

## *Interview:* What is the Future for Adult Education?

(Interview with professor dr. Peter Jarvis)<sup>1</sup>

**J. Jakovljević:** *According to you, what would be differences between adult education and lifelong learning?*

**P. Jarvis:** To some extent this answer depends on which country we are talking about, because adult education varies from country to country. For instance, in USA adult education includes vocational education while in UK adult education is liberal leisure time education. It means that vocational education growing out separately from liberal adult education. So, there are slightly different conceptions not only between America and UK, but in the rest of the world also.

In a real sense, by ages there was the system of education for adults as opposed to adult education when education of adults is a part of mainstream. I suspect that is how you in Serbia regard andragogy – as a part of mainstream educational system. In that way it could be said that the West caught up with you, because you had this history a little bit longer. So, when Dušan Savićević talked about andragogy with Malcolm Knowles, Malcom could never understand it, because he didn't see adult education as part of the mainstream system and we always had that difference.

Adult education varies from country to country, each contains slightly different philosophies. In one sense it could be said that all philosophies are about the fact of giving adults educational opportunities, either in leisure or in vocation. As the knowledge society happened and lifelong learning grew, then it became much more taken for granted that there is a system of education for at least for workers. In European documents in 2006., lifelong education and lifelong learning was not about people outside of work – it could be found only education for work, education for citizenship – never education for leisure, education for third-age and fourth-age people either.

Actually, it was very much about the transfer of responsibility in education from provider to recipient. Then recipient became as it were a client of educa-

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tional system and lifelong learning. So, the learner is a client to a system that could be provided by anybody. It is totally different understanding of provider and a supplier. The recipient is the one who makes demands in a market. By the end of the century we got a market economy of learning; the learner being as it was the recipient or the customer to the education who was a supplier of learning materials and learning opportunities.

**J. Jakovljević:** *What do you perceive as the most important achievement in the science and practice of adult education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?*

**P. Jarvis:** I am not sure that they are both science. I certainly don't see adult education as a science at all. Also, I don't see education as an academic discipline – it is a field of study. The field of study produces own knowledge. The discipline is the perception of the perspective I take upon from the field of practice. Education, in that sense, is the field of practice. What is the most important is that theoretical perspectives in the 20<sup>th</sup> century emerged from the field of practice.

Now, the biggest achievement was to convince the rest of the world that all these perceptions that adults couldn't learn were wrong. At the end of 1980s we began to have a difficulty with adulthood when we recognized that adults could learn. It is a single achievement – changing the view that adults could tackle learning was of major significance.

Did we produce a unifying theory? In one way we can say that the andragogy is a unifying theory, but I think that it is a body of knowledge that related to different areas of practice rather than unifying theory. Do we have a unifying theory now at the turn of the century? All we have to do is to recognize in this modern age that all grand theories are dead in some way. So, to say that we have one single theory is quite problematic. I don't think that we as educators convinced the world what an important thing adult learning is. I think that global capitalism did that, because it set demands. These demands are for knowledge – we are knowledgeable workers. From 1970s and 1980s the managers of the workplace said that the workers have to become knowledgeable. So, it was a demand - the people have to keep on learning. So, the Universities were growing because industry and commerce demanded it. In a sense, that demand placed adult education in a very important but very subservient role. I say subservient, because education became the handmaid of industry. In very real sense, that is why things like education for the third-age people is not mentioned in early documents – they were not workers and they were not important to the workplace as they were before. Until a bit later when knowledgeable workers retiring – there were no learning demands in the system for them. But, they didn't stop learning which created a

demand for learning beyond the workplace. So, no single effect has a single cause, and to say that the workplace is the only cause of learning would be quite wrong.

There is a demand now for more and more researches to be done to understand the knowledge, applications of more and more things we are exposed to, like the media and the web. All of that added to the opportunities to learn. So, even though the workplace was primary cause, certainly was not the only cause.

*J. Jakovljević: What would be the biggest obstacle in further development of adult education?*

*P. Jarvis:* Money! Fundamentally, the people who can't afford to pay and those who want to pay for education throughout lives are the middle classes. There will always be this major divide between the people who can and can't afford to pay for education. Maybe the latter don't want to pay either, because if they didn't have a success in school they could not get the jobs demanded them to keep on learning at least informally. Then they don't want to spend the money on things that don't interest them. It is not just that we are talking about the West.

In the third world, the people who desperately want to learn, can't afford it either. Then we are coming back to the major thing in industry. Europe outsourced the labor from the countries where the labor is cheap. The demands, to produce knowledgeable workers, are not the same from industries in the poor countries. They don't want knowledgeable workers, because they could be expensive. What they want is a cheap work force. What poor countries have is a mindless type of work that is outsourced from Europe, because it is cheap. So, the battle goes on. As poor countries become richer, Europe and other rich countries are moving again and outsourcing the work force from elsewhere. So, in that sense the money becomes a major issue, but there must be an incentive.

We, from adult education, know that the relevancy of what you study is important. If your interests come from the field of leisure, you will learn something about that. For example, the people who are keen on gardening they will learn something about gardening, but they don't have to go in Education Center for that – they will go to Garden Center. The Garden Centers offer courses of gardening – they give lectures on gardening, but also they give practical demonstrations. But, the course on gardening in Garden Center cost money as well.

So, money and motivation (two Ms) are crucial factors in adult education, but in the same time they are major obstacles. Clearly, motivation can exist in many countries around the world where money doesn't.

*J. Jakovljević: In understanding the world as a learning society, could knowledge be interpreted as a factor of cohesion or as a factor of distancing the societies, considering different levels of achievement the learning society?*

*P. Jarvis:* That is the major trap in the term knowledge society. The knowledge society does not use the whole spectrum of knowledge. It only uses a small amount of knowledge – it uses science, technology, social sciences that deal with organization and efficiency, it uses law, economics and trade. It does not use the humanities. So, we actually don't have a knowledge society at all. We have a society that places emphasis on certain forms of knowledge and that becomes a core to knowledge society.

That is dangerous, because in neoliberalism where the end can often justify the means and there is no other morality, then increasingly we can use science to produce the goods we want. Let's take ecology for instance – the big corporations, many of which pollute the world, do that for the sake of profit. The science produces their goods, but they forget the ethics, the ecological and biological issues of the world. So, we have to be aware that if we talk about knowledge society we actually talk about scientific knowledge society used for Western capitalist purposes mostly. This is not the world we want.

On the other hand, if you are relatively poor person in India and you get scientific education you can become middle class person. So, there won't be many objections to this type of society from there. People, who become middle class because they can master sciences, won't oppose that type of the world because they have a benefit of it. Let's look at another example, health – lots of people would not be alive today at all if they didn't benefit from the scientific society and the world we live in. As we are direct beneficiaries from these types of societies, it is very hard to say that is good or that is bad as it is simple. It is not simple and we just have to face the reality of complexities of these arguments. Perhaps, if we look at it realistically we can tackle it more.

Again, there is no grand theory. We have to recognize that the most power lies with those who control the money and information technology - that's not the individual governance, that's large corporations. Today, that would be mostly in America. But, this could change rapidly with the tremendous growth in China. As they are causing the changes in the world with production, they can bring changes in some other aspects. We will see what will happen in the future.

To conclude, yes, knowledge does produce distance between societies, because some countries can afford a scientific research base and many poor countries can't. Lots of big Universities offer Master or PhD degrees or scholarships for people from poor countries. Once they get scientific education somewhere else they won't go back, because the standard of living and so education is like a magnet. So, the rich countries benefit more and more from researchers and the poor countries are left without them. Consequently, knowledge becomes divisive mechanism.

**J. Jakovljević:** *Does education change the world or the social changes i.e. the world change the education? From the historical perspective, what is the interrelation of education and social changes?*

**P. Jarvis:** We can say that work changes the world basically and the scientific work changes the world. If we look at the studies of humanity, man as worker and man-labor, Marx and many other people emphasize that element. In the knowledge society the work needed knowledge and then the knowledge becomes a factor in the change. The fact that the work makes changes in the world is not only the western concept. Confucius said that hard work leads to achievement and ability to achieve. So, if you work hard you achieve. Consequently, the change comes from people who are prepared to work hard and prepared to keep on working against the odds. Knowledge and education have become an important factor in it.

Education is a change agent because of the demands of those who work hard to produce capital. But, at the same time is useful for those who produce capital. So, it is not a primary change agent, it is more being changed by primary change agents. But, having been changed it becomes a very useful tool in the process of change. And in the knowledge type society knowledge is a major tool the worker has. But, the man as worker is a major change agent. Accordingly education becomes a tool.

**J. Jakovljević:** *Which are the biggest changes in adult education that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will bring?*

**P. Jarvis:** I think the realization that it is the whole person that learns and the fact that we continue to learn and use our knowledge, for not just capital production but for the good of the whole world and for the good of people. It could already be seen that the older people, for instance, who keep on learning get a sense of achievement from doing it.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century might push us to the recognition of the wider implications of learning then we have at the moment. Perhaps, the recognition of the things like 4 pillars of learning (from the Delors report), although I think it should be the 5<sup>th</sup> - learning 'to love planet'. The humanistic nature of education and learning is not as dead as it was in 20<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, I think that it is important to put the whole person back to a learning theory, not just bits of a person. Therefore, the more governments begin to use formulations like this, they are becoming more popular and we may begin to see more changes in that direction.

I think that financial crisis of the last year has dented people's confidence in neoliberal economics. My fear is what we see now is that form of neoliberal-

ism is reestablished because it is supported by politicians. Also, the quickest way to get out of the crisis is to reestablish the past, rather than to find another way forward. So, I think that the great opportunity for real changes is missed in this crisis. Perhaps we have to wait for the next one, unfortunately. But, there is a wider perception. The confidence of the Europe was destroyed by the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, maybe the confidence of neoliberal economics will be destroyed by this crisis even though it is continuing. Maybe we will see changes as a result.

**J. Jakovljević:** *What are the values that characterize learning society?*

**P. Jarvis:** Knowledge society is driven by neoliberal economics and capitalism. So, the fundamental value is profit for the few and the power goes with it. That is very much in contrast with the values we put to education and learning. The knowledge society which is near to neoliberal economics has few values that are fundamental to humanity itself. On the other hand, learning gives you a sense of self-achievement; by learning, individuals have a better health, better understanding of the world etc. So, there is a cruel dichotomy between the values of the neoliberal economics on one side and values of humanities on the other. Someone says that the pure science has no values. I am not sure about that, because pure science tries to reinterpret the world as it is. But, no empirical knowledge has a value implicit in it, no fact has knowledge implicit to it, it is a power that people can pose knowledge upon it or values upon it. Even Marx was writing about class bias I think he was quite right for the world and time we live in now.

**J. Jakovljević:** *What is the relation between lifelong learning and happiness?*

**P. Jarvis:** I am not sure there is an intrinsic relation between LLL and happiness, because I can learn to be sad. We have to recognize the complexity of this relationship.

In another sense, learning is intrinsic to people who can begin to make a meaning and to find some forms of contentment. But, learning itself has no intrinsic value either. Learning is more about human being's benefit as a result of learning. It could be that the more I can pursue the questions that I have no answers to, the happier I will become. Again, it is not the simple relationship, but more we begin to philosophise learning the more we can recognize those complexities.

If it is the whole person who learns and if we place the emphasis on the humanity of the learner then we can get back to learning to be, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to care for planet. There is a sense in which for the whole my life I am learning to be me. So, the key is to be concerned for the learner and the process of learning so that we keep on becoming and growing

as human people - the process of becoming. Therefore we keep becoming who we are!

**J. Jakovljević:** *What do you think that we should ask the ones who deal with adult education? What would be the key question that would you ask someone from this field?*

**P. Jarvis:** All these questions or just why do you want to become adult educator?

