

Education for a New Global Civilization: Insights from Daisaku Ikeda's Commemorative Annual Proposals

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Abstract

Grounded in Daisaku Ikeda's philosophy of ningen kyōiku, or human education, alongside his lifelong commitment to fostering a society serving the essential needs of education, this article interrogates his annual commemorative proposals in light of current European political and pedagogical trends. The aim is to elucidate Ikeda's vision of a new global civilization, and clarify the role of education in achieving this vision. Ikeda's distinctive approach is characterized by a focus on inner change as the catalyst for societal, gradualist, non-violent change. Throughout the four decades during which Ikeda submitted his proposals (1983-2022), Ikeda articulated a coherent framework geared towards supporting the development of a pluralistic and peaceful society, based on reverence for the inherent dignity of life, in which individuals can thrive and dialogic relationships are cultivated across linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries. Intertextual discourse unfolding through Ikeda's proposals brings together pressing geopolitical and social issues, recent and ancient philosophical and literary stimuli, nuclear weapons and the environmental crisis, and introduces concepts from the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, often articulated as concrete educational proposals and practices. This article retraces key concepts and arguments as leads for a dialogic reflection

on what scholars, researchers, and practitioners of education can do to bring society "from a culture of war characterized by conflict and confrontation, to a culture of peace based on cooperation and creative coexistence". After examining Ikeda's critique of modern civilization with specific attention to implications for education, the article presents open questions and interim conclusions, considered in terms of the different facets of curriculum. In light of the cogency, timeliness, and relevance of Ikeda's proposals, the article invites further research and suggests to include Ikeda's proposals in higher education curricula pertaining to pedagogy, political science, sociology, geography, history, and philosophy.

Keywords: Ikeda, global citizenship education, curriculum studies, dialogue, peace education

1. Introduction: Transforming Hopeless Times Through Education

"Recent times have shown a disturbing loss of confidence in the political process and a regression of political culture witnessed by low voter turnouts". This phrase could be taken from current newspapers columns, as voter turnout in Western democracies shows a general decline (e.g., Ezrow & Krause 2023; Kostelka & Blais 2021; Valgarðsson 2020) and Italy witnesses its lowest historical turnout for the European elections held in June 2024 (European Parliament 2024). Far-right, eurosceptic neo-nationalist parties gain ground in Europe as the compounding impacts of climate change, economic shocks, and an alarming increase of armed conflicts exacerbate inequalities, fostering forced migratory flows and driving humanitarian needs to record levels (Civil7 2024). In the meantime, studies evidence an accelerating worsening in youth mental health, with post-pandemic effects widening pre-existing disparities, alongside increasing rates of depression,

anxiety, climate anxiety and suicidal thoughts and behaviors (e.g., Prichett *et al.* 2024; Bommersbach *et al.* 2023; Mento *et al.* 2023).

What can we do as researchers, scholars, and practitioners of education at this historical juncture? Is striving even meaningful, when desired outcomes seem so out of reach? In the context of these questions, I propose to re-examine crucial aspects of educational curricula, inspired by Daisaku Ikeda's philosophical vision of education and peace building (see also Inukai & Okamura 2021). Indeed, the quote opening this article comes from a text published by Ikeda in 1999 as part of a four-decade writing project, on which this article is centered: Ikeda's annual commemorative proposals, issued every year from 1983 to 2022.

After introducing the author and the chosen corpus, I examine Ikeda's critique of modern civilization with specific attention to implications for education. Retracing some of the main points of his repeated calls for a new global civilization, I then propose three interim conclusions, to be considered in terms of the different facets of curriculum (He *et al.* 2015), and some open questions. In light of the cogency, timeliness, and relevance of Ikeda's proposals, I invite further critical engagement, and suggest to include some of Ikeda's proposals in higher education curricula pertaining to pedagogy, political science, sociology, geography, history, and philosophy, as a concrete step towards transitioning "from a culture of war characterized by conflict and confrontation, to a culture of peace based on cooperation and creative coexistence" (Ikeda 2006: 17; see also Goulah & Urbain 2017; Noddings 2012).

2. Daisaku Ikeda and Education

In light of current trends and events in politics and education, this issue of *Critical Hermeneutics* centered on rethinking education in light of new needs and burning issues, with specific attention to educational

models and philosophies, is particularly timely. Seeking to bring new stimuli to the academic debate around philosophy of education, curriculum studies, pedagogy, sociology, and psychology, focusing my attention on the European context, in this article I engage with Daisaku Ikeda's pedagogical vision of human education, or *ningen kyōiku* (Goulah 2024, 2021b, 2020b) from the perspective of his annual commemorative proposals, often referred to as peace proposals.

A renowned philosopher, Buddhist leader, global peace builder, prolific author and poet, Daisaku Ikeda attracts growing scholarly attention in the field of education, especially in Anglophone academia. His contribution to pedagogy and philosophy of education encompasses multiple modes, whose impact is being acknowledged by a burgeoning body of literature pertaining to the fields of Philosophy of Education (e.g., Goulah 2020b, 2012; Williams 2020; Hatano 2012; Nagashima 2012; Miller 2002), Sustainability Education (e.g., Sharma 2020, 2020b; Goulah 2019, 2017, 2010), Language Education (e.g., Goulah 2013, 2012b, 2011; Obelleiro 2012), Value-Creating Education (e.g., Bosio & Guajardo 2024; Goulah 2017b; Gebert & Joffe 2007), and Ikeda / Soka Studies in Education (e.g., Nuñez & Goulah 2021; Goulah 2012, 2010b), among others. Growing interest in Ikeda as a leading thinker in education is signaled by his presence in recent handbooks and encyclopedias, such as *The Palgrave Handbook of Educational Thinkers* (Goulah 2024) and *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education* (Goulah 2021b). As a recognition of the significance of his work, Ikeda was awarded more than four hundred academic honors by universities in Asia, the Americas, and Europe. He is also the dedicatee of a number of research institutions across these continents.

Ikeda repeatedly asserted his interest in education as his "final and most crucially important undertaking" (1996/2021: 5). This statement needs to be contextualized in Ikeda's understanding of education as the most effective means to achieve societal and cultural

change, shaping the direction of societies and the history of humankind. This conviction characterizes his philosophy of education (Sharma 2020b; Busacchi 2014b; Goulah & Urbain 2013; Urbain 2010) and repeatedly appears in his annual commemorative proposals, where it is stated directly (e.g., Ikeda 2017: 5; 2005: 8; 1996: 20) as well as through the voices of like-minded intellectuals, including Elise Boulding (Ikeda 2015: 4), Malala Youszafai (Ikeda 2014: 3), and Nelson Mandela (Ikeda 2014: 10; 1996: 15–17), among others.

Ikeda's heritage in education encompasses essayistic writings, university addresses, dialogues, and texts specifically addressed to students and teachers (e.g., Ikeda 2021b, 2010b; Garrison *et al.* 2014; Ikeda & Wider 2014), alongside a number of pedagogical endeavors. These embrace formal education, through the founding of a school system ranging from kindergarten to university level, including 18 schools in Brazil, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, and the United States (Inukai 2018; Heffron 2009), and the establishment of a wide network of international educational exchanges. In the realm of non-formal education, Ikeda promoted a vast number of initiatives in the fields of peace education, environmental education, and global citizenship education, promoted by Soka Gakkai International, of which Ikeda was the founding president, and affiliated institutions (e.g. Ikeda & Goossens-Ishii 2024; Pellecchia 2022; Goulah 2020; Urbain 2016; Urbain *et al.* 2016). With his philosophy of *ningen kyōiku*, or human education, centered on interlocking commitments to dialogue, global citizenship, life-to-life encouragement, creative coexistence, and value-creating approaches to knowledge, society, and power (Goulah 2024, 2021), Ikeda has much to offer to the current debate around education theories and practices.

3. Ikeda's Annual Commemorative Proposals

So far, Ikeda's proposals commemorating the anniversary of the

establishment of Soka Gakkai International (January 26th) were examined by scholars from the perspectives of environmental ethics (Goulah 2010), philosophy of peace (Goulah & Urbain; Urbain 2010), world peace (Paupp 2012), philosophy of action (Busacchi 2014), human education (Goulah 2024b), and spirituality (Šorytè 2023). Given Ikeda's commitment to education, his proposals are a promising subject of greater scholarly attention in the field of education, as recently highlighted by Goulah (2024). In each proposal Ikeda discusses the role of education in human history and the most appropriate means toward education reform, clearly and cogently articulating his call for education and society to move beyond the concept of nation-state towards a polycentric culture of peace, rooted in democratic dialogue.

A complete description of this corpus goes beyond the scope of the present article, although some major features shall be clarified to allow a contextualized reading by scholars who may not be familiar with Ikeda's work. First of all, as other sectors of Ikeda's complex, multi-discursive body of work (Busacchi 2018), his proposals are characterized by a complex editorial and translational history, which is yet to be fully mapped. So far, I worked on the English and Italian renditions of the original Japanese texts. English and Italian translations are openly accessible online on the websites daisakuikedada.org, sgi-peace.org, and sgi-italia.org. My research on Ikeda's proposals is currently ongoing, and will include a semantic analysis of key terms in original texts in the future.

Conducting research on translated texts requires considerable caution, as linguistic and cultural differences and potential changes in translation standards – which are likely though not verified, considering the 40 years intervening between the first and the last commemorative proposal – might obscure some connections, or create false leads. On this side, the analysis I developed is backed by research in the field of

transnational literature and translation studies, particularly in examining the negotiations of meaning involved in translation (Pellizzato 2023, 2023b), the influence of extra-textual factors on the fruition and reception of texts (Pellizzato 2024, 2024c), as well as the interpretive challenges posed by works characterized by a complex translational genealogy (Pellizzato 2024b; 2021: 357–363). On the other hand, it is important to remember that Ikeda was deeply involved in translation processes, both as a reader and as an author of texts intentionally produced for translation into several languages (Gebert 2012).

As a robust corpus of 40 proposals, Ikeda's commemorative annual proposals engage with a broad spectrum of topics, exploring the interrelation between core Buddhist concepts and the diverse challenges global societies have to face to realize peace and human security. Some themes are recurrent and appear in almost every proposal, such as peace building, sustainability and climate change, disarmament and particularly nuclear disarmament, human rights education, international cooperation and humanitarian relief, equality and empowerment of marginalized social groups (women, youth, displaced and poor people). Other subjects stem from contemporary burning issues, such as wars, natural disasters, economic recessions, the Covid-19 pandemic and other humanitarian emergencies. While the former part of each proposal unfolds on a conceptual and philosophical level, the latter part always includes concrete proposals advanced by Ikeda for tackling explored issues. Urbain (2014) outlined the factual heritage of some of these concrete proposals.

Besides annual proposals issued from 1983 to 2022, Ikeda also penned proposals addressing specific themes such as the role of United Nations (2006b), sustainability (2012b, 2002b), nuclear abolition (2009b), and education (2000/2021, 2001/2021). Including this latter group of texts, the corpus examined towards the ends of this article

amounts to a total of more than a thousand pages. Considering its length and breadth of scope, one could think of Ikeda's proposals as the equivalent of a multi-installment, multi-volume treatise. This would foreground elements that indeed characterize the proposals, such as their strong conceptual coherence, the network of references connecting each proposal to several others (alongside other works by Ikeda), and the proposals' finiteness as texts with a clear beginning and clear end. Furthermore, a book or booklet form characterizes part of the proposals' circulation. Many individual proposals, in fact, were published in booklet (as well as digital) format by Soka Gakkai International, of which Ikeda was the founding president.

Ikeda issued his first annual commemorative proposal in 1983, when Soka Gakkai International was accredited as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) in consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Since then, he issued a proposal every year to celebrate the founding day of Soka Gakkai International, on January 26th, until 2022. In 2001, major ideas and concepts from extant proposals were compiled in a volume titled *For the sake of peace: Seven paths to global harmony. A Buddhist perspective* (Ikeda 2001b). In the book, textual material from the proposals was reorganized in seven chapters, "seven paths to peace that seek to overcome major obstacles to global well-being" (Paige 2001: xiii). In this work, the chosen guiding principles are peace, self-mastery, dialogue and tolerance, community, cultures, nations, global awareness, and disarmament. Busacchi (2014) developed his analysis of Ikeda's proposals along these seven lines.

In 2014 another volume was issued (Ikeda 2014b), edited by Olivier Urbain, who previously published the first pioneering scholarly work on Ikeda's theory and practice of peace (Urbain 2010). Selected proposals were excerpted or fully republished, arranged by theme into chapters, each one related to a specific aspect of the role and mission

of the United Nations. Further research is needed to fully map the print and digital publication, circulation, and translation of Ikeda's proposals.

4. Ikeda's Proposals as Curriculum

Besides demonstrating the necessity of reconstructing the genealogy and history of this corpus towards gaining a more comprehensive understanding of each text, the partial mapping outlined above shows how reading Ikeda's proposals only as books or booklets would partially obscure the nature of the author's modes of thinking, which are largely recognized as inherently dialogical (Goulah 2018, 2012; Bradford 2018; Busacchi 2018; Urbain 2013; Stearns 2018). Ikeda's (2018) conviction of the central role played by dialogue in peace building, his commitment to dialogue, his praxis, as well as the lineage of his engagement in peace building are well encapsulated in the following passage, which is worth quoting at length:

Growing up in Japan during World War II taught me all I will ever need to know about the suffocating realities of a militarism that will not brook free and open discussion. This experience instilled in me the conviction that dialogue is a bastion protecting human dignity against the assaults of violence, an essential force for the creation and expansion of peace.// After the war ended, I worked to develop grassroots dialogue under the tutelage of Josei Toda, a proponent of the ideals of human revolution and global citizenship. The following words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, encountered in those days, left an indelible impression in my young mind: "the best of life is conversation, and the greatest success is confidence, or perfect understanding between sincere people" (vii).

Josei Toda, who Ikeda regarded as his mentor, was an elementary school teacher, author, publisher, Buddhist war resister, activist, and cofounder of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creating Education Society, the forerunner of Soka Gakkai and Soka Gakkai International, see Gebert 2016). The quoting of Ralph Waldo Emerson signals the important role played by transnational literature in the formation of Ikeda's literary selfhood (Goulah 2024), which is a prominent feature of his proposals. Ikeda quotes tens of literary works in his proposals, spanning genres, centuries and continents. Authors referenced multiple times include Chingiz Aitmatov, Albert Camus, Fyodor Dostoevsky, the above-mentioned Emerson, André Gide, Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, Victor Hugo, José Martí, Boris Pasternak, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Rabindranath Tagore, Leo Tolstoy. Ikeda also brings into the text of his proposals his published dialogues with literary authors, such as the above-mentioned Aitmatov and the Cuban poet Cintio Vitier, plus an overwhelming number of other writers, leaders, scholars, and intellectuals, including the Brazilian writer Austregésilo de Athayde, the peace scholars and activists Elise Boulding, Johan Galtung, and David Krieger, the pacifist scientists Joseph Rotblat and double Nobel Prize Linus Pauling, the political leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, the economist Hazel Henderson, the industrialist and first president of the Club of Rome Aurelio Peccei, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, the scholars Jim Garrison, Larry Hickman, Neelakanta Radhakrishnan, and Sarah Wider, the historian Arnold Toynbee, the scholar and civil rights activist Vincent Harding, the Russian mathematician Victor Sadovnichy, and the politician and Islamic religious leader

Abdurrahman Wahid, among many others¹.

A note on other leading figures often quoted in Ikeda's proposals, however concise, cannot fail to mention Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Wangari Muta Maathai, Nelson Mandela, alongside the philosophers Hannah Arendt, Henri Bergson, John Dewey, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, José Ortega y Gasset, Plato, Amartya Sen, Max Weber, Simone Weil, Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, alongside the diplomats Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Ban Ki-moon, and António Guterres, and the psychologists Erik Erikson, Viktor Frankl, and Carl Gustav Jung.

Dialogue is, in short, a characterizing component of Ikeda's proposals. As such, it defies the boundaries of closed textual forms, while structuring Ikeda's praxis and scholars' theorizing on his work. In his seminal study, Urbain (2010) identified a tripartite movement in Ikeda's theory and practice of peace, leading from inner transformation, or inner peace, to global citizenship, or global peace, through dialogue. In Paupp's (2012) analysis, the three pillars of Ikeda's philosophy of peace are inner transformation, or human revolution, dialogue, and global citizenship. Later, Urbain and Goulah (2013) defined Ikeda's principles, practices, and proposals as centered on *ontological becoming*, or the inner transformation occurring through dialogic exchange in the local-global space of otherness.

Besides dialogue, another characterizing commitment of Ikeda's proposals concerns education. Each and every proposal pays specific attention to educational processes as fundamental to the cultivation of "robust, engaged people acting as individuals and in solidarity", who feel the whole world as their home and collaborate with institutions

¹ A complete list of Ikeda's published dialogues is available online: <https://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/records/dialog.html> (last accessed: 07/25/2024).

working “to build a global society of peace and creative coexistence” (Ikeda 2006: 9; see also Ikeda 2020, 21; 2005: 2; 2000: 15; 1987: 21). Addressing ordinary citizens, world leaders, specialists, and international organizations alike, Ikeda designates education as the means for effectuating lasting societal change (e.g., 2021: 15; 2019: 29; 2017: 5; 2014: 11), and repeatedly designates education as one of the three pillars of Soka Gakkai International’s socially engaged activities, alongside peace and culture (e.g., 2022: 23; 2020: 30-32; 2016: 12; 2013: 9; 2011: 14).

Once acknowledged the importance of dialogue and education in Ikeda’s proposals, how is the relationship between these two elements to be understood? The final section Ikeda’s 2000 education proposal, advocating for society to serve the essential needs of education (2000/2021), states that dialogue is an indispensable component of human being and becoming. As such, dialogue needs to be integrated in educational curricula well beyond formal education:

When defined as those activities that foster the talents and character of human beings, “education” is in no way limited to classrooms but is a mission that must be undertaken and realized by human society as a whole. We must now go back to the original purpose of education – children’s lifelong happiness – and reflect upon the state of our respective societies and our ways of living (81–82).

In light of the intentional and substantial pedagogical dimension of Ikeda’s proposals, a particularly apt conceptualization of this corpus is that of a “sweeping curriculum of global citizenship, value creation, and human education” (Goulah 2024: 15). A curriculum of such proportions allows a number of different reading paths. In response to the questions leading this article, I propose to set our departure point

in Ikeda's critique of modern civilization, serving as the argumentative groundwork for his advancement of a gradualist approach based on inner reform as the necessary foundation of a new global civilization.

Before moving ahead, let us pause and carefully consider the dialogic component of Ikeda's proposals in light of current challenges in education. Bringing Ikeda's pedagogy of *ningen kyōiku* into teaching and learning practices within the institutions we work at invites for deeper dialogic engagement in all facets of the curriculum: the subject matter, the teacher-student relationship, and the *milieu*, including the curriculum hidden in students' everyday experiences (He *et al.* 2015). Let us take a few moments for a thought experiment engaging our imaginative abilities: what would classes be like, if among our learning goals we inscribed the development of dialogic skills? What kind of activities shall we integrate in our lessons? What effects would such classes have in the short as well as in the medium and long run? How would recurrent dialogic engagement impact the students' sense of loneliness and alienation? How would students that are proficient in dialogic skills interact with others, as they grow and go on to take active roles in society? Would that impair or enhance the reweaving of our increasingly polarized societies?

5. Modern Civilization and the Pitfalls of One-Dimensional Value Systems

The relevance of dialogic skills to current challenges in Western societies becomes apparent in light of the current radicalization of international and civic strife, characterized by the spread of isolationist and neo-nationalist tendencies among widening social disparities. Examining Ikeda's view on contemporary issues brings to the fore specific aspects of his critique of modern civilization. Looking back at the unfolding of human history, Ikeda (1987) questions historical narratives centered on progress with rigorous arguments, reflecting on

how too often revolutions fell short of the promise of establishing human rights, which served as their prime drive:

Although I do not reject the ideas of progress in history, revolutionary movements in modern times have not fully achieved human liberation [...]. In general, modern revolutions have lacked the momentum to materialize the human rights they claim to have won – at immense costs in blood. True prosperity in our age requires that human rights are not merely promised by a social system, but also that they guarantee the conditions required to live up to the best of human nature (3).

Distinguishing between the formal promise of human rights, which remains a theoretical possibility in the lived lives of people from broad sectors of human societies, and the effectuation of conditions allowing people to actualize their potential to the fullest, Ikeda identifies the cause of the continued contemporary crisis “in an arbitrary and one-dimensional value system that measures every endeavor of humankind against the yardstick of ‘progress’” (1998: 11).

To articulate his vision in accessible terms, Ikeda borrows metaphors from a speech held in Japan by the philosopher Umberto Eco: while the Judeo-Christian tradition gives time clear directionality, often conceptualized in terms of “progress”, a future society based on respecting human dignity and valuing cultural pluralism would be better represented by the image of a constellation. Drawing from the works of scholars Arnold Toynbee, Francis Fukuyama, Samuel Huntington, and world leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and Rajiv Gandhi, Ikeda builds on Eco’s constellation metaphor to clarify the human-rights-based society he proposes to cultivate: one in which each star’s brilliance is enhanced, not impaired, by the brilliance and the diversity

of other stars in the constellation.

With a characterizing argumentative move, recently recorded by Goulah (2020b), Ikeda populates Eco's constellation metaphor with meanings and concepts from the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, modeling the kind of intercultural dialogue he calls for in his proposals. He mentions Indra's net, or the vast web sparkling with countless jewels suspended above the palace of the god Indra (also known as Shakra). Through correspondence on the metaphorical semantic level, Ikeda brings into the discourse the concept of dependent origination, or *engi*, outlining his own re-interpretation: "applying this metaphor to human society, the stars represent individual human beings, the constellation is the culture which they collectively produce, and the vast expanse of the sky represents a global community of flourishing diversity" (1998: 11). In this view, diversity is essential to the wellbeing of the whole community. Choosing a particular culture as the central one, Ikeda warns, leads to considering one set of values as absolute and universal, creating "an artificial and unhealthy ranking or hierarchy of cultures" (12).

What is, then, the sole criterion of modern civilization Ikeda critiques? From the 1980s to the 2020s, his reflections focused around a handful of concepts, namely pleasure or desire (2020, 2017, 2008, 2000, 1994, 1987; with specific attention to convenience and utilitarianism, 2006, 2005, 2004, 1994), economic capacity and material wealth (2016, 2010, 2009, 2005, 1999, 1998, 1990), isolationism and individualism (2009, 2006, 2002, 1999, 1994, 1991). Significantly, Ikeda refrains from simplifying the phenomena characterizing modern societies by flattening all cultural, societal, geopolitical, and economic matters onto a single term or principle. Rather, he develops a multifaceted discourse, shifting the lens he uses to analyze his subject matter: on some occasions he observes modern civilization through a philosophical and spiritual lens, other times he

adopts an economic lens, other times he takes on a psychological and political one. For the sake of space, each of the following subsections exemplifies the intertextual discourse developing across Ikeda's proposals through one or two textual samples, introducing some of the pedagogical remedies Ikeda presents in his proposals.

5.1 "The Single-Minded Pursuit of Pleasure"

When taking on a philosophical and spiritual lens, Ikeda brings back the development of industrialized capitalism to the pursuit of pleasure and desire: "modern industrial civilization places priority on convenience and efficiency as the primary standards of progress and development, and in this context it is difficult to avoid, or indeed resist, the single-minded pursuit of pleasure, which has become the supreme value" (1994: 16). Ten years later, Ikeda (2004) expands on this point, connecting desire with scientific rationalism, technology, human security, and educational curricula:

From the industrial revolution, modern civilization has been on a trajectory of fevered advance, served by the tools of scientific rationalism. The driving force has been the untrammelled pursuit of desire, the limitless inflation of the superficial self. Nothing manifests this more fiercely than nuclear weapons, which embody the willingness to hold the right to live of all people on Earth hostage to the predominance and security concerns of certain countries. They epitomize a civilization dedicated to the service of desire, born of the fusion of technological development and military objectives.// How can this be resisted and transformed? I believe that the key lies in fostering a genuine awareness of others, which in turn forms the basis for the development of such virtues as public consciousness and public spiritedness

(6).

In Ikeda's analysis, scientific progress guided by "limitless inflation of the superficial self" is what led to the nuclear era, a time in which all human beings on Earth are at risk of a possible nuclear attack, so that a restricted group of people shall enjoy predominance and so-called security based on mutually assured destruction. According to Ikeda, this is based on a fundamental confusion between the absence of pain or suffering (2004: 8).

As a pedagogical remedy, Ikeda proposes to foster "a genuine awareness of others" with the goal of raising citizens with a developed public consciousness, a clear awareness of interdependence, and a contributive attitude. Further than bringing to the fore the key role of interdependency in all facets of curriculum, Ikeda's critique of modern civilization suggests a fundamental revision of assessment in education, which leads us to the next facet of our analysis.

5.2 The Difference Between Currency and Value

When looking at society from an economic perspective, Ikeda exposes "the standard of values that judges human worth solely on the basis of economic capacity" as an "enfeeblement of the sense of value" (2010: 2), in agreement with the French sociologist Emmanuel Todd as well as the philosophers Simone Weil and Gabriel Marcel. To the nihilistic pursuit of financial profit, Ikeda opposes the concept value creation (*sōka*), as defined by the Japanese educators, Buddhist leaders and peace builders Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, respectively first and second presidents of the Soka Gakkai. Ikeda's impassioned call for an "essential reorientation of our way of life based on a commitment to the welfare of all of humankind and the entire planet" (2010: 6) has specific relevance to educational curricula, as demonstrated by Sharma *et al.* (2023) and Goulah (2020c, 2017b) through empiric qualitative

research, whose findings invite a deeper engagement with Ikeda's concrete proposals in the realm of education.

Ikeda's 2009 proposal, issued on the heels of the 2008 financial meltdown triggered by the bankruptcy of the investment bank Lehman Brothers, opens with a powerful diagnosis, pointing at the confusion between currency and value as the cause of the contemporary crisis of the globalized financial system:

As I have pointed out in these proposals on a number of occasions, the deepest root of the crisis is an unhealthy fixation on the abstract and ultimately insubstantial signifier of wealth – currency. This is the underlying pathology of contemporary civilization. It might be stated figuratively that the hopes people embraced for a post-Cold War non-ideological world have disappeared into the sneering maw of all-conquering Mammon (1).

Through the spirit of abstraction, a concept Ikeda integrates from Gabriel Marcel's philosophy, financial accumulation of currency becomes an end, instead of being a means. Continuing Ikeda's reasoning in the context of education brings us to the recognition that a similar conflation between currency and value characterizes teaching and learning in Western societies.

Readers who are teachers working in high school and higher education might recall the screens of the digital platforms they use for grading. These interfaces often give visual substance to the reduction of value and learning to the single numeric value of "grades currency". Oftentimes, in fact, the graphic interface of these platforms associates the names (and even the pictures) of students with the mere numerical value of their grade means, or a numeric evaluation of academic success (3 stars out of 3, 4 points out of 5, etc.). Using these platforms

daily, students themselves might end up conflating their progress with their grades, learning the habit of accumulating “grades currency”, coherently with school systems granting access to opportunities on the basis of grades. In this way, the prioritization of one sole measurable value relegates the process of “learning to learn” (Goulah & Ito 2012) to the null curriculum, or “that which is given less emphasis and excised first if budgets are decreased” (He *et al.* 2015: xxv; see also Eisner 1979). Similarly, the assessment of the students’ contributive abilities, which theoretically matter as a decisive factor in building thriving societies, end up being disregarded by teachers and learners alike.

Ikeda’s remark from the same proposal, stating that the pursuit of profit “entraps and mesmerizes us, drawing us into modes of action we would otherwise avoid” (2009: 2), not only applies to the perils of exclusively focusing on numeric assessment of learning; it also applies to the presumption that human societies can continue to thrive while destroying its natural and cultural environment. Drawing implications from this latter interpretation in terms of educational curricula leads to realizing the many ways in which interdependency with our human, cultural, and natural surroundings are still absent from many facets of curricula, despite continued efforts at several institutional levels, including recommendations, frameworks and pedagogical materials² developed by the European Union (Bianchi *et al.* 2022; Council of the European Union 2022).

5.3 Individualism and Isolationism: Globalization and the Problem of Identity

The challenge of integrating interdependence in teaching and learning leads us to the lens we consider in this subsection, the third one. When

² <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/green-education/learning-for-the-green-transition>

Ikeda examines the contemporary crisis from a psychological and political standpoint, the pursuit of freedom and the removal from one's context characterizing modern civilization appears to lead inevitably to individualism and isolationism:

Seeking maximum freedom for the individual, modern civilization has focused on cutting people loose from the restrictions and restraints of our various "contexts". Our gains in material wealth and convenience have been great indeed. But what is the actuality of the "free individual" stripped of all context – the bonds and ties of family and neighborhood; regional, occupational and national communities; religious and other affiliations; and of nature itself? Is this idealized free individual not, in the end, but a fiction? Is the logical outcome of this pursuit of freedom anything other than unbridled individualism, the naked embodiment of unrestrained desire? (Ikeda 2006: 2).

From his perspective couched in Mahayana Buddhist tradition, Ikeda considers interacting with otherness as "the inescapable premise for a genuinely humane way of life. The process of patiently, persistently training and strengthening ourselves demands that we confront and engage in dialogue with others" (2010: 5). In this regard, Ikeda agrees with Ortega y Gasset: our willingness and capacity to coexist peacefully with those who are different from us is what divides barbarity from civilization. This is why dialogic engagement is crucial for human education, or *ningen kyōiku*.

Individualism, isolationism, and ultranationalism grow from a common root, according to Ikeda: "unable to keep up with the ferocity and speed of globalization", he observes, "people withdraw deeper and deeper inward, becoming blockaded within themselves" (1999: 3).

Seeking a sense of belonging, they hold on to divisive traits, sinking into an identity crisis, on which Ikeda elaborates to a considerable extent – a topic deserving of further scholarly attention.

To counter this tendency and reweave the social fabric, Ikeda maintains that a lasting and peaceful revolution shall surge from the interiority of each person. The task of education is fostering such a peaceful revolution: “unleashing the vitality of ordinary citizens – one by one – is the only certain way to bring into sight the horizons of a new civilization, a new era of the people. This has been my constant conviction for many decades” (2006: 3). Let us therefore examine Ikeda’s vision of a new global civilization from the perspective of education.

6. Teaching and Learning Towards a New Global Civilization: Open Questions and Interim Conclusions

In the context of this journal’s special issue, an outline of Ikeda’s vision of a new global civilization might well begin from his 2000 proposal, centered on “prospects for intercultural dialogue and peace as we enter the third millennium” (1), commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai International. In it, Ikeda takes stock of the twentieth century in terms of external reformation, ideology, and attachment to difference:

The twentieth century was an era in which different ideologies, competing views of justice, vied violently for ascendancy. In particular, we have seen ideologies that were fixated on external differences and distinctions – such as race, class, nationality, custom or cultural practice. These ideologies have claimed that such factors are the key determinants of human happiness and that the obliteration of differences is the most certain path to eliminating the evils and resolving the

contradictions of society. The history of the twentieth century is written in the blood of the victims of these deluded ideas (5).

As a counter-example, Ikeda picks out the US movement for social justice leading to the Civil Rights Act in 1964, seen as successful because accompanied by inner reformation “transcending differences from within”, instead of levelling differences from without:

One that particularly stands out is the civil rights movement in the United States, which brought about dramatic reforms including the historic Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the bold experiment of affirmative action that followed.// To be maximally effective, legal and structural reforms must be supported by a corresponding revolution in consciousness – the development of the kind of universal humanity that transcends differences from within (6).

Ikeda elaborates on the theme of inner reformation in his 2001 and 2004 proposals, which are particularly relevant to our reflections in terms of what is worth learning, doing, and assessing in education (Schubert 2009), and warrant further research.

In dialogue with Goulah’s theorization of Ikeda’s educational philosophy of *kyosei*, or creative coexistence (Goulah 2024, 2019, 2010b), the first interim conclusion I advance is that, through his proposals, Ikeda invites us to (re)center education on inner reformation, creative coexistence, and the self-mastery required to bring our own humanity into full flower, as stated in the following passage:

Self requires the existence of other. We cannot engage with others in an effective and productive manner if we lack the inner tension, the will and spiritual energy to guide and control our emotions. It is by recognizing that which is different from and external to ourselves, sensing the resistance it offers, that we are inspired to exercise the self-mastery that brings our humanity to fruition. To lose sight of the other is thus to undermine our full experience of self (Ikeda 2004: 3).

The exercise of one's humanity, and therefore Ikeda's vision of human education, is also at the core of the second interim conclusion I propose in this article: in dialogue with Busacchi's reading of Ikeda as a philosopher of action (Busacchi 2018, 2014), I contend that reading Ikeda's proposals makes the case for shifting towards an intercultural and transnational approach in educational curricula. Ikeda's 2000 proposal, among others, calls for "the creative efforts of individuals to develop a multilayered and richly patterned culture of peace" (2000: 1) as the necessary foundation for a new global civilization. This cannot happen if a nation-state-centric view continues to structure educational approaches to subject matters such as history, geography, literature, and philosophy. Alongside other sectors of society, education too needs to shift towards a "life-sized paradigm" (Goulah 2024b).

Integrating the development of solid dialogic skills in educational learning goals is therefore the third interim conclusion I put forward. Cultivating one's ability to dialogue appears as a necessary complement to the above-mentioned component of an intercultural and transnational approach, as well as the foundation of peace education (Ikeda 2000: 8) and value-creating education, as explored more than a decade ago by Goulah's (2012) analysis of value-creative dialogue. This warrants questions I submit to the attention of the communities

of research and practice intersecting through this special issue of *Critical Hermeneutics*: how much room do dialogue and diversity have in the facets of the curricula we co-construct through our work in research, teaching, and learning? How can we broaden this space, if we consider it to be insufficient? How can we bring it to the center of our research and praxis? And how are we to restructure our praxis, if we seek to empower learners to take action as creators of richly patterned cultures of peace? The degree we achieve in effectuating this, according to Ikeda (2011), will be the measure of how much we enable students to become active, contributive citizens, who are able to shift governments as much as the times we live in require:

If global civil society can raise its voice and increase its presence, bringing about a tectonic shift in international public opinion, this would be a force that no government could ignore. It is necessary to begin a process that will crystallize the will of the world's people in a concrete and binding legal form. This is the clear goal toward which we should move (12).

Given the cogency, timeliness and relevance of Ikeda's proposals, I invite fellow scholars, researchers, and practitioners of education to join the critical dialogue, including their own students in the discussion circle. Looking forward to future developments, I conclude by suggesting to include some of Ikeda's proposals in higher education curricula pertaining to pedagogy, political science, sociology, geography, history, and philosophy, as a concrete step towards the transition "from a culture of war characterized by conflict and confrontation, to a culture of peace based on cooperation and creative coexistence" (Ikeda 2006: 17).

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