, for granted. But this is a universal goal that we must strive to realize and implement. It is a fundamental concept, and it can never be reemphasized enough as the key to educational reform.

For this purpose, let us experiment by replacing the phrase "development of personality" with the word "happiness." The first president of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who was an outstanding educator, never ceased to stress that the purpose of education is ensuring children's happiness.

Makiguchi's pedagogy is gradually gaining international recognition today, but it was originally conceived under the prewar militarist regime in Japan, which mobilized every educational institution to foster obedient imperial subjects. It was against this process that Makiguchi protested, asserting that education's true aim should be the lifelong well-being of children and critiquing the Imperial Rescript on Education as providing nothing more than a "minimum set of moral standards."

In other words, he was a farsighted individual who, during a period of fanatical militarism, held fast to his belief that society should serve the authentic needs of humanistic education and that education must never be sacrificed to nationalist goals.

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 postwar Japanese society. This mistaken attitude results in liberty yielding to indulgence and self-seeking, peace yielding to cowardice and indolence, human rights to complacency, and democracy to mobocracy.

Consequently, development of personality ceases, and we are left with immature and arrogant individuals, unable to grow out of their childish ways and never listening to others, described by José Ortega y Gasset.9

The experience of a truly human 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. Enmity, contradiction, and discord may seem to be an unavoidable aspect of relations between humans and our relations with nature and the universe. But it is through the

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process of persevering in spite of this and transforming these conflicts, restoring and rejuvenating the bonds between us, that we are able to forge and polish our individuality and character.

If these bonds are severed, the human spirit can only roam aimlessly in the pitch darkness of solitude. In psychological terms this might be referred to as a "communication disorder," a pathology of modern society due to a weakening of the bonds between people.

Antisocial behavior and the increasing viciousness of juvenile crimes are acute manifestations of this social pathology. There is an ongoing debate in Japan about amending the juvenile law, but changing the law will not of itself lead to a solution of the problem. It is the responsibility of adults to patiently restore the ability to communicate by listening to the voices of isolated children calling out for help from the darkness.

There is a famous episode about Socrates in which his influence on youth is described as being like an electric ray that stings those who touch it. He explains that he can electrify others because he is electrified himself. Similarly, a teacher must be constantly creative if he is to evoke creativity in his students. This is an essential quality in an educator.

What is most important is the attitude of the teachers themselves. Human interaction is the key.

Restoring Human Bonds

Creative coexistence is clearly one of the key concepts for the twenty-first century. I also referred to this several years ago in a proposal entitled "A Renaissance of Hope and Humanity."10

Communication between humans and the natural environment is also vital. In this respect also, Makiguchi was a man with piercing foresight. At the opening of his book, *The Geography of Human Life*,11 Makiguchi stresses the importance of the influence of the natural environment on the development of personality by citing a work by the renowned educator and reformist Yoshida Shoin (1830–1859): "People do not develop in isolation from their environment, and human affairs are just a reflection of the people. Therefore, to understand human affairs, you first must understand the local context in which the people have developed." Makiguchi went on to state that you can only foster qualities of compassion, goodwill, friendship, kindness, sincerity and honesty, and cultivate nobility of the heart, within the local community.

The Geography of Human Life was published in 1903, more than half a century before environmental issues such as shortages of natural resources and energy and pollution of the atmosphere and water compelled humanity to reconsider our relationship with nature. Even then, Makiguchi keenly perceived that a breakdown of communication with nature not only causes humans physical damage but also results in the destruction of virtues such as compassion that are essential to development of personality.

If the twentieth century was a century when human beings violently destroyed the global environment like rapacious invaders, maintaining communication and contact with nature is absolutely indispensable in the education of our children and the young people who are to take responsibility for the twenty-first century. Just as with communication between humans, we must increase our opportunities to interact directly with nature, rather than with the world of virtual reality. What can virtual reality offer to compare with the real-life sensation of communicating with nature — breathing the same air and basking in the same sunlight as the earth, trees, grass, and animals — the dynamic expanse of life?

I recall a moving passage from an essay by Nobukiyo Takahashi, an authority on forest research.

"The beauty of the evening forest, especially under a full moon, throws into sharp contrast the boundary between the sky and the mountain ridges, as if viewing a wood-block print. It is a world

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of white and black. It is also a world savored only by those who experience it. Captured in photos or video, you may be able to discern these images to a certain extent, but you can never feel them in the same way. Because when you are there, it is not only through your eyes that you are touched: your skin senses the temperature and humidity; you smell the evening forest; fleetingly heard sounds that defy definition flit past your ears. Go out into the night forest, pick up a leaf, examine it front and back. How much beauty you can discover!"12

If we are to build a society that serves the essential needs of education in the twenty-first century, we must not become divided or isolated. Rather, we must deepen human bonds that transcend differences of race and nationality and also be in free and full communication with nature. We must give the highest priority to cultivating in young people the strength of character and values that will enable them to take the lead in building a world of creative coexistence.

The Independence of Education

Next, I would like to raise a few specific suggestions regarding reform of the education system.

Faced with the crisis in education, the National Council on Educational Reform (NCER) was established in March 2000 as the Japanese prime minister's advisory board to discuss the direction of educational reform together with various Ministry of Education bodies.

While it is natural that education be recognized as a matter of utmost national importance, reform must not be conducted piecemeal by merely looking for remedies for specific problems but should be carried out with a long-term perspective. Since education is inextricably interrelated with society, the process of responding to the changes of the times naturally may entail a degree of trial and error. Frequently, however, the orientation of reform has been strongly affected by the political current of the time or has consisted of myopic countermeasures that are simply reactions to changes in the immediate environment.

This was a problem in prewar Japan, as well. In *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*,13 which was published seventy years ago, Makiguchi indicated: "As is the difficulty with any old, long-established edifice, our thoroughly inconsistent educational system has been patched up with an endless succession of stopgap remedial measures. Our schools are unable to respond to the demands of the new era and, as a result, are misdirecting the future progress of the young people who enter them. This is a truly distressing situation."

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 an independent permanent central agency for education and a "national institute for educational research" to assist it. The latter was indeed founded soon after the war, but a central agency as he envisaged it has yet to be realized.

The NCER could potentially fulfill this function, but as this is an ad hoc body, there would be the risk that this important issue might come to be treated in a stopgap way. This is why I would like to propose the establishment of a permanent central commission for education committed to the long-term reconstruction of the entire framework of the educational system. This should be launched as an independent body that is institutionally insulated from all political influence. Ensuring independence is indispensable as a means to prevent a loss of continuity in educational policies in the event of changes in the administration and also to avoid arbitrary reforms caused by political interference.

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 profound endeavor that shapes the

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individuals of future generations, it should be completely independent of political interference. This also was the spirit of Makiguchi and his close associate and successor, Josei Toda, who both campaigned selflessly during the 1920s and 1930s against the nationalistic education that was pushing Japan on the path toward war.

Such a permanent central commission should then take the lead in setting forth firm principles and long-term directions for reform in education while communicating with organizations such as the National Institute for Educational Research of Japan.

In addition to this vital mission, this permanent central commission would have a broader focus that could enable Japan to open a new path toward international contribution. 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 twenty years ago, for what might be called a "United Nations of Education"14 in order to work toward making education independent of political interference throughout the world.

If Japan could take on the role of promoting independence of education throughout the world by establishing a permanent educational commission in this way, this would doubtless help create a new identity for Japan as a country devoted to education.

In April 2000, Japan sponsored the first G8 Education Summit, attended by education ministers. I would like to propose that Japan should actively support the regular holding of international educational summits in the future, promoting a broad range of exchanges not only at the governmental level but also between individuals actually engaged in education. As confirmed at the G8 Education Summit, educational issues are not limited to individual countries. Hence Japan should assume a pivotal role in leading other countries toward international cooperation to open a new horizon for education in the twenty-first century.

Balanced Reform

Next, I should like to mention some points pertaining to reform of education in schools, which has recently become a focal issue in Japan.

The core of this reform has been "structural deregulation." The intention is that liberalization in the field of education will be promoted by abolishing the exams between junior and senior high schools in the public school system and introducing greater choice of school. The reforms also include a reduction in overall class hours, aiming to provide more latitude for children's growth by introducing a five-day school week. These measures are presumably a result of recognition of the importance of encouraging competition between schools and in reaction against rote learning.

In the Japanese context, if these reforms are enacted without completely thinking them through and providing the resources to ensure they work, we may end up asking too much of children's self-motivation. Makiguchi described the impact that the indiscriminate advocacy of "freedom" can have on the educational process: "Mere liberation, unaccompanied by a creative, constructive element, falls into directionless indulgence. When one thinks of the impact on the educational economy of the innocent pupils, it is impossible to regard this with indifference."15

This warning from the past should not be neglected today. Our communities, our schools, and families need thorough, prudent preparation. 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 easily backfire as they have done in the past.

Makiguchi proposed a half-day school system, and of course this would reduce the amount of time spent at school, but he was not motivated merely by opposition to an overemphasis of rote

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learning as is the case at present. His intention was to achieve spiritually and physically balanced growth, whereby children could experience simultaneously the enrichment derived from learning at school and that derived from practical experience in society.

Makiguchi stressed: "The malady of contemporary education is not so much that there is an overemphasis on factual knowledge, but that educators' approach to the concept of intellectual education is not appropriate."16 He called for a comprehensive change in Japanese attitudes to education, shifting from an emphasis on factual knowledge alone to the development of intellect and wisdom. He felt that this is the challenge that should be addressed by schools.

Rather than focusing critically on the existing school system, curtailing its functions in such a way as to attack its very foundations, I believe that we should seek a process of reform from the standpoint of restoring our schools' fundamental function as the forum for imparting intellectual education in the true sense of the phrase.

Creativity and Experimentation

If we are to truly change school education, empowerment of teachers must be a component. I would like to propose a transition to an approach which is more decentralized, which gives each school a freer hand and gives more authority to principals through democratization and transparency in the appointment process as well as encouraging the creativity and ingenuity of teachers. Because reforms have in the past been imposed uniformly, I believe it has been difficult for teachers to formulate new ideas as various restrictions lead them merely to perform their part adequately and no more.

Education should be for the sake of children and should not be under the monopolistic control of the government. In Japan, the government is deeply involved with details such as screening of textbooks and imposition of the curriculum, which means that we have not cultivated the means to nurture autonomy of schools and teachers or the individuality and creativity of children.

Uniform standards should be limited to matters of basic framework, and the independence of the school should be respected in practical matters. At the same time, teachers should encourage one another to enhance the quality of education through a process of trial and error.

In recent discussions on reform, there has been an ongoing debate about the quality of individual teachers, including suggestions that teaching certificates be subject to periodic renewal. What is really needed, however, is for the entire school to unite behind the challenge of enhancing the quality of education across the board. An example of this might be to have all teachers regularly open their classes to observation by their peers, as well as promoting exchanges between teachers of other subjects and from other neighborhood schools for the purpose of research.

The traditional Japanese system is reaching its limits, as seen in the breakdown of the lifetime employment and "promotion by seniority" systems in our companies. Positive competition is required if we are to reinvigorate our society. To enrich school education, teachers need mutual inspiration and motivation, encouragement and solidarity. Moreover, regular open days for children's families and members of the community as well as exchanges of views between elementary, junior, and senior high school teachers in the same community would be useful in deepening cooperation.

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 through encouraging the creative energy of educators.

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Other countries recognize a variety of schools operating under differing educational approaches — the Steiner schools grounded in a unique educational philosophy, the charter schools in the U.S.A., and "free schools" that enable children to select their own subjects of interest. Japan also needs to have a similar diversity of schools, a fact that many people now recognize. The NCER is deliberating the question of authorizing community schools, a new type of public school established and operated by the community. This is certainly a worthwhile avenue to consider.

To enable creative ideas to be put into practice, I would like to propose that the criteria for giving approval to new types of schools be relaxed. We also need to encourage experimental classes within the existing system and find ways to disseminate information about innovative measures that have been successfully tried out.

Faced with the problems of bullying, violence and absenteeism, the Soka Gakkai's education division has compiled a collection of records of the practical steps its members have taken as teachers to solve problems. This project has been carried out in response to the proposal on education I made sixteen years ago. I was tremendously gratified to hear recently that more than ten thousand such experiences have been compiled, evidence of the painstaking efforts of the teachers over the years. These are precious records and reports on educational methodologies as put into practice in the field and are an extremely beneficial means of sharing teachers' experiences.

Amid growing concern about the "flight from learning," it is now the vital role of education to strive to create the kinds of schools where children can always find the joys of learning and living.

The Ministry of Education initiated this year a policy whereby a school can apply to become a "research development school" with the freedom to determine its own individual curriculum. The system is open to both public and private schools, and the government will provide financial support. I welcome this system in that it encourages creativity and imagination in the classroom. I also believe that analysis of accumulated results and sharing of information will benefit the educational system as a whole.

Interaction between theory and concrete results from experimentation is a prerequisite, and a good example of this is in the work of the American philosopher John Dewey, who enhanced and deepened his educational theories through the experience gained at the Chicago Laboratory School.17 In the same way, Makiguchi's *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy* and Toda's *Deductive Guide to Arithmetic* (Suirishiki Shido Sanjutsu) were both works that were based on actual practice in the classroom.

Toda, Makiguchi's most loyal supporter and my own mentor, established an elementary tutorial school, the Jishu Gakkan, in 1923 as a place to prove through experimentation the theory of value-creating education. Makiguchi referred to the Jishu Gakkan as a materialization of his own vision for elementary schools, describing it as the greatest proof of his work. Meanwhile, being determined to continue Toda's work, I have founded a system of schools from the elementary to university and postgraduate levels based on Makiguchi's principles of value-creating education.

Volunteer Activities

In addition to establishing a creative learning environment, it is equally important to cultivate humanism in our children through actual experience in society. One well-documented tendency in modern children is egoistic behavior and attenuated human relationships, while the intensely competitive examination system becomes the sole focus of children's lives. In addition, many are so absorbed in the virtual world of the internet, television, and video games that they have

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become numb to the stimulations offered by the real world.

How can we encourage children to directly communicate with society and nature? One popular idea is experience in volunteer activities. I believe this should be promoted — not merely through occasional field trips but as continuous ongoing activities. To be specific, there should be activities that produce tangible results — work within the community, such as recycling, that contributes to society and provides a sense of fulfillment, as well as planting trees and flowers and conservation activities that generate concrete results.

Recently, children have been becoming more and more violent, and the incidence of juvenile crime is rising. Involvement in constructive, creative activities would lead to the well-balanced physical and spiritual growth of children. After engaging in constructive activities and projects, children would return with healthier emotions and peace of mind, bearing out the words of the philosopher William James when he spoke of the need for a "moral equivalent of war"18 to develop discipline and channel aggression.

In this regard, Makiguchi asserted that, through his vision of a half-day school system, the surplus energy of young people, often directed to antisocial targets, can be used in a way that is of value to society, thus contributing toward both individual happiness and the community at the same time. Experiencing the feeling that one's actions are of use to others gives confidence to the young people and becomes a firm foundation for spiritual growth.

The year 2001 has been designated as the UN "International Year of Volunteers." Taking this as an opportunity, we should deepen appreciation of volunteer activities throughout society, not just in the limited environment of the school, and pave a path toward a humanitarian society in the twenty-first century.

Fundamental Reform of Universities

Next, I would like to touch upon the university entrance examination system, which is a pivotal issue in educational reform in Japan. Currently, as the already excessive pressure of examinations intensifies, one serious problem is the tendency to turn high schools into nothing more than a preparatory stage for entrance to universities. Now that family size is decreasing and the pressure for access to higher education is less, Japanese society is presented with a good opportunity to review this system and renew it so it can become one that is truly beneficial to both students and colleges.

What needs to be considered first is diversification of admission processes. I feel there is a need to improve the current university entrance system from a selective screening exam to that of an aptitude test for entrance. The method of university admission should not be limited to written entrance examinations. Broader opportunities should be opened up through diversified processes such as admission on grounds of special talents and merit; all these efforts should respect and encourage the applicant's will to learn.

The beginning of the university academic year should also be moved from April to September,19 both to facilitate smooth transition for exchange students and those returning from studies overseas as well as to provide graduates of Japanese high schools time and various opportunities after graduation and before university entrance. This period could be used as an opportunity to acquire experience in society, to read extensively, and ponder carefully on life.

Related to this, I would like to touch upon the nature of university education. Most important, there is a need to reconsider our approach to education in terms of including both specialization and a well-rounded general education. 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 breadth of education a student can receive. Liberal arts at Japanese universities are currently lacking a clear-cut goal or principle, and I

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would therefore like to call for a reevaluation of our approach in this crucial area. Simultaneously, we must expand education in specialized fields and ensure coordination with the courses offered at graduate school.

The Contributions of Soka University

It is vital that we define the ideal direction for humanistic education and create a new current of education for the twenty-first century. Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo, will open in 2001 as a liberal arts college focusing on providing a well-rounded general education while preparing students to pursue more specialized courses of study, including postgraduate courses. As its founder, I am committed to bold experimentation and full implementation of the ideals of value-creating education.

In all areas of university education, but especially liberal arts, we need to end the tight demarcations between departments and adopt an organic and interdisciplinary approach. For this purpose, faculty members should be urged to drastically reform their teaching methods. One reason why many students find the classes unattractive is the outdated contents of the classes repeated year after year. I have already referred to the dysfunction of the school education system: the problems faced by universities in this regard have tended to be neglected.

The interim report of the University Council of the Ministry of Educa-tion emphasized the need to enhance the teaching abilities of university faculty members. Faculty members must make ceaseless efforts to improve the quality of classes and avoid inertia, to prevent the overall quality of university education from being damaged.

In Japan, Soka University established a Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in 2000. The center will support the faculty in various projects to develop innovative teaching methods and also provide students with learning assistance to help them gain the ability to resolve difficulties on their own.

At Soka University of America, meanwhile, every student and faculty member will participate in the Core Curriculum, a unique series of four courses focusing on central issues facing our world in the twenty-first century:

What is an individual human life?

What is the relationship between the individual and the physical environment in which we live?

What is the relationship between the individual and the human environment in which we live?

Global issues in peace, culture and education.

Each issue will be addressed from a range of perspectives—historical, multicultural, analytical, and experiential—so as to provide the foundation for ongoing learning.

In Japan, too, I believe that a liberal arts education should be the core element of the first half of every university degree course, as it provides a general understanding of humanity. For the second half of the course, we need to make university administration more flexible, namely, to introduce a double-major system and establish a system that allows compatibility in credits and transfers between schools to enable students to move to universities in specialized academic fields.

When choosing universities, students in Japan are inclined to prioritize universities or departments that are easy to enter. If this situation persists, it will never generate positive results for either the students or the universities. To avoid this, universities should cooperate in providing classes in areas that students truly wish to pursue. During their time in university, as students' interests develop, they are likely to wish to change courses to a completely different

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field, which may require moving to a different university. The current system, however, does not allow the transfer of credits and thus discourages this process.

To respond to this, universities in some parts of Japan are starting to form alliances enabling the transfer of credits. These are bold reforms that are of great significance for the benefit of the students. Ideally, universities should allow individual students to study what they want, when they want, and where they want. To achieve this, we need to allow mobility, concentrating on the academic discipline and specialization, not the university. This will form part of the development of a lifelong education system.

Promoting International Exchange

Another task that universities should address, I believe, is opening their doors to international exchange. Japan, in particular, urgently needs to promote internationalization in all institutions of higher learning.

Soka University aims to be a new kind of university based on the principles of humanism. For this reason, ever since it was established, it has actively promoted educational exchanges with universities in other countries throughout the world. It has already signed academic exchange agreements with more than seventy universities. Through such exchanges, many students have acquired the opportunity to study abroad, and regular exchanges of faculty members have been promoted. We are striving toward globalization of the educational environment through enhancing mutual understanding between cultures.

The high quality of American universities' educational standards in comparison to those of Japanese universities is often mentioned here. 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.

In Japan, teaching staff have basically tended to work abroad only for the sake of career advancement, while students often view overseas study purely in terms of future career opportunities. But from the viewpoint of cultural exchange and enhancement of the quality of education in Japan, we urgently need to find ways to increase the flow of exchange students coming to Japan. Scholarships will be an important means of supporting students studying abroad as well as encouraging foreign students to study in Japan, and creating a fuller scholarship system will therefore be crucial from the standpoint of building an identity for Japan as a country that places the utmost priority on education.

On the same theme, I want to emphasize the importance of language education, especially English, at an early stage. Even if we make structural preparations for international exchange at the university level, unless we fundamentally break down the language barrier, the range of exchanges will not expand, and these plans will remain "pie in the sky." Moreover, globalization means that linguistic proficiency is becoming an indispensable ability in life. Language skills can help to bring the world together. Language is a tool which enables us to expand our chances of learning about the lives and differences in values of people throughout the world as well as promoting heart-to-heart exchanges.

As one concrete measure, it is important to actively promote English education in elementary schools. However, this should not consist of just bringing forward junior high school English classes, but rather focus on learning conversation skills in an enjoyable environment that also deepens understanding of culture. (Naturally, we should not neglect the study of Japanese language, history, and culture as well.)

Toward a Century Radiant with the Smiles of Children

Lastly, I would like to reemphasize the global challenge that faces us: the creation of a human

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society that serves the essential needs of 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 lifelong happiness — and reflect upon the state of our respective societies and our ways of living.

What kind of world should we build for our children to inherit? At the threshold of a new century, we have a great opportunity to seriously face these issues — and it is an opportunity we must seize.

The UN has designated the first decade of the twenty-first century (2001–2010) the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World. I wholeheartedly welcome this designation since it is a theme I have asserted continuously over the years. UNESCO will be assuming a central role in this campaign, but its success depends on a broad range of popular support and cooperation.

The youth division of SGI-USA has been engaged in "Victory Over Violence (VOV)," a movement to educate people about nonviolence, since 1999. This movement is conducted through promoting dialogue to disseminate the spirit of nonviolence. The overarching goal is to transform the tendency to downplay the sanctity of life that became deeply rooted in the minds of our children during the twentieth century, the century of war and violence. The VOV movement is developing broadly in U.S. society and receiving support from many human rights organizations, schools, and other educational institutions. Above all, it has become a tremendous source of hope and courage for young people who have suffered the effects of violence.

Like the U.S.A., Japan also needs to address this tendency to devalue life. Sensational coverage of tragic incidents, pointing at the darkness in children's hearts, will never do anything to solve the problem. It is society's values that have become inverted. As adults, we must speak out and take action. The Soka Gakkai has consistently emphasized the promotion of peace education on the grassroots level. In line with the UN international decade, I call upon the Soka Gakkai youth division and the education division to play central and active roles in raising awareness of the culture of peace and nonviolence in Japanese society.

I believe that through such engagement we can strive to construct a value-creating society and live truly non-egoistic lives grounded in mutual respect.

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. I believe that education in the broadest sense is the mission of every individual. To awaken this awareness throughout society must be the highest priority in all our endeavors.

Finally, I would like to conclude by pledging that I will devote all my energy to creating a century in which children's lives will shine with happiness and the magnificent promise of education will finally be fulfilled.

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2. *Chuo Koron*, September 1999 issue.
3. 1868–1912. Considered to be the beginning of Japan's modern period.
4. Kyoiku Kihon Ho. Promulgated on March 31, 1947.
5. Kyoiku Chokugo. Issued by Emperor Meiji on October 30, 1890, and remained in effect until the end of World War II.
6. Glorifying the values of loyalty and filial piety, the Imperial Rescript on Education was used as an absolute guiding principle of education and served as a powerful tool of ideological

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16. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei Gairon*, The Complete Works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1930, reprint, Tokyo: Daisanbunmei-sha, 1984), vol. 8.
17. The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools site, < http://www.ucls.uchicago.edu/.>
18. "The Moral Equivalent of War," speech given at Stanford University, 1906.
19. Currently, all Japanese educational establishments commence the academic year in April.

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