III. SOCIOLOGIJA

ADULT LEARNING DIMENSIONS: CASE STUDY OF BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE

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Abstract

The world today is looking into the ways of promoting and enhancing individual and national existence through activating lifelong learning. This trend places more and more demand on all stakeholders to be present in this undertaking and to encourage more participants to join in. The demand for active participation in learning from outside and the inner projection of one's own existence is discussed in the didactic literature and in social research. Active participants in lifelong learning are adults whose situation can be described in dimensions. ICT as a tool has a particular power in extending the access of learning opportunities by "withdrawing from proximal view". In such a way it offers yet a more liberatory approach to participation of yet broader groups of individuals. The current article looks into a small-scale case study of the blind and visually impaired adult learners for the presence of the universal dimensions of adult learning.

Key terms: lifelong learning, adult learners, adult learning dimensions, ICT, blind and visually impaired people.

Introduction

Learning all life is becoming the norm in the present situation in the world. The presence of learning in human life is explained as immanent to the existence of an individual e.g.: a basic human right (Mezirow et al, 1990); or as immanent to the context of our existence e.g.: learning is taken as an integral component of any living system (Kolb, 1984. du Gay 1996, Brown and Duguid, 2000). Individual learning is seen as liberatory, overcoming outer oppression (Freire 1997). However, on the far end of the same attitude individual learning is judged as a futuristic, utopian dimension related to the private sphere of self-reflection, which can provide a consideration of one's fundamental values and therefore of one's identity (Brownhill, 2001). The context in which the individual lives and which provides its own reasons for continuous learning often seeks to reinstate itself. Thus the researchers Bourdeau and Passeron (1977), Giddens (1994) highlight the reproductive force of society supported education; Althusser (1972) sees state provided education as serving the ideological needs of the state; many authors justify learning as the core of economic development (Conceicao, Heirot and Ludwall, 2003; Eraut, 1997; Oliver, 1999) and some, in a dystopian vision of society, consider the threat of learning all life to become compulsory (Merriam and Caffarella (1991), Tait (1998). They argue that educators believe in the goodness of continuous learning. Yet, the scholarly argument about the benefit of politically supported learning all life is still vibrant. The examples are drawn not so much from the empirical description but, rather, from the prescriptive projection of what a future society with lifelong learning and life wide learning could look like.

The aim of the article is to overview the presence of the adult learning dimensions supporting the two existing trends, i.e. institutionally supported and individually undertaken adult learning.

The object of the research is manifestation of adult learning dimensions in the ICT application by adult blind and visually impaired people.

Methods used: document survey, literature analysis, metaanalysis.

Adult learning dimensions

Continued learning includes adult learning which in its present situation comprises both state controlled and uncontrolled modes. The situation of adult learning can be framed by applying conceptual measures, adult learning dimensions. The use of the term dimension in social and educational literature is diverse. To use dimension with a certain interest in mind and give "the meaning to the measure through meaningful indicators" is a position supported by an education management scholar Jeliazkova (2002). She emphasizes that "Dimensions are usually selected for a certain study with the certain interest in mind […] The interest determines in large part the indicators selection" (p.90).

For the lack of common definition of the model of sustainable development dimension as a conceptual guideline is created in the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission Report UNIDO, 2005) where sustainable development is given conceptual guidelines i.e. environmental dimension, economic dimension and social dimension .

Adult learning dimensions depend on the variables of the learning reality (Bitinas, 2000; Targamadze, 1998). The societal tier of the learning reality consists of the political-legal, economic, socio-cultural and technological influences (Senior, 2006) and temporal environment characteristics. These types of sources roughly build up legally enforced political dimensions and didactic process dimensions, which exist as didactic theories and are, in most cases, not enforced.

Legally enforced political dimensions

Supranational and national visions of the learning society

Visions of the future learning society are also supported on the supranational and national policy levels. Thus political-legal influences, very often combined with economical and technological, find their expression in dimensions mentioned in strategic and supportive documents on the supranational, as well as national, level.

EU vision of the future society is developed in the European Commission documents (1995, 2000, and 2001); The Bologna process in higher education documents (from1999). From these documents appear the dimensions of the future of European zone society: employability/flexibility, active citizenship, social inclusion and personal fulfillment (Jarvis, 2004).

On the national level, Lithuania's national policy seeks to conform to the European Union level economic and social conditions, to participate in the social programmes on the global scale and to develop its own social identity. These facts are supported by Lithuania being a party to a number of international and supranational programmes, conventions and agreements. Of the main international agreements which influence the vision of the future learning society in Lithuania could be mentioned: the "Dakar Framework for Action. Education for All" which calls for :" Meeting our collective commitments of ensuring education for "each citizen of each society," (UNESCO, Action plan), and EU Membership Treaty in 2004 after which Lithuania became a part of many EU Council, EU Commission and the Bologna process actions. These documents transposition international vision of the learning society onto the national vision.

National documents signpost the steps Lithuania made in forming national vision of national learning society since Lithuanian Education Concept Document (1992); Lithuanian Adult Education System Concept (1993); Law on Non-formal Adult Education (1998), Long-Term Development Strategy of the State (2002); Long-Term Economic Development Strategy of the State (2002); National Education Strategy 2003-2012; Law on Education (2003); and Strategy for Lifelong Learning Implementation (2004); the White Paper on Science and Technologies (2001), and many others. The main dimensions for the future Lithuanian society are security, competitiveness, strong political control, efficiency, inclusion **(**Long-Term Development Strategy of the State, 12 November 2002, No. IX-1187), information technology growth, democratic principles and citizenship, preservation of national identity (Proposals for Scientific Research and Development Priority Setting, LET, 2006).

Humanism, democracy, preservation of identity and historical continuity, renewal as openness to change, development of the skills needed for the state, personal professional development are listed as the main normative dimensions for the future society (General Concept of the Education in Lithuania (1994); Lithuanian Adult Education System Concept (1993); Strategy for Lifelong Learning

Implementation (2004). Equal opportunities, contextuality, efficiency and continuity are listed as the main principles of education in the Law on the Amendment of the Law on Education (2004).

The politically enforced dimensions of adult education listed within the learning environment are shown in Table 1. They have political–legal influence on supranational, international and national levels incorporating economic influence, and technological influence.

Table 1. **Normative dimension characteristics of the societal tier**

Sources	List of normative dimension characteristics
Theoretical literature	Participation; equality; inclusion; competitiveness; empowerment; successful life
International documents	education for "each citizen of each society"
EU documents	employability/flexibility, active citizenship, social inclusion; personal fulfillment
Lithuanian documents	security, competitiveness, strong political control, efficiency, inclusion ; information technology growth; democratic principles and citizenship, preservation of national identity; information technology growth; democratic principles and citizenship, preservation of national identity; humanism, democracy, preservation of identity and historical continuity, renewal as openness to change, development of the skills needed by the state, personal development professionally; equal opportunities, contextuality, efficiency; continuity

Didactic process dimensions

Adult learning didactic process dimensions are the dimensions derived from the existing adult learning theories. The theories are classified as behaviourist, humanist, cognitivist, social and situational (Merriam, Caffarella, 1998); behaviourist, humanist, cognitivist, gestalt theory, social reproduction (Cullen et al, 2002) and constructivism, socioculturalism, transmission, metacognition (Pollard 2005). Most authors classify the theories from the point of view of how a learner participates within the learning process from the psychological point of view and what effect the learning process can produce on the personality of the learner. However, when looked at from the point of view of the management of the learning process and the involvement of the teacher as the manager of the process many of the above theories also fall into the category of management theories of learning, among such most widely quoted are: double loop learning (Argyris, 1976); social learning theory (Bandura, 1977); situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991); social learning (Vygotsky, 1976); conscientization (Freire, 1997).

There is certain juxtaposition in terms of education and learning in didactic process dimensions. At the foundation of the juxtaposition there lie two philosophical approaches to the interaction between the state and the individual. Durkheim, in his social study *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education* has pointed out that society acts through our consciousness in telling us what to learn (Durkheim, 1973) and thus, eventually, supports the idea that the state is the educator of the individual. Giddens in *Modernity and Self-Identity* holds that an individual cannot take oneself as a passive being forced by the conditions to act, and the individual is forced to make conscious choices, however, these liberatory acts of choice may be held as both: 1) empty, being one of many, often richer motives; and 2) dangerous, since responsibility [of the State] becomes meaningless (Giddens, 1991). Two positions supporting the initiative to educate and the initiative to learn stand in juxtaposition. The communal sphere ruled by the state takes upon itself the care about education where as the individual initiated learning not all is appreciated outside the individual.

Jarvis (1998) seeks reconciliation of the individual and society through education and states: "to become educated is to become a member of society" (p.181). Learning, in his understanding, is by its very nature essentially private and individualistic. Yet, in many policy-forming documents there is an attempt to shift individual emphasis from learning and explain relation between education and learning as symbiotic. Jarvis writes: "[…] the power that holds education and learning together lies in the fact that learning, as expression of individual liberty cannot be sustained for long outside the interdependent and overlapping communities to which we all belong "(p.193). For example, the approach to education is most commonly agreed as a basic learning need (UNESCO, Dakar, 1990); as an integral part of social model (EU Brussels, 2002); as a tool for achieving global goals. Although education and learning are seen as elements of the same process, political literature clearly emphasizes the importance of political commitment in empowering the state controlled education system to meet the challenges of the environment and the needs of the individuals. Learning is treated as a right and as a means which can be fostered through education.

On theoretical grounds learning and education are seen as two differently charged concepts. Education is a public phenomenon and gains public recognition for the learning it provides. Jarvis (1998), in effect, seconds this approach and shows the evolution of learning into education through an institutional process. The society's distrust to learning in Jarvis's opinion emerges because of the very nature of learning "private and individual" therefore the society cannot control it and cannot assert that it "actually took place" (Jarvis, 1998), therefore the only recognized learning is certified learning. Such approach reveals the tendency to give normative power to education as the accepted learning in the learning society. Ritzer (1993) and Hartley (1995) warned the society of overcharging the education with control. Ritzer points out four dimensions: "efficiency", "quantification and calculability"; "predictability" and "control" which close the naturally open "soft" system of learning reality and turn this system into quantifiable – hard system, which is not acceptable for any complex social system.

On the other hand, from the perspective of lifelong learning only learning, not education, opens possibility to learn all life. Edwards et al. (1998) maintain that since the settings of adult learning are far wider than the formal institutionalized provision of adult education, learning is a far wider concept than education. The value shift from achieving a status of an "educated person" to a "lifestyle learner" is reflected by Edwards (1997).

By some authors education and individualized learning are treated as equal values, for instance by Israel, Checkoway, Schulz, Zimmerman (1994); Niemi (2004) maintains that: "The ability of people to gain understanding and control over personal, social, economical, and political forces in order to take action to improve their life situations comes through education or self-regulatory learning"(p.14).

Adult learners and ICT

Adult learning, utilising technologies like the Internet, will play an increasingly significant role in society, undercutting the dominance of traditional, institutionalised education and training. This prognosis is suggested in the Tavistock Institute report 2002 (Cullen et al, 2002). The information on ICT spread is regularly updated by EU initiatives and stand alone attempts to measure the situation. The data used in this article are taken from the survey carried out by the Nordic Council of Ministers "The Indicators for the Information Society in the Baltic Region 2005" and a more focused survey, overviewing the extension of ICT tool to the groups of society on the verge of seclusion, Grundtvig 1 project "SEE–VIP – Selected eLearning Education for Visually Impaired People" initiated market study „Needs of Visually Impaired and Blind People in the Baltic States (Lithuania and Estonia) 2007.

The results in the Nordic Council of Ministers produced material prove that ICT is used at home and work on a daily basis as a popular communication tool and "the perception of tools as well as their actual use enable the mind to progress to new knowledge" p.57 (Cullen et al, 2002).The scope of such alteration is more than 53 million people in the Baltic Region, who use the Internet to communicate with others. Another important purpose of ICT use is searching for information: 43 per cent of the population in the Baltic Region, compared to 37 per cent of the population of EU25 is involved in this activity.

By 2005 more than one third of the region's population have participated in organized computer courses and one in ten has used the Internet for formalised educational activities. 48 per cent of the Lithuanian enterprises use the Internet for training and education, which is far more than the EU25 average of 20 per cent.

The overall trend indicates an individual and organized efforts to develop along the new paths of knowledge acquisition. However, on the background of technologically empowered society their still remain groups which do not have equal access to the knowledge created by ICT tool. Didactic approach to deal with this situation is best reflected in Conscientisation call to listen to the needs of citizens, e.g. "those which are formed in solidarity with the interests of the least powerful in society"p.5 (Cullen et al.,2002). The grounds for such collaboration are to support the overall dimensions of the political development of the society which are to cause the change in the status of all individuals in the society. A survey of a social group of users verging on the seclusion was Grundtvig 1 project "SEE–VIP – Selected eLearning Education for Visually Impaired People" initiated market study "Needs of Visually Impaired and Blind People in the Baltic States (Lithuania and Estonia) 2007".The survey was carried through questionnaire analysis and by face-to-face interviews. The tasks of the market study were:

1) To review the development level of eLearning in Lithuania and Estonia and also, where possible, in Latvia, and the involvement of the blind and visually impaired in distance education in these countries;

2) To examine the attitudes of the blind and visually impaired with regard of learning/teaching in general and distance teaching/learning in the Baltic States, using empirical data; to identify the barriers and favorable factors influencing the opportunities of distance education for the blind and visually impaired in the Baltic States; using empirical and other available data;

3) To assess the needs for eLearning for the blind and visually impaired in the Baltic States; using empirical and other available data.

Genetic or acquired vision impairment, sudden or gradual loss of vision affects the life style, values, behavior and emotions of the person and people around. In an effort to facilitate best possible conditions for the blind and partially sighted to integrate in the society under the new conditions, the World Blind Union (WBU) and the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI) have prepared a programme Education for All, which is a part of the broader programme Vision 2020 (www.vision-2020.org) aiming to ensure an opportunity of education to every blind or visually impaired child.
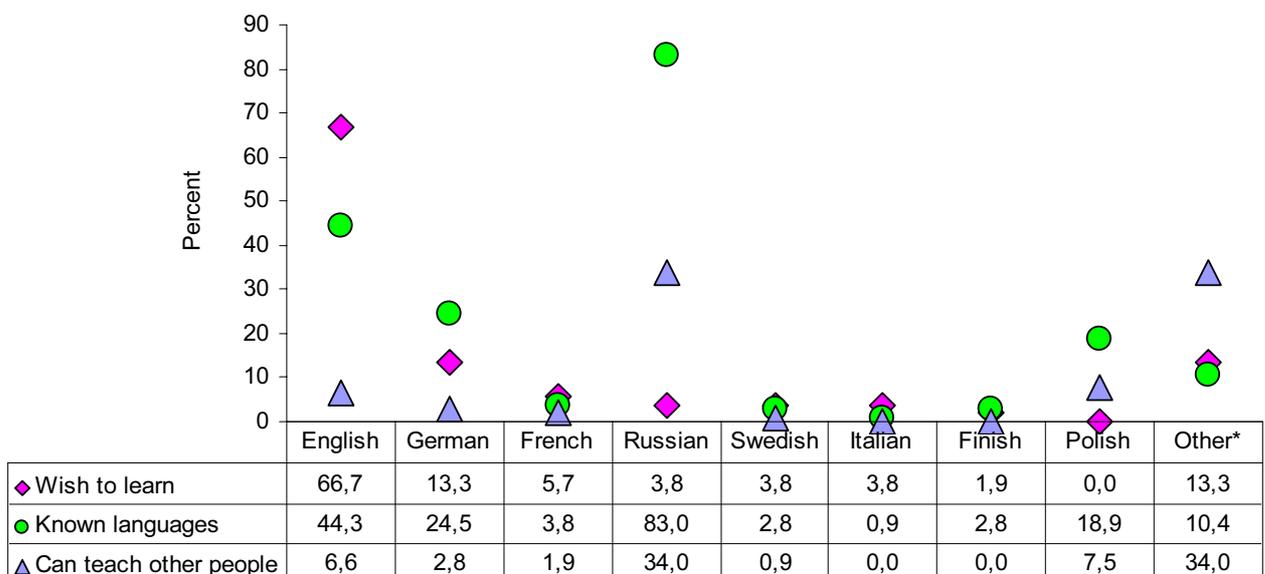
In Lithuania, blind and visually impaired people learn computer literacy in:

1) The formal education system: LASUC (Education Center of Lithuanian Union for the Blind);

2) the non-formal education system, which includes institutions offering services to the blind and visually impaired, such as centers of social services, day centers, community centers, the Disability Business Information Center, etc.; it also includes projects aimed at expanding competences that the blind and visually impaired need in an information society;

3) The blind and visually impaired informally teach each other to use computers; several publications are available to assist the blind and visually impaired to acquire computer literacy skills independently.

This last trend, in particular, points to the situation, which in Giddens' (1994) opinion is directly related to the growth of the information society.

This latter trend is seconded, as the survey „Needs of Visually Impaired and Blind People in the Baltic States (Lithuania and Estonia) 2007" shows, in some other areas of learning situations.

In the course of the survey the respondents were asked about the languages, which they can speak, which they want to learn or could teach others. It appeared that blind or visually impaired people in the Baltic States could speak a lot of languages. Among the most popular used languages were Russian, German and English (see Picture 2.11). Other Slavonic languages (Belorussian, Ukrainian, Polish, Slovak) were also mentioned some of which were native tongues of the respondents. Some respondents claimed to be able to speak Scandinavian languages (Swedish, Finnish), Spanish, Italian, Czech and other (see Annex 2, Question 23). Several of the face-to-face respondents said that they were very basic users of other languages, but they maintained that they could communicate with others or understand each other. That particularly related to the English language, see picture 1:

	English	German	French	Russian	Swedish	Italian	Finish	Polish	Other*
♦ Wish to learn	66,7	13,3	5,7	3,8	3,8	3,8	1,9	0,0	13,3
● Known languages	44,3	24,5	3,8	83,0	2,8	0,9	2,8	18,9	10,4
▲ Can teach other people	6,6	2,8	1,9	34,0	0,9	0,0	0,0	7,5	34,0

Picture 1. Distribution of the respondents by language skills. In per cent.

Among the languages that blind or visually impaired people wish to learn in the Baltic States a lot of people mentioned English (listed by almost two-thirds of the respondents). The respondents were asked if they could teach others the languages that they know. About one fifth did not offer any answer to the question, but several respondents picked some languages that they could teach others. One third indicated the Russian language (see Picture 1). Other languages, which the respondents indicated as able to teach, are native languages such as Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish and other. The respondents who had philological education stated that they could teach English, German or French languages and other languages. The respondents interviewed face-to-face agreed that they were able to teach languages but in a non-professional way only.

Such movements as providing computer or language teaching to each other, in the opinion of Cullen et al (2002) signal complex changes in traditional notions of identity, community and - by extension - social exclusion and integration., as a result of globalisation and instantaneous communication.

Conclusions

1. Adult learning diversity within the context of lifelong learning allows to measure the whole phenomenon by dimensions which generally fall into two groups: legally enforced political dimensions and non-enforced didactic process dimensions. These two groups to some extent reflect the relationship of an individual to society and the juxtaposition of learning to education.

2.ICT as a new tool in acquiring knowledge enhances independent knowledge acquisition and heightens society's diversity along the dimensions of information access and participation.

3.The traces of the tendency in the group of blind and visually impaired adults are to teach other members of the group computer skills and languages show the that this group of participants in adult learning and education signal changes in the traditional understanding of exclusion and integration and, in particular, to learning and participation in education.

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SUAUGUSIŲJŲ MOKYMOSI DIMENSIJOS: AKLŲJŲ IR ŽMONIŲ SU REGOS NEGALIA ATVEJIS

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Santrauka

Suaugusiųjų mokymasis visą gyvenimą trunkančio mokymosi kontekste – platus ir daugialypis reiškinys. Siekiant apibrėžti šio reiškinio erdvę taikytinas matas – dimensija, konceptualiai tapatinama su suaugusiųjų švietimo, mokymo bei mokymosi išorinėmis bei asmeninėmis paskatomis. Politiniai, ekonominiai, socialiniai, kultūriniai ar techniniai visuomenės keliami tikslai nubrėžia švietimo siekius valstybiniuose ir tarpvalstybiniuose dokumentuose. Šie tikslai ir suvokiami kaip įstatymiškai palaikomos suaugusiųjų mokymosi dimensijos.

Įstatymiškai negrindžiamos, bet visuotinai prieinamos didaktinio proceso dimensijos taip pat apibūdina suaugusiųjų mokymąsi. Situacijos kompleksiškumas pasižymi dar ir tuo, kad šiuolaikiniame pasaulyje atsiranda naujos mokymosi priemonės – IKT, kurios išryškina mokymosi prieinamumo ir dalyvavimo mokymosi procese dimensijas. Straipsnyje remiamasi tyrimais, atliktais įgyvendinant Šiaurės Ministrų Tarybos ir GRUNDTVIG1"SEE-VIP" projektus, ir nubrėžiami pagrindinių mokymosi dimensijų pėdsakai socialinėje suaugusiųjų grupėje, itin jautriai reaguojančioje į visuomenės iššūkius žmonių su regos negalia aplinkoje.