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Community Development as Community Empowerment

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Contents

1. Issue	1
2. Position and Significance of the Concept of Community in the Northern Educational Movement	2
(1) Education via writing on daily life essay as a Criticism against the Deficit Educational Model	2
(2) Understanding of Subject in Learning as Agents in Daily Living	3
(3) Unified Understanding of Movement and Learning	5
(4) Learning toward Local Community Development	7
3. Theory of Community Empowerment	8
(1) Fundamental Characteristics of the “Northern Education Movement”	8
(2) Community Empowerment Model	9
4. Conclusion: Transformative Learning and Community Empowerment	12
Acknowledgment	13

1. Issue

Japan started emphasizing independent support as the basis of its social and public policy in the early 2000s¹. This is commonly seen as part of the country’s welfare restructuring based on a workfare policy. However, in the course of support provision, questions have arisen regarding the policy’s underlying nature of individualistic views regarding personal ability (e.g., employability) and the concept of independence based on such views. In actual support provision, the effectiveness of a client/user -centered approach (as seen with the stand-by type and the accompanying type) has been recognized, and the importance of creating an environment for social capital formation has also been discussed. Based on these practical experiences, there is a need to develop a theory for independent support beyond the framework of related political measures.

Three major issues have arisen from practical experience. The first is the question of how

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people receiving support should be viewed. If they are considered as subjects taking initiative to solve their own problems rather than as objects to be supported, the question of how to define the roles of support practitioners (providers) is raised. Second is the question of exactly what the nature of support methods should be in consideration of their differences from human services based on interpersonal relationships or group work. If their definition is based on the concept of creating an environment, then direct emphasis is not placed on clients; clarification is then required as to how these methods can be defined as independent support. Third, these questions bring up the further question of how to establish practical and theoretical units for the control of human development based on the value of independence. This is a fundamental question faced in modern education theory.

In response to these questions, work is conducted to develop theorization and expand the participation theory using the concept of empowerment from a viewpoint of community welfare. More recently, an approach has also been developed in which the educational support functions inherent in independent support practices are organized into a form of social pedagogy. Such trends are not discussed here due to space limitations². However, in short, if goals for independence are set externally for the agent, and if only empowerment and participation toward such goals are emphasized, such support will be absorbed into the tone of current political measures as a mild form of realization for the workfare policy regardless of the good intentions of supporters. This is because agents in such practice are evaluated on their situations and achievements in consideration of their proximity to predetermined goals, and they may be judged as not having the required qualities. This is the same viewpoint adopted in the deficit model inherent in the workfare policy³.

Then, what theoretical framework should be used to approach the questions raised through experience gained from independent support practices? In this paper, a series of questions concerning independent support are discussed based on experiences in community education and community development in Japan's Tohoku regions. Issues arising from related practices are tackled using a community empowerment model as a new theoretical approach.

2. Position and Significance of the Concept of Community in the Northern Educational Movement

(1) Education via writing on daily life essay as a Criticism against the Deficit Educational Model

Modern Japanese education is said to have begun with the establishment of the Education System Order (known as the Gakusei in Japanese) in 1872. The Gakusei, which was intended to provide education to all people, was an essential element in achieving "compressed

modernization” (Manabu Sato)⁴. However, fatally, it made the education practices under it internalize two closely related contradictions. One of these was the separation of everyday-lifestyle and education, which caused wisdom that had been accumulated in community life and handed down from generation to generation to be all too easily discarded in the name of modernization. The other was the objectification of learners, who should in fact be subjects in learning. The process of school education development in the Meiji era involved importing European education models mediated through the filter of Japanese nationalism and standardizing education goals. Learners evaluated by way of examinations became little more than objects judged by their proximity to expected goals. It was an inevitable consequence that educational practice was often accompanied by authority.

Given this background, it can safely be said that the formation of Japanese education was based on a deficit model. The characteristics of such education continued after World War II.

As long as local communities were seen as the base of a semi-feudal system that supported Japanese fascism, such communities were seen as little more than obstacles in education toward democratization. Children living in these communities were viewed as objects to be rescued by education, but were not considered agents in the process of learning.

In contrast, life composition (education via writing on everyday life essay: *tsuzurikata* in Japanese) teachers in Tohoku (and Hokkaido) were aware of the limitations of the old fashioned life composition education and community education approaches that were formed within the new education system before World War II. With that awareness, these teachers focused on education based on the reality of rural life in northern regions, and set the goal of education via writing on everyday life essay to standardize artistic qualities that would shape actors capable of creating new cultural elements in the community. Practices and efforts toward theorization implemented by Shuntaro Murayama from the prewar period onward were further developed by Seiichi Kenmochi and Jin Makabe into community education⁵. In the development of this educational practice we can find an education model (or an independent support model) that would replace the deficit model: this was the learning theory developed based on the reality of the daily lives of children.

(2) Understanding of Subject in Learning as Agents in Daily Living

Education via writing on everyday life essay involves teaching children how to write. Its significance as an education model are summarized here. First, the development of a learning theory internalizing the daily lives of children as learners was sought, and focus was placed on the understanding of learners as agents in life. Makabe, with reference to Shuntaro Murayama,

argued that the northern education movement had an underlying concept by which children were seen as such agents⁶. “Children who show poor performance in math at school and cannot answer questions asked by their teachers look very confident and matured once they come home and wear a straw coat with a sickle in hand to go to a field. They appear to be competitive workers. Village teachers see them actively working.”⁷

In local production and daily living activities, local languages are produced in the form of dialects, and unique techniques/cultural elements related to the local natural environment also develop. Makabe also focused on handcrafts and peasant art, viewing farmers as agents who create lifestyles and elements of culture. His understanding of farmers is similar to that of Michael Cole, who highlighted the limitations of literacy in which cultural differences are ignored⁸.

The second point is a focus on the thought on a way of recognizing life, which rules subjectively constructed life. Seiichi Kenmochi points out that teachers started focusing on differences in how things were viewed by children from cash crop-cultivating villages and children from rice-cultivating villages.

According to Kenmochi⁹, “children from charcoal communities use units based on sheaves, those from silk culture communities use grams, those from apple-cultivating communities use boxes, those from rice-cultivating communities use straw bags, those whose fathers are salaried employees use units of the monthly salary, and those whose families run shops use speculative profit-and-loss arithmetic as a unit to clarify gain and loss in work outcomes. These units reflect the weight of labor history and life, which regulate children’s perception of society and nature. Differences in livelihoods are subtly reflected when children weed the school yard as well as in coursework.” Thus, it is safe to say that a structure of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu¹⁰) representing local areas and social hierarchies was seen as an issue.

The third point is the pedagogical importance of expression. Writing on everyday life essay involves learning via self-expression, and serves to objectify life. However, this objectification is conducted not with individual facts in daily living but with life actively developed and created as described above, and further embraces the self. A theoretical structure identical to that of the practice related to consciousness raising defined by Freire is seen here¹¹. It should also be mentioned that objectification of the thought on a way of recognizing life (from the second point regarding the significance of life composition education) and the reconstruction of thought based on such objectification were recognized as practical issues. Self-expression is premised on the assumption that an audience is present, and meditation in the course of expression is therefore performed from the audience’s point of view. Here, it is safe to say that there is potential open for

collaborative exploration of the thought of life recognition by internalizing others within the self.

(3) Unified Understanding of Movement and Learning

In the way described above, the educational model based on life composition education involved questioning of the way of community life itself and focusing on the relationship between the process of community life reconstruction and the new self-development of learners. Based on this background, the Community Education Movement in Yamagata Prefecture was formed in around 1960. The Farmers' College Movement, which was a kind of people's college movement, developed as an extension of this.

There was a need here to clarify the logic of learning, especially the organizing one of creative learning. In the community, farmers' and teachers' movements were extensively promoted with the aim of addressing contradictions in daily living, and provided a variety of leaning programs involving initiatives such as local-community surveys and analysis of political measures. Such movements promoted the democratization of local communities and nurtured numerous activists. However, there emerged a new challenge involving the clarification of a theory by which informally developed learning was reflected in a practical educational theory based on formal forms of learning. Kenmochi stated:

“Teachers get together to encourage children and the young to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to change and reorganize contradictions in production and work activities; we also actively promoted movement activities involving parents and the young. Opportunities to communicate with parents and the young have been created, while parents, the young and teachers have organized related learning activities. However, because the historical significance of such activities has not been defined, movements and research are not linked, and the issue of experience not being utilized in the classroom has not yet been overcome. The important tasks of the Eighth Research Conference on Education include reviewing the achievements and defects of grass-roots movements to date and determining the direction for the development of such movements.

For this purpose, the activities of teachers, the young, women and labor unions and the history of group activities must be evaluated, and the outcomes must be shared. This is an important task in clarifying the process of people's self-formation(or development).”¹²

Based on this background, one of the challenges faced in learning practices was to clarify

the self-formation process among people as actors in local communities through social movements to address contradictions in production and life and through learning developed in such movements. This has particular significance in terms of the establishment of learning based on the objectification of the self-formation process. This is because, as discussed earlier, a theory related to changes in the thought on a way of recognizing life must be analyzed in order to clarify the self-formation process of agents through social movements if community life is formed voluntarily under this thought, which is socially and culturally regulated. To do this, a practice different from that of life composition, life recording and group activities based on composition and record of everyday life is necessary. The Farmers' College represented a response to this need.

The first Farmers' College meeting was held in Yamagata Prefecture in 1964 with the theme "How to Organize Learning Movements in Rural Communities," which encapsulated the motive to objectify learning movements themselves and organize a new learning system subjectively. The conditions set for the creation of such a system were based on a learning method developed by Shinano Production College and the theory of community development presented by Senroku Uehara. The method was used as learning experience to support sharing and collective objectification of experiences, while the theory was used as a method for understanding the aggregation of global historical issues in light of the contradiction in which communities organized by active residents become localized. One leader of the Yamagata Farmers' College Movement, Jin Makabe, criticized the cultural invasion in which dialects (i.e., local languages, as noted earlier) were suppressed by administrative measures such as "mechanization" and "systematization", and also slated developmentalism because it strips the value of agricultural techniques and art created by farmers based on their close relationship with local natural surroundings. Makabe viewed oppression and deprivation occurring in local communities in light of conflicts occurring around the world in relation to ethnic independence. The summary of the 1968 Fifth Farmers' College meeting includes the following points:

4. In addition to looking at contradictions in the entire system and concentrating our daily demands on agricultural cooperatives and local governments, we must learn theories that support observation of the destinies of our people, and must also organize movements in relation to the challenges we face in order to develop our communities as places worth living in.
6. Learning related to issues of the people always requires overall and full-scale awareness. We treasure the history and cultural tradition of the people and will further develop full-scale learning and movements.

In this way, Yamagata Farmers' College viewed community development as a practice for the realization of ethnic independence (i.e., a way of playing roles in the transformation of social systems) based on an understanding of contradictions related to production and daily living activities in terms of contradictions related to the entire social system. The thought on a way of recognizing life was expanded to support this understanding of local issues in light of world history. Meanwhile, in order to create a local community worth living in, local residents were required to assimilate such ways of thinking. The challenges faced by the Farmers' College were redefined based on these observations.

(4) Learning toward Local Community Development

Dialects and agricultural techniques are an objectified and crystallized form of knowledge inherent in production and living, and are tools of vernacular development (Illich¹³). Based on their presentation as elements lost due to developmentalism for the localization of local communities, political measures are relativized and their limits are revealed. However, this indication is only effective if production and living have recognized value. If the value of local elements to be denied is simply insisted on without mediation, the result will be little more than fixed ideology as seen with agricultural fundamentalism and localism. The effectiveness of criticism from this viewpoint will be limited.

In the 1970s, the Farmers' College started questioning the way society works in light of the fundamental relationship between nature and people. However, in the sense discussed above, this was not based on the premise of simply reviving previously destroyed elements. It should instead be seen that it was necessary to again question the whole of society for nature and people in order to gain a fundamental understanding of the contradictions inherent in the modern social system and to create another social system to replace it. Yamagata Prefecture's Takahata Town launched an initiative to promote organic farming in the 1970s. The project originated from the "severe self-contradiction" (Makabe) faced by farmers. That is, conventional regional agriculture is based on methods that make farmers unwitting assailants, producing crops that threaten the health and lives of the entire nation, including themselves, despite their earnest efforts to supply food for people.

Two elements of significance can be drawn from this. One is an awareness that justice realized in local communities becomes a social ill without the reconstruction of a more comprehensive social system for production, distribution and consumption as a prerequisite for the system of local production and living. As a result of this, issues emerge regarding solidarity between producers and consumers as well as that between farm villages and cities. The other

element of significance is the need to understand contradictions facing local communities as conflicts related to a shift in the purpose itself, rather than as conflicts over tools and instruments for development or advancement. Because the purpose here is to promote agents' motivation for the development of their activities, this makes people fundamentally aware of contradictions on the subject's side. Kanji Hoshi and others from Takahata Town began work to promote organic farming in search of a social system that would not divide producers and consumers in consideration of the contradiction that farmers can become assailants. Regarding this initiative, Makabe stated, "What he is trying to ask others and himself is something necessary for human independence that ranges over ways of looking at the world, senses of value and civilization."¹⁴

Community development is enabled by learning practices that address this issue. Centred on the Research meetings on Organic Farming, a study group has been organized in Takahata Town to support comprehensive discussion of issues related to industry, education, culture, healthcare and welfare with people from the community and elsewhere who have different backgrounds. It can be considered that the value of harmonious coexistence is now highlighted as a summary of community development practices in the town, and that this coexistence clearly functions as a tool for new creation in the community.

3. Theory of Community Empowerment

(1) Fundamental Characteristics of the "Northern Education Movement"

The community development practices described above can be seen as a process of learning and educational practice to help residents become independent. Based on this viewpoint, the characteristics of the community education movement and community development practices in Yamagata Prefecture are discussed here.

First, learners were considered subjects of daily living. Here, the term *subject* is used to mean a creator. Children were a part of communities as places where production and daily living activities were performed, and played an important role in the reproduction of such activities. It is of course possible to think of community generation based on play-related activities rather than on activities related to production or daily living. In either case, the principle of educational practices was premised on learners' roles as agents who constantly develop daily living. Although not cited here, Makabe points out that farmers in northern regions have always engaged in dialogue with nature to deal with harsh natural conditions, and have created distinctive techniques to accommodate local conditions and unique elements of culture based on tradition. Accordingly, it is safe to say that an agent in life is a subject in a life that creates life.

Second, focus is placed on the functions of the thought on a way of recognizing life as a

medium for creating life. *Thought* in this sense involves a framework within which to organize recognition of life, and can also be seen as a schema for the recounting of life stories. Given that it is closely related to culture, it can also be identified with the concept of habitus proposed by Pierre Bourdieu. This thought was generated based on a standardized pattern of local nature, people and society, and is known to have varieties corresponding to the social class (e.g., roles played by merchants and sericulturists). Meanwhile, as dialects are formed based on cultural commonalities corresponding to geographical regions, it appears certain that this thought (which can also be described as a frame or schema) has a hierarchic structure within itself.

The significance of focus on this point is that it supports understanding of norms that are generated and function in a community formed by a life that creates life. It also enables the discussion of methods for self-formation implemented by internalizing culture within the community. More specifically, the thought discussed here represents a theoretical key to a uniform understanding of activities, communities and self-formation.

Third, the focus of learning is placed on the formation or transformation of the thought discussed here. Localized thought itself provides chances for criticism of the local aggregation of contradiction in contemporary world; however, it does not produce any logic that might help to resolve these contradictions and create new communities. The Farmers' College Movement in Yamagata Prefecture supported learning toward the exploration of thought for the local resolution of contradictions in contemporary world.

Fourth, this thought was developed in the 1970s to confront inconsistent circumstances; it was used to criticize the social system while being internalized within it. Based on this experience, local thought and knowledge were redefined as tools for creative practices that would help to overcome the inconsistencies of the modern social system. They were also seen as tools to enable collective self-formation supported by the thought of independence with human dignity.

(2) Community Empowerment Model

The characteristics of the community education discussed above suggest the potential for the establishment of an independent support model different from the deficit model described in Section 1. Here, community education is discussed as a community empowerment model.

First, the community empowerment model differs from the deficit model in that it views all people involved as subjects. In this model, children who are unsuccessful in school education and residents living in deprived areas are also subjects creating a life that creates life. More specifically, even if agents seem to be in a non-active state, this is not because they lack ability; in fact, the situation results from their being active. The underlying problem at the start point of

support is found in understanding this contradictory behavior. The importance of assessment is emphasized in the field of human services, but this is not a classification of agents based on conditions listed in a diagnosis table. The role of assessment lies in its use as a tool to understand that reality involves understanding the activeness of actors who seem to be in a non-active state and grasping the logic by which they create lives in their own ways. To achieve this, dialogue with the agent is necessary. This is completely different from interview-based diagnostic assessment.

Second, people need support when their activeness is exhibited in an unintended way and their dignity may be threatened. Such situations are inseparable from oppression in relationships with others and the exclusion in communities which results from the ways of activities that reproduce such relationships. However, communities established on a basis of collaboration with various others are platforms for the development of individuals. Understanding of the agent as an individual, with focus on activities conducted to reproduce a series of such relationships, is necessary to comprehend the agent specifically and developmentally as the subject of life creation. Conversely, a unit for the analysis of character building and self-formation may also be a community based on cooperation between the self and others rather than on decontextualized individuals. The community education movement in Yamagata Prefecture adopted this analysis unit consistently.

Third, in relation to independent support, levels of freedom in this analysis unit represent a scale as well as a target in evaluation of practices. In principle, independence involves having a reason (ground) for existence within oneself, and in this sense it is synonymous with freedom. If such freedom is objectified in line with life, focus is placed on the freedom to form a community based on collaboration between the self and others and the freedom of self-formation based on the creation of such a community.

The concept of Gutiérrez's "repertoires of practice" and her "re-mediation" theory are highly suggestive in the discussion of freedom¹⁵. For example, even if people are isolated and engage in antisocial behavior, the situation is based on the activeness of agents within a life that creates life. Accordingly, the expected support involves the improvement of conditions to help such people recognize the contradictory display of their activeness and change the way they act, rather than teaching them how to become independent or providing remediation to correct skewed cognition or mental functions. Gutiérrez refers to this type of support as "re-mediation".

People who have only limited means of solving problems and whose level of freedom for practice is low also have limited repertoires of practice. If this is discussed based on Amartya Sen's argument, it can be said that their capabilities are limited¹⁶. However, Sen also notably

proposed that capability is determined by various factors including institutional, cultural and economic environments. The reason for looking at the idea of repertoires of practice here is to focus on scenes in which these factors are pragmatically integrated by the agent's activities. For example, although opportunities for education and capability are inseparable, the nature of the opportunities required and why they are needed can be specifically questioned by examining relationships with the freedom of life creation by the actor.

From this point of view, Yamagata Prefecture's community education movement can be seen as a practice against the policy in which goals for educational and agriculture-related activities were set in the name of modernization, and which sought to force the achievement of goals based only on the controlled methods toward such ends. In this movement, teachers and farmers whose repertoires of practice were restricted expanded these repertoires and collectively attempted remediation to enable independence as a form of freedom.

Fourth is the creation of uncontrolled practice through qualitative conversion of practice. Uncontrolled practice requires not only quantitative expansion of repertoires of practice but also qualitative expansion of practice through transformation of the structure of the practice restricting repertoires. This is because even a new community of practice formed with higher freedom on a local level requires constant negotiations with external communities as a condition for its existence, and is placed within a more comprehensive social system that restricts it. It should be considered that conflicts of value and interest between communities and the tendency of transformation in a community of practice that results from constraints posed by institutions or markets (e.g., subsidy-based guidance for the goals of practice) inevitably arise. This creates a contradiction in which practice based on goodwill can result in the cutting of internal and external community links and supplement an oppressive social system. This was exactly the situation seen in Takahata Town.

This situation gives rise to a serious contradiction in which justice formed by practice is denied. In other words, disorder that undermines the premise may occur, and conflicts within the community of practice may be intensified. Qualitatively new practices can be created only if this serious contradiction is resolved. A new theory of practice was sought to overcome not only the contradiction in Takahata town but also the limitations of consumer culture. It is inevitably become a universal practice that approaches toward the liberation of conflicting communities and the alteration of the external social system that has constrained the community of practice.

As discussed above, the community empowerment model promotes understanding of agent's facing difficulties without separating them from the communities they ceaselessly create, and helps us to question the relationship between the re-organization of oppressive communities and

agents' independence. The practice model generated from Yamagata Prefecture's community education movement represents this concept well.

4. Conclusion: Transformative Learning and Community Empowerment

The process of community empowerment involves the transformation of a schema, which is a medium for the active organization of life. The learning practices pursued by Yamagata Farmers' College and Takahata Town focused on a new thought (schema) as a condition for the creation of new practice. This type of learning can be seen as the transformative type developed by Mezirow, and community empowerment involves transformative learning as an essential element.

However, views of transformative theory may differ from that of Mezirow, who explains that doubt is cast on the validity of the assumed frame of reference by the placement of an epistemic dilemma as a precondition and by repeated meditation based on the communicative rationality of Habermas, and that this doubt is even critically meditated. Habermas's explanation seems to have validity for the community education movement in Yamagata based on the fact that the thought of life recognition was re-examined and efforts were made to form new thought. However, in reality, the transformation of thought in practice and the generation of practice with new qualities occurred only when: (1) the contradiction within the self, as an individual formed from conventional practice ("community formation based on collaboration between the self and others"), and the contradiction inherent to the practice included in social systems are understood uniformly, and the need to fundamentally change the motive of the agent and the setting of goals (targets) arises; and (2) experience from new collaborative practices created in response to such needs (e.g., a change of farming methods) is objectified and dialogical learning for collective interpretation of related significance is developed. Focus should be placed on the generation of activities preceding the formation of a frame of reference or thought; activities precede consciousness. A model for the development of new thought is generated via the experience of collaboration, whether experimental or otherwise. Dialogue involving meditation should be seen as a process for collaborative exploration of the model.

To achieve these ends, we must acquire a language of our own to highlight the potential behind our own practice; a language that goes beyond conventional ways of thinking and the words that support them. We must develop ways of thinking and ways of living that ensure our freedom. Transformative learning construed in this sense serves as an essential element in the creation of new communities; the details and methods of community education as a practice for the organization of such learning must be clarified.

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¹ By way of example, the following political responses are based on independent support as a key concept:

2002: Act on Special Measures concerning Assistance in Self-support of the Homeless

2003: Youth Independence and Challenge Plan (2005 – 2010: Youth Independence School)

2005: Act to Support the Independence of the Disabled (from protection to independence; self-pay burden of 10%)

2005: Working and Independence Support Program for People on Welfare (subsidiary project)

2014: Legislation for the Development of Towns, People, and Jobs

2015: Enforcement of the Act to Support the Independence of the Poor and Needy

² The following resources provide further information on empowerment theory:

Miyazaki, T. (2014). Support for Poor and Needy People as a Form of Community Empowerment. *Study of Poverty*. Vol. 13. Akashi Shoten

³ *Ibid*

⁴ Sato, M. (2009). Reconstruction of Communitality and Autonomy in Education. In Yano T., et al. (Eds.), *Transformation of Education*. Seiri Shobo

⁵ For this point, refer to the following articles :

Miyazaki, T. Development Process of Community Learning Theory in Community Learning Movements: Development of the Northern Education Movement

Sato, K. (Ed.). *Creation of Community Learning*. Tokyo University Press, 2015

⁶ Makabe, J. (1970). *No no Kyoikuron (Education theory in campestral field) (I)*. p. 218. Minshusha

⁷ *Ibid* p. 224

⁸ Cole, M. (2002). *Cultural Psychology*, translated by Amano, K. Shinyosha

⁹ *Kenmochi Seiichi Kyoikuron-shu (Theory of Education)*. Vol. 2. (1973). p. 134. Minshusha

¹⁰ Bourdieu, P. (1990). *La Distinction*, translated by Ishii, Y., Fujiwara Shoten

¹¹ Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Aki Shobo

¹² *Kenmochi Seiichi Kyoikuron-shu (Theory of Education)*. Vol. 2. (1973). P. 119

¹³ Illich, I. (1982). *Shadow Work*, translated by Tamanoi, Y. and Kurihara, A., Iwanami Shoten

¹⁴ Makabe, J. (1970). *No Kyoikuron (II)*. p. 165. Minshusha

¹⁵ Gutiérrez, D. Kris, Morales, P. Zitlali and Martinez, C. Danny. (2009). Re-mediating Literacy: Culture, Difference, and Learning for Students from Nondominant Communities. *Review of Research in Education*. SAGE

¹⁶ Sen, A. (1999). *Inequality Re-examined*, translated by Ikemoto, Y., Nogami, Y. and Sato, J., Iwanami Shoten