

“When I talked to my parents about my dreams, they said that they could never work out. Everyone tells me I should work for the government, because it would make my parents happy and proud.” These words of a Chinese woman are echoed throughout East Asia every day. What is “success” for you? In Japan, Korea and China, “success” is basically considered getting into a famous university and then getting a stable job. Yet, is that really what success is?

I’m convinced that the present conveyor belt educational system is mass-producing hopelessness and not true success. Let’s take a look at the young people who are trapped in this factory.

In Japanese schools, teachers just explain the stuff, giving students no opportunity to express their opinions, which makes them more introverted. Also I’ve observed that when my class has to choose a leader, nobody raises their hand to volunteer. In Asian culture, people are scared of what other people think of them and don’t want to stand out from the crowd, because if they fail, people judge them and they feel embarrassed. In this way, when they come to a crossroads in their life, they simply choose to follow the same path as everyone else. For us young people, it’s almost as if we’re just standing on a conveyor belt that has been well oiled in advance.

What stops us young people from pursuing dreams and becoming global leaders is our fear of failure and our lack of self-confidence.

For example, when Asian students need to speak English, they often hesitate to speak, as they fear to make mistakes in pronunciation or grammar. That’s because in the English education system of Japan, all they do is take tests that require exact answers. In this way they stop asking questions, they stop thinking about communication, the real goal of language, and they stop trying new things.

In any area of life, to try something new we need confidence, but to gain confidence we need to try something new. Success on exams is not bad, but it is not enough. Because I did well on paper tests, I had confidence in my English. However, when I went to Australia this summer, I found that my English was still quite poor. I couldn’t keep up when Australian teenagers or clerks at shops talked quickly. And when anyone spoke to me suddenly, I couldn’t say anything in reply. Because of this I lost the confidence I had gained at school, but realized that I had to study harder. Experiencing failure is often what will motivate a person to try harder and gain real confidence. Thanks to my experience in Australia, I’m now on the path to becoming more proficient and therefore more confident than I was before the stay.

I was really fortunate to be able to spend four weeks in Australia. Our present age of globalization offers us so many great opportunities, but it also poses unprecedented dangers. For those of us aspiring to be the global leaders of tomorrow, what’s important is not so much getting all the answers right on tests as asking the right questions and exploring the answers with creativity, confidence, and courage. Let us never forget the wise words of a great leader, Franklin Roosevelt: “There is nothing to fear but fear itself.”