

# Adult Education, Democracy and Social Justice

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**Abstract**—Once, Seiichi Miyahara, on the basis of understanding of the adult education, pointed out that “two major conditions to support the development of social education are democracy and technology”. Adult education and democracy is closely connected to each other. I would like to emphasize on the importance of democratic dimension. But it is necessary to explore some important questions. What kind of content about democracy that we would like to implement through adult education? What is the educational approach to implementing democracy? I had examined critically the meaning of deliberative democracy. From the standpoint of social justice, I had insisted to need building productive relationship adult and community education with social movement. I would like to emphasize on the importance of democratic dimension. But it is necessary to explore some important questions. What kind of content about democracy that we would like to implement through adult education? What is the educational approach to implementing democracy? I had examined critically the meaning of deliberative democracy. From the standpoint of social justice, I had insisted to need building productive relationship adult and community education with social movement.

**Keywords**—community development; adult education; democracy; social justice as participation

## I. INTRODUCTION

As globalization advances, local communities and the daily life of those who inhabit them are changing significantly. Policy perspectives are also fundamentally being transformed.

Under the transition to reflexive modern [1,2], as labor markets become more flexible and diverse, economic disparity is widening. As a result, lifestyles are becoming more individualized and privatized attitudes are spreading, which in turn has led to an increase in intolerance. Isolation and hikikomori (social withdrawal) among child-rearing families, youth, and the elderly have emerged as major societal problems.

Opportunities for learning have also expanded explosively in recent years. However, against this context of expanding markets for learning and increasing individualization of the labor markets and daily life, education, too, is becoming increasingly individualized, for instance through television- and internet-based learning opportunities. The transition from “education” to “learning” is a conceptual transformation symbolic of this broader change [3,4].

Life-long learning policies function as a driving force behind these changes. The single-minded emphasis on

economic values such as efficiency and the rise of managerialism in the selection and evaluation of designated managers are transforming the administration of adult and community education.

Today, observers are asking anew how cooperative attitudes can be revived and how education can contribute to the realization of equality, justice, democracy, and other values recognized as important by modern societies. Do the community development projects being advanced voluntarily and independently by community residents contain the possibility of achieving these goals? What types of community development and education enable their achievement?

In this paper, I investigate critically the character of community development under lifelong learning policy. Next I’ll examine the meaning of deliberative democracy from the point of learning theory. Finally, I would like to insist to need building productive relationship adult and community education with social movement.

## II. LIFELONG LEARNING POLICY: A JANUS-FACED POLICY

Gert Biesta emphasizes three dimensions of purpose in his discussions of the shifting purpose of lifelong learning [3]: the economic dimension, the democratic dimension, and the personal dimension.

Turning our attention to the recent past, the 1972 Faure Report strongly emphasized the democratic value of lifelong learning, and called for the creation of the “complete man” through this type of learning [5]. This can be called the “democratic dimension”. The “democratic dimension” here refers to concern over how to cultivate individuals who will achieve equality, justice, and democracy.

However, discussions in the EU and OECD since the 1990s have focused on the need for individuals to engage in learning throughout their lives in order to support knowledge-based societies and economies [6,7]. The goal of this learning is to develop “human resources” capable of triumphing over global economic competition. Today, lifelong learning is changing from the right to the obligation of every individual. It would not be an exaggeration to say that this “economic dimension” has conquered the policy world.

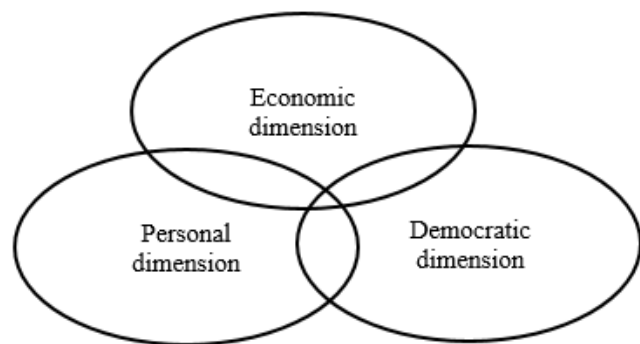


Fig. 1. Three dimensions of lifelong learning.

In contrast, at first glance, the “personal dimension”—which addresses the individual interests and enjoyment of each citizen—appears not to contribute to society or have a public character. Biesta understand the interrelationship between these three dimensions in the form of a Venn-diagram of overlapping areas [3]. While it is possible to conceptually differentiate these three dimensions, they overlap with and supplement one another. In other words, all three are indispensable elements when constructing goals for lifelong learning.

However, as mentioned above, the economic dimension has dominated lifelong learning policy in recent years. In the sense that this one aspect has been emphasized to the exclusion of others, it represents a particular ideology. This ideology is responsible for changing education from a “Treasure Within”—as the 1996 follow-up to the Faure Report termed it—to a “Pressure Within.”

### III. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL ORDER POLICIES

#### A. Lessons from Past Community Development Practices

Learning from past attempts at community development is important when creating new community development policies and practices. Community development in the broad sense of the term has arisen as a policy issue in Japan three times since the Meiji era.

The first was the Local Improvement Movement, a reorganization of Japan’s ruling mechanism that occurred against the context of the social and economic threats that shook the emperor system following the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). It was led by the Home Ministry and was launched with the promulgation of an imperial rescript in 1908 (Meiji 41).

The second was the Movement for Rural Economic Improvement (1932–1941), which emerged when Japan’s system of government was once again shaken, this time by the impoverishment of rural villages caused by the Showa Depression, and the intensification of radical farmers’ movements on both the left and the right. While this movement led to the reorganization of rural governance systems, it is also said to have laid the groundwork for fascism dominated regime.

The third, after the Second World War, was the advancement of community policies in the early 1970s. This

was the period when societal and economic distortions caused by rapid economic growth were becoming clear. Traditional social education (adult and community education) was cast aside and attention was focused on developing independent citizens’ activities, educating citizens, and cultivating the civic spirit of self-governance.

It goes without saying that the historical context and problems of these three eras of community development policy differ. However, if we nevertheless examine them in relation to one another, several similarities become apparent. First, each era aimed to cultivate citizens capable of accurately understanding their community’s needs and spontaneously and actively responding to them. Second, they all promoted the networking (cooperation and integration) of various organizations within the community while also aiming to reorganize and reintegrate autonomous organizations. Third, they each anticipated that social education would play a large role in the achievement of these various goals. In particular, they emphasized the education of citizens (the indoctrination) and the cultivation of core human resources who were capable of proactively responding to the demands of the state and were civic-minded and committed to improving their own situation.

These past experiences suggest several lessons relevant to current community development activities. Namely, community development has been viewed in policy terms as an opportunity to resolve the contradictions that arise within local communities, and in doing so, to reorganize national systems of governance; in addition, autonomy and independence have always been demanded of community members. Initiatives or research that fails to carefully consider these connections between the state and social education are not only less meaningful, they also run the risk of being subsumed under systems of control. Let us now consider this point in more detail.

#### B. Community Development as Social Order Policy

In contemporary society, it is not realistic for the state to repressively and forcibly organize people to educate or train them. To the contrary, we might even say that autonomy, independence, and initiative are more highly praised today than ever before. We are living in an era in which government bodies emphasize to be independent, to have self-responsibility, self-help.

To put the situation in extreme terms, it follows that community development activities should not be praised simply for being voluntary and independent. Under the principle of subsidiarity principle, the state does not provide money or services to ensure the rights of citizens. Stated in more concrete terms, the neoliberal state reduces welfare services and dismantles systems. The following statement expresses the attitudes at work when the state undertakes a shift in policy principles aimed at liberal reform.

Citizens today are dependent upon the state to the extent that they will resort to extortion for what they want. “Because it is too late to motivate people by making use of their hunger for advancement, we call for participation as a substitute motivating force. It is essential to involve as many people as

possible in decision-making processes so as to prevent them from losing their motivation” [8].

This insist itself is no more than a reworking of European and American discourse regarding the urban underclass, but the statement of willingness to allow citizens to participate in policymaking is surprisingly blunt.

This is the implication of the policy. Like Michel Foucault’s concept of “discipline,” the aim is to develop an independent mental realm within people and induce them to manage their own actions, and to conduct and ceaselessly question themselves in order to ensure that their behavior matches social norms. This type of intervention strategy is called a public order policy [9]. It follows that citizen participation and active citizenship are particularly central principals during periods of liberal reform, and must be evaluated cautiously.

Certainly, autonomy and independence are important when carrying out community development activities. However, the type of community being created, and the type of education and training used to create it, are even more important issues. The relationship between these issues and the realization of a democratic society demands close examination.

#### IV. ADULT EDUCATION AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

##### A. *Adult Education and Democracy*

Japan’s lifelong learning policies do not appear to place an especially large emphasis on economic goals. Perhaps to counterbalance this, community development policies are strongly emphasized. Although this is different from the economic dimension, education is nevertheless valued not in its own right, but rather from a functional perspective. In the sense that education is viewed as a means to some other end, these policies share a basic approach with policies that emphasize economic concerns.

In contrast, I would like to emphasize that it is possible to protect and enhance democracy through education-based community development. But how can this possibility be realized? Below I sketch out a theoretical answer.

As the historical lessons of Europe and North America demonstrate, and as Miyahara Keiichi has also pointed out, adult education is institutionalized along with the development of democracy, and once it is institutionalized, it is viewed as playing the role of supporting and developing democracy [10]. Even if this assertion is correct, it is necessary to understand in more concrete terms how educational activities lead to the realization of democracy.

##### B. *The Meaning of Democracy: Deliberative Democracy as Learning*

To answer this question, we must reflect on the definition of However, it is immediately evident that this theory rests on similar premises as transformative learning theory, and for that reason contains a number of similar problems. Takahashi criticized some points to transformative theory based on liberalism [2]. I would like to point out following three problems.

First, it presumes the existence of independent individuals with complete information who are not influenced by anything other than their dialogue with other people. These “bubble-wrapped individuals,” so to speak, are presumed to shut themselves up inside and be able to control the democratic operation of external institutions by coming to agreements purely on the basis of dialogue; they are presumed to know of no means of communication other than the spoken.

Second, it ignores the diversity and differences between all those who should participate, and presumes that deliberation will take place within a community of individuals who are capable of mutual understanding and who share everything with one another [11]. The debate disregards differences that arise due to disparities in ethnicity, gender, class, and historical background.

Third—and this stems partly from an American bias—the debate lacks state theory perspectives. There is simply a classroom space full of free, equal individuals enjoying intellectual, rational conversation; at most, power differentials in this classroom space are discussed. Democracy is enclosed in the world of the classroom.

The following suggestion may feel abrupt, but is not the essence of democracy to be found less in deliberation between rational subjects and more in the people who lodge objections against the political methods of the Abe administration and shout out “Down with Abe” and “Don’t mess with the people”? There is no need to exaggerate and dub this “agonistic democracy [12]”, but how meaningful is a democracy of pleasant dialogue when democracy is on the verge of being trampled?

Democracy is not a process of coming to agreement through dialogue, but rather something that is won through debate, negotiation, and sometimes struggle. I would like to say that adult education for democracy should have productive relationship with social movement.

#### V. EXPERIENCE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

From the standpoint of social movement, nothing to say, democracy contains an essential opportunity for social justice. There can be no democracy without justice, and neither should there be. The realization of democracy in community therefore advances hand in hand with the realization of social justice.

As I have pointed out previously [2], opportunities for learning about democracy lie not in reflecting on the meaning of social justice but rather in understanding and overcoming specific, local injustices one by one.

The citizens’ movement against pollution in the 1970s is an example of this. The important point here is that through this social movement, personal needs came to be understood as being of public, and therefore a public space was created where diverse citizens encountered one another and carried out activities within the context of their tense relationship with the state and its administrative bodies. Only through the experience of engaging in collaborative activities with mutually dependent individuals is it possible to learn about democracy.

What, then, is the focus of social justice within contemporary community development? It can be found in the question of how to reflect the voices of minorities and people who are excluded from main society, marginalized and discriminated against. Building solidarity with these vulnerable individuals is also a learning process. Building solidarity with people from different cultural backgrounds while respecting (not assimilating) their right to be different requires empathy, restraint, and tolerance. The meaning of social justice is transformed from “distributive justice” to “justice as participation”. Cultivating these qualities is, from the perspective of democracy, a crucial challenge for contemporary education.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The issues I have raised in this paper are not novel. In a sense, they can even be considered the basic problems of adult and community education. I am simply pointing out the need to root democracy firmly in communities through adult and community education, and to make that democracy flourish. However, within the current political climate, that is precisely the most valuable perspective. Active participation is not an obligation, but rather an issue of our responsibility to future generations. This is not a vision that will be achieved without passion.

In education, we should be always asked what kind of values do we have. It also entails supporting the development of agency in the people who will take over our society in the future. The essence of education will not be shaken by criticisms that it is political or ideological. However, precisely

because education is a value-laden activity, those who wish to make a profession of adult and community education must constantly reflect on what is good education, for the sake of rooting democracy in communities, and achieving social justice.

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