Social Science Education in Open Universities

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This is an inquiry into the nature of the student needs and knowledge in the distance education and the lifelong education that is being provided in the social sciences. What kinds of university learning in the social sciences do students enrolled in distance education and lifelong education courses at Open Universities want ?

Two somewhat ambiguous explanations can be used to answer this question. The first is that students need to acquire professional knowledge, and the second is that they wish to master the liberal arts and acquire bildung knowledge in the social sciences.

In the university social science education, it may be essential to investigate scientific problems and to acquire professional knowledge. The relation between two kinds of knowledge needs to be stressed: as students needs more professional knowledge, the knowledge itself generally must become more integrated.

Sometimes professional knowledge, which the social sciences generates in large quantities, is liable to diverge in fragments, and this fragmentary knowledge often creates a state of complexity and uncertainty which we cannot understand. When this occurs we must know well enough and have the talent to piece together the fragments of knowledge. We must keep the essence of the scientific knowledge in sight, integrating the fragmentary knowledge. It is important for us to synthesize the pieces of professional knowledge and reconstruct the meaning of the knowledge in the social sciences.

INTRODUCTION

Student's entrance motives converge on two main purposes in the University of the Air in Japan: to pursue professional education, or to pursue bildung education. Although these purposes are very different in nature, students often have both at the same time. This has many implications when thinking about today's lifelong education and distance education, and holds an important meaning for today's social science education as well. The field of the social science is currently subject to repeated specialization, and this is thought to have a critical influence in determining the character of knowledge targeting the social science. In this short essay, I want to return to the basic characteristics of knowledge and to consider the current state of social science education and the problems caused by the need to provide both a professional education and bildung education are obtained at the same time.

NATURE OF SOCIETAL KNOWLEDGE

The most basic character in the knowledge treated by the social sciences is that the knowledge wears 'sociality.' Societal knowledge is a type of knowledge that is generated after passing through the interaction between individuals at least once. Two or more men have to understand it in order for it to exist as knowledge, and this should be made a concept. From this viewpoint, two kinds of knowledge exist in the social sciences. Although some may question whether these classifications are appropriate, the first can be referred to as 'living knowledge,' and the second as 'dead knowledge.' Of course, 'living' or 'dead' are just metaphors that correspond to what the famous economic philosopher Hayek called 'subjective data' and 'objective data.' The first type of knowledge contains a subjective opinion, and the second type can be reduced to scientific, objective facts. Social science teaching by distance education questions the following respect. If all of knowledge used in social science teaching were 'objective data,' it would be quite effective to disseminate this knowledge through popular education in large quantities. However there may be a limit in such methods in today's social sciences, since a 'fact' in the social sciences by definition contains someone's 'opinion.' In this respect, therefore, the knowledge treated by the social sciences is different from scientific knowledge. As the sociologist Weber pointed out, 'meaning' which human conduct creates is always included in societal knowledge.

For instance, a 10,000-yen note circulated in Japan is in material terms only a small piece of paper with print that is worth about 20 yen. Although this can be easily understood as 'objective data,' almost all Japanese recognize this slip of paper as worth 10,000 yen. This is what Hayek calls 'subjective data.' Thus, We can interpret that the same object is worth 20 yen on one side and 10,000 yen on the other side. This difference in the economic value

of the this slip of paper can be attributed to a difference of the meaning socially brewed there; the difference between the social meaning of 'a mere slip of paper' and 'money.' If the consideration of people does not embrace this slip of paper, the societal knowledge of money does not come into existence.

Hayek gives an example of a case where an archeologist recognizes a 'stone implement.' He thinks about whether the object which looks like 'stone implement' as it appears before him is actually a 'stone implement,' i.e., a tool truly made by man, or it is chance product created by nature. Whether the consideration of man lies here to distinguish this information is an important question. It is very possible that the question of how to understand the consideration of man will result in knowledge peculiar to the social sciences. There is a difference between knowledge directly abstracted from a physical characteristic and knowledge passed once through the mental action between people. In this respect, Hayek thinks it very meaningful to distinguish 'subjective' from 'objective.' He recognizes that this is the starting point of meaning in societal knowledge.

Therefore, 'sociality,' i.e., the characteristic of the knowledge in the social sciences, is not generated until the relation to others is established. It is not as if the problem was concluded by its own average. The knowledge in the social science has the character that is generated or renewed whenever the problem is caused between other people. Therefore, it can be said that societal knowledge is influenced easily by changes in society. Society is structured so that knowledge newly generated on the spot influences all of the social sciences. In a sense, societal knowledge cannot obtain meaning until the information of others is combined with its own information. This is a one of the remarkable characteristics of knowledge in the social sciences.

This leads to the question, —a question, peculiar to societal knowledge— of which type of knowledge is more important for society, the knowledge of ordinary people or the knowledge of experts. Because experts acquire important information and are left in an environment that they can use, it comparatively more than the man on the spot can use his knowledge, it is often evaluated that such expert knowledge has usually a higher value in society. However, the information passed by the man on the spot is more important than expert's information, because, as described above, most knowledge that exists in the society is influenced easily by changes in society. Hayek called such knowledge generated in time and place in specie 'unorganized knowledge.' This can be called, 'living knowledge.' It can be said that the individual dominates the expert or people other than "me" in this respect, although the individual knowledge of one's surroundings may be thought to have such characters.

Although the character of societal knowledge that contains the information on the spot

cannot necessarily be considered to work in practice, in theory this character often has an important meaning also. Since theory in the social sciences is continuously reinterpreted and changes from generation to generation, and it will always have the meaning suitable to the generation at any given time. Knowledge in the social sciences is also updated whenever it is used or reproduced. This alerts us to the necessity to note the following respect at once, as mentioned above, though it is clear in societal knowledge that the information on the spot is important. Such individual knowledge might not make sense, though this might seem to contradict the importance of the information on the spot seemingly. That is, we should recall here is that societal knowledge does not make sense until someone has relation to others. This is the same problem as the following. An expert's knowledge in the narrow range has importance only within that range. Here, it is more important to know how to unite knowledge that is isolated and exists in respective specialized areas. Knowledge on the spot is also imperfect at this stage; it is only a fragmented piece of information. Imperfect knowledge can be united and has potential to make amends for the mutual lack. This combination works sufficiently when societal knowledge has the character 'sociality.' Since knowledge is always imperfect, it is necessary to continuously transmit, acquire, and integrate knowledge.

DIFFUSION OF SOCIETAL KNOWLEDGE

In considering today's social science education, a problem can be seen in the increase of the knowledge in such social sciences and its tendency to diffuse gradually in modern society. We also have difficulties caused by the increases in societal knowledge. For instance, the progress of the informationalized society increases the number of media that mediate between people and invites the expansion of the amount of information as a result.

I wonder why such societal knowledge shows this tendency towards diffusion. It can be said that such phenomena exist inside societal knowledge, though it might be recognized that such phenomena are reflections of changes in the society. For one, the progress of society increases the complexity of the relation to others and the differentiation and diversification of societal knowledge. Furthermore, the social sciences diverge and increase minute knowledge in special field. The phenomenon of diffusion of societal knowledge can be explained by these two tendencies.

One social phenomenon that influences knowledge in the social sciences is 'Popularization.' From the viewpoint of societal knowledge, I wonder what situation is indicated by popularization. If we follow the definition of a sociologist D. Bell, who arranged and classified some classic theories of mass society, mass society can be characterized in several ways. First is the revolution of traffic and communications, second is the increase

in the contact between men, and third is increased the degree of mutual dependence realized by the social division of labor. The characteristics of the first and the second are the points that we focus on here. It is shown that the flow of societal knowledge and information has an important meaning when a society is popularized.

If we observe carefully, however, we can understand that the two routes are prepared in the increase and diffusion of societal knowledge by this social phenomenon of popularization. The first and second characteristics mentioned above show this. Respectively, they show two different forms of flow of information. The first brings a qualitative change in the flow of information by the progress of the popularization. The change will cause new media that mediates people, and as a result, this new channel will make qualitative change. Since this change influences the types of societal knowledge, the channels of the information are diversified. The diffusion of knowledge in a qualitative meaning results. As a result of the popularization, the second characteristic of the mass society is the tendency of people to repeat the same knowledge. Media developed once are imitated many times and are used repeatedly. The amount of information flowed expands there. This popularization generates a quantitative expansion of societal knowledge. Thus, the social movement of the popularization makes societal knowledge qualitatively diversified on the one hand, and brings a quantitative increase on the other hand. That is, the diffusion in the content of knowledge has occurred quantitatively and qualitatively.

SPECIALIZATION OF SOCIETAL KNOWLEDGE

One countermeasure to the increase and the diffusion of societal knowledge like this is prepared on the side of the social sciences. This is the division-of-labor system in the theory of social science. This specialization is implemented to decrease the charge allocation of each field and tried to combat the increase of knowledge in all respects. However, does the specialization of such theories really have the ability to counteract the popularization?

According to the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, this intellectual division of labors started in the European world suring the age of the “ Encyclopedists.” At least, the division-of-labor age of such knowledge can be considered to have stared when the world moved beyond the age of Newton; an age that was ended by the genius of just one man. That is, it was thought that two or more Newtons only would have to work on a special field, respectively dividing the range of the defense into smaller ones when it is impossible to be handled by only one Newton. In one special area that appeared narrow, the interior was actually deep, and the road that diverged there pioneered a vaster field. As a result, the theory field differentiated goes deep into the study area within a narrow range divided into successively smaller branches. Therefore, it can be said that specialization was unable to

demonstrate any effect as a wall of defense against the expansion of societal knowledge. Specialization would much rather contribute to the increase in societal knowledge than reduce the amount of knowledge. Because of this relationship, the popularization and specialization are suitable, as pointed out above, and come together after this age. Specialization has chiefly resulted in the development of a new method of the information, and the popularization has chiefly expanded the amount of knowledge transmitted.

Specialization was unable to stop the increase of quantitative knowledge and even promoted its increase in a qualitative point like this. Some difficulties are forecast from such theoretical specialization in addition to the increase of the amount of knowledge. First, a tendency toward complete isolation from the movement of reality is caused in societal knowledge. In scientific recognition, it is of course of no use to progress so far from the reality with the specialization of the theory advancing. This is because the model analysis cannot keep theoretical 'reality,' if the essential is distinguished from the not essential. Therefore, it is impossible to bring the entire individual detail observed into the theory. In the theory field of the social sciences, Hisao Ootsuka has said that deductive reasoning and inductive proof have caused in 'Ideal experiment device' to be assembled inside his head. This condition would cause any scientist to abstract any object that is not present at the time. In a sense, the world of a pure theoretical rule would be made up there. This theoretical thing which is cut out a part of the reality is neither a reality nor a different thing at all. However, the model is only a model to the end. Even if the reality were directly forecast by using this model, the reality would show hostility at once. After all, the reality is different from the model that has value in the world of theoretical reality. Perhaps such restrictions are not avoided by the model analysis. However, the problem is that such specialization makes theories into dogmas occasionally. The theory could come to be a doctrine, and there is a tendency for the dogma to influence the reality jumping over the theoretical world. Of course, it is not bad that the theory influences the reality. When the knowledge obtained within the narrow range is applied to the entire society without any examination, then it is a problem. Thus, specialization poses the risk of causing dogmatization.

Another difficulty which specialization brings is a situation that can be called a fragmentation of knowledge. The theoretical field differentiated as we have described above goes deep into the study area within successively narrow branches. As a result, each field of the social sciences extends to details and offers detailed information. For instance, law, politics, economics, and sociology have differentiated from philosophy and ethics, and they are subdivided further and have branched into basic or applied special fields in the social sciences. The problem is that this subdivided special field has narrowed. Therefore, the knowledge clarified in a special field is considered only a mere fragment. Originally, societal

knowledge was a type that made sense when combined with itself. However, the knowledge of experts is limited within a narrow range, and its use must be to confine itself. If movement of specialization is justified, these evils need to be removed.

We can say that specialization is right when the partial knowledge obtained in each narrow special field is located in the whole system of knowledge and a system by which such knowledge can be evaluated exists. As mentioned above, Ortega defined an expert as a man who does not know except his specialty at all. If experts fitting this definition spread in the world, a lot of knowledge will turn into fragments, leading to the initiation of human beings that are kept in their limits and satisfy themselves too much. On the other hand, however, Ortega said that one could compose true knowledge if one of the fragments of one's knowledge is combined with other fragments.

Usually, such balance is kept and the combination of fragmentary knowledge is able to reproduce synthetic knowledge. In an actual study field, it is only specialization that does not exist as the field progresses. Therefore, the knowledge fragmented in itself and the knowledge individually recognized is no consideration. It is a problem that the fragment is left as it is; there is only a fruitless accumulation of expert knowledge, and no effort is made to integrate this knowledge.

SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION AT OPEN UNIVERSITIES

The Open Universities in each country today supply distance education by various communications and lifelong education opened to the public. A common problem in lifelong education and distance education is that the knowledge is transmitted in large quantities and is diversified. This occurs because the kinds of students learning create a sexual difference, a generation difference, and a job difference, therefore broadening the areas of concern. And the knowledge is also put in a state with a great difference because the region to which students belong is quite wide. From the current context, it can be said that the students of the Open Universities are left in a situation of popularization and diversification of knowledge in society.

Various problems have been caused in the knowledge of the social sciences, and as we have described above, these have had a considerable influence on the education of the social sciences. The popularization and specialization of the knowledge of the social sciences must be dealt with by the education method.

I wonder how the societal knowledge that has been described up to now in the social science education will be offered to students. The idea of Boot and Hodgeson has several implications in this respect. They classify open learning process into two types. They think that the method of conveying knowledge in the education process differentiates the pattern

of knowledge qualitatively. The first learning process utilizes stored knowledge, which can be peddled out just like a commodity in an economic transaction. The second involves not individual knowledge but knowing. This knowledge is seen in the learning process, and is required in the mode of thinking and intellectual activity of the education process. It is a problem whether the student comes to be able to acquire knowledge that has already existed efficiently when the knowledge of the former is offered by social science education. On the other hand, however, it is important to find the meaning, reinterpretation and new definition in the thinking activity of the latter knowledge. The method of supplying such societal knowledge has been divided clearly between general public education and elite education. The method of the former was adopted in general public education and it was thought that this knowledge only had to be disseminated as efficiently as possible. On the other hand, a latter method that gives priority to the training of thinking and a face-to-face method was adopted in the elite education. It was thought that the methods of both type of education could not be united at that time. However, there is the tendency for the latter method to be requested in general public education due to the increase of knowledge caused by today's popularization. Moreover, it has come to be recognized that such thinking training is now necessary even in a basic and rudimentary learning.

CONCLUSION

As stated above, the advantage of social science learning through lifelong education and distance education can be found in the mutual combination of knowledge from a variety of generations, jobs, hierarchies, and regions and in the distinct possibility of achieving a synthesis. And, there is also the possibility for knowledge stored in specialized research field to be integrated. Here, the difficulties of popularization that have cut off and separated local opinions and a sense of value might be solved. It might be possible that people who are usually shut in a special office and cannot go to school because of a remote location, etc., can acquire knowledge in a less confined environment outside of their narrow space. The advantage that the social sciences might interact with the reality of the society can be considered more important, though the student who receives the supply of knowledge has the advantage of other types of knowledge at once. If we can continue the wide-range communication and combine local, fragmentary knowledge, we might reproduce a slightly more universal knowledge.

At the beginning of the 18th century, Vico in Naples explained why the university was needed. In any single art and science, he maintained, it is difficult for one individual to be sufficiently well versed in detail. Therefore, the university was constructed and all subjects and courses were installed. Though one philosopher might have been able to be an entire

university in the age of Greece, knowledge concerning the laws was needed to maintain the state in the age of Rome. Books were copied, study was divided, and the opinions and ideas of society were diversified. The necessity for the university can be considered to have arrived. Although it was necessary to arrange the knowledge accumulated till then at the university and to integrate the knowledge which continued increasing, special new areas were being developed and unknown knowledge needed to be found. The knowledge that had been buried until then needed to be reproduced because the knowledge had to be synthesized through the comparison with the knowledge newly added. At the university, the system of overall knowledge was requested to be achieved after examining the overspecialized knowledge inherited by individual scholars.

Even the situation of social science education is similar. Though it will be impossible to avoid the increase of knowledge in the professional education of the social sciences in the future, this will always be so. As described previously, the increase of societal knowledge invents various evils like fragmentation and makes knowledge a dogma.

Therefore, it is needed today to arrange, integrate, and simplify fragmented knowledge. The meaningless knowledge which ends in dyspepsia needs to be weeded out, and the useless increase of knowledge needs to be stopped. This is where the significance is in bringing a lifelong education and a distance education to social science education. As man's knowledge is either local or imperfect; this is not originally avoided. Imperfect knowledge will have a tendency to increase in the future. It is necessary to connect and to recompose the fragments, and to make sense. Therefore, knowledge must always have the capability to be communicated mutually. I think it is important to strike a balance between the collection and the integration of societal knowledge here. In considering what the significant knowledge is, both professional education and bildung education should be balanced and advanced.

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