

New Trends in the Study of Social Education

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Social education is seen as one important way of building a learning society, through supporting people in solving their daily problems. In a learning society, people could participate in a big project to develop their community as well as enjoying learning, without being excluded because of economic status, gender, age or ethnicity. Implementing a community education plan is the important role for social education, in other words, social education has become a main actor in a changing society.

1 The Present State of Social Education

After World War II, many people have learned on their own through small groups and study circles to create a new democratic society. The Social Education Law was launched in 1949 to make clear the responsibilities of the government and to support self-directed learning activities by the people. In the Social Education Law, social education is defined as systematic educational activity aimed at young people and adults, excluding activity conducted through courses provided by schools in accordance with the law; it includes after-school studies for pupils and students as well as education at public halls (*kominkan*), libraries, museums and the like. *Kominkan*, libraries and museums were built as social education facilities and contributed to bringing people learning opportunities over the past 60 years. Every local government has Social Education Directors who provide professional and technical advice to people who want to run adult education programs. Practitioners in the relevant subjects facilitate study circles and organize multi-agency projects to develop networks within local communities. People enjoy participating in classes at *kominkan*, and value the relevant facilities and the various activities they can contribute to as volunteers to make a difference in their society.

There are no data regarding the overall ratio of people participating in adult education, but the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Technology (MEXT) has conducted a survey of the number of people taking classes and courses at social education facilities every 5 years or so (MEXT 2009: 2). According to the data of the Fiscal Year 2004 survey, over 12 million people participated in some class at Public halls and 8 million attended courses offered by education boards, and in both cases about 65% of those attending were women. The number of people taking some courses at youth education facilities was 615,889 and there were 234,325 attending wom-

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en's education facilities.

Figure 1 Number of social education facilities and people taking classes and courses

Type	Frequency (FY2005)	People taking classes and courses (FY2004)	Female (%)
Education boards		7,972,707	65.7
Prefectural/Municipal divisions		8,087,092	62.2
Public halls (and similar facilities)	18,182	12,456,887	66.5
Libraries	2,979		
Museums	1,196	1,421,025	
Quasi-museums	4,418	1,119,949	
Youth education facilities	1,320	615,889	59.8
Women's education facilities	183	234,325	94.5
Culture halls	1,885	1,819,415	

Resource: MEXT, *National Report of Japan for the CONTINFEA VI*

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) emphasizes that the improvement of social education facilities such as public halls and libraries and the provision of learning opportunities should be implemented by local governments in accordance with the situation in each area, and that private sector education programs and associations, including social education correspondence and culture centres, also play a major role (MEXT HP). There are numerous private groups and non-profit organizations (NPOs) that provide learning opportunities in social education and collaboration between them remains an issue.

2 New Approaches under the Revised Fundamental Law of Education (2006) and the Revised Social Education Law (2008)

Several new approaches have been introduced by the recent revision of the Fundamental Law of Education and the Social Education Law:

(i) School education and social education

A part of the Social Education Law was revised in June of 2008. This revision has made to reflect the outline of "Cooperation between school, home and local community" in Article 13 of the Fundamental Law of Education. Article 5 of the revised Social Education Law regulates the cooperation, and the MEXT stipulates that "school-supported local headquarters' projects should be constructed around the junior high school area by local volunteers." The role of school supporters is identified as one of the important duties of social education administration in the future. As mentioned above, Article 2 of the Social Education Law defines social education as a systematic educational activity chiefly done by young people and adults, excluding educational activities done as part of the school curriculum. Therefore, participation in educational activity done as part of the school curriculum is kept to a minimum, and activities such as open-air schools conducted in outdoor educational facilities, outdoor sports for young boys and girls, Parent and Teacher Association (PTA) activities, children's associations, activities of voluntary local groups to promote children's development, and after school activities should be provided by the social education sector. It can be said that this revision of the Social Education Law emphasized social education as an important partner of school education.

First of all, the appointment of a School Support Coordinator is given as a concrete method. Local School Support Coordinators have set up activities for the first time in various places nationwide through Local School Support headquarters' projects that the MEXT funded in Fiscal Year 2008, and already around 1,800 Local School Support headquarters have been established in Japan as of April 2009 (MEXT HP). There is no special qualification requirement in becoming a School Support Coordinator. However, an understanding of local community life, residents' networks, key persons and local activities, are needed to become a coordinator. Such knowledge about the community is promoted by volunteer work and participating in social education. Furthermore, if a lot of adults recognize the unforeseen and transferable outcomes between different learning experiences and understand the characteristics of adult learning and where it can lead, the activity will be further enhanced and a fruitful learning community will be created.

Secondly, it seems that cooperation will be deepened if the school teachers and staff involved in the projects also gain knowledge and understanding about adult education. If school teachers and staff could understand what parents and local people want their children to be, they could provide more comprehensive learning for children and work together to support children's education.

(ii) Home education and family support in social education

Home education was given importance by MEXT through an amendment of the Social Education Law in 2001, and in the revised Fundamental Law of Education in 2006, the article about home education was cited in the articles on social education. Article 10 of the Fundamental Law of Education stated that the national and local government should endeavor to take the necessary measures to support education in the family, by providing opportunities to learn, relevant information, a counseling system and other measures. In accordance with the revision, home education is given priority in the Social Education Law in 2008, and since then central and local government have tried to improve family education and to support parents who experience difficulties in raising their children. There has been great debate for years on these matters in the field of social education studies. A short review of this debate is outlined below.

3 Trends in Social Education to Tackle Contemporary Problems

The Japan Society for the Study of Adult and Community Education (JSSACE) has taken the initiative in social education research. The number of members in the JSSACE is about 1,000 as of July 2009, consisting of teachers in universities and junior colleges, researchers at many academic institutions, social education directors, and local community educators and practitioners in NPOs and NGOs all over Japan. It is one of prominent features of the JSSACE that there have been many practitioners tackling the problems from various points of view to develop the quality of life for people in their communities.

A National Conference is held every year in addition to four regional conferences which are held in various places around the month of June. At the National Conference of JSSACE, 120 or more individual research papers are presented and special symposiums are held about contemporary educational issues which attract members to discuss these issues. The Bulletin of JSSACE is published annually, and includes theses which are peer-edited. A report on the previous year's research is summarized by a research team, so that people can understand current research trends.

The result of this project study is a special issue volume published as a year book titled “Social Education in Japan”.

Besides JSSACE, the Japan Association of Lifelong Education has been engaging in research on lifelong education, and there are some private-sector research institutes, among them the Japan Association for Promotion of Social Education. It was established in 1963 and now it has over 20 workshops at the annual conference. The purpose of it is to foster democracy in Japanese society through promoting social education by the people as well as publishing information and research reports once a month. The following academic organizations have been engaging in research about social education facilities for many years: the Japan Society for the Study of Kominkan, the Japan Society of Library and Information Science, and the Museological Society in Japan.

Research trends and practice in social education are outlined below.

(i) Learning in local communities and globalization

Social education has been described as a special concept that includes every educational activity in a society to develop democratic community life regardless of age, and the concept is comparable with that of adult education in many countries. It has a strong tendency to pursue social justice not only for individual fulfillment but also for community development. The salient point is its pragmatic perspective deeply rooted in community life.

The propaganda drive towards decentralization by the central government in Japan has seen the reorganization of local government. This has been a big challenge to every community resulting in the destruction or transformation of the social education system in many local government areas since the 1990's. There is a significant contradiction between the idea of achieving a learning society and the governmental system through which policies should be carried out. Moreover, the economy in Japan has been in recession since the global economic crisis, unemployment has increased, and governments cannot exercise enough power to encourage social cohesion. On the other hand, many foreigners (i.e., “newcomers”) have come to Japan to find work. Social education that has been established in local areas has suffered serious structural damage, but people are trying to challenge the associated problems and make changes through social education activities.

The JSSACE has published *Social Education and Lifelong Learning under Globalization* in 2005. In this book, some issues related to multicultural education, local culture and minority education are examined. In this book Asaoka wrote, “We realized that we must fundamentally overhaul the relations with the earth, nations, regions and individuals.” (JSSACE 2005: 285) Many projects are now organized to present worldwide movements to protect human rights and learn from these practices carried out in underdeveloped communities and with excluded people.

In 2008, the JSSACE published *Local knowledge: Toward an Alternative Theory of Lifelong Learning* which was the result of a 3-year study. Maehira, the project leader of this study, wrote; “Globalization reduces the distance of time and space. However, it ironically imposes the consciousness of the importance of local knowledge on people. ” It was also argued that the lifelong learning process cannot be separated from ones life history and the space in which the body is found (JSSACE 2008: 225). This approach will be able to put forth a new thematic issue in the field of social education and lifelong learning, asking if local knowledge could be a counterbalance to the destruction of communities by globalization? Or are there any contradictions within local knowledge systems?

(ii) Family education and youth work

There is a long history in education of child care, and family education classes have long been held at schools or public halls under the auspices of local education boards. In the field of social education, parents are thought of as learners with the potential to become good caregivers for their children and also to become independent citizens themselves. Social education directors have been careful not to enforce discipline on parents in these classes, because the principles of childraising should belong to the parent. Also, mothers' mutual study groups and play group activities have been strongly recommended for a long time.

As the number of child abuse cases and counselling issues concerning children have dramatically increased in this decade, parenting education has become an important theme in Japanese society. The interest in family education by government presses for the conversion of the paradigm of social education as non-interventionist to a more interventionist stance concerning state power in relation to the family. Often a problem happening within a family is so complicated that many interventions are going on at the same time, from social services, child care, health services, special needs education, a fathering team, an early education project, etc.

If there is a serious problem, for example, domestic violence or child abuse, the family is referred to the relevant section and will be supported by professionals, according to the guidelines of local governmental regulations. Now a multi-agency integrated approach is needed, and the initiative for parenting education should be taken up by the social education sector.

In social education practice, the method of raising the competency of parents through group work is used, and cooperation in childraising by play groups or by non-profit organizations (NPOs) and voluntary groups of parents and residents is prominent. Ogi refers to these activities not as childraising but as supporting work for children's self development (Ogi 2005). This method has been practiced in social education for a long time as children's education outside school and in youth work, and the role of staff is to support children and young people to learn by doing, even if there is some adventured element in the practice. And if this kind of practice involves children in another place besides school, it means that children should not be evaluated by the same standards as in school education. Tanaka insists that participation of children or young people is one of the key words for the future of youth work in Japan (JSSACE 2002: 255). However, school support projects by local headquarters, as mentioned above, are strongly promoted by the government and people will be mobilized to participate in the big projects. As these integrated organizations will be managed by many volunteers around the school, the question arises as to whether the project is just a supplement to school or something more. A new research team of JSSACE has started in 2008, and action research into these projects will be conducted by them.

Several approaches to the problems of NEETs (those not in employment, education or training) have been tried in recent years. A full-scale survey about transition from school to workplace is being carried out by the JSSE at the moment. The youth support initiatives are organized by NPOs and some companies funded by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, and some useful case studies will be carried out by the young people and staff. In Japan there is no formal qualification for youth workers, family support workers, personal advisors in job café and such workers. The possibility of new qualifications and training systems in social education are under discussion.

(iii) Learning for gender equality

In 1999 the Law to Promote Gender Equality was made after a long campaign by women.

To build a fair society without discrimination between men and women is now on the national agenda. However, there is a strong assertion that men and women should act differently according to their sex and Japanese society should maintain the traditional gender roles. The implementation of the equality policies emanating from women's studies and human rights is an important issue in social education. Classes on women's issues are held at public halls and women's centers and the like. Important courses are about second chance learning, returning to work after raising children and communication skills training because women need to have the confidence to start again. For men, 'bringing up children' courses and cooking classes are very popular all over Japan.

Fathers, however, do not take unpaid childcare leave because they are supposed to work very hard and there are stereotypes for male roles in Japanese society. New research on the theory of work life balance and the implementation of its principles are being conducted in the field of social education as well as in social welfare.

(iv) Elderly people and lifelong learning

Education for elderly people is another experimental project in the field of lifelong learning. As the population ages, a new approach has been introduced and institutions called "silver colleges" for elderly people are being established in many areas. For instance, a holistic approach is being used by Ithaca College and the Long View programme in the USA, whereby through collaboration with the college, elderly people living independently can attend some classes as adult students. In turn university students can experience job placement or service study in the town. This kind of approach is used in many countries and has been introduced into Japan, but a holistic approach to elderly people is still challenging.

Hori introduced the theory of gerontology and has studied educational gerontology for years, showing that the theory and practice of education for elderly people should be examined more precisely and should reflect the respective backgrounds of elderly people (Hori 2006).

(v) Growth of NPOs and community business

The extension of public interest activity by citizens including NPOs is leading to a new movement, and the learning and practices of people who attempt to produce a new culture in their locality for themselves has come to the notice of social enterprises based in the community, as have NPO/NGO activities. The current research on Social education is precisely reflecting the situation of society described here and has a very close relationship with the hope to create a truly democratic society.

In the JSSACE's annual report of 2007, *New Trends in Adult and Community Education and the Growth of NPOs*, some fundamental domestic issues are examined, for instance, an ideal relationship between NPOs and community self-governments, the role of citizens' organizations in managing social education facilities, the professional abilities of NPOs and so on. International experiences such as an attempt to develop employment in German environmental NPOs and an interesting project for poor people's empowerment in Bangladesh have also been examined.

Networking and partnership have been used as key concepts by NPOs in education programs to promote relationships with central and local governments. However, to realize effective collaboration, closer communication and joint activities at every level are essential. Therefore, an outreach approach and participative research methods are used. In the course of pursuing the theory and implementation of the programmes by NPOs, some relevant bodies, social businesses, community businesses and small companies are under consideration.

(vi) Adult learning theory and staff training

Miwa summarized the trend of theory in adult learning in Japan as follows:

Since the 1990s a new theory of adult education and adult learning, so-called “post-andragogy” or “reflection” theory has been developed and introduced in the field of adult learning. This theory emphasizes “self-reflection” or “critical reflection” about learner’s life experience or assumptions that come from learner’s life experience (JSSACE 2004: 263).

Reflection theory is introduced in various fields where professionals have to manage adult development either one-to-one or in groups. Miwa said that reflection theory is now useful, not only for learners and facilitators, but also in the community development movement and university reforms, etc. This approach has been a part of the thematic study of JSSACE on professional development. A project team has carried out a wide range of research and their results are going to be published in 2009. At the same time, a special committee report on social education staff will be released. The committee was organized in 2006 to watch progress towards the revision of the Social Education Law and made a proposal for the preservation of the social education directors system in education boards in local governments. After realizing this goal in the amendment to the Social Education Law, the committee published further discussion on the training system of social education directors and related professional staff training at graduate schools of universities in 2008. Their conclusions were published in cooperation with the project team on professional development mentioned above (JSSACE 2009).

4 The Role of Social Education in a ‘Knowledge-Based Society’

It has been said that in a modern society people should have access to a broad basic knowledge to keep up with the increasing speed of globalization. Every one is living in a learning society, in other words, in a knowledge-based society. In 1995, the European Commission defined modern society as a learning society;

Everyone’s position in society will increasingly be determined by the knowledge he or she has built up. Tomorrow’s society will be a society which invests in knowledge, a society of teaching and learning, in which each individual will build up his or her own qualification. In other words, a learning society... (European Commission 1995).

In Japan, the Lifelong Learning Law was introduced in 1990 and the ideas of both ‘lifelong learning’ and ‘a learning society’ have been very popular with the public. The notion of lifelong learning has a tendency not to be understood as the people’s right to learn or as a means to acquire life skills, but as a leisure time occupation. Learning may only be available to those who can pay for it.

The image of a learning society was slightly changed through the publication of *The Future of Higher Education in Japan* by the Central Council for Education in 2005. This emphasized the importance of creating a knowledge-based society. And now, in the central government, MEXT gives its first priority to realizing a lifelong learning society and explains the reasons as follows;

(1) The need to remedy Japanese society’s preoccupation with academic credentials;

- (2) increased demand for learning activities in a developing society;
- (3) the need for learning in response to social and economic change; and
- (4) the need to revive and improve the educational strengths of the home and the local community.

Responding accurately to such learning needs not only serves to improve the careers of those studying, but also helps in the development of human resources which can be the backbone for social systems, significantly contributing to the development of both society and the economy (MEXT HP).

The importance of realizing a knowledge-based society is now recognized world-wide and in many countries policies are proposed, and responsibility for prioritising this issue is delegated to various committees.

This ideal image of society inspires people. At the same time, however, there are many serious problems in Japanese society today. In the first decade of the 21st century, the Japanese economy could not recover from the after effects of the collapse of the bubble economy and economic recession gave people a pessimistic perspective about their future. The gulf between rich and poor has been deepening year by year. The gap between rich and poor causes parents' educational expectations for their children not to be met. The numbers of parents attending counseling in relation to child abuse has increased almost 40-fold in the past 20 years, and there appears to be a higher incidence of abuse in families where the head of household has no full time job. Family support programmes have therefore become a big issue in Japanese society.

In relation to young people, NEETs have attracted people's concern and many research projects have found that big economic changes were in the background. Fresh Start programs and youth support projects are being carried out by central and local governments in partnership with the private sector. The number of suicides committed by middle-aged men has not been reduced in spite of every effort by counselling professionals. For such people living in difficult circumstances, more learning opportunities are needed to help them survive and lead fulfilling lives.

Social education is seen as one important way of building a learning society, through supporting people in solving their daily problems. In a learning society, people can participate in a big project to develop their community as well as enjoying learning. They are not excluded because of economic status, gender, age or ethnicity. Implementing a community education plan is the important role of social education, in other words, social education has become an important actor in a changing society.

Trends in the study of social education reflect the current age, or the people's desires, especially those people living in difficult circumstances. The gap between an ideal knowledge-based society and real problems in the society should be bridged thorough public and private activities. The study of social education has been carried out to achieve its social purpose through collaboration between the public sector and the community members.

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