

**MY DEBT TO MAKIGUCHI
AND HIS LEGACY –
BY STEPHANIE TANSEY, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

Stephanie Tansey, founder of The New School of Collaborative Learning, speaks on working together to build the cultural Silk Road of the future at the East West Culture Exchange (1999).

Stephanie Tansey founded The New School of Collaborative Learning, a bilingual and international school in Beijing, China in 1994. She started the East West Exchange and the East West Culture Exchange in Chengdu, Sichuan in 1999. She is now setting up youth councils in high schools and at George Mason University in metropolitan Washington, D.C., to involve youth in solving the drug and violence problems in their community. Born and raised in Japan, she now lives in Rockville, Maryland, with her husband Bob, a dedicated diplomat and father, and her children Alena and David, who attended NSCL in Beijing.

Today I believe we are facing a crisis in education in the U.S., and I am worried, as are many others, about the future of the young Americans who attend today's public schools. I am not concerned about the level of skills or academic proficiency as much as I am about the type of human beings coming out and entering society. What values do they bring to society? What do they learn in school to help make the world a better place? Are they going to be able to turn our world's problems around? Moreover, what do we learn from our SGI Buddhist organization that can help us warm and encourage the hearts of others in our communities so we can improve and protect our planet? The concepts applied in Soka education offer answers to these vital questions.

I am an educator in the field of social foundations¹ of education. The New School of Collaborative Learning, the bilingual international school that I founded in Beijing, China, is located in a Chinese elementary school. We educate Americans, Asians and Europeans.

In establishing the school, I was guided by the educational concepts of first president of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. His book *Education for Creative Living* became my foremost source of wisdom and encouragement along with current SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's ideas on Soka education. I used other philosophies as well, including John Dewey's, and collaborated with teachers and students, both Chinese and non-Chinese, and with people from the Sidwell Friends School here in Washington, D.C.

I learned from Makiguchi that a good teacher lays down guidelines, points to the sages of the past, offers a framework, but expects students to figure out what to do. Makiguchi says, "It is the function of education to guide unconscious living to consciousness, valueless living to value, and irrational living to reason."² Teachers can best help to guide others by example, by shared experience, by being a model who is doing the same thing, by being a lantern in the dark — helping society through wisdom, not by just acquiring more and more knowledge. Knowledge must be coupled with wisdom. We need to create educational systems that enable people to support the planet and its inhabitants.

At the New School of Collaborative Learning, the balance of self and other was the foundation of the school. What we needed were teachers who could, based on compassion, put students in the driver's seat of their own education. The concern of the administration and the

teachers is to motivate students to improve the world.

A team of teachers, one Chinese and the other not, instructs each level. One particular Chinese teacher was paired with a teacher from England who taught Chinese language, math and art. That first year she had difficulty getting students to take her seriously. The second year she paid more attention to what other teams were doing and attended a course I was teaching on Makiguchi's methods. It stressed the formula that if you care deeply for your students they will be inspired to learn independently as well as care for their society. At first she had trouble grasping this but after many discussions she came to understand what she calls "the human way" of class management and opened her heart. She is now the best teacher we have and her students love her, work hard and are motivated.

What I discovered is that Makiguchi's theory is very relevant today in the field of education. I also discovered that Makiguchi was laying down his ideas for the forerunner of the SGI, the Value-Creating Education Society (Soka Kyoiku Gakkai), in his book *Education for Creative Living*. Moreover, I learned how to be a better guide to others in our Buddhist community; how to help them find their mission in life, and how to grow in compassion and wisdom and feel the creative force within my life as well. I encourage everyone to use the tenets of Soka education to reach the hearts of others in the greater community of life, so we can improve and protect our planet.

The Soka Gakkai International is concerned with guiding its members toward their own enlightenment and the enlightenment of the planet. Our practice — for ourselves and for others — is all about developing our true self, our Buddha nature, and helping others discover their own path and mission. It is about making a difference in our homes, at work, in our communities and in our Buddhist community. We practice with our fellow SGI members and then create the changes in society that we wish to see in the world. This is creating value. Since Makiguchi focused on how to create value, studying his ideas is critical as we polish our lives and the SGI. The more we learn how to create value, the more influence we have in saving the world, and the more our lives begin to flower.

In *Education for Creative Living*, it states: "As long as individuals think only of themselves, there is no room for ethics. For cooperative and harmonious ethical life to make sense, people must first be receptive to the needs of others.... As humans we are born into society. Every one of us should offer his or her services to society for the good of all in the best way individually possible. No one lives a life apart; no occupation arises independent of the needs of others around us. In the rightful order of mutuality, each person, each labor, is part of the whole.... Entering into cooperative social living requires taking the ends of individual life and simultaneously applying them as means to the fulfillment of the greater common life."³

Teachers and leaders who care are of primary importance. Now that we have the Internet, knowledge is easy to access — but knowledge alone will not save the planet. We need to develop our humanity as teachers, leaders or parents so that we can guide unconscious living to consciousness, valueless living to value, and irrational living to reason.

President Ikeda writes: "The moment one resolves to join in and work alongside everyone, to respect everyone and have the spirit to humbly learn from them, one embarks on the road to becoming a great leader. This was also one of the essential points of the 'leadership revolution' of which President Makiguchi spoke."⁴

If Makiguchi created the idea of Soka education because of his concern for schooling, he used ideas also to create the SGI. Adding value to the world is what Buddhism is all about. The more we consciously add value, the more powerfully we change the world. Who is going to ensure that our schools produce students who want to improve the world? We are. How do

you make the world a better place? Read Makiguchi and Ikeda's thoughts on Soka education. Soka education offers answers to these vital questions to educators and everyone else.

1. Social Foundations is a field in education (like curriculum and administration) that looks at the social foundations of education philosophy, curriculum and teaching methods with the view that how and what you teach produces the social foundation for your society. Changing society requires that we change how and what we teach. Makiguchi, Dewey and Ikeda are examples of such educators who see education as the way to change society.
2. Makiguchi, Tsunesaburo, *Education for Creative Living*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum, ed. Dayle M. Bethel, (Iowa State University Press, 1989), p. 90.
3. Ibid., pp. 43, 45.
4. Ikeda, Daisaku, *Faith into Action*, (World Tribune Press, Santa Monica, CA), p. 177-78.