

2016 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Youth Category – 3rd Prize】

Education to Foster Understanding

(Original in Japanese)

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I believe that 'positive peace' is the most important factor in building a better future. To achieve this, we need education that teaches each person to value both themselves and the people around them, and to have their own opinions.

I think that when we learn to like ourselves, we learn to value ourselves. And what makes us like ourselves, I think, is finding a special skill, or something that only we can do. Therefore, from the time we are young, I think we need to accumulate as much learning and experience as we can, including our studies, so that we expand our potential. It's my view that education means both acquiring knowledge and also finding and polishing our individuality.

In order to better understand and value other people, there are three main aspects of education that I think are needed.

The first is education through books. Through books, we have the opportunity to imagine different worlds, come in contact with a wide range of values, and ponder all kinds of things. If we have this kind of experience from the time we are very young and while our brains are malleable, I think that we will develop a wealth of sensitivity and will be able to consider the feelings of others. Therefore, when we are very young and cannot read yet, it is important that we are read to, and once we can read on our own, we need make it our regular practice.

The second aspect is thinking about the future by learning about history. When I was in Grade 8, in order to learn different views on the atomic bombing of Japan, I had the opportunity to read textbooks from Asia, the United States, and Europe. In the Asian and European textbooks, there was almost no mention of the atomic bombing, and the American textbook talked mainly about the Manhattan Project, with no mention of the damage and suffering that took place. I

realized then that history is perceived differently in each country, and I was very surprised. It also occurred to me that each country might be choosing not to publish certain things in its textbooks that are not to its benefit. In order to avoid making the same mistakes again, we should learn about our country's darker history.

Therefore, I propose that we create international standards for history textbooks. From a wide range of viewpoints, I think we should compile the ones that seem necessary, and publish who holds which opinion. We should not only learn these points of view, but also make time to think about our own views.

The third aspect is expanding our learning of different cultures and languages. In our rapidly globalizing world, we will likely have more and more opportunities for exchanges with people from different cultures. It can be difficult, at times, to understand other cultures, and discrimination sometimes results from the differences between cultures. Culture is not something to be judged as superior or inferior. If, from the time we are young, we have contact with and become familiar with people from many different cultures, then we will have no trouble living together in a multicultural society.

I envy kids who are bilingual. From the time they are babies, they are brought up hearing two different languages, and they have no trouble learning and switching between them. I am only studying English. It has been four years since I started learning it, but I still have a long way to go. Also, because culture and language are closely related, I think they should be studied together.

I think that one of the cornerstones of education is being open-minded. While our minds are still open—in other words, while we are young—the most important thing, I think, is to learn good habits and practices. In order to achieve this, the understanding of adults in our lives is indispensable. To gain their understanding, I think we should create something like a model district to demonstrate a concrete example.

An education that fosters individuals who can value themselves and others is, in my view, the kind of education we need to build a future world of positive peace.