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This article aims to build a frame of reference to reconsider the meaning of knowledge in line with collective value formation and to regain lost popular knowledge in comparison with paternalistic or scientific knowledge. Following a brief introduction of Japanese social education and a critical/creative review of Freire's concept of conscientization, a case study of a community-based social enterprise and its learning practice in the area affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake is explored. The focus of the analysis is to clarify the restructuring process of knowledge construction through collective and dialogical community actions.

Reconsidering the Meaning of Knowledge Based on Experiences of Community-Based Social Education Practice in Japan

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Introduction

Sociocultural thought in modern society is strongly influenced by the capitalization process of the world. That in turn is based on economic liberalism theory, which underlines the importance of private property and competitive market order. Nowadays, reification (Marx, 1867) has replaced the relationships between people with the relationships between things, and it has penetrated every corner of our life. This process of reification has diluted mutual help. Accordingly, in society, the difficulty of mutual recognition or intersubjectivity formation has grown. A society lacking reciprocity has undergone change in the manner of self-recognition, and it tends to normalize “ontological insecurity” (Young, 1999). It has also been clarified that the influence of self-actions on others cannot be seen, and people cannot take ethical responsibility for their actions (Polanyi, 1944). In other words, reification causes a lack of the capacity for imagination and transforms people’s way of understanding themselves. The recent buzzword “knowledge-based society” is deeply bound up with the market-oriented view of learning. Social education in Japan, which has a long history of democracy learning and community-based mutual education, has also been undermined by individual development, particularly since the 1990s.

This article explores the implication and recent trends in community-based social education in Japan, which places great emphasis on dialogical community learning embedded in collective social practice, focusing on the process of reconstruction of knowledge that fosters subjective cooperation. First is a brief introduction of Japanese social education and a critical assessment of current trends in the learning society, which emphasizes individual empowerment. Second, through a case study of a community-based social enterprise and its learning practice in the area affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake, the restructuring process of knowledge construction through collective and dialogical actions is analyzed. The aim of the analysis is to clarify the practical logic of collective knowledge formation beyond the scope of the Freirean view of conscientization. Finally, a conclusion and implications are shared.

Japanese Social Education

In Japan, the term “social education” has been widely used in adult, continuing, and lifelong education—particularly since the enforcement of the Social Education Act (1949) after the end of World War II. The Social Education Act makes the following definition: “Social Education is organized learning activities covering the areas of adult education, community education, and education for children and youth that takes place outside of school” (Social Education Act, Article 2). The key characteristics of social education in Japan may be summarized as following.

First, the ideology of democracy and sovereignty of people with the reflection on the defeat in World War II has been an important element for Japanese social education. The Constitution and the Basic Act on Education (1947) states the following: “Education shall aim for the full development of personality and strive to nurture the citizens, sound in mind and body, who are imbued with the qualities necessary for those who form a peaceful and democratic state and society” (Article 1). Thus, this indicates the strong intention to pass on experiences and reflections.

Second, the Social Education Act is primarily directed at out-of-school young people and adults; however, its effect should be regarded as wider community-based learning activities—irrespective of age. Thus, social education in Japan practically consists of formal, informal, or nonformal learning in line with the demands of actual life.

In this way, the practice and theory of social education in Japan have taken a fruitful course by emphasizing various community learning activities through social collective practice. Further, mirroring the individualization of society based on reification of the world, social education (which had been nurtured by social relationships) also has to be restructured. Thus, reconsidering the development and reconstruction of social education is an important issue in contemporary social context—both for Japanese social education and adult education or lifelong learning worldwide.

Community-Based Learning and Knowledge

Criticisms about decontextualized knowledge acquisition have been advanced in the field of education, such as a criticism of institutionalized school education (Illich, 1970) and of banking education (Freire, 1972a). These criticisms are based on the thinking that knowledge does not exist outside the learner's experiences and recognitions, because knowledge is constantly reconstructed while a learner transforms his/her framework of interpretations and recognitions. The basic idea of community-based learning discourse appears to be firmly linked to such discussions.

However, in real life, it is not easy for ordinary people to establish a system of knowledge to confront the owner of so-called absolute or scientific knowledge. Under such circumstances, the Fukushima nuclear power plant accident, which was triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, induced many people to reconsider the meaning of knowledge. Immediately after the accident, in the news coverage, the explanations from the "intellectuals" or "specialists" were very ambiguous. Previously, in discussions about nuclear power, opinions that expressed danger and environmental destruction were presented in a way that suggested that this form of energy was clean. At the time of the Fukushima accident, the experts did not offer any solutions about how to deal with the crisis. That revealed the danger of solely depending on absolute knowledge and the ambiguities about where responsibilities lay in a highly specialized and divided society.

It is generally regarded that providers of knowledge based on modern science are equivalent to carriers of knowledge. Those who provide knowledge have become those who are also responsible for subsequent judgments, choices, and actions. In this regard, it becomes necessary to assess the situation for "ordinary" people. Many Japanese realized that they hardly understood anything about their country's energy policy and that nuclear energy was treated as a major tool. The underlying issue here is as follows: before we argue whether or not we agree about solving a problem, it is necessary to note that we have not paid attention to the matter as it relates to our own lives. In this sense, when mapping out our future society, we must dispense with the current social structure, in which knowledge is highly dependent on particular individuals. Further, no one knows who they are dependent on (dependency without relationships). It should not be the role of certain people but the responsibility of everyone to determine the way in which civil society and community develop.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that embracing a certain critical attitude toward expert-led paternalism does not necessarily deny expertise. Further, emphasizing popular knowledge does not denote anti-intellectualism. Generally speaking, anti-intellectualism is understood as "an attitude to interpret the world as people desire, dismissing or ignoring empiricism and objectivity" (Sato, M., 2015, p.4). Originally, however, anti-intellectualism was against "something" that accompanies intellect, and it was an indicator of wholesome,

rather than unwholesome, society. In this context, “intellect” does not just imply an ability to understand or analyze something; it also includes self-reflection (Morimoto, 2015). Thus, the key point here is not to prove absolute truth, but to clarify how it occurred and developed (Foucault, 1969). In terms of social pedagogy, it may be interpreted that knowledge is not transmitted; it is continuously reconstructed through collective or dialogical actions and reflections.

Above all, with respect to community-based learning discourse in Japan, the following points should be stressed. First, local or popular knowledge—as distinct from universal knowledge—has been emphasized. Second, local knowledge is not necessarily confined to mere experiential knowledge with probability. Accordingly, the formation of collective knowledge based on dialogical or mutual learning in actual community life has been an important aspect of learning practice. Third, in addition to knowledge acquisition, knowledge is reconstructed through an interactive relationship.

Japanese Community-Based Learning and Freire’s Conscientization

As knowledge specialization progresses, knowledge management has become an important value in society. Further, in “the late modern era” characterized by the “risk society” (Beck, 1986; 1999), the acquisition of knowledge and skills is even regarded as an essential condition for survival. In this context, the task of reexamining knowledge seemingly appears to be in line with the direction of knowledge society in the sense of guaranteeing the rights of individuals as the subjects of learning.

Trends in the systematization of lifelong learning in Japan since the 1990s have also not been irrelevant to these social changes. Such trends appear to indicate a means of avoiding risk in personal career development. However, it is necessary to question the possibility of eliminating a substantial sense of insecurity by pursuing only improvement in individual ability.

The importance of the transformation of learning from propositional knowledge to practical knowledge is now commonly shared in education discourse. It is consistent with the history of modern adult education thought and that of Japanese social education, which underscores the inseparable relationship between learning and social action (Sato, K., 2015). For example, situated learning theory is one of the influential areas related to radical and transformative learning discourse on the basis of criticism of decontextualized intellectual knowledge. Situated learning theory asserts that “learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 31). In this respect, learning can be understood as the interactive realization in community practice (Otaka, 2013).

To facilitate the transformation from decontextualized learning, it is vitally important to locate learning activities within learners’ needs and the social needs of others in relation to the real world. That is opposed to just talking

about the significance of learning, in which personal connections are absent. In pursuit of an inclusive society, it is necessary to transform personal needs into social needs.

Freire's concept of conscientization through social practice strongly resonates with reaffirmation of the meaning and objectives of learning. Conscientization has been proposed as a strategy in community learning. Conscientization allows people to critically and creatively look at their situation: identifying problems; liberating people's thinking and values; and transcending their own situation. In that way, individuals become the subjects of their own lives, particularly by sharing a sense of collective reality through a continuous learning process (Freire, 1972a,b).

One of the major criticisms of Freirean approaches comes from Marxist theorists, who argue about its diversity and incoherence (Youngman, 1986). Reviewing these arguments, Mayo (1994) identifies the core of the criticism is that Freire "overemphasised the role of ideas in social change and the importance of development of individual consciousness, whilst under-emphasizing the importance of developing strategies for structural change" (p. 201). Indeed, there is a tendency in the general Freirean approach to focus primarily on the development of individual consciousness, such as the Adult Learning Project in Scotland (Kirkwood & Kirkwood, 1989). However, the individual development itself is a precondition to attain more holistic community actions; thus, it is not necessarily incompatible with structural change.

The main issue in this debate is that to transform individual actions into wider holistic community actions, it is necessary to create a dialogic space that combines individual and community empowerment. Thus, these arguments have suggested that a new paradigm of community learning should be considered in a critical and creative context—one that consciously and continuously organizes the process of self-realization and mutual understanding.

The difficulty here is that one's self-realization is frequently in conflict with the self-realization of others. This is the essential contradiction with collective action. The fundamental question with regard to Freirean approaches relates explicitly to this issue. In general, the Freirean view of the status quo of a community characterized as "oppressed" is unconditionally seen as a homogeneous entity—irrespective of the internal dynamics and complexity of collective practice. That view does not address the specificity of people's lives and collective community action; therefore, it slides over contradictions and tensions within social settings.

If critical consciousness is more about a shared agenda (shared consciousness with others) rather than personal factors, a pertinent question in community learning discourse is as follows: should the collective, dialogic process of learning activities help to form or reconstruct knowledge with collective value? In other words, while recognizing differences and conflicts of interests, it is necessary to consider whether the learning process is accompanied by the accumulation of situated collective knowledge beyond the development

of individual consciousness. Ultimately, these arguments lead to a discussion of the meaning of knowledge with collective value formation.

Workers' Cooperative Movement in the Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster Area

Workers' cooperative is a community-based social enterprise, which was established by the unemployed, war widows, and middle-aged and elderly people, aiming to achieve "humanized life and decent work" in the early 1970s (Otaka, 2017). Currently, the national federation of the Japan Workers Cooperative Union (JWCU) has more than 300 offices across Japan; in 2016, its total annual turnover was 33.5 billion Japanese yen, and it had 13,420 worker members (Japan Workers' Co-operative Union, 2013; 2018). Its development process has been filled with continuous contradictions related to cooperation, but, at the same time, it can be regarded as a social education practice in a way to resolve local issues through community-based learning among worker members, service users, and local residents.

Initially, workers' cooperatives emphasized self-actualization in the workplace, improving working conditions, and promoting workers' self-recognition as owners of their own labor. At this stage, one of the most important principles is that of "decent work," which was "to respond to the people's needs and trust" (Japan Workers' Co-operative Union, 2017, p. 14). However, self-actualization was confined to the scope of the individual or workplace level.

Through a unified approach to local job creation and community development, JWCU has broadened its area of practice to cover wider social aspects. Today, JWCU defines its work as "associated work" that comprises cooperation among worker members, cooperation with users, and cooperation with the community (local residents). Notably, in recent years, characteristic changes can be described as working with the socially disadvantaged and with local residents in deprived rural areas.

The following section presents a case study of workers' cooperative, Tome Community Welfare Center, which is currently engaged in eight projects, including welfare services, forestry, and support projects for people in need. The work is carried out by thirty members aged from their twenties to sixties. Among those projects, three are analyzed to illustrate the transformation in the relationships and consciousness of people involving in the practice of reconstructing of knowledge through community-based learning.

Project One: Happy-Day—a Multigenerational Symbiotic Welfare Premise. The city of Tome is a deprived rural area, where depopulation and decline in local industry have been serious issues. It was affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. Initially, a workers' cooperative was commissioned by the local municipality to conduct a vocational training program for earthquake and tsunami victims in October 2011. This was the origin of the Tome Community Welfare Center (TCWC) workers' cooperative. At the beginning of its program, TCWC told trainees that the aim was not only to

support them in finding jobs, but also to launch a community-based cooperative business of their own. This demonstrates a fundamental ideology of workers' cooperative, which places importance on creating and rebuilding a community together with various people.

However, the development of TCWC was subject to dispute: each trainee had their own opinions and interests. Various business plans came to an impasse, and consequently many trainees left after the training program ended. It was under these circumstances that Happy-Day was established as a day-care center for elderly people by two trainees with the support of a retired nurse. This was the first community-based business conducted by TCWC. As a first step, Happy-Day members visited every household in the area to explain the project to create jobs and drop-in spaces to deal with community issues and needs. That community action provided an opportunity for Happy-Day to learn about and understand the actual situation of the community where it was based, which helped change the Happy-Day's initial aim that was to inform people about its ideas.

The project was launched by unemployed people, who were perceived as lacking professional knowledge. The perception that they were not experts in welfare became an invisible barrier: the workers' anxiety could not be dispelled. However, through its daily work and dialogic communication with local residents and service users during the past seven years, Happy-Day members now feel that working with the awareness of lacking of expert knowledge has become their strength. The chief manager of Happy-Day said that her expertise could be expressed as skills and knowledge based on a sense of livelihood. In that context, knowledge was (re)structured by collective relationships.

Currently, a day service for after school children with disability called Pokkapoka has been launched by the parents of disabled children on the same premise. It is deeply linked to the idea of a multigenerational symbiotic welfare base, which TCWC has aimed to develop from the beginning. This symbiotic welfare premise is an outcome of community learning processes in which worker members self-contextualize the meaning of associated work rooted in the community. Based on the workers' own sense of livelihood, their expertise is acknowledged. This is a community sense of reconstruction of knowledge with collective value formation.

Project Two: Reborn-Forest Tome—Emergence of Subjective Mutual Relationships in the Community. In October 2014, with young people who have multiple struggles, TCWC started a self-cutting small to medium-size forestry management project called Reborn-Forest Tome (RBFT). Its aim was to solve the problem of abandoned forests. After rapid economic growth in the post-World War II period, many mountainous rural areas faced difficulties in making a living from forestry because of cheap imported materials. Masubuchi Ward, which is located in the northeastern part of Tome, encountered such problems. When RBFT started, it aimed to resolve local issues, such as, animal damage and natural disasters caused by the increase in

abandoned forests. However, it was difficult to attain understanding from the forests' owners. Further, due to lack of skills, RBFT faced difficulties operating its projects.

Facing this situation, RBFT realized that it was a necessity to first receive support and understanding among local residents and began distributing monthly community newsletters to the 200 households in the ward as well as providing them some living supports, such as gardening work, grass cutting, and housekeeping. Through such efforts, RBFT became aware of the fact that many locals possessed diverse skills. One RBFT member described this as "sensuous knowledge." Since then, RBFT started supporting local elderly, while learning a lot from them. RBFT came to understand the importance of uncovering, sharing, and inheriting these resources and knowledge.

From the perspective of collective value formation, RBFT can be seen as having created an environment where the relationship between the supporter and the person supported is not fixed. The foundation of such a community-based development approach in conjunction with local residents' life experiences and skills is embedded in various informal and nonformal learning practices, such as community design workshops, community surveys, community roundtable meetings, and forestry schools. Another example is the Masubuchi Autonomous Community Promotion Meeting, which was jointly established by local residents and RBFT in 2018: the aim is to promote free discussion about the community's resources, issues, and needs. The meeting is based on sharing collective value through community learning. It resulted in a unique practical concept of combining forestry and community regeneration called "Satomori-gata Ringyo (Landscape Protecting Forestry)."

Local residents, however, did not initially have positive feelings about RBFT, which was due to negative impressions about the reconstruction process following the disaster. Tome is adjacent to Minami-Sanriku, a town that suffered serious damage through the tsunami, and had makeshift housing and volunteer bases. After public subsidies expired, many companies and volunteer organizations withdrew from the community. As a result, many locals thought that RBFT would also soon disappear. Young people left the region due to the decline of its primary industries. Thus, most residents (mainly elderly) were in a state of resignation and unable to consider the community's future. The population of Tome declined by 8,000 over a period of 10 years. The aged population is over 30% (Tome-city, 2018).

Their perceptions, however, have gradually changed through communications with RBFT, who continues their involvement in the local issues; frequently socializes with them; and constantly offer their help. In addition, the young people working for RBFT are not necessarily skilled in the work they do, and often, elderly locals are able to teach them. This means that people who are usually regarded as having retired from their careers and become those who need to be supported find an opportunity to utilize their experience and knowledge. Based on the accumulation of collective relationships, six local women set up an agricultural team in cooperation with RBFT in

September 2017, using abandoned farmland. This can be described as a transformative community development approach, which leads to a transformation from “ontological insecurity” (Young, 1999) to ontological hope: the sense of security is situated in the community and social life.

Project Three: Tomomachi-Tome—Working Together With Needy People. In accordance with the Act on Self-Reliance Support for Needy People enforced in April 2015, TCWC was subcontracted as an independent support consultation program for needy people by the city of Tome. The result was a project called Tomomachi-Tome. It is an outcome of mutual trust working with the local municipality through a vocational training program for the earthquake and tsunami victims at the early stage of its development. However, consultation support for people with various problems (such as social detachment, mental illness, intellectual or developmental disorders, multiple debts, homelessness, ex-prisoners, sexual minorities, and victims of domestic violence) proved very difficult. Particularly, for TCWC who raises “no refusal support” as their substantial value, there were plenty of unknown things to deal with such as a mental illness consultation. Through its support activities, Tomomachi-Tome found that many locals possessed various skills and knowledge, and realized that expanding both people and community “capability” (Sen, 1992) was in keeping with the ideology of workers’ cooperatives. Furthermore, through a collective working process it involved diverse people, worker members also increased their own motivation and rediscovered the value of their work. Expressed as a “jumble space,” Tomomachi-Tome has become a place for informal or nonformal community learning amongst worker members, users, and local residents.

In general, welfare-related work requires a certain expertise. That is particularly true in contemporary society, which is characterized by specialization or division of labor; roles tend to be fixed. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to offer holistic support for the needy. Tomomachi-Tome also faces a similar problem of becoming merely a service provider. Owing to the complex difficulties of the needy, there have been some cases of Tomomachi-Tome sending users with multiple difficulties to specialized institutions, such as hospitals or public support bodies. However, not all problems could be solved. Through such experiences, Tomomachi-Tome has recognized that its project concerns creating a community mutual self-help system by forming various barrier-free, accessible spaces and promoting relationships for people in need. Tomomachi-Tome has provided an opportunity to transform locals’ perspectives to a broader social aspect and also to reflect on its way of working.

Recently, one of serious social issues in Japan is that some people (for some reasons such as health issues) could not tidy up their houses and leave rubbish lying around the outside for many years. It causes a pollution as well as hygiene problems in the community. Workers’ cooperative has also engaged in solving such local issues. In August 2017, Tomomachi-Tome established a life-support project SKETCHA, engaging in “a little work” such as tidying up littered houses, and assisting with farm work, as well as housework. Its

purpose is to create intermediate work opportunities for the needy. It provides a dynamic impetus in connecting people by fostering intersubjective relationships in solving local issues and in raising consciousness about mutual coexistence. These collective actions help promote an awareness that poverty or difficulties are not individual matters but community issues.

Conclusion and Implications

This article reviews practical issues in contemporary Japanese social education related to community-based learning in terms of knowledge reconstruction, including reexamination of expertise. It explores the logic of reconstructing collective values beyond the level of individual conscientization. The key characteristics of the case study present the following implications.

First, the workers' cooperative generally places the emphasis on job creation corresponding to community needs. Notably, the case study clarified that problems and needs (which were revealed while deepening the relationship with the local community) became shared issues rather than just information or knowledge. However, at that stage, the developed consciousness is confined to the workplace; its practice has not extended to community collective actions involving service users and local residents.

Second, the opportunity to break through that limitation was embedded in the process of recognizing abilities and skills possessed by users and local residents. It can be said that rediscovery or reconstruction of knowledge with collective value formation should be rooted in real-life situations (situated collective knowledge) accompanied by an awareness that everyone has meaning in their existence and can play a certain role.

Third, such a collective conscientization is enabled by forming a "jumble space," in which everybody in the community can easily present their problems. Here, there is no longer a fixed dichotomous relationship, such as supporter-supported and teacher-student.

Fourth, the development process of TCWC has been in line with local issues, and that has made TCWC aware of its limitations. Thus, its community actions have led TCWC to seek diverse connections with others. In that way, the external community has turned out to be a resource.

Fifth, the foundation for further development of TCWC's collective actions has been underpinned by informal or nonformal learning in diverse forms. These processes can be a form of self-expanding learning practice (Engeström, 1987; Miyazaki, 2016). That practice has a common value in its initiation; then, new issues are discovered through mutual learning. Ultimately, the process becomes extended to a wider collective practice, in which both individuals and the community are synchronically empowered.

Finally, community-based collective learning is also a process of self-redefining the meaning of expertise. An approach that focuses on self-contextualization of reality and the formation of collective values, allows people to liberate themselves from the objectivization of learning. It also frees them

from being unable to think beyond the dependency on paternalism or noncontextual scientific knowledge. Thus, deliberating about the process of collective subjectivity may also provide an opportunity to reconsider the meaning of “civic expertise” (Fujii, 2004).

The experience of the Japanese community-based learning practice based on the critical extensions of Freire’s concept of conscientization may contribute to reframing lifelong learning discourse in a climate of highly individualized and fragmented societies. If lifelong learning is to enhance mutual humanization of people as well as community life, and thereby transform individual consciousness to collective consciousness, then the formation and reconstruction process of situated collective knowledge is a core issue that demands further consideration.

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