

Conceptual Research in Theoretical Studies

Intersections of Human Education and Curriculum

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THIS PAPER EXAMINES DAISAKU IKEDA'S PERSPECTIVE and practice of *ningen kyoiku*, or "human education." Ikeda and the Soka tradition of education informing his perspective and practice have gained increasing purchase in the field of Curriculum Studies (Goulah & Ito, 2012; He, Schultz, & Schubert, 2015). Here, I apply peace education pioneer Betty Reardon's (2017) approach to understanding the alternative mode of thinking present in Ikeda's philosophy and practice of peace to his philosophy and practice of human education. For Reardon (2017), these modes include "values, i.e., moral and ethical principles and standards; concerns, i.e., problems that violate the values; proposals, i.e., ideas for overcoming or resolving the problems; actions, i.e., steps to implement the proposals; and consequences, i.e., potential outcomes of the actions" (n.p.).

Building off of this framework, Goulah (2019) identified a sixth mode of thinking, Buddhist philosophy, and indicated that Ikeda incorporates Buddhist philosophy to shed light on the problems and challenges he discusses. I argue that these six modes of thinking present in Ikeda's perspective on human education indicate his fundamental intent of outlining a vision in which human becoming, or what he calls "human revolution," should be the central focus of all human endeavor and a central principle of Curriculum Studies. Salient to the field of Curriculum Studies, Schubert (2009) asked, "What is worth knowing, needing, experiencing, doing, being, becoming, sharing, contributing, and wondering?" (p. 22). I conclude that the intersection of these questions in relation to human revolution and human becoming in education lead to the need for teacher agency in schools as "learning cultures of human becoming."

Values

Present in Ikeda's perspective on human education is a notion of values that describes moral and ethical principles and standards (Reardon, 2017). Although there are many values we could articulate, fundamental to Ikeda's perspective on human education is the unwavering and

selfless commitment of one individual to another even against challenging obstacles. At the age of 21 and under the pen name Shinichiro Yamamoto (1949), Ikeda wrote an article about the great Swiss educator, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827), in which Ikeda chronicled the life and character of Pestalozzi, emphasizing his unwavering and selfless commitment to his students.

After unsuccessful attempts as a farmer, Pestalozzi began teaching a group of students nearby who were too impoverished to attend school and who were also “malnourished and lice-ridden” (Yamamoto, 1949, p. 2). Ikeda (as Yamamoto, 1949) wrote of Pestalozzi’s efforts, “[he] poured his energy day in and day out into enabling these children to become fully human” (p. 2). Ikeda continued by stating, “In the midst of his own poverty, he fed the children good food, keeping the bad parts for himself. As a result, day by day the children became healthy and grew rapidly, overflowing with vigor” (p. 2). Regardless of the obstacles at hand, Pestalozzi was committed to enabling the children to become fully human. Through his consistent efforts, his children were able to develop quickly.

Over time, Pestalozzi’s circumstances degraded, and he became ostracized from his community. However, Pestalozzi remained committed to his children. Ikeda (as Yamamoto, 1949) wrote, “People increasingly distanced themselves from him. But he remained undeterred and, convinced of the value and importance of education, dedicated himself more and more to the children” (p. 2). Eventually, Pestalozzi became regarded in the field of education and was emulated for his approach. Ikeda concluded by stating, “Nothing is more important for the advancement of humankind than education” (p. 2).

It is quite clear that the education Ikeda is speaking of is a form of human education that emphasizes human becoming or human revolution. From his writing on Pestalozzi, it is evident that, for Ikeda, human education is marked by an unwavering and selfless commitment of one individual to another and that it is these efforts that are most important for the development of human beings and all of humankind.

Concerns

Ikeda (1980a, 1980b) noted that this unwavering commitment to fostering the lives of others is greatly challenged through both external and internal forces, perhaps most notably, the lack of empowerment and loss of conviction and sense of self experienced by many people. Ikeda (1980a, 1980b) shared his own feelings of this nature when he recalled his childhood experiences at the end of World War II when the people of Japan were struggling to survive after placing trust in the Emperor and the government and facing the destruction of Japan’s defeat. Ikeda (1980a) wrote, “I could no longer believe in anything,” and “We had utterly lost our connection to reality” (p. 24). Ikeda (1980b) continued to discuss the despair that limited people from advancing:

people were jaded just trying to keep body and soul together. Life had become one sigh or one gasp after another. Everyone had to push to the limit just to exist one day at a time.... The desolation and discouragement...robbed people even of the ability to think. (p. 51)

It is important to note that the destruction and devastation people experienced was at a significant time in human history, although these internal forces are not specific to that time or space. Ultimately, Ikeda argued that limitations or barriers to fostering human potential lies in the hearts

and minds of individuals. Although Ikeda explored this within the context of the war, he also related this same force to contemporary bullying.

Ikeda (2010a) stated, “bullying is just war in miniature” (p. 122). He continued, “Pettness, arrogance, jealousy and self-centeredness—all those base and destructive emotions violate human rights” (p. 122). In other words, individuals’ struggles to overcome their own limitations and negative tendencies are barriers that prevent the growth and development of self and others. Essentially, Ikeda was stating that disregarding the value of one’s life leads to the devaluing of others, which can manifest itself as discrimination against others; the polar opposite of human education. Ikeda (2010a) wrote, “These negative tendencies are what make our society discriminate against people and ignore human rights” (p. 122). Therefore, Ikeda (2013) wrote, “Respect for the individual and the dignity of life must be the foundation for all things” (p. 5). In other words, by having conviction in the dignity of our own lives, we can respect the lives of others. With this as our foundation, we can overcome our negative tendencies that limit our engagement with others, thereby, facilitating our human revolution and fully engaging in the process of fostering others.

Proposals

In his address at the general meeting of the education division of the Soka Gakkai on August 25, 1984, Ikeda (1984) stated, “The true goal of education should be the cultivation of the individual character on the basis of respect of humanity” (p. 329). As indicated, this individual character that is the aim of human education is embodied through the unwavering, selfless commitment by Pestalozzi to others and is made through efforts to overcome one’s negative tendencies amidst challenging circumstances based on the respect and dignity of human life. Therefore, by overcoming one’s self and seeking to fully engage with the unique individual right in front of us, we can fully engage in human education and foster others. In the context of education in schools, Ikeda (1984) wrote, “Recognizing each student as a unique personality and transmitting something through contacts between that personality and the personality of the instructor is more than a way of implanting knowledge: it is the essence of education” (p. 336). Ikeda (2010b) elaborated further by stating, “It is only in the burning furnace of intense, soul-baring exchanges—the ceaseless and mutually supporting processes of inner and outer dialogue between one’s ‘self’ and [an]...’other’—that our beings are tempered and refined” (p. 57). That is, only by fully engaging with others with our whole beings can we undergo our human revolution, create value, and develop as human beings.

Developing our character to the level of engagement needed to foster others is difficult. Therefore, Ikeda (1996) proposed three essential elements that individuals should seek to embody. It is these same elements that also comprise Ikeda’s definition of a global citizen. They are as follows:

- 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. (Ikeda, 1996, p. 55)

Obelleiro (2012) elaborated on these three elements of global citizenship. Of wisdom, he wrote, “This ‘wisdom to perceive,’ then, entails a way of looking at the world that yields understanding...this is an understanding not of mere matters of fact, but of the normativity of an interconnected world” (p. 47). Ikeda’s perspective of wisdom fosters the disposition in others to seek understanding based on the interrelation of all beings. Yet, forming relationships with others based on this deep understanding of interconnectedness requires courage. Obelleiro (2012) commented further on Ikeda’s notion of courage, “We live in a world of conflict and danger, and to perceive it in its true light we need courage” (p. 49). Courage is then augmented by compassion, which Obelleiro (2012) noted is “not just based on empathy, but also on solidarity” (p. 50). Goulah (in press) synthesized these elements in relation to human education. He wrote,

Significantly, these qualities of wisdom, courage, and compassion are not just the essential elements for global citizenship. Within [Ikeda’s] framework of *ningen kyoiku*, or “human education,” they are also key to unlocking one’s full humanity. That is, for Ikeda, being human is an action, a continual process of *becoming*. (p. 14)

Therefore, to engage in human education is to foster global citizens is to be and become fully human. Thereby, a global citizen is one who is consistently in the process of becoming fully human. Consequently, we can state that a global citizen is one who undergoes human revolution to create the utmost value and contribute to all of humanity.

This is evident in Ikeda’s 2014 peace proposal as he writes of human revolution, “I emphasized that a renewed focus on humanity, reforming and opening up the inner capacities of our lives, is key to enabling effective change and empowerment on a global scale. This is what we in the SGI call human revolution” (p. 2). This “opening up the inner capacities of our lives,” this human revolution, of becoming fully human, is also the essence or aim of human education.

Ikeda continued by stating that only through this human revolution to overcome our own challenges can we create value, transform society, and solve the global challenges humanity faces. Ikeda (2014) wrote,

the courage and hope that arise from this inner change must enable people to face and break through even the most intractable realities, a process of value creation that ultimately transforms society. The steady accumulation of changes on the individual and community levels paves the path for humanity to surmount the global challenges we face. (p. 2)

That is, only by continuing to undergo human revolution can one create the utmost value and contribute to global society. Therefore, by engaging in human education, one can develop the capacity to fully exist, foster others, create value, and contribute to society.

Actions

Despite the traditional societal perspective of a global citizen, one does not need to go too far to engage in the process of becoming fully human and to manifest the global-citizen-elements of wisdom, courage, and compassion. Goulah (in press) wrote, “For it is here in the daily realities of our normal lives that global citizenship...emerges most fully” (p. 17). In other words, through

the interactions of our daily lives, we can engage in the process of becoming fully human. To ensure that individuals can engage in human education and fully develop as global citizens, Ikeda founded the Soka schools: Soka Junior High School and Soka High School in 1968; Soka University of Japan in 1971; and 12 additional Soka schools throughout Asia, Brazil, and the United States (Gebert & Joffe, 2007, p. 77). Soka University of America in the United States has as its mission “to foster a steady stream of global citizens committed to living a contributive life” (Soka University of America, 2020, n.p.).

Soka University of America (2020) also explains that it is founded based upon “the sanctity of life” and states:

Education is an integrating process in which students gain an interdependence of themselves, others and the environment. Wisdom, courage and compassion—values treasured by the university—do not exist in isolation. They emerge in individuals as they learn the importance of service to others, to the natural world around them, and to the great cause of peace and freedom. (n.p.)

The elements of human becoming, of wisdom, courage, and compassion, have formed a foundation for a humanistic educational system that seeks to develop fully human beings or global citizens through direct engagement and dedication to others who take action in their daily lives and local communities.

An underlying current that has been expressed throughout as part of Ikeda’s human education is the intense relationship between fully committed individuals for others. This is best conveyed as the mentor-disciple relationship or, at times, the teacher-student relationship, which most accurately describes Ikeda’s development of becoming fully human through his engagement with his mentor Josei Toda. Goulah and Ito (2012) stated, “Ikeda revised and expanded the notion of *ningen kyoiku* [human education] into a *principle, process, and goal* of becoming fully human in the truest sense (in and outside school)” (p. 62). They continued, “For Ikeda, it is the continual volitional development of one’s wisdom, humanity, and creativity through creative coexistence with others; it is the human education that he experienced as a disciple with [Josei] Toda” (p. 62). It is this relationship of mentor and disciple, teacher unwavering in their full commitment to their students, to surmount obstacles and undergo their human revolution, that enables their students to become fully human and develop as global citizens to create value and contribute to the lives of others. It is this relationship that is the hallmark of human education at the Soka schools that Ikeda founded.

Consequences

As a result of these efforts, individuals who are educated under the Soka ethos of human education express the importance and significance of teacher-student relationships. Goulah and Gebert (2009) wrote, “There is, thus, in the Soka schools and among educators inspired by the philosophy, a strong emphasis on the human qualities of teacher-learner interactions” (p. 126.) In Takazawa’s (2016) dissertation, the author acknowledged that some students who engaged in humanistic education from the Soka schools became educators who instruct based on the relationship of mentor-disciple, stressing the importance of the teacher-student relationship for fostering the growth of their students. Takazawa (2016) noted that “the quality of relationship

between the teacher and the students...is demonstrated by a teacher's sense of care" (p. 116), which can be likened to the unwavering and selfless commitment of the educator as embodied by Pestalozzi. Takazawa (2016) stated the following based on his interactions with an educator, Alex, who engaged in human education under the Soka ethos,

Alex disclosed that she provides unconditional love for her students even if the students do not love her in return. She also strove to champion her students' cause by giving them a voice in an adult world often dismissive of children. She demonstrated her care by being inclusive of every student, especially those students with special needs and embracing students for who they are. (p. 116)

From this anecdote we can glean Alex's unwavering and selfless dedication to her students amidst the many obstacles we could imagine she faced. By working toward her human revolution and overcoming these difficulties, she was able to care for the individual in front of her based on their needs. She had to manifest the wisdom to know how to engage with her students, the courage to take action, and the compassion to fully understand. As a result, as she was enabling her students to become fully human through their life-to-life interaction, she was also becoming fully human and developing her capacity as a global citizen who can create value under any circumstance and contribute to the well-being of others. This is perhaps the foremost implication of human education—that each individual engaged participates in a process of becoming fully human, thus, being able to develop their lives more fully and contribute to the growth of all of humanity. In essence, human education creates a flow of individuals becoming fully human and contributing to the welfare of all human beings.

Buddhist Philosophy

Ikeda (1996) described this exemplar global citizen who ceaselessly engages in the process of becoming human and takes action for the sake of others as a bodhisattva. Ikeda (1996) stated,

Buddhism calls a person who embodies these qualities of wisdom, courage and compassion, who strives without cease for the happiness of others, a bodhisattva. In this sense, it could be said that the bodhisattva provides an ancient precedent and modern exemplar of the global citizen. (p. 56)

In other terms, we could say that the bodhisattva is fully engaged in human education by participating in the continual process of becoming human through ceaseless engagement to contribute to the development of the lives of others. Yet, understanding the difficulty of manifesting the elements of wisdom, courage, and compassion that are inherent in global citizenship and human education, Ikeda stresses the significance of faith. Goulah (in press) wrote of Ikeda,

in his Buddhist philosophizing Ikeda clarifies that courage can be difficult to muster. In such instances he insists that faith can be substituted for courage, faith to spark even a glimmer of willingness, intent, or interest that, in time, manifests as courage. He declares

that “Faith is another name for courage” and that “faith is invincible courage; it is indomitable conviction infused with the spirit to never give up.” (p. 16)

This spirit of “never giving up” is the spirit of the bodhisattva, the global citizen, and the essence of fostering others through human education. Although Ikeda draws on faith in Buddhist philosophy to express his perspective, Goulah (in press) noted that the power of equating faith with courage is that it “can be universally expressed and freely chosen by anyone, anywhere; it is completely drawn volitionally from within” (p. 17). Therefore, we can conclude that the only limitations to acting in accordance with the bodhisattva, to engaging as a global citizen, and becoming fully human lie in the resolve within the depths of each individual. It is this firm resolve oriented towards becoming fully human that is most necessary for the development of humanity.

Significance and Implications

Ikeda (1996) wrote,

the root of all of these problems is our collective failure to make the human being, human happiness, the consistent focus and goal in all fields of endeavor. The human being is the point to which we must return and from which we must depart anew. What is required is a human transformation. (p. 54)

Therefore, Ikeda (1996) stated, “The task of education must be fundamentally to ensure that knowledge serves to further the cause of human happiness and peace. Education must be the propelling force for an eternally unfolding humanitarian quest” (p. 53). Since the human being should be the “consistent focus and goal in all fields of endeavor” and education must drive “an eternally unfolding humanitarian quest,” it is logical that our schools transform into learning cultures of human becoming.

How do we enable all children to engage in human revolution, develop as global citizens, create value, and become fully human? How do we teach to manifest wisdom, courage, and compassion? How do we foster the spirit to “never give up” or to have an unrelenting commitment to others? How do we engage with our local communities? What is the role of knowledge in a learning culture of human becoming? Whose knowledge is it? These are some among the many questions that we would need to answer when conceiving of the practical implementation of a school situated as a learning culture of human becoming and responding to Ikeda’s notion of human education.

In the field of Curriculum Studies, Schubert (2009) wrote, “What is worth knowing, needing, experiencing, doing, being, becoming, sharing, contributing, and wondering?” (p. 22). He, Schultz, and Schubert (2015) acknowledged these questions in relation to the fluid and dynamic complexity of curriculum as the interactions between subject matter, teachers, students, and milieu or environment as curriculum (p. xxv-xxvi). The authors elaborated by stating,

Seeing curriculum as a continuous ebb and flow of these interactions reveals the need to continuously ask the basic questions about what is worthwhile and for whom it is worthwhile in adjusting relationships among subject matters, teachers, students, and milieus in every situation. (He, Schultz, & Schubert, 2015, p. xxvi)

Therefore, as teachers interact most directly with students, a learning culture of human becoming would require teachers' agency to create and respond to changing circumstances and human dynamics. He et al. (2015) wrote, "Educators...must be enabled to imagine, invent, and practice ideas that respond to situations as they arise" (p. xxvi). With teacher agency oriented in the direction of human becoming, new educational practices would emerge to create learning cultures of human becoming. Ikeda (2013) wrote, "The classroom experiences of individual educators will undoubtedly give rise to good, constructive ideas" (p. 5). Yet, Parkison (2019) noted that an emphasis on teacher agency rooted in dialogical relations and oriented towards human becoming is not our current state of public education. Rather, our current system of public education approaches academic standards as objects of study with restrictions for developing curriculum as opposed to considering them as "subjects of intention," in which they are defined by our "purpose in relation to them" (p. 47).

From this perspective, curriculum is viewed as a course of specific content to be learned, as opposed to an area of human inquiry in which agency and meaning can be made in relation to the subject matter and each other (Kromidas, 2019). Therefore, Parkison (2019) commented on the inauthenticity derived from an oppressive educational system in which teachers are "totaliz[ed]" by academic standards, testing, and accountability, and Parkinson added, "Authenticity and dialogue free from monologic ideological narratives like the [Common Core State Standards] depend upon intentional and empowered participation in the dialogical processes of curriculum development and instructional decision-making" (p. 51). Sinclair (2018) echoed these sentiments by discussing how reading instruction and activity have declined to a state where they are devoid of relation to making meaning in the world and are replaced by building a skill for career readiness.

Reading has increasingly been rendered merely a passive tool one must acquire to get a job instead of being framed as a rich, dialogic activity of engagement in the world and ideas. Reading has become about isolated spectacle instead of dialogic lived experience. (Sinclair, 2018, p. 26-27)

Spector (2018) elaborated on "bureaucratic dehumanization" and emphasized that educators' roles have become purely functional and impersonal, indicating limited time for educators to actually think about their instruction and relationship to students.

Consequently, Parkison (2018) stated, "The relational nature of learning and the classroom require a teacher who is engaged, has made meaning of, and has ownership of the content, processes, and products of the curriculum" (p. 51). Kromidas (2019) also emphasized teacher and student agency and affirmed education as a process of "continual becoming." Kromidas (2019) stated, "we invite teachers and their students...to ask what the goals of our endeavours should be...and to work out how we should teach to enact them in the present" (p. 84). Returning to Sinclair (2018), the author also called for teacher and student agency and stressed the significance of acting on student experience to uphold their right "to act as agents in the world" (p. 41). Lastly, Spector argued that "under the jurisdiction of instrumental rationality, one is freed from having to think for oneself" creating the conditions in which teachers blindly conform to the task of achieving predetermined objectives instead of taking "ethical responsibility" to foster student learning in relation with them (p. 518). Therefore, it is clear that, in order to create conditions in which students can engage in a continual process of human becoming, teachers must have agency to take thoughtful action in dialogic relation with their students. Teacher as agent of curriculum, thus, becomes the core element in creating schools as learning cultures of human becoming. As

Knight (2019) succinctly put it, “Curriculum is a site of possibility...for imagining alternate and renewed stories of the human” (p. 106). The teacher as agent of curriculum can create and engage in dialogical relations to foster human becoming. However, as indicated, the current systems and structures make this is a challenging feat.

Therefore, it is ultimately the resolve of educators to perceive themselves as agents of curriculum and to engage in their own process of becoming fully human with the determination to enable others to do the same that is required to foster students as fully human beings, as bodhisattvas, and as global citizens to take the lead in an “eternally unfolding humanitarian quest” for the happiness of all of humanity.

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