

Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Education and Foreign Language Learning: A Short Essay

Jason Goulah

The important thing is to develop proficiency in foreign languages.

Daisaku Ikeda (1978/1987 p. 54)

Introduction

This essay focuses on Daisaku Ikeda's view of value-creating education relative to second and foreign language learning. It can be read in part as a follow-up to the essay I published in this journal in 2009, "Considering Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Lev Vygotsky in the Concept of Space" (Goulah, 2009), in which I examined Makiguchian and Vygotskian conceptualizations of physical and social space in language education. The essay anticipated *Creativity and Critical Thinking—Vygotsky, Bakhtin, Makiguchi and Ikeda*, a newly developed graduate course in the School of Education at DePaul University, and sought to introduce Makiguchian philosophy into second language theorizing. Since publication of that essay, I have taught *Creativity and Critical Thinking* three times to 30 students from disciplines as diverse as special education, educational leadership, mathematics education, physics education, curriculum studies, social and cultural foundations of education, elementary education, women's studies, and bilingual-bicultural education. As the third offering of this course enters its last four weeks, publication of this issue of *Soka Education* gives me opportunity to reflect on course readings and discussions and, thereby, consider Ikeda's views of value-creating education in my own discipline of language and culture education.

Foreign Language Education in *The Pedagogy*

Although Ikeda has advocated that students learn multiple languages in a number of his entrance ceremony speeches at Soka University, he has not written much on language education per se, especially in his works translated into English. Some may therefore argue that Ikeda's ideas, particularly with regard to value-creating education, do not apply to second and foreign language learning. This argument may seem even stronger in light of Makiguchi's *Soka kyoikugaku taikei* (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy, 1930/1981-88, Vols. 5-6; hereafter *The Pedagogy*), which contain the following two passages: "To this day,

foreign language courses are blindly maintained, the holy of holies to the educator” and “We have come to the dead end of unrealistic subjectivism. To allocate school time and funds to foreign languages and arcane mathematics is the height of the traditionalist bourgeois mentality” (1981-88, Vol. 6, pp. 361-362; cf. Bethel, 1989, p. 188).

I first read these passages over 10 years ago when introduced to Soka education and the work of Makiguchi and Ikeda. At the time I was a high school teacher of Japanese, Russian and English as a second language and a doctoral student in second and foreign language curriculum and instruction. Based on these passages, I assumed that value-creating education had absolutely nothing to do with my discipline and, for a brief period, did not give it much thought. However, according to Saito Shoji (2003/2010), “(a)lthough Mr. Makiguchi used ‘value-creating pedagogy’ [*soka kyoikugaku*] tens of times, he uses the phrase ‘value-creating education’ [*soka kyoiku*] only five times” (p. 142). Reflecting on why, Saito concludes, “I wonder if Mr. Makiguchi didn’t think the following: ‘I formulated the theory of ‘value-creating pedagogy’ in my own way; I want my younger colleagues to take responsibility for creating ‘value-creating education.’” (ibid). In other words, Saito asserts, “‘creation’ [*sozo*] is borne from where it does not exist. Simply memorizing what one’s predecessors say or what is written in books is nothing more than ‘value consumption’ [*kachi shohi*]. ‘Value consumption’ and ‘value creation’ are different. We must each earnestly learn and think and, when in doubt or when stumbling, ask and answer for ourselves, ‘How would Mr. Makiguchi think about this?’ [In this way], just as ‘value-creating education’ states, we must literally ‘create’” (ibid).

Value-Creating Language Education

I agree with Saito and believe foreign language learning is one area where we must “create” applications of value-creating education, especially given the interconnected, intercultural and interlingual nature of today’s world compared to when Makiguchi wrote and taught. Ikeda has already begun such creation by establishing Soka University of America *first* as a graduate school of teacher education in second and foreign language instruction and, later, as a 4-year liberal arts college where foreign language learning and study abroad are compulsory for all students. The significance of these aspects of Soka University of America cannot be overstated, especially in light of the aforementioned passages from *The Pedagogy*. In other words, I believe it is noteworthy that Ikeda founded the first Soka University outside of Soka University, Tokyo, as an institution focused on language education and, moreover, later as an institution where all students must learn a language and live, for even a short while, in a country where a foreign language is spoken. These “creative” aspects alone should encourage scholars of value-creating education to open a new path of theorizing, research and practice relative to language and culture learning.

In addition to these creative aspects, a number of Ikeda’s speeches provide insight into his views

about value-creating language education. Two are particularly illuminating: *Education Toward Global Citizenship* (*Chikyu shimin kyoiku e no ichi kosatsu*) and *Serving the Essential Needs of Education* (*Kyoiku no tame no shakai mezashite*). In the latter, in a passage worth quoting at length, Ikeda argues,

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. Language skills can help to bring the world together. Language is a tool that enables us to expand our chances of learning about the lives and 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. This, however, 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. (2000/2010, pp. 106-107; see also Ikeda, 2000, p. 9).

However, just four years earlier at Teachers College, Columbia University, Ikeda asserted,

Both Dewey and Makiguchi looked beyond the limits of the nation-state to new horizons of human community. Both, it could be said, had a vision of global citizenship, of people capable of value creation on a global scale.

Over the past several decades, I have been privileged to meet and converse with many people from all walks of life, and I have given the matter some thought. *Certainly global citizenship is not determined merely by the number of languages one speaks or the number of countries to which one has traveled.* (Ikeda, 1996/2010, p. 112; see also Ikeda, 1996/2004, p. 88; emphasis added)

Reading these together, I was impressed but found them peculiar; they seemed contradictory. I wondered why a person who has extensively traveled the world and established a graduate school for second and foreign language teacher education (which later, as a 4-year college, included compulsory language learning and study abroad) contend that global citizenship is not determined by the number of languages one speaks or the number of countries to which one has traveled. I read these essays before I was familiar with the Ikeda corpus; however, after some years of reading his work I believe the answer lies in his Buddhist humanism. Although the limited space of this essay prohibits me from fully explicating this notion, suffice it to say simply that based on the Buddhist principles of *engi* and *esho funi* and the concept of dialogue that Ikeda often articulates in, as, and *for* the Lotus Sutra (and in the actions and writings of

Nichiren Daishonin), he subscribes to the idea that human beings are not only interconnected with one another, but they are also interdependent. Based on these concepts, then, dialogic engagement with the Other allows one's identity to emerge more fully. In this way, as we engage the Other, we understand the self. Put differently, dialogue is a vehicle for revealing our inherent Buddha nature. Parenthetically, this view of two-way dialogic engagement is reminiscent of Bakhtin's theories of *answerability* and what Holquist (2004) calls "dialogism." This similarity of thought warrants further inquiry and is one reason why I couple Bakhtin with Ikeda in the class *Creativity and Critical Thinking*.

Dialogic Value Creation

In conceptualizing value-creating education in the context of foreign language learning, then, Ikeda's approach does not place importance on language per se, but on the process of dialogue. Language is just a tool in this process. In other words, without language proficiency dialogue cannot be realized and, in this sense, language proficiency is therefore necessary to create value. For Ikeda, it is through the process of dialogue with the Other that values of peace, humanism and global citizenship can be created; indeed, it is through dialogue with the cultural and linguistic Other that we can "create" new values, not just "consume" existing ones. This is a new approach to language education. Whereas much of the current discussion on language education surrounds critical approaches to empowering nondominant communities and positioning the role of English as a second language "either as a fundamental tool that unquestionably brings professional success or one that oppresses us under capitalism, neoliberalism and the global market" (Guilherme, 2007), Ikeda's view focuses on using language to bring forth one's full humanity. This is noteworthy and deserves further exploration.

Notes

1. A version of this essay, titled 言語教育に於ける創価教育、創価教育学者の研究：私の体験 (*Gengo kyoiku ni okeru soka kyoiku, soka kyoikugakusha no kenkyu: Watashi no taiken*), was presented at a meeting of the Soka Gakkai's Academic Division on December 4, 2010 at Nihon Youth Hall, Shinjuku, Tokyo. I use "foreign" language rather than "world" language because "foreign" is the English term used in translations of Ikeda's original Japanese.

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