

Closing Words for the 2020 Soka Education Student Research Project

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By Bryan Penprase, Dean of Faculty, Soka University of America

Thanks everyone for inviting me here to the 2020 Soka Education Student Research Project Conference- it is a great honor and I always look forward to this event and enjoy hearing from these thoughtful and deep-thinking scholars and seeing the intense engagement that goes on within this conference. The conference embodies both in its subject matter and the method of delivery the best of Soka Education - engaging in courageous dialog, connecting to the community and the larger world, and building compassion and creating value in all who are here. I also have a tough job following the amazing presentations that just happened – Anabella’s excellent presentation and the impassioned presentation by our student activists who are working for change and to bring Ethnic Studies to Soka University.

Today I wanted to mention a topic that is especially relevant here at SUA these days – a consideration of our mission of global citizenship in the context of social injustice, and how we can foster dialog within our campus and beyond these walls that will create enormous value both for our institution and the larger world. This issue is urgent and demonstrated by the presence of these students as well – who are demonstrating great courage in their efforts to promote social justice and greater equity in our curriculum and pedagogy. The essential element in fulfilling our mission of global citizenship is rooted in local dialog, which requires us to work within our community with courage and a relentless effort to remove injustice.

Let’s consider each of these important elements in turn - global citizenship, community, injustice, and dialog, and some of the ways that Soka Education might describe each.

Global Citizenship

*Global Citizenship above all is rooted in courage, compassion, and empathy, which one builds within oneself which is not driven by international travel or language acquisition. As SUA’s founder Daisaku Ikeda put it in his book *Soka Education*, as well as in his Columbia Teacher’s College speech of 1996:*

“The following are essential elements of global citizenship. • The wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living. • The courage not to fear or deny difference, but to respect and strive to understand people of different cultures and to grow from encounters with them. • The compassion to maintain an imaginative empathy that reaches beyond one’s immediate surroundings and extends to those suffering in distant places.”¹

Ikeda states further,

¹ Ikeda, D., 2001, Speech delivered at Teachers College, Columbia University, on 13 June 1996: Education for Global Citizenship,’ in *Soka Education: a Buddhist Vision for Teachers, Students and Parents*. Santa Monica, CA: Middleway Press.

“When we learn to recognize what Thoreau refers to as ‘the infinite extent of our relations,’ we can trace the strands of mutually supportive life and discover there the glittering jewels of our global neighbors...”

Ikeda notes that

“wisdom and compassion are intimately linked and mutually reinforcing.” *And that* “it is the passionate desire to find ways of contributing to the well-being of others that gives rise to limitless wisdom.”²

“Compassion consists in the sustained and courageous effort to seek out the good in all people, who-ever they may be, however they may behave. It means striving, through sustained engagement, to cultivate the positive qualities in oneself and in others. Engagement, however, requires courage. There are all too many cases in which compassion, owing to a lack of courage, remains mere sentiment.”³

Community

Global citizenship begins within one’s own community and is as much a local process of dialog with those around us as one that reaches across international borders.

Ikeda wrote that the roots of global citizenship “is not determined merely by the number of languages one speaks or the number of countries to which one has traveled”⁴ but as described by Makiguchi in his 1903 work the Geography of Human Life, is based within the community as a vital site of learning.

Makiguchi wrote: “The community, in short, is the world in miniature. If we encourage children to observe directly the complex relations between people and the land, between nature and society, they will grasp the realities of their homes, their school, the town, village or city, and will be able to understand the wider world.”⁵

Ikeda described how global citizenship can begin at home. He wrote:

“Our daily lives are filled with opportunities to develop ourselves and those around us. Each of our interactions with others — dialogue, exchange and participation — is an invaluable chance to create value. We learn from people and it is for this reason that the humanity of the teacher represents the core of the educational experience.”

² Ikeda, D., 2010, *Soka Education: For the Happiness of the Individual*. Santa Monica, CA: Middleway Press, p. 113.

³ Ikeda, D., 2010, *Soka Education: For the Happiness of the Individual*. Santa Monica, CA: Middleway Press, p. 114.

⁴ Ikeda, D., 2010, *Soka Education: For the Happiness of the Individual*. Santa Monica, CA: Middleway Press, p. 112.

⁵ Ikeda, D., 2010, *A New Humanism: The University Addresses of Daisaku Ikeda*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, p. 58.

As Makiguchi stated,

“Educational efforts built on a clear understanding and with a defined sense of purpose have the power to overcome the contradictions and doubts that plague humankind and to bring about an eternal victory for humanity.”⁶

Injustice

One main purpose of citizenship is to add value to our society, to our countries and to our world, by rooting out injustice locally, in our country and beyond. A noted Ikeda scholar in the room, Jason Goulah, pointed out that Ikeda’s conception of global citizenship was strongly shaped by viewing racial injustice during a visit to Chicago in 1960. Daisaku Ikeda quoted Dr. Martin Luther King in making this point in an address to the SGI with the US in 2004. In Ikeda’s words:

“Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. declared, **‘Injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent, and determined action.’** We cannot remain silent in the face of injustice. When we see something wrong, we must say so. Striving with strong determination and persistence until we root out injustice is the way to protect our harmonious organization dedicated to truth and justice.”⁷

Ikeda’s quote from Dr. Martin Luther King comes from the 1963 Letter from a Birmingham Jail. Within that letter are additional important statements about injustice and tensions within US society. Many of King’s critics (and critics of other activists) felt that King was only creating tension in society by his activism.

King countered by saying:

“Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with.”⁸

King continued:

“injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.”

⁶ Ikeda, D., 2010, *A New Humanism: The University Addresses of Daisaku Ikeda*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, p. 60

⁷ Ikeda, D., 2004, “The World Awaits the SGI-USA,” within *My Dear Friends in America*, Denver, CO: World Tribune Press, p. 496.

⁸ King, M.L. Jr., 1963, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” available at https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.

King also described both the courage of African American civil rights activists and also his white supporters in his letter. King wrote:

“I suppose I should have realized that few members of the oppressor race can understand the deep groans and passionate yearnings of the oppressed race, and still fewer have the vision to see that ***injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent and determined action.*** I am thankful, however, that some of our white brothers in the South have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it. ... They have languished in filthy, roach infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of policemen..”⁹

Dialog

To close, I would just like to stress the ultimate importance of community dialog in global citizenship and in striving for justice. Such dialog begins at home, and must include all of us - both those directly impacted by injustices around us, and those who recognize those injustices and have the courage to take actions to remove those injustices. As Daisaku Ikeda put it:

“Everything begins with dialogue. Dialogue is the initial step in the creation of value. Dialogue is the starting point and unifying force in all human relationships.

Dialogue is not some simplistic assertion of one’s own position, nor is it necessarily about persuading others to one’s point of view. Dialogue is about demonstrating respect for another’s life, and being determined to learn when confronted with differences in personality and perspective.

The mark of wisdom lies, more than anything else, in the ability to listen.

To have faith in the power of dialogue is to believe in the promise of humanity.”¹⁰

Thank you for inviting me here - and congratulations on a great first day of your conference -and I wish you the best in the coming day of dialog and discussion as the conference continues.

⁹ King, M.L. Jr., 1963, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” available at https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.

¹⁰ Ikeda, D., from quotes within “Words of Wisdom – Buddhist Inspiration for Daily Living,” website available at <https://www.ikedaquotes.org/dialogue/>.