

Contributions of Daisaku Ikeda's Thoughts to Understanding Contemporary Educational Innovation

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the contributions of Japanese philosopher and educator Daisaku Ikeda to contemporary educational innovation. It highlights the importance of Ikeda's humanistic approach, which emphasizes dialogue, peace, and the development of individual potential to address current and future challenges from a community perspective. The work examines how Ikeda's ideas can be applied to education, promoting inclusive, ethical, and active learning. Examples of these principles in practice include the *Education for Happiness* course and the upcoming *Master in Educational Innovation for Value Creation* at the University of Alcalá, both aimed at training educators to focus on holistic student development, global consciousness, and value creation. The *Daisaku Ikeda Research Institute for Education and Development* also plays a crucial role in disseminating these humanistic educational values.

Introduction

This proposal analyses the contributions of Japanese philosopher and educator Daisaku Ikeda in the field of contemporary educational innovation. Through an examination of his writings and speeches, the fundamental principles of his humanistic approach are identified, emphasizing the importance of dialogue, peace, and the development of the individual's full potential to face current and future challenges from a community perspective. This work investigates how Ikeda's ideas can be applied in education today, promoting methodologies that foster active, inclusive, and ethical learning. This analysis demonstrates that Ikeda's ideas provide a relevant theoretical and practical framework for addressing the educational challenges of the 21st century, emphasizing that, from his perspective, education should not only prepare students in academic competencies but also shape them into global citizens committed to the well-being of society as a whole.

A Human Education for building Global Citizenship

One of Ikeda's main contributions to education has been the promotion of an ethic based on global citizenship. This type of education seeks to instill in individuals a sense of belonging and responsibility toward a global community, focusing on developing a genuine concern for peace and global well-being, grounded in a shared awareness of our common humanity. The lack of this global empathy is, ultimately, what contributes to the emergence of armed conflicts (Ikeda, 2009).

Education is what makes us truly human, a force with the capacity to transcend borders and unite people around shared values. According to Ikeda (2020), education should go beyond the limits of knowledge to serve causes like happiness and peace. In this sense, the pursuit of knowledge has no meaning in itself unless it is directed toward improving the human condition, becoming the driving force behind a continuous humanistic inquiry. It is essential to place human beings and their happiness at the center of education, also understanding the interconnectedness of all forms of life (Ikeda, 2005, 2007). Authentic happiness (2020), he asserts, resides in a life dedicated to value creation. Value creation involves the ability to find meaning in any circumstance, to improve one's own life, and to contribute to the well-being of others, regardless of the difficulties or challenges faced. This approach goes beyond an individual pursuit of well-being; it is a process of inner transformation, a "human revolution" that not only leads to personal happiness but also enables one to make a meaningful contribution to the world.

Ikeda's educational and philosophical proposals focus on the intrinsic value of the human being, promoting both personal development and global peace and harmony. His educational approach is based on the human capacity for self-transformation, which, in turn, can lead to societal transformation (Ikeda, 2020). This transformation process is supported by dialogue, which, according to Ikeda (Bradford, 2021), must always be grounded in respect for the dignity of each individual. Through an education that fosters this type of dialogue, Ikeda envisions a world where peace and happiness are attainable for all, within the framework of a committed and compassionate global citizenship.

In his vision of global citizenship, Ikeda defines three fundamental characteristics (2020): wisdom, courage, and solidarity. Wisdom is necessary to recognize the deep connections that unite all forms of life and to understand that our actions impact the entire planet. Courage involves not fearing differences but respecting them and learning from them, with a willingness to grow through encounters with other cultures and perspectives. Finally, solidarity means

cultivating an active empathy that goes beyond our immediate environment and extends to those who suffer, even in the most distant places. This solidarity should not remain a mere expression of superficial compassion; it must be a constant commitment to seek the good in every human being, regardless of their behavior or circumstances.

However, Ikeda warns that true solidarity requires courage. Solidarity that is not accompanied by bravery often becomes merely an emotional statement, without concrete action. It is courage that drives us to act in defense of justice and the well-being of others, even when this involves risk or sustained effort.

The ideal of global citizenship is deeply embedded in all the educational institutions founded by Ikeda, such as Soka University. This university places special emphasis on internationalization, with many of its students spending several months at a foreign university as part of their education. This experience fosters not only academic learning but also the development of intercultural understanding and global empathy, preparing students to become world citizens committed to peace and cooperation.

In summary, the humanistic education promoted by Ikeda is presented as a key tool for building a more just, peaceful, and empathetic society. By focusing on value creation and the development of global citizenship, this educational vision has the potential to transform both individuals and society as a whole, contributing to a fairer and more compassionate world.

Education as a pillar for transforming our society

Education cannot be confined to the classroom, as it does not solely involve the transmission of technical knowledge or skills within an institutional setting. Rather, it is a comprehensive process that shapes our humanity, forges our character and identity, and prepares us to live fully and meaningfully in society. From Ikeda's perspective (Inukai & Okamura, 2021), education is what truly makes us human, as it enables us to understand our role in the world. Every interaction and every space where we coexist in society is an opportunity to learn with others through dialogue. Education is a collective endeavor that requires the commitment of all sectors of society to allow the full development of each individual, regardless of their personal circumstances.

Therefore, we can say that society should serve education, not the other way around. Historically, this has not been the case, as education has been used as a tool to shape individuals who meet the expectations of a given society. From this perspective, education

would be at the service of society, adjusting to the economic, political, or cultural needs of the time. People are prepared to be productive workers, obedient citizens, or informed consumers.

But this view limits the transformative potential of education. If education only serves the demands of society, it risks becoming a mechanism to perpetuate the status quo and social injustices, without questioning the systems or values upon which that society is based. This is the situation that Makiguchi already opposed when he confronted the militaristic role that education had in his time. Following his masters, Makiguchi and Toda, Ikeda (2020) proposes that society should serve education in a way that promotes the holistic development of each individual. This stance involves building societies that foster critical thinking, creativity, solidarity, and a commitment to social justice. If society works to support education, the citizens educated within this system will not only be able to integrate into society but also improve, transform, and adapt it to the new needs that arise in the future.

Assuming the transformative capacity of education in building societies capable of facing future challenges, we need to clarify what the purpose of education should be. The Japanese educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (Bethel, 1998) argued that the fundamental purpose of education should be the happiness of the learners. This revolutionary idea challenges the traditional view of an educational system focused on job training, advocating instead for an education that fosters the development of individuals who are happy and committed to their society. Makiguchi's concept of happiness implies that it is not merely an individual state, but one that is connected to the common good, rooted in the understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings and phenomena in life. We cannot be happy in isolation, nor can we base our happiness on the unhappiness of others.

In this way, education is not a tool confined exclusively to the classroom, but a force that defines our humanity and should be valued and promoted by society as a whole. If education is oriented toward the happiness of each person, as Makiguchi proposed, then society must commit to creating an environment in which this form of education can thrive. This implies reimagining the role of education not merely as a mechanism for adaptation, but as a transformative force that can improve both individuals and society.

Contribute to the peace and sustainability of our planet

One of the pillars of Ikeda's educational philosophy is the concept of education as a means to foster peace and mutual understanding among people in a sustainable world. His writings

suggest that dialogue is an essential tool for resolving conflicts and building a more harmonious society that enables us to understand realities different from our own. Ikeda argues that dialogue not only enriches knowledge but also strengthens human relationships and promotes a culture of peace. In this sense, his ideas align with the goals of contemporary education, which faces the challenge of forming responsible global citizens who are aware of their interconnection with their context and with others. Ikeda (2020b) urges us not to live indifferent to the suffering of others and to leave no one behind, promoting a society based on an ethic of caring for and improving not only our own lives but also the lives of others.

According to Ikeda, education should empower individuals to become agents of positive change in their communities and the world. The goal is to build an education system that fosters values of compassion, empathy, and global responsibility, nurturing committed global citizens who can face the challenges of the future by building peace and ensuring planetary sustainability. Sustainability should focus not only on environmental aspects but also on the ethical and spiritual development of individuals to promote peaceful and respectful coexistence with the planet and with other human beings. Sharma (2018, 2020) emphasizes the need for a holistic approach to sustainability education, one that advances not only technical and scientific knowledge but also respect for cultural diversity and the interdependence of all forms of life.

We need to develop sustainable education that helps students appreciate the natural environment and understand that their well-being is intrinsically linked to the well-being of the Earth. This implies that, in addition to learning about topics related to global warming such as recycling or renewable energy, students should understand the deep connection between their daily actions and the health of the planet, fostering a sense of ecological responsibility that transcends the individual and projects into the community and global spheres.

In this sense, Ikeda (Henderson & Ikeda, 2004) urges us to take on the following commitments for environmental care: to learn to respect our planet and all its diverse forms of life; to care for the community of life with understanding, compassion, and love; to build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable, and peaceful; and to protect the Earth's biodiversity and beauty with future generations in mind.

Dialogue as a fundamental tool for peacebuilding

As we have mentioned above, dialogue is a central theme throughout Ikeda's work, not only from a theoretical perspective but as a fundamental tool for peacebuilding.

The core of such efforts must be to bring forth the full potential of dialogue. So long as human history continues, we will face the perennial challenge of realizing, maintaining and strengthening peace through dialogue, of making dialogue the sure and certain path to peace. We must uphold and proclaim this conviction without cease, whatever coldly knowing smiles or cynical critiques may greet us. (Ikeda, 2005, p. 2)

For Ikeda, dialogue is not merely a discursive or intellectual activity; it is a deeply transformative process that requires the ability to open oneself to others with humility and a willingness to learn. Throughout his life, he has engaged in dialogue with numerous thinkers, politicians, academics, and others from various cultures and beliefs, all with the aim of advancing peace. Many of these dialogues have been published in books and writings in multiple languages, reflecting his conviction that dialogue is an unparalleled means of building bridges of understanding and collaboration. For Ikeda, dialogue is an essential tool that fosters mutual understanding, respect for diversity, and the creation of peaceful relationships founded on compassionate love.

In this way, dialogue becomes a fundamental tool for overcoming prejudices rooted in unfamiliarity with others, fostering trust-based relationships through a deep understanding of realities different from one's own. Such understanding allows barriers that often separate us to be broken down, paving the way for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. In a world marked by polarization and conflict, dialogue, according to Ikeda, serves as a proactive strategy to dismantle the walls of ignorance, enabling people to recognize the inherent dignity of every human being (Ikeda, 2016).

Dialogue also becomes a process of self-reflection and personal growth. When we listen to and understand perspectives different from our own, we confront our own limitations and prejudices, promoting the ideal of human revolution (inner transformation) that Ikeda advocates (Ikeda, 1993). This inner transformation, like understanding others, is essential for building true and lasting peace, as solutions to conflicts are not found solely in external agreements but in changing individuals' mindsets and openness. This approach is evident in his annually published peace proposals. His perspective emphasizes that peace cannot be achieved through political or economic agreements alone; it requires an ethical and humane

foundation, where dialogue enables the creation of genuine connections and the overcoming of barriers that divide people and nations.

Ultimately, for Ikeda, dialogue is a means to manifest the interdependence of all life. Through dialogue, we recognize ourselves not only as individuals but as members of a shared humanity, which is crucial for addressing global issues from a perspective of global citizenship. Ikeda's work emphasizes that authentic dialogue is the path to building a global society founded on peace, justice, and solidarity, where each individual can contribute to and benefit from an environment of mutual understanding and respect (Ikeda, 2020).

In his peace proposals, Ikeda emphasizes that dialogue is the path to fostering engaged global citizenship, where people not only recognize their interdependence but also act in support of human rights, social justice, and environmental sustainability (Ikeda, 2016). For Ikeda, peace is built on a foundation of human dignity, and genuine dialogue enables the recognition of this dignity in every person, regardless of their background or circumstances (Ikeda, 2017). By overcoming fear and prejudice through dialogue, people can collaborate to create a world where peace is a shared reality, sustained by the collective effort of all.

Inner transformation and the development of our unlimited potential

Ultimately, as ordinary citizens, we each have a role in fostering this ideal. Through personal growth and collective solidarity, we contribute to building a society rooted in peace and creative coexistence. This shared journey of inner transformation and the exploration of our unlimited potential allows us to shape a world where each individual's dignity is honored, and every life can flourish to its fullest.

Josei Toda introduced the term "human revolution" (Ikeda, 2004) to describe the inner transformation that drives positive change in an individual's life and environment. This concept of human revolution suggests that the most effective way to initiate lasting social reform is through individual transformation. To build a peaceful society, it is essential to begin with the inner change of each person.

As expressed in *The Human Revolution*, volume I, "the great inner transformation of a single individual can contribute to altering the destiny of a nation and, indeed, of all humanity" (Ikeda, 1993). This vision underscores the limitless potential within each individual, highlighting that the seeds of profound societal change are planted through personal growth and self-mastery.

Only when individuals work to transform themselves can they inspire and catalyze meaningful change within their communities and society as a whole.

Alongside this inner transformation, there is a growing awareness of the need for a humanistic form of education. This type of education goes beyond basic literacy; it encourages creative coexistence with the natural world and fosters a culture of peace (2001). Such a shift in education calls for a renewed focus on values such as inner reformation, creative coexistence, and self-mastery, allowing each individual to cultivate their fullest potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

Expanding on this theme, Daisaku Ikeda, in his 2013 proposal, described the mission of religion in the 21st century as fostering societal flourishing and creative coexistence. This mission emphasizes uniting people around an ethic of reverence for the dignity and inherent value of all life, encouraging each individual to recognize their interconnectedness within a global community. By embracing such an ethic, we advocate for a society grounded in peace, solidarity, and respect for diversity.

Rethinking the role of the teacher

From this humanistic approach, considering the current era marked by the expansion of artificial intelligence and easy access to knowledge through the internet, it becomes essential to rethink the role of the teacher in our society. The teacher's role is no longer just as an information transmitter but now holds a much deeper significance: to guide, inspire, and support students in their learning journey. This perspective, championed by thinkers like Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda, and Daisaku Ikeda, places the teacher at the core of an education aimed not only at building knowledge but also fostering wisdom and the holistic growth of each student.

Makiguchi suggested that rather than focusing solely on educational methods, the emphasis should be on cultivating a teacher's mindset or attitude essential for education (Bethel, 1998). In today's society, teacher education often prioritizes technical aspects, methodologies, and tools, but this view encourages us to reconsider: such tools lose their value if educators lack foundational preparation and have not reflected on their own educational perspectives.

According to this perspective, education should not be seen as a mere transfer of knowledge but as guidance in a learning process that fosters research skills and self-directed learning methods. Makiguchi (Bethel, 1998) suggests that education is not simply about dispensing

information; rather, it provides the keys that enable access to deeper knowledge. This perspective encourages teachers to create a context of freedom where students can learn, create value in their lives, and grow from the discomfort that sometimes arises from questioning or adapting to new situations.

Following Makiguchi's ideas, we could define some key points that characterize the role of the teacher (Matsumoto, 2021):

1. Teacher's attitude as a guide: More than a knowledge transmitter, the teacher is a facilitator who inspires students to take charge of their own learning. This perspective, influenced by constructivist approaches, highlights the teacher's role as a companion on the student's educational journey, fostering autonomy and reflection through active practice.
2. Genuine interest in student well-being: Following Makiguchi's philosophy, the teacher should show authentic commitment to the personal needs and development of students. This interest goes beyond academics, extending to emotional and social well-being, creating a safe and supportive environment for holistic growth.
3. Belief in students' unlimited potential: Ikeda and Makiguchi's vision emphasizes that all students possess intrinsic value and unlimited potential. By believing in each student's abilities, the teacher fosters an attitude of respect and support for each one's human development, helping them to discover and maximize their talents and skills.
4. Continuous learning and mutual growth: In this approach, the teacher is not only a guide but also a learner growing alongside their students, promoting a model of shared and ongoing learning. Ikeda's vision, related to "human revolution," suggests that the teacher should undergo inner transformation, gaining new perspectives and continuously refining themselves to inspire their students.

In summary, rethinking the role of the teacher today, from the perspective of human-centered education, means recognizing them as essential in shaping autonomous, critical individuals committed to their own growth and that of their community. This new role encourages teachers to act as guides, genuinely invest in students' well-being, believe in their potential, and engage in continuous learning that mutually enriches everyone involved in the educational process.

Implementing Daisaku Ikeda's ideas on education: our work at the University of Alcalá

Inspired by these educational principles based on the work of Daisaku Ikeda, in the 2016/17 academic year, we began offering the elective course *Education for Happiness* at the University of Alcalá. Over the years, the dozens of students who have taken this course have had the opportunity to reflect on how they are taking initiative in their own lives and creating their happiness while beginning to see themselves as agents of social change in their roles as future educators and responsible citizens. Through experiential and transformative learning, students reflect on their responsibilities and make meaningful decisions as they build their careers. This reflective process enables them to explore how they can contribute to the well-being of their communities and foster an education system rooted in humanistic values.

From the work in this subject, the *Daisaku Ikeda Research Institute for Education and Development* was established at the University of Alcalá to promote the legacy of Makiguchi, Toda, and Ikeda and foster future research in this field. The institute not only supports academic research but also creates practical guides and resources for educators who wish to implement these principles in their classrooms. This dual approach—bridging theory with actionable practices—has strengthened the institute's role as a key contributor to contemporary education in Spain. Research conducted at the institute has focused on topics such as teaching competencies for building global citizenship, dialogue as an educational and peacebuilding tool, and the development of a generative teaching identity for social transformation through education.

These initiatives highlight the importance of an education that transcends the mere transmission of technical and academic knowledge. Inspired by Ikeda's ideas, they seek to train Spanish-speaking educators in methods and practices that promote a human-centered approach, emphasizing the holistic development of students and the creation of value in their personal lives and society at large. By nurturing educators who embody these values, the University of Alcalá and its research institute contribute to building an educational landscape in Spain that values respect, human dignity, and a commitment to peace and global understanding.

Over the years, the institute has been active in organizing community outreach events that center on themes of education, peace, and dialogue. Additionally, two of Ikeda's books have been republished in Spanish, making his ideas more accessible to Spanish-speaking audiences. The launch of the *Cuadernos del Instituto Ikeda* journal further reflects the institute's

commitment to expanding the discourse on humanistic education and fostering intellectual exchange on how educators can create environments that nurture personal and collective growth.

Last September, the institute also launched a Master's in *Educational Innovation for Value Creation*, an advanced program focused on developing the personal transformation of teachers as social change agents. This program provides future educators with both the theoretical and practical tools to engage students as whole persons, fostering a sense of global citizenship and a commitment to social responsibility. Through coursework, workshops, and practical experiences, students in the Master's program explore ways to integrate humanistic values into their teaching practices, emphasizing the creation of value in their students' lives and the cultivation of a more inclusive and supportive community. In addition to learning about the latest techniques and innovative teaching methodologies, there is an emphasis on reflecting on the development of a teaching identity built on humanism and value creation. The program's impact extends beyond the university, as graduates go on to inspire a new generation of learners with a holistic and ethical approach to education.

Through these efforts, the University of Alcalá and the *Daisaku Ikeda Research Institute for Education and Development* continue to foster an education that not only prepares students for the workforce but also empowers them to become active, compassionate members of society who contribute positively to the world.

Conclusion – What does innovation mean to us from this approach?

In conclusion, Daisaku Ikeda's contributions to educational innovation provide a valuable and necessary perspective for contemporary education. His humanistic approach offers a framework that addresses students' academic needs while also promoting their holistic development as individuals and global citizens. The application of these ideas in institutions such as the University of Alcalá demonstrates the transformative potential of an education based on values and the development of human potential.

Innovation in education, according to Ikeda's philosophy, is rooted in the creation of value within the real-world contexts where educators and students operate. This approach goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge; it seeks to cultivate meaningful contributions to society, emphasizing peace, sustainability, and social responsibility. An innovation based on

value creation engages deeply with the social and cultural environment, fostering a sense of purpose and interconnectedness among students and educators alike.

A key component of this innovative approach is the inner transformation of teachers. By nurturing the best within themselves, educators can inspire and draw out the best in their students. This personal growth enables teachers to not only impart knowledge but also to guide students on their own journeys of self-discovery and empowerment. As a result, the educational process becomes a shared experience of growth, where both teacher and student engage in mutual learning and development.

Moreover, Ikeda's vision promotes an innovation committed to social transformation. Education is seen as a vehicle for raising awareness among individuals about their role as agents of change in society. By embedding values like peace, sustainability, and compassion into the curriculum, education becomes a force for cultivating global citizens who are equipped to tackle the pressing challenges of our time. This type of innovation transcends methodologies or techniques; it is grounded in the development of each person's unlimited human potential.

Ultimately, this vision of innovation offers a profound shift: one where the goal of education is not merely academic success but the empowerment of individuals to create value in their lives and in the world around them. Through inner transformation and a commitment to global and social well-being, education can become the cornerstone of a more peaceful, sustainable, and humane society.

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