

SGI Canada Educators' Perspectives on Creating Value in the Teaching and Learning Environment

Paul Sherman^{1*}, Olivia Boukydis²

Community Social Services Department, Soka Education Research Centre on Global Citizenship, University of Guelph-Humber, Toronto, Canada^{1&2}

paul.sherman@guelphhumber.ca



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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives and experiences of educators who practice Soka (value-creating) pedagogy in their teaching and learning environment.

Methodology: The participants were educators who were teaching, or had taught, in a formal public or private education system in Canada and were also affiliated with the Soka Gakkai International Association of Canada Educators Group. An online survey was distributed to the educators describing the study and requesting their participation in a semi-structured interview. Fourteen survey respondents were chosen for an interview.

Results: The study's findings revealed important themes concerning how Soka education positively influenced the educators' relationships with their students, how teachers structured their teaching and learning environment, how teachers perceived their role as educators, and how the teachers' Buddhist spiritual practice inspired and guided their application of Soka education.

Limitations: The findings are best interpreted within the study's limitation of selecting participants from a teacher population that would likely perceive Soka education in a largely favorable light.

Contribution: Our research poses potential inquiries for further study, given the novelty of the finding that identified how teachers used their Buddhist practice to inspire and advance their teaching. This aspect of teaching practice is not widely represented to date in the Soka education discourse and may have implications for future investigation.

Keywords: *soka education, value creation, humanistic, Buddhism*

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1. Introduction

This article reports findings from recent research that explored how educators understand and apply Soka (value-creating) philosophy in their teaching and learning environments. The research examined the perspectives of educators who have taught in a formal public or private education system, and who was also affiliated with the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) Association of Canada. The Soka Gakkai (literally, *Society for the Creation of Value*) is a global Buddhist organization that promotes peace, culture, and education based on respect for the dignity of life (Gakkai, n.d.-a). There are 12 million SGI practitioners in 192 countries and territories worldwide. SGI Canada is the constituent SGI organization in Canada and is a registered charity (Canada, n.d.).

Soka education, which was initially developed in Japan by Soka Gakkai founders and educators Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda (see below), is a relatively unfamiliar pedagogy within Canadian educational circles and, therefore, it is likely that adherents of the Soka philosophy and

practice would be sufficiently familiar with this concept than most other Canadian educators, to appropriately engage in the research study.

In the following sections, we provide a brief review of relevant scholarly literature on Soka education, followed by the research methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusions.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Soka Theory and Soka Education

Soka (value-creating) education is a humanistic-based approach to well-being formulated by the Japanese educators Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871 - 1944) and Josei Toda (1900 - 1958) in the early part of the 20th century. Daisaku Ikeda (1928 -), a leading Buddhist philosopher, educator, and international peacebuilder, has further advanced Soka education over the past 50 years based on the joint vision of Makiguchi and Toda. Makiguchi was convinced that education was the key to securing individual and societal well-being, or as he believed absolute happiness. He felt that happiness was discovered through a transformational process of creating value in one's life through everyday interpersonal interactions.

The term 'soka' was born of discussions between Makiguchi and Toda that centered on the concept of value-creation (J Goulah & Gebert, 2009). (Ikeda, 2010b) states, 'Our daily lives are filled with opportunities to develop ourselves and those around us. Each of our interactions with others—dialogue, exchange and participation—is an invaluable chance to create value'. (Hefron, 2014) suggests that Soka education might be better understood as a philosophy of life rather than a philosophy of education, as it 'describes neither a specific school nor a general school of thought...[but] a way of being in the world [and] a process of becoming' (underscore not in original). (Nuñez, Goulah, & Dillard, 2021) notes that while Ikeda's educational philosophy has been variously labeled as 'human education', 'humane education', and 'humanistic education', the former seems to be the most fitting usage, as it is based on Ikeda's notions of becoming human. Elsewhere, (Jason Goulah, 2020) clarifies that Ikeda's essential educational philosophy and practice is best characterized as human education, with 'Soka or value-creating education as one means for actualizing its intended goal of human being and becoming'. The notion of 'becoming' is emphasized here as it highlights one of the most critical principles of Soka education, that is, to stimulate in a mutually beneficial way, the potentiality of both the student and teacher to become more human, a process that value-creating education refers to as 'human revolution'¹ (Kuo, Wood, & Williams, 2021).

As an educator, Makiguchi believed that the essential role of education was to enable the creation of value for the benefit and prosperity of the individual and for society. He wrote, 'Human life is a process of creating value, and education should guide us toward that end. Thus, educational practices should serve to promote value creation' (Makiguchi & Bethel, 1989). (Ikeda, 2010a) notes that, according to Makiguchi, what ultimately defines value, 'is whether something adds to or detracts from, advances or hinders, the human condition'.

2.2 Soka Education Research and Application

Until the past decade, there has been a relative lack of familiarity and scholarship on the topic of Soka education, however, a growing number of global educators sympathetic to the ideals of this philosophy are practicing its concepts in teaching and learning environments around the world (Sherman, 2016). (Nagashima, 2012) and more recently (Inukai, 2020) have noted a paucity of empirical research on Soka education or in the field of Soka studies. (Mokuria & Wandix-White, 2020) report there is little published research on the application of Soka education in formal school settings. While (Nuñez et al., 2021) advise that globally there has been 'remarkable development in the field of Ikeda studies in education', there still appears to be a dearth of research related to the application of Soka philosophy in the teaching and learning environment. Nonetheless, of particular note are the above-mentioned studies by (Nagashima, 2012), (Inukai, 2020), and (Mokuria & Wandix-White, 2020), as well as research by

¹ An expression coined by Toda to express the central idea of Nichiren Buddhism, which is the process of fundamentally transforming one's way of living (Toda, n.d.).

(Ikegami & Agbenyega, 2014) and (Ikegami & Rivalland, 2016). Findings from these cross-cultural studies (Japan, Brazil) indicate common characteristics of Soka educators, such as being reflective, compassionate, agentic, encouraging, and respectful, as well as having a holistic perspective of students, believing in their own and their students' unique and unlimited potential, valuing their students as individuals, and fostering in their students an attitude to contribute to the well-being of others and society.

This article reports findings from recent research in Canada that are largely congruent with the aforementioned studies, and lend a level of affirmation for the globally shared values and practices of educators who apply value-creating pedagogy in their teaching and learning environments.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Ethics Approval

This study received research ethics approval from the Humber College Research Ethics Board (RP-0407), and endorsement from the General Director of the Soka Gakkai International Association of Canada (SGI Canada).

3.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives and experiences of educators who practice Soka (value-creating) pedagogy in their teaching and learning environment.

3.3 Research Question

The research inquiry addressed in this study was; How do educators apply value-creating pedagogy in their teaching and learning environment?

3.4 Participants and Procedure

Soka education is not a widely known pedagogy in Canadian educational circles and, therefore, it would be highly likely that only practitioners of Soka philosophy, i.e., members of the SGI Canada organization, for the most part, would be familiar enough with this concept to engage in the research. Therefore, the SGI Canada Educators group, comprised of educators who were active practitioners of Soka philosophy within SGI Canada, was approached to enlist potential participants who would fit the study's selection criteria. An online survey was distributed to its members describing the study and requesting them to complete the survey if they were interested in participating. Twenty-three individuals responded to the survey, of which eighteen were deemed eligible according to the project criteria. Fourteen survey respondents were ultimately chosen for participation to conduct a manageable number of interviews for transcription, coding, and analysis within the anticipated time frame of the study (6 months), as well as to provide a reasonable level of data for reliable analysis. The eligibility criteria for participation in the study were that the participants were required to be:

1. Actively practicing the philosophy of Soka, which was defined as engaging regularly with the practice of Nichiren Buddhism prayer and study within the SGI, and
2. Currently teaching (or previously taught) in a public or private educational system at any level from pre-school to tertiary.

Participants selected for the study were provided with a written description of the study and a form with which to indicate their informed consent to participate.

3.5 Measures

Semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A for Interview Guide) were created by the research team that would provide an opportunity for the participants to freely discuss their knowledge and perspectives of, and experiences with, Soka education philosophy and its application in the teaching and learning environment. Additional Likert-type questions were asked that sought to quantify the participants' affiliations with both SGI and teaching, as well as their understanding and application of Soka education theory and pedagogy. Participant interviews lasted on average from 30 to 45 minutes.

3.6 Data Analysis

Three distinct codes for subsequent thematic analysis were developed that were drawn from the interview questions; 1) describing value-creating education, 2) applying value-creating education, and 3) experiences in the classroom framed within the Theory of Value. A fourth additional code labeled ‘random’ was used to capture any unique text segments not conforming to the original three codes. 239 distinct coded text segments (‘issues discussed’) were drawn from the composite participant interviews and subsequently identified for thematic analysis. Additionally, a basic statistical analysis was used for calculations of mean and standard deviations for those questions yielding numerical data.

The thematic network technique outlined by (Attride-Stirling, 2001) was adapted for use as the principal thematic analysis tool. In this method, the text data is systematically extracted from three levels of increasing abstraction—Basic themes, Organizing themes, and Global themes. Five steps were followed in undertaking the thematic analysis; (1) coding the material, (2) extracting salient issues discussed, (3) constructing the thematic network, (4) analyzing the thematic network, and (5) summarizing the thematic network. From the 239 identified issues discussed 43 distinct basic themes were yielded, which were further distilled into six organizing themes, and then finally refined into four unique global themes.

4. Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives and experiences of educators who practice (or practiced if retired from the teaching profession at the time of the study) Soka (value-creating) pedagogy in their teaching and learning environment. The study was conducted using a phenomenological methodology that sought to answer the broad research question of how educators understand, experience, and applied value-creating pedagogy in their teaching and learning environment. This section reports firstly on specific participant characteristics as they relate to their affiliations with 1) Soka Gakkai International (SGI) and, 2) formalized teaching within a private or public educational system, as well as their understanding of and experiences with Soka education theory and application. This profile data is then followed by our findings of global themes related to the participants’ experiences with and perspectives on Soka education.

4.1 Participants Profile

As this study explored the experiences and perspectives of teachers who practiced Soka education, two essential criteria for inclusion in the study were that all participants be required to observe Soka philosophy (i.e., membership in the Soka Gakkai International Association of Canada), as well as currently teaching (or previously taught) in a formal public or private educational system. Both of these conditions were met for all 14 participants. The reported average length of affiliation as a practitioner of Soka philosophy was 33.6 years (SD = 10.2), with a range from 15 to 46 years. The reported average length of teaching was 20.3 years (SD = 14.1), with a range from 4 to 52 years. The grade levels taught by the participants are broadly categorized into the following: Grade school (primary/ elementary/high school) = 58%, higher education (university/college) = 38%, and adult continuing education = 4%. See Appendix B for a summary of participant demographics.

4.2 Understanding and application of Soka education

Using a 7-point Likert-type scale, participants were asked about their understanding of Soka education, their understanding of Makiguchi’s Theory of Value (the underpinning of Soka education), and how often they used Soka education principles in the teaching and learning environment. Table 1 reports on the results of these three questions and suggests that, as a collective and with minimal variability, the participants indicated they had a relatively good understanding of Soka education, but less so with the Theory of Value. On the whole, the participants reported a rather strong utilization of Soka education in the teaching and learning environment.

Table 1. Understanding and usage of Soka education

Query*	Mean Rating	SD	Range
Understanding of Soka education (1=not at all, 7=a great deal)	5.1	1.4	2-7

Understanding of Theory of Value (1=not at all, 7=a great deal)	4.7	1.8	1-7
Usage frequency of Soka education principles in the classroom (1 = rarely, 7 = all the time)	6.2	1.5	1.5-7

*All items used a Likert-type scale from 1-7

4.3 Global themes derived from participant interviews

An analysis of the participant interviews revealed four major global themes related to perspectives and practices of Soka education in the classroom. These themes are described below and highly align with four fundamental elements of pedagogy that were extracted from the composite interview data, 1) how teachers view their students, 2) how teachers relate to their students, 3) how teachers structure the teaching and learning environment, and 4) how teachers view themselves as an educator. These pedagogical elements will be woven into the explications of the global themes.

4.3.1 Global theme #1. Teachers use a student-centered approach that fosters agency through a supportive, inclusive, and joyful environment.

This global theme refers to pedagogical practices concerned with how teachers relate to their students and how they structure the teaching and learning environment. The overall theme was organized around sub-themes that align with these pedagogical practices and encompassed several approaches employed by teachers,

1. Student-centred, humanistic, strength-based
2. Focus on student happiness and well-being
3. Respect for the dignity of each student and respect for student difference
4. Create an environment of trust, safety, dialogue, and open discussion

According to the respondents, student-centered means accepting and encouraging students, focusing on their individual happiness and well-being, and treating each student with dignity and respect. Such approaches are central to helping students recognize their unique potential, which is a key tenant of the teacher-student relationship within Soka education. To illustrate, the following comments capture the approaches used to unlock student potential and their role in promoting student-centeredness,

I respect, understand, and trust each single student and their potential no matter what happens... and I always think, how can I support my students, and how can I cultivate their characteristics through my teaching.

These perspectives illuminate a reciprocal relationship between the realization of potential and student-centeredness. This is a sensible connection because for one's potential to be recognized, there is a need to understand and appreciate the uniqueness of each student by placing them at the center of their learning. Moreover, student-centeredness involves seeing beyond what is presented at face value and promotes consideration of one's broader experience, as evidenced by the following reflection,

Value-creating education deals with the whole person as they are in their environment and where they are at that time...the idea is to allow that person to develop their fullest potential.

One participant remarked that a holistic and humanistic approach should be used to create a 'joyful and successful learning experience for students'. Taken together, these reflections highlight the value of understanding the whole student, as this helps to foster a student-centered approach built on student respect, acceptance, and happiness. This global theme also draws attention to the learning environment and the approaches used to promote a supportive, inclusive, and joyful space for students. Noteworthy elements include the creation of safe and trusting environments and the promotion of dialogue and open discussion between teachers and students. Most notably, dialogue is used as a tool for fostering inclusion and support as evidenced by the following sentiment,

I try to make it more as a dialogue, where each individual can have a point of view of what they're learning...what may make a difference in their whole life...and their life in society, their life at the college...and to what level we should change the different aspects of life to reach a better, sustainable world.

4.3.2 Global theme #2. Teachers view their role as mentors encouraging their students to realize their unique potential.

This general theme refers to pedagogical practices largely associated with how teachers relate to their students and how they view themselves as an educator. The overall theme was organized around related sub-themes of how teachers view their role as an educator and encompassed a number of basic elements of the teachers' responsibilities such as:

1. Believing in/helping to develop/discover each student's unique potential.
2. Creating a happy and joyful teaching and learning environment.
3. Building student confidence and capacity.
4. Fostering student empathy and understanding of others.
5. Cultivating student agency through ownership of their learning.
6. Raising student self-esteem by promoting self-respect and respect for others.

These aspects of the teaching function are not necessarily the sole domain of value-creating educators, and many, if not all of them, can be considered essential elements of humanistic education. Nevertheless, the first two elements are noteworthy, as they appear to form the focus of how Soka educators understand their paramount role as an educator, as well as how they principally relate to their students.

Many participants invoked the belief that a large part of their role as an educator was to have the conviction that every single student they engaged with had their own unique potential, and that their responsibility as an educator was to find a way to activate their students' distinct potential. This sentiment is highlighted by the following participant,

The organizing principle of Soka education is that the educator works creatively to bring out the full potential of each individual student because we see everybody as having a unique potential.

The educational milieu was seen as a significant factor in helping students discover their latent capabilities. In particular, a happy and joyful teaching and learning environment was believed to be necessary for optimal student (and teacher) growth, as expressed by this participant,

My understanding is Soka education is for sake of students' happiness, and is always student-centred. It means human-centred and to encourage each single student. The purpose [of Soka education] is to ensure that a child (and as a teacher and educator I always have this in mind), should have a joyful and successful learning.

Moreover, several participants voiced conviction that their students' happiness was of primary concern when tension conceivably existed between the competing needs of the student and those of forces external to their students, including the needs of teachers themselves. It [Soka education] is education centred on the child's happiness and well-being rather than on some predetermined outcome that the educator or the administration wanted for the child. I think that the objective [of Soka education] from my understanding is the happiness and fulfillment of each individual on their own terms, not as a function of society's needs.

Lastly, this reflection from a participant highlights how she both views and relates to her students, as well as how she views herself as an educator. It speaks to the primary focus of education being the students' happiness, which parenthetically aligns with the purpose and practice of value-creating education,

During my time as an ECE working with students, I have never consciously thought of teaching my students in the way that Soka education does, but the reason why I wanted to work with children is because I wanted to work for the happiness of children, which I think aligns with Soka education and I try to teach them in the best way possible and I always try to have their best interests in heart.

4.3.3 Global theme #3. The teaching and learning environment facilitates mutual growth for both teachers and students.

This global theme refers to elements of pedagogy related to how teachers relate to their students and how they structure the teaching and learning environment. It was organized around the sub-theme concerning teacher approaches to their personal and professional development and encompassed the following elements:

1. Teacher preparedness and transformation.
2. Professional development and character growth.
3. Commitment and dedication.
4. Self-awareness and self-improvement.

This theme highlights the integral role of teachers and the impact that reflection and introspection have on the teaching and learning environment. To illustrate, one participant remarked,

It's the kind of education which puts students first...it also places a lot of responsibility on the teacher who is a very central person in the classroom to really keep transforming herself and himself all the time.

Moreover, this theme illuminates how teachers apply elements of Soka education and their Buddhist practice to fuel their own growth and development and to encourage the same for their students, as demonstrated by the following remark,

If there is no beauty, gain, or good I should be changing my profession...I reflect on that every single day...my teaching profession is part of my life...if my profession is not beauty, gain, or good then I am not living.

These comments elucidate how educators create value in their lives through their personal growth, and how their own development directly impacts that of their students. The following classroom experience of a participant demonstrates the self-reflective process and the impact it had on the teacher's transformation and development, I remember having a student and the vibe she gave off was really antagonistic. I never wanted to look in her direction...but then I thought 'Who knows what she is going through? Who knows what her home situation is like?' These students go through many things that we don't know, my heart just opened and I never saw that anymore in that student. This reflection shows a perspective gained from engaging in self-reflection, and the growth and opportunities it creates for teachers and students. Recognizing the significant impact teachers can have on their student's lives encourages their own growth, and demonstrates a vested interest in their own potential and the potential of their students.

4.3.4 Global theme #4. Teachers use their Buddhist practice as a means to inspire and enhance their teaching approach.

This central theme refers to specific elements of pedagogy related to how teachers view their students, how they relate to their students, and how they view themselves as an educator. It was organized around sub-themes largely related to how teachers integrate their SGI Buddhist practice with their teaching methods and encompassed basic elements from their Buddhist practice such as:

1. Cultivating connections and inclusivity.
2. Fostering a spirit of respect and dignity for each other.
3. Promoting dialogue and open discussion in a safe and trusting environment.
4. Encouraging working together/collaboration/learning from each other.

Images of a Bodhisattva were invoked by a few participants, as they envisioned their roles as educators to work for the happiness of their students by helping them to discover their potential,

My role is really to serve as a catalyst, as a vehicle to help them discover their potential, and to surpass themselves and to believe in them, kind of as the spirit of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, who according to Buddhist legend saw the Buddha nature in each person.

Other participants associated their Buddhist spiritual practice of chanting² to their pedagogical practices in the classroom environment,

As Buddhism says, when we chant we discover our hidden potential. Keeping that in mind, I always want to treasure everyone with respect and dignity. Those are things I try to bring into my teaching... to treasure each child and bring out their fullest potential, just as we learn in our Buddhist practice.

This next and final reflection is a poignant story from a participant showing how they applied their Buddhist practice to a common challenge teachers face in the classroom, at once illuminating how the Soka educator views and relates to their students, as well as how they view themselves as a teacher. While somewhat lengthy, the entirety of the reflection requires retelling for a full account of the story,

One year I had two students who were very difficult to work with. They had a lot of behavioral issues, they could become very violent and they could be verbally abusive toward me. In the beginning I [got] so angry at them every single day even though I knew it was kind of out of their control and they were only 4 years old, but I just couldn't take the abuse from them. I lost my motivation to work my best for them or have their best in my heart. But I remembered what Buddhism is about, [which is] seeing each individual's potential and I really chanted to be able to see these boys with compassion. I started to see them as unique, capable individuals with so much potential. I have to say that it was so hard to do and of course, I could not keep that up every single day, but every time I would become angry I would chant again and just remember that these boys have potential too and are just as precious as other children that don't cause me any trouble.

4.4 Discussion

In this section, we discuss the major findings framed within the four global themes that evolved from the research.

4.4.1 Global theme #1. Teachers use a student-centered approach that fosters agency through a supportive, inclusive, and joyful environment

Participants reflected on their student-centered teaching approaches and their connection to student happiness. Educators identified encouragement and acceptance as vehicles for student-centeredness as it allows students to exercise their voice and autonomy, leading to the realization of happiness. The revelation that happiness informs one's teaching approach isn't surprising given its relationship to Soka philosophy. The influence of happiness has been noted in prior research. For example, following their work with Soka educators in Japan, (Ikegami & Agbenyega, 2014) described happiness as the main contributor to quality early childhood education. Our research supports this claim, as participants commonly expressed how the happiness of the learner guides their pedagogical practice.

Participants also reflected on holistic teaching approaches and their promotion of student-centeredness. This viewpoint contrasts with what is considered the more traditional teacher-centered approach applied to the learning process (Muhammed, Dutsinma, Suleiman, & Ahmed, 2021), and aligns with teaching practices in jurisdictions that are more progressive in the application of their curriculum (Sunarti, Hafizah, Rusdinal, Ananda, & Gistituati, 2022). Holistic approaches encourage educators to be mindful of the whole student and to foster an inclusive environment that promotes dialogue, support, and trust. Moreover, to be mindful is to consider student strengths, challenges, and circumstances, all of which encourage the development of potential (Mokuria & Wandix-White, 2020). Furthermore, recognizing the value of adversity may help educators to withhold judgment and to demonstrate compassion and patience, which is critical to value-creating pedagogy (Joffee, Goulah, & Gebert, 2009). Lastly, participants noted that holistic approaches foster respect, which is a highly promoted value in Soka philosophy. (Ikegami & Rivalland, 2016) posit that respect is critical to Buddhist practice and Soka educators because it creates positive and inclusive relationships within the teaching and learning environment.

² The basic Buddhist practice of Soka Gakkai members is chanting, or invocation of the phrase, 'Nam-myoho-renge-kyo' and reciting portions of the Lotus Sutra (Gakkai, n.d.-b).

Our research suggests that student-centeredness is integral to the practice of Soka educators and that embracing the unique qualities of each student can lead to their happiness and the realization of their potential. The issue of student potential will be explored next.

4.4.2 Global theme #2. Teachers view their role as mentors who encourage their students to realize their unique potential

Student potential is commonly explored in Soka philosophy (Ikegami & Rivalland, 2016) and participants highlighted how potential is cultivated through the teacher-student relationship. One participant remarked that ‘the organizing principle of Soka education is that the educator works creatively to bring out the full potential of each individual’. This perspective not only locates student potential within the teacher-student dyad but also complements Ikeda’s perspective on the teacher-student relationship. Ikeda notes ‘the mentor [teacher] creatively and imaginatively uses various means and methods to inspire and awaken in the learner’ (Nagashima, 2012). This comment speaks to the connection between the teacher-student relationship and student potential as it addresses the significant impact educators can have on the learning experience. Moreover, this connection has historical relevance to Soka education as this theme aligns with two educator principles related to humanistic education, i.e., ‘Faith in the diverse richness of human potential’, and ‘The mutually interactive and inspirational relationship between educators and students’ (Ikeda, 2013). Interestingly, these principles were developed nearly 50 years ago (in 1974) and yet, as evidenced by our current research, remain highly relevant to contemporary pedagogical practices of Soka educators. The mutually beneficial relationship between teacher and student is an essential characteristic of Soka education and is further explored with the third theme from our research.

4.4.3 Global theme #3. The teaching and learning environment facilitates mutual growth for both teachers and students

Participants commented on self-reflection and its promotion of awareness and transformation. Reflection is a valued practice in Soka education as it informs how growth and transformation influence one’s pedagogical practice. This perspective is shared by (Nagashima, 2012) who posits that educators need to fully engage in the teacher-student relationship and to ‘undertake his or her own human revolution to bring forth ...wisdom, courage, and compassion’. Moreover, reflexivity ensures that the needs of students are prioritized by educators and also fosters a mindful approach that encourages professional and personal growth (Mokuria & Wandix-White, 2020). This approach aligns with our research in that preparedness, professional development, and character growth were a few of the terms used to describe the professional and personal changes experienced by participants, thus highlighting the impact that self-awareness has on the teaching and learning environment. This theme signals the essential transformative notion within Soka philosophy known as human revolution and its impact on the teacher-student relationship. Within the Soka Gakkai movement, human revolution and one’s Buddhist practice are inextricably linked. How Soka educators use their Buddhist philosophy to inform their teaching practices is the final significant theme to emerge from our study.

4.4.4 Global theme #4. Teachers use their Buddhist practice as a means to inspire and enhance their teaching approach

Participants reflected on their Buddhist practice and its cultivation of connections, collaboration, and dialogue. For example, they described their practice of Buddhist chanting as a process for achieving the realization of their own and their students’ potential and happiness. The frequent references that participants made to their spiritual practice suggest that Soka educators place great importance on the value of their faith as inspiration in the classroom. While the application of Buddhist practice to one’s teaching approach has only been minimally addressed in existing research, our findings align with prior research on this topic. For example, (Ikegami & Rivalland, 2016) confirm in their study the ‘consistency between teachers’ [Buddhist] belief and their classroom practices as a key factor in the promotion of quality relationship with children’. Moreover, the authors noted that Soka educators illustrated ingrained Buddhist beliefs in their understanding of Buddhist philosophy, which motivated them to incorporate their spiritual practice in a way that influenced their classroom activities. Our research aligns with these findings and in our view highlights an important yet relatively undisclosed aspect of

the discourse, which is the extent to which Soka educators utilize their Buddhist faith to inform their teaching. It has been noted in the literature that education optimally helps to develop students' abilities in the intellectual, social, moral, as well as spiritual or religious realms (Marzam, Elpina, Rusdinal, Ananda, & Gistituati, 2022; Miftahurrohman, Hariri, Rini, & Rohmatillah, 2021).

Lastly, an interesting finding from the study was the apparent discrepancy between participants' understanding of Soka education and their understanding of Makiguchi's Theory of Value, which is the foundation of value-creating education. This seems to suggest that along with one's Buddhist beliefs, it is the Soka educators' knowledge of value-creating approaches, and not necessarily their understanding of the underlying theory, that best informs their pedagogical methods in the teaching and learning environment.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

This article examined how self-identified Soka educators understand and apply value-creating pedagogy in the teaching and learning environment. The research revealed themes concerning how Soka education positively influences educators' relationships with their students, how the teaching and learning environment is structured, how teachers perceive their role as an educator, and how their Buddhist spiritual practice guides their application of Soka education.

Our research offers a valuable contribution to the growing discourse on Soka education and highlights the progressive features of this unique humanistic philosophy. (Ikeda, 2013) outlined five principles established in 1974 by the Soka Gakkai Humanistic Education Study Group in Tokyo. These principles continue to represent the core of Soka education's values:

1. Respect for the sanctity of life.
2. Faith in the diverse richness of human potential.
3. An emphasis on the mutually interactive and inspirational relationship between educators and students.
4. A shared aim among educators and students is to continually create value and strive for self-transformation.
5. A firm grasp of the abilities of students and appropriate guidance.

These five longstanding principles of Soka education complement some of the major themes of our research, particularly those related to happiness, potential, teacher-student relationship, and self-transformation. This would suggest that these fundamental values remain relatively static over time but with continued contemporary relevance to both the theory and application of Soka education.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The findings of this research are best interpreted within certain limitations of the study. The sample for this study was rather conveniently selected from a teacher population that would likely present their perceptions of Soka education in a largely favorable light. The researchers were comfortable with the knowledge that while the data might be somewhat skewed, it would nevertheless produce important insights for achieving the study's purpose of examining perspectives and experiences of educators who practice Soka (value-creating) pedagogy in their teaching and learning environment. The study aimed to draw on teachers' perceptions of value-creating education and its application in the teaching and learning environment. Given the relative unfamiliarity with this educational practice amongst the general professional teacher population in Canada, the intentional selection of the research participants was a necessary condition for obtaining the information required for the study. Future research in this area might explore a modified version of the interview questions with non-Soka education teachers that aims to compare and contrast their teaching practices with those of Soka educators.

This study used qualitative interviews that relied heavily on teachers' articulating their own perceptions of their teaching philosophy and practices. Although limited in scope, the study might have been

strengthened by including additional data through the use of focus group interviews and even perhaps *in situ* observation of the teachers' classroom practices.

5.3 Implications for further study

Our study poses potential inquiries for further study, given the novelty of the fourth global theme that identified teachers using their Buddhist practice to inspire and advance their teaching. This aspect of one's teaching philosophy or practice is not widely represented to date in the Soka education discourse and may have implications for future investigation. For example, new research might consider the extent to which Soka educators rely on their spiritual faith to apply Soka principles to their teaching, and whether authentic Soka education principles can be applied in the absence of this connection. This exploration could enhance our understanding of the practical application of Soka education within the broader education system, as well as provide insight into the under-examined relationship between one's spiritual and professional teaching practices.

Declaration of interests

The authors acknowledge that no financial interest or benefit has arisen from the direct application of this research.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

1. Please spell your first and last name.
2. Are you an actively practicing member of Soka Gakkai International (SGI)¹?
3. How long have you been a member of SGI?
4. Are you currently (or have you previously been) involved as an educator in a public or private education system?
5. How long have you taught in the education system?
6. What grade level (s) have you taught?
7. On a scale of 1-7, with 1 being “not at all” and 7 being “a great deal”, please rate your understanding of Soka education.
8. In one or two sentences please describe soka or value-creating education.
9. Please talk about your perspective and personal experience with applying value-creating education in your teaching and learning environments within formal education.
10. On a scale of 1-7, with 1 being “rarely” and 7 being “all the time”, please rate how often you use (or used, if no longer teaching) soka education principles in your teaching and learning environments.
11. Please provide some examples of how you have applied value creating education in your teaching and learning environments.
12. Please provide up to 5 words or phrases that best describes how value-creating education is applied in the teaching and learning environment.
13. On a scale of 1-7, with 1 being “not at all” and 7 being “a great deal”, please rate your understanding of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi’s Theory of Value and his three principal values of beauty, gain, and good.
14. Please relate an experience you have had in your teaching and learning environment that exemplifies the creation of one or all of the values of beauty, gain, and good.

¹ An actively practicing member of SGI is defined as engaging on a regular basis the practice of Nichiren Buddhism prayer and study.

Appendix B

Summary of Participant Demographics

Participant #	# Years as an SGI Member	# Years as a Teacher	Educational System taught in	Grade levels taught*
1	30	18	Private	Grade school
2	46	45	Private, Public	Grade school Higher education
3	43	10	Public	Grade school Higher education
4	35	20	Public	Grade school
5	45	52	Public	Higher education
6	36	20	Public	Higher education
7	45	13	Public	Grade school Higher education
8	25	4	Public	Higher education
9	15	30	Public	Grade school
10	35	20	Public	Grade school Continuing education
11	30	6	Public	Grade school
12	20	25	Private, Public	Grade school Higher education
13	unknown	10	Public	Grade school
14	23	21	Public	Higher education

* Grade school denotes primary, elementary or high school. Higher education denotes college or university.