

Development of Good Human Beings

Zoab Mirza

Director of Instructional Design, Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, USA

[Abstract] Education is the only way to cultivate human beings. In our current education system, educators focus on creating curricula that help students attain their career goals. We need to develop an equal emphasis on human development to impart values that embody wisdom, courage, and compassion. This essay highlights the primary resources on values, concerns, proposals, actions, consequences, and Buddhist philosophies shared by Daisaku Ikeda about becoming good human beings, who can contribute to the betterment of society both locally and internationally. Ikeda is a Japanese Buddhist philosopher, educator, author, and third president and then honorary president of the Soka Gakkai, the largest of Japan's new religious movements. This paper also draws on the secondary literature in Ikeda studies.

[Keywords] moral, ethical principles and standards, value, diversity, human beinging

Introduction

When animals are born, they already possess the knowledge to live and survive from the day of their birth. For example, since birth, a bird already knows how to make a nest, fly, and find specific food they need to eat. Herbivores are animals that eat plants, while carnivores will only eat other animals. All animals know what type of food they need to eat, and what natural-living skills are necessary to reproduce, hunt, build a home, and survive amongst other animals. They already have consciences, but unlike human beings, they do not have self-consciencies.

When human beings are born, they depend on external factors like support from parents, schools, and society to instill skills and values to become good human beings. To develop self-conscience, they need to learn and develop the values that make them good human beings based on their social, political, and economic systems. The only way to learn those values is through education, which is an evolution. This essay highlights the primary resources on values, concerns, proposals, actions, and consequences human beings can draw on. Specifically, it delineates Buddhist philosophies shared by Daisaku Ikeda about becoming good human beings who can contribute to the betterment of society, both locally and internationally. Ikeda is a Japanese Buddhist philosopher, educator, author, and third president and then honorary president of the Soka Gakkai, the largest of Japan's new religious movements.

Values: Moral and Ethical Principles and Standards

Ikeda (1984) explained that the aim of education should be the cultivation of the individual character to them as a whole. It is a process that can only be provided through education. Generally, in school, we are taught by scholars with a defined curriculum that is serving the list of external stakeholders, like serving in the military, following the rules by the emperor, or creating values that only support specific belief sets by established system. Ikeda (1984) lists three principles that should be in the educational framework - totality, creativity, and internationalization. The totality of wisdom refers to interrelation, emphasizing keeping the big picture in mind and how there are sub-units interconnected, for example, part of the human body and its components. Acknowledging that everyone is unique and creative in their way, humans should be treated accordingly. And finally, the ability to foster people with international perspectives is

encouraged.

Good human beings are able to exercise their practices when they are happy. Ikeda (2013) identifies happiness as the aim of life, and education should mainly aim to make learners happy. Happiness is tied to an individual's social, political, and economic environment, but can be cultivated by "cognition of truth (truth-good-beauty)" and "creation of value (gain-good-beauty)" (Goulah & Ito, 2012, p. 59). Within globalization, these new morals and educational standards must be created for 21st century global citizenship. Old teaching methods have to change, and students should be engaged in dialogue to reflect on their actions to be happy. As explained by Ikeda (2013), this can be done by teaching willing people to experience the joy of living, to harmoniously coexist and thrive with others and nature, and to be committed to always developing and improving both themselves and their environment.

Ikeda (2013) explains what young teachers' focus can bring in the change needed to establish humanist education, which will remove their egoism and arrogance, support them in exhibiting faith in the potential of every student, and engage them in teacher's professional development to improve as educators. But all educators need to adhere the following five principles:

- Respect for the sanctity of life
- Faith in the diverse richness of human potential
- An emphasis on the mutually interactive and inspirational relationship between educators and students
- A shared aim among educators and students to continually create value and strive for self-transformation
- A firm grasp of the abilities of students and appropriate guidance (Ikeda, 2013, p. 211).

To instill such values to make good human beings, Ikeda (2013) focused on inclusive education, focusing on urban and rural students. Due to a lack of resources, the rural students would mostly suffer from equal access to education, but the teachers must stand up for their rights. All students must be taught to foster compassion, wisdom, and courage to treat each other with respect and kindness instead of bullying, Ikeda (2013).

Charity begins at home. Before teachers can be taught compassion, wisdom, and courage, parents play a foundational role in developing values in their kids. Home is the first place of human education for a child outside the school to learn values to become good citizens. Ikeda (1977) highlights a mother's role in developing emotional skills and father's impact on improving the social skills of their children. Both have an important role to play to impart the spiritual values that become the foundation of how a child sees the world. But for Ikeda, the mother's role is so profound that Goulah has shared insights in multiple poems such as "Mother" (Ikeda, 2014) and "A Symphony of Great and Noble Mothers" (Ikeda, 2009), and in essays such as "A Mother's Love," "A Word to Young Mothers," and "Mothers" (Ikeda, 1979) (Goulah, 2020, p. 159).

In any context of an individual's life, either at home or school, they need to become good human beings as defined by Ikeda (2010). That 'goodness' can be defined as that which moves us in the direction of harmonious coexistence, empathy, and solidarity with others. The nature of evil, on the other hand, "is to divide people from people, humanity from the rest of nature" (p. 57).

Concerns: Problems that Violate the Values

Ikeda (1984) explained that politics should not dictate educational reforms. Still, this has unfortunately continued in Japan with the political aim to focus on education to meet the nationalist goal and established militarization. In modern Japan, education has been cultivating people to add

value to the nation and big business, supporting the national and economic structure. This has resulted in negligence of the wisdom of totality. Ikeda reported that instead of focusing on human values, the students are more focused on passing the examination. He further shared his disappointment with schools and institutions not able to stimulate and develop skills in creativity.

Ikeda (1977) recognized early that instilling values in students to become good human beings was hindered by issues such as an ability to complete homework, having no access to recreational facilities, health cases of broken bones, and stress-related gastric ulcers in children. Another problem he recognized was students bullying other students, especially from low incomes families who pick on kids weaker than themselves (Ikeda, 2013). These issues continue to decline civilization as a whole, deteriorate the human race itself, and block the vision to build for the future. The few educational counseling services available to support students were only available in private schools, where the cost was too high for most families to afford.

Ikeda (1981) shared dissatisfaction that education never gets a priority. Before the war, military needs took precedence over people, and in current times economy took priority, and people continue to be the second preference. Ideally, religion is focused on embracing human values, but unfortunately, the need for "self-perfection" and "compassion" towards others has not happened with any religion. Historically, when "self-perfection" became the focus, it resulted in "egocentrism." When the emphasis is on compassion, it causes "self-sacrifice" and "self-deception."

Contemporary education has become almost totally a transmission of knowledge, and deprive youth of the abundant spirit, which should be theirs, creating people who are narrow-minded, stony-hearted, and weak. A weak educational system has not allowed children to reach their fullest potential and embrace values that make them good human beings. Instead, there is undue strictness and scolding for enforcing the school norms, without creating a safe space for children to ponder and explain their actions (Ikeda, 1977, p. 37). Ikeda shared his concern that in addition to a weak educational system in school, at home as well parents have not kept a balance of their roles and how they impact their kids. A child's home is the safest, and their first school is their home. Unfortunately, the mother's duties towards her children's education have become excessive, while the father has abandoned his responsibilities, resulting in the distortion of knowledge in the modern home.

Proposals: Ideas for Overcoming or Resolving the Problems

Ikeda (1984) recommends that in addition to three branches in the government, namely, legislative, executive, and judiciary, there should be a fourth branch of the government independent of the three branches, that is education. All educational reforms should be human-centric to promote value-creating education to help individuals become good human beings without any involvement from politics. To build this moment, Ikeda (2013) makes it imperative to create an inclusive and fulfilling educational environment that creates less pressure for students by reducing textbooks and classroom hours. Developing human education to maximize students' potential and enable them to develop values to become good human beings will help them lead a happy life and create a prosperous society to flourish. To develop human education, Ikeda (1981) pointed out that education is the only means to cultivate human beings. Ikeda (2013) further explained that although schools focus on grades to measure students' success, it is a measurable outcome. But to develop infinite creative potential and to promote students to reach their full potential, the grade is only one type of assessment measure to evaluate a student's capability.

Goulah and Ito (2012) list four types of curriculum development proposed by Ikeda at the

United Nations during a world summit of educators:

- Peace education for students to learn the impact of wars and promote nonviolent measures to enforce new viewpoints.
- Environmental education to teach students about ecological realities and how saving the planet can help us all.
- Development education to focus on economic issues, especially dealing with poverty and global justice.
- Human rights education to create awareness of human values and respect.

The organic way of implementing curricula for these outcomes, as explained by Ikeda (2007), is to promote the concept of new human revolution to improve curriculum development through the involvement of educators without having any interference from external non-educational stakeholders.

Actions: Steps to Implement the Proposals

The establishment of a United Nations of Education explained by Ikeda (1984) would assure that educational activities are not influenced by any of the three branches of the government. Without interference from these branches, it becomes possible for educators to focus on working with their students. Beyond the conventional role between teachers and students, they can create an environment of growth for both teachers and students to work together to create a new future with human values that will serve the betterment of the society. One way to create the bond is by playing dodge ball during recess and after school. Ikeda (1981) that is, when teachers make a conscious effort to take personal responsibility to contact their students. Instead of focusing on guiding and enforcing specific viewpoints, teachers should pay more attention to listening to their students and providing them with ample opportunities to ponder and reflect. This can only happen when teachers have immense understanding, sympathy, and love for their students to become comfortable to cry and laugh with them. Ikeda (2013) describes how teachers embrace these values by “chanting” (Ikeda, 2013, p. 5). To become a teacher who can win the trust of the students, they need to become a teacher who can win the trust of the entire faculty and who can win the trust of the students’ parents and guardians (Ikeda, 2013, p. 5). To win students’ hearts and be supportive to those, especially with low grades, the method of engagement should result in reducing the anxiety of those students by asking them questions related to topics like their health, school commute, and their family.

When focusing on students, it is important to make sure that we pay close attention to our youth. For a bright future, Ikeda (2013) recognized that reaching out to the youth people is critical to establish policies that do not violate human values. For example, there is a zero-tolerance of bullying and violence in Soka schools. But to tackle it, the goal should not be to punish the bullies but acknowledging that the act of bullying happening in the classroom, and to help students understand that it is everyone's responsibility not to accept and tolerate abuse silently.

For the standard implementation of best practices embracing human values, Goulah and Ito (2012) explain how locally and internationally, there are 15 Soka institutions across seven countries. Soka University has created a Core Curriculum with four unique courses for students to learn the dignity of life, human interactions with humans and the environment, and global issues in peace, culture, and education.

Consequences: Potential Outcomes of the Actions

Ikeda (1984) explains that the benefit of establishing value creation practices, the unique outcomes of the actions, is that educators traveled all over the world to meet other educators to discuss their problems and come up with solutions through dialogue. Students, both boys and girls, were sent to various parts of the world and awarded the Soka Education Prize to acknowledge the great achievement made by individuals for the development of education to promote value creation for becoming good human beings.

Ikeda (1984) explains that to promote the values, in Japan the Educational Counselling Center was established, which was run by ten volunteers to provide free counseling for students and families suffering from problems like truancy, speech disabilities, bedwetting, and other emotional disorder. To help students, teachers in Narashino, Chiba, established weekend healing sessions for elementary and junior high school students called "Hope Classes." Since 1972, members of the education department, together with the parents to instill hope and confidence in parents in the local community, by launching a parenting class to engage in finding suitable solutions to problems concerning academic development and raising children. Lectures, question-and-answer sessions, and discussions were conducted on the topic of the ideal relationship between parents and children. These measures not only helped the local community but also encourage students with low grades to work towards entrance examination to enter private junior high schools. For example, out of eight of Hagino's students, seven passed the exams for private junior high school.

Buddhist Philosophy: A Way of Illuminating Issues in Teaching and Learning

Ikeda's spiritual knowledge stems from Buddhism. Obelleiro (2012) identifies that Buddhism has a mixed reputation with an extreme representation of religious "elitism" on one side, and "equally familiar images of a list of social engagement and compassionate actions" (Obelleiro, 2012, p. 42). But Ikeda distances himself from any stereotype of religious elitism. He does not enforce Buddhism for educators to learn values to become good human beings.

Ikeda (1984) references how an educator Yukichi Fukuzawa in Japan spoke of connection among things to explain his concept of the totality of wisdom. "The Japanese word *en*, which he uses in this meaning, is found in such famous Buddhist terms as *engi*, the pivotal doctrine of casual origination" (Ikeda, 1984, p. 333). To appreciate everyone's personality, "Buddhism describes the flowering of the personality which emanates from the depth of life with the statement that each person's individuality is unique as cherry, plum, peach, or apricot blossoms" (Ikeda, 1984, p. 335). In a passage in the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha declares his intent to enable all beings to become "equal to me, without any distinction between us" (Ikeda, 2013, p. 192). These were the values that promote educators from the counseling members to impart education stemmed from the true dignity of life with the sole purpose to do the best for each student, without asking for anything in return. Again, these values arose from the sense of mission as Buddhists, i.e., their actions out of their consciences to support humanity. The belief that no child is bad at heart is central in the Buddhism, the philosophy of human evolution, is also the ultimate educational philosophy.

Goulah and Ito (2012) explains how Ikeda focuses on wisdom, courage, and compassion align with the values in Buddhism, that is, "Buddhism calls a person who embodies these qualities of wisdom, courage and compassion, who strives without cease for the happiness of others, a bodhisattva" (Goulah & Ito, 2012, p. 67). These are the people who dedicated their lives to remove the suffering of others.

Conclusion

Ikeda's spiritual beliefs as a Buddhist are a foundation of how he explains the roles of educators in society. He does not make Buddhism a key requirement for educators to embrace to become effective teachers. He focuses on secular aspects that any person can relate to and apply. The notion of "bodhisattva" is a trait of an educator who wants to do good for humanity. Becoming a good human being is an evolution and not something that we all human beings know from the day of birth. Ikeda (1984) added three principles that should be in the educational framework: totality, creativity, and internationalization as the pillars to create humanistic and value created education.

For education to be unbiased and human-centered, it has to be independent of any government branch and should be its own entity. Then only, the educators will have the freedom to work with their students to develop skills and values that make students happy and develop them into contributing citizens, locally, and internationally. Beyond educators, parents play a crucial role in value creation. They need to have all the knowledge and tools to develop a strong foundation for their children, where both boys and girls are given equal opportunity to reach their full potential.

To expand value creation, the establishment of Soka Schools and curriculum continues to spread Ikeda's mission. With globalization, Obelleiro (2012) explains how Ikeda emphasizes teaching values to foster global citizenship. This can only happen through an unbiased democratic way of keeping educators engaged with the students. Teacher need to develop strong relationships to impart core values of becoming good human beings without fear and anxiety of getting poor grades, which is merely one way of measuring student learning outcomes. When we see people positively inspired by other people's character then, based on Ikeda, we can implement the essence of education.

References

- Ikeda, D. ([1975] 1981). Intelligence, emotion, and will. In *A Lasting Peace: Collected Essays of Daisaku Ikeda* (179-182). Weatherhill.
- Ikeda, D. (1984, August 24). Thoughts on the aims of education. *Buddhism in Action*, 2, 328-344.
- Ikeda, D. ([1984] 2010). Humanity in education. *Soka education: For the happiness of the individual. (revised edition)* (161-175). Middleway Press.
- Ikeda, D. (2013). *The new human revolution*. 24, 189-240. World Tribune Press.
- Ikeda, D. (2013, June 14). *Teachers are the most important elements in the students' educational environments*. World Tribune Press, 4-5.
- Ikeda, D. (2013, August 2). *Illuminating your communities with the light of education*. World Tribune Press, 4-5.
- Goulah, J. (2020). Human education: Daisaku Ikeda's philosophy and practice of *ningen kyōiku*. *Schools: Studies in Education*, 17(1), 153-170.
- Goulah, J., & Ito, T. (2012). Daisaku Ikeda's curriculum of Soka education: Creating value through dialogue, global citizenship, and "human education" in the mentor-disciple relationship. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 42(1), 56-79.
- Obelleiro, G. (2012). A moral cosmopolitan perspective on language education. Special Issue: "Daisaku Ikeda, Language and Education," *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies: An International Journal*, 9(1-2), 33-59.
- Goulah, J. (2020). Human education: Daisaku Ikeda's philosophy and practice of *ningen kyōiku*. *Schools: Studies in Education*, 17(1), 153-170.
- Goulah, J., & Ito, T. (2012). Daisaku Ikeda's curriculum of Soka education: Creating value through dialogue, global citizenship, and "human education" in the mentor-disciple relationship. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 42(1), 56-79.

Obelleiro, G. (2012). A moral cosmopolitan perspective on language education. Special Issue: "Daisaku Ikeda, Language and Education," *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies: An International Journal*, 9(1-2), 33-59.