

2016 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – 3rd Prize]

Choosing What We Need

(Original in Japanese)

Chinatsu Ueno

(Age 14, Japan)

Matsumoto Shuho Secondary School, Nagano

Who is it that receives education?

I think it's obvious that the answer is: we, ourselves. Education will go on for a long time to come, and many people will receive an education, but from each person's perspective, the one who receives the education and does the thinking is none other than our own self.

Then, who is it that gives education?

The first answer that comes to mind is teachers and parents, but that is only when we are at school or at home. After all, even when we become adults and grow older, education is taking place everywhere, all the time. In that case, it would seem that there are countless people who educate us. But if we change the question to *Who chooses the kind of education we get?* I think the answer is the same as before: we, ourselves. How much we listen to what someone has to say and how much we pass it off is up to our own free will.

We are the one who receives education, and we are also the one who decides what kind of education we get. It seems to me that when we think about education, for some reason this point is easily forgotten. When we think about what kind of education is best, we are probably imagining the person receiving the education to be someone far away.

For example, it is often said that it's good to learn everything through actual practice. I think this is an important idea, and it's something that everyone can understand. But I also think that few people would carry out this kind of learning without being forced to do so.

I once went by bicycle to visit a friend of mine who lived in the mountains. At a certain distance

from the mountain, the slope suddenly became steeper. I wondered if it was what you call an alluvial fan. As it said in my textbook, the higher up you go, the more the surroundings change from fields to orchards. I remember thinking, "So this is what that looks like." That moment has stuck firmly in my memory.

This happened completely by chance, but I experienced firsthand that, while it's easy to say we should learn through experience, it requires a lot of work to actually do it. There are also some things that you do need to experience in order to really understand them.

We also tend to think that if someone teaches us something, we and all the people listening are learning the same thing. But actually, even when listening to the same thing, people are in all different states—some are enthusiastic, some are not paying attention, and so on. Because everyone's level of interest is different, giving everyone the same talk does not result in the same understanding.

We hear a lot about 'individualized education'. However, when each person's level of interest is different, I think each person is already getting an education that reflects their own individuality. What is important, therefore, is not for the person giving the education to adapt it for each individual, but for us to create an educational environment in which we can pursue our own interests. Most of all, I think that the person receiving the education should not hold view that it is *being given* to them, but rather that they are seeking out the things they want and need for themselves. People choose and decide for themselves what kind of education they receive. This decision-making ability is very powerful.

The theme of this essay contest is "to build a better future". Who is it that builds a better future? The fact of the matter is that we build it ourselves. It is easy to imagine a better future, but we might think that it will be fulfilled by someone in the distant future. That is wrong. All of us who are living today have the privilege of creating the future.

We are not receivers. Have we unconsciously given up on building the future? Are we waiting for someone else to do it? It is certainly an enormous task, but if we don't try, there are things that will never change, and things that we will never attain.

In my opinion, education to build a better future is education that emphasizes the decision-making power that we have, and the importance of taking action on our own. But

more important than anything else, I think, is having positive intentions to decide and act for ourselves. That, I think, is the foundation of everything. Although it seems an extremely difficult task to accomplish, that is how I would like to be.