9 Informal learning is not informal education?

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Informal learning in the community can be seen as one of the most central concepts in the research by Sabina Jelenc Krašovec. In this chapter we try to get a deeper understanding of her ideas on learning and education related to that concept and confront these thoughts with a broader scientific discourse on informal learning. The idea for this was triggered by a statement we found in an editorial in the Journal *Andragoška spoznanja/Studies in Adult Education and Learning*:

> Informal learning in the community is neither formal nor informal education, it can also take place in educational institutions but then outside of the official curriculum as this is mostly about resisting the imposition of knowledge as regulation (publicly certified knowledge). (Jelenc Krašovec, 2017, p. 10)

What does it mean when informal learning is not (formal or) informal education? What are the concepts behind this quote and what is specific to learning in the community? To gain a deeper understanding of these issues, we first discuss the concept of "informal learning" and then reflect on the interrelationship of learning and education, which also allows us to look at the principle of teaching. With these concepts and ideas in mind, we turn to Sabina Jelenc Krašovec´s work on learning in the community and finally conclude with some thoughts on the specificity of this educational context and the significance of the specific forms of learning and education occurring within it.

9.1 What does "informal" mean?

In the European debate on lifelong learning, the distinction between three approaches to new knowledge has established itself. However, the distinction between formal education, non-formal education and informal learning is by no means as trivial as the casual use of this subdivision in many documents suggests. Formal learning is usually understood as participation in state-recognised general or vocational education programs that lead to generally recognised qualifications, the curricula of which are coordinated with educational administration and social partners. Learning opportunities that are institutionally anchored but do not lead to recognised qualifications as well as all vocational training and continuing education then fall under the category of non-formal learning, although, in this context, problems concerning clear demarcation have already surfaced in

the international debate. The delimitation of forms of informal learning seems to be even more difficult and obscure.

The term, originally coined by Dewey (1938), is used today primarily to refer to supplementing organised forms of learning or alternative forms of knowledge acquisition. It is easily overlooked that informal learning as learning outside of institutional contexts is the oldest form of learning, and is responsible for the biggest part of all our learning (Eraut et al., 1999). The discussion on informal learning, which has been going on internationally since the 1970s, can therefore be understood as a rediscovery of the most original form of human learning. What is essential here, is the awareness that learning is not limited to organised measures and institutionally embedded programs, but takes place in a wide variety of life contexts (cf. Schmidt-Hertha, 2013). At the same time, the international scientific discourse on informal and non-formal learning also reveals the vagueness of this classification of the different forms of learning (cf. also Overwien, 2000) and the difficulty of giving the term "informal learning" an empirically tangible form.

Various criteria can be used to distinguish between formal, non-formal and informal learning, but only a few central characteristics can be addressed here. The degree to which learning is organised, structured and organisationally embedded may differ. Thus, depending on the learner's influence on the content, goals, methods and temporal structuring of learning, the degree to which learning arrangements are self-controlled or externally controlled can be determined. However, learning processes can only be located on this continuum if they are intended, goal-oriented and organised in a certain way. Learning processes can occur consciously or unconsciously; learning results can be directly accessible as explicit knowledge, or they may take the form of implicit knowledge, as such not being directly communicable by the learner themselves (cf. Baron et al., 2000; Eraut, 2000). Thus, one can further distinguish organised vs. spontaneous, directed vs. incidental, and conscious vs. unconscious learning –- although again, these are not categories but continuums, each with its respective extremes.

In order to be able to make empirical statements about formal, non-formal and informal learning, it is nevertheless necessary to draw a boundary between the different forms of learning, even though this can hardly go beyond an idealised heuristic. Informal learning is often either equated with non-intentional, incidental experiential learning (Marsick & Watkins, 1990; Mocker & Spear, 1982), or it is reduced to mere self-directed learning. It has become common practice – not least due to the operationalisations applied in the Adult Education Survey and the

relevant publications of the EU and OECD – to also subsume forms of self-directed (i.e. intentional) learning under informal learning (cf. Dohmen et al., 2019). The borderline between non-formal and informal learning then runs along the institutional embedding, i.e. the (external) degree of organisation of the learning processes. A clear demarcation of informal learning from socialisation and enculturation processes, however, does not occur. This negative definition of informal learning as learning that is not embedded in structured offers leaves it as a residual category – albeit one that is quantitatively very significant (e.g., Coffield, 2000; Tough, 1982) – the specific quality of which is hardly recognisable (cf. Billett, 2004, p. 118). Against this background, a limitation of the term informal learning to learning processes perceived as such, at least retrospectively, seems sensible (cf. also Garrick, 2005), because it maintains the concept of incidental learning as an intersection of informal learning forms. Livingstone (1999, p. 69) suggests that the essential characteristic of informal learning is the independent acquisition of knowledge or skills that endure long enough to be recognised as such in retrospect.

9.2 Learning and education: two sides of one coin?

In the discourse on learning outside institutional arrangements, informal learning (e.g., Kusaila, 2019) and informal education (e.g., Noguchi, 2017) seem to be used synonymously, even if learning and education are generally treated as rather different activities. The difference between informal learning and informal education becomes clearly visible once we focus on the acting subjects – the informal learner and the informal educator (e.g., Feng et al., 2017). However, the latter is usually thought of as a non-human actor (e.g., television) or addressed with respect to learning environments that do not fit the idea of informal learning outlined above, but could rather be associated with non-formal learning (Roosmaa & Saar, 2012). Nonetheless, the question remains whether informal learning may also include activities that might be referred to as education. To answer this question, some more insights on learning and education may be helpful. To this end, we will draw on some of the ideas on learning voiced by Sabina Jelenc Krašovec.

> Learning is always composed of two integral processes – interaction and internalization; at the same time, learning comprises cognitive, emotional and social components (Illeris, 2002, p. 19). Informal learning includes all three components and simultaneously opens the door to real, active knowledge that connects individuals to the topical problems in the society, the people solving them, to willpower and passion. (Jelenc Krašovec, 2017, p. 11)

Though this point seems obvious, it is still highly relevant as it argues against a reduction of learning to a purely cognitive process. Learning – whether formal or informal – always goes together with emotions and it always has a social dimension, too, even if it does not necessarily happen in the social presence of others. Learning occurs when we interact with the thoughts, ideas and emotions of others, no matter whether they are communicated in a personal encounter or materialised in texts or objects (e.g., artwork). Learning can be planned, organised, and reflected in many ways and settings. However, most of our learning remains unconscious and tacit, as it is based on experiences which we do not identify as learning experiences (Eraut et al., 1999). In this sense, learning becomes a more or less unavoidable and ubiquitous event which may happen at any time or anywhere. Thus, it seems necessary to identify the kind of learning that is meaningful for the learner, on the one hand, and for society, on the other. In Sabina Jelenc Krašovec´s work, both dimensions seem to be of equal relevance.

In contrast, education is thought of as an intentional process that is to some extent planned and usually organised by people other than the learner themselves. Jarvis (1983) conceives of education as a "planned series of incidents, having a humanistic basis, directed towards the participants´ learning and understanding" (p. 26). In his *International Dictionary of Adult and Continuing Education*, Jarvis (2004) lists various definitions of education, all of which, however, agree more or less explicitly on education being a planned and organised process. In coherence with this approach, informal education can only refer to those forms of learning which are intentionally planned and organised by the learning individual themselves or by others, beyond any kind of institutional setting or professional teaching. Informal education in this sense includes self-organised learning as well as peer teaching or planned learning processes inside a community, as long as they are not organised by education professionals, otherwise they would be considered formal or non-formal education.

Applying a rather linguistic point of view, we can say that there is no passive subject in learning. A person can learn, but they cannot *be* learned. By contrast, in education, the learner is actually passive as he or she is educated, while the active part is the one who educates. This educator is active in organising and planning the process of education – in some instances, the educator and educated may even be one and the same person. In other words, education is driven by the ones who arrange the learning, not by those who learn. In a sense, this is what John Garrick (1998) points to in his book *Informal Learning in the Workplace: Unmasking human resource development*, when he describes how human resource professionals are

encouraged by managers to convey a hidden agenda of commitment in processes of informal education.

The aim of education is learning, but education as a planned and organised process does not necessarily reach its goal. While education describes the activities undertaken to motivate, initiate, and foster learning, the learning itself is inseparably linked to the learner and their dispositions, motivations, etc., in the context of a specific situation. If we focus on learning that is to a certain extent planned and organised, learning and education can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Education then describes activities that enable learning, and learning happens in an environment which has been prepared to enable these processes. If we focus on learning as an exchange among people – which seems to be the main focus in Sabina Jelenc Krašovec´s work – we can differentiate between the role of the learner and that of the educator, each with their very own tasks. However, this differentiation cannot be made in informal settings where these roles are mixed up and where social exchange means that all subjects involved learn and teach (or educate) simultaneously (e.g., Thalhammer, 2017). The central tool for this exchange, for learning and for teaching, is communication based on the relationships among subjects.

> Habermas (Habermas, 1989; 2001, p. XI) puts the question of communication at the core of his theoretical model of society, which is based on the theory of communicative action. He connects the individual observer, actor and speaker with other observers, actors and speakers in the field of intersubjectivity, which explains how the participants' interaction with one another gives rise to their mutual interpretations of social situations. An individual is in fact not isolated but is instead involved in interpersonal relations in which he/she is defined as a personality and actively participates as a subject. (Jelenc Krašovec et al., 2017, p. 57)

Habermas (1981) further develops his idea of non-hierarchical communication, providing equal chances for all participants to initiate, engage in, and interpret communication, thus creating the ideal conditions for unfolding human rationality and, analogously, for learning. In other words, based on Habermas´ approach, an ideal learning situation is one which gives equal chances to all subjects involved to adopt both roles, i.e., to be learner and to be educator. In this case – and probably in this case alone – learning and education might be considered one and the same, as participants are engaged in or at least have the chance to be equally engaged in both processes.

However, the focus of the inquiries and ideas formulated by Sabina Jelenc Krašovec was not so much on forms of institutionalised education, but rather on something

that is also discussed under the term "public pedagogy". This term is broadly used, and according to Sandlin et al. (2011, p. 340) five orientations can be found in public pedagogy: "(a) citizenship within and beyond schools, (b) popular culture and everyday life, (c) informal institutions and public spaces, (d) dominant cultural discourses, and (e) public intellectualism and social activism". The idea of public pedagogy is related to learning in a public sphere and to the inseparability of learning and resistance against the powerful structures inside a society. Even though the concept is criticised as "unwieldy and often under- and un-theorized" (Ford & Jandrić, 2019, p. 93), it makes it possible to link learning and social resistance in a civil society, revealing that learning occurs in the course of these activities which necessarily also leads to activism.

9.3 Can education be informal?

The practice of adult education is historically closely linked to political agreements, often through the definition and reproduction of the culture of local, regional or subcultural communities. Against this background, and in contrast to it, another of Sabina Jelenc Krašovec's research foci needs to be examined, – that on informal learning by adults in the community, especially in "open public spaces". Activity by adults in the community (e.g., in public discussions on local problems), in her view, means a radical and critical practice that strives for more social justice, inclusion and greater equality for different groups. Due to the pressure to resolve everyday inequalities, injustices and the lack of consideration of the needs of the residents of the community, including those of the excluded and/or disadvantaged residents, new forms of (participatory) community democracy are emerging as a form of decision-making on community issues. These can also express themselves in resistance to established conservative practices and stereotypes (Jelenc Krašovec, 2017, p. 9). This leads her "to think that all of this can only be resolved in the community, outside of educational institutions, outside of organized and goal-oriented education, which often renders people small and powerless" (Jelenc Krašovec, 2017, p. 10).

In her research approach, Sabina Jelenc Krašovec is particularly concerned with public spaces as "everyday arenas where people share experiences beyond their immediate circle of friends, family and age group" (Jelenc Krašovec et al., 2017, p. 56). These include areas that are traditionally considered to be public open spaces (e.g., main streets, street markets, parks, playgrounds and allotments), filled with diverse people and uncontrolled events. These open public spaces provide communication and learning experiences that force people to move beyond the self and to consider

the plight of others. In this way, open spaces offer the breadth necessary for the flow of information between the people involved, and they promote the exchange of ideas and knowledge through mutual cooperation: by acting in these open spaces, the persons involved learn who they live with and at best, they learn what these people think and dream of (Jelenc Krašovec, 2015; Jelenc Krašovec et al., 2017).

In summary, this approach refers to a relational concept of space in which the space itself is understood as being socially constituted and created by everybody included in it. In this way, the action-structuring effect of open spaces is brought into focus, the fact that they enable open and indefinite social and personal changes in a variety of ways (Jelenc Krašovec et al., 2017).

The challenge here is to recognise and research the pedagogy that reinforces our own private and public lives. This broad understanding of learning contexts widens the perspective, allowing educational researchers to answer crucial questions concerning the investigation of places and people outside of formal educational settings. Sabina Jelenc Krašovec meets the challenge of researching specific forms of knowledge in this difficult-to-access field of research. Through her empirical studies, by researching changes in various public open spaces, she can confirm that learning was not mentioned often by the members of the communities themselves, but rather mostly took place as a hidden activity (Jelenc Krašovec et al., 2017, p. 55).

> This was obvious also in our research through their narratives that emphasised collaborative planning, sharing knowledge, internalising the meaning of social actions, becoming empowered and therefore initiating new actions. (Jelenc Krašovec et al., 2017, p. 59)

Although this invisible learning is mostly linked to the acquisition of tacit knowledge, her research still reveals the great importance of this type of learning, which takes place in the course of everyday actions by people who want to influence the quality of their lives, democratic practices, their own personal and possibly also professional lives. The studies show that this knowledge is particularly important or even crucial in the struggle for rights, personal and community growth and development (Jelenc Krašovec, 2017, p. 11).

In open spaces, learning tends to take place unplanned or unintentionally, and mostly unconsciously. In this way, the growth of tacit or implicit knowledge is encouraged. In contrast to formal or explicit knowledge, this form of knowledge is difficult to express or extract and therefore more difficult to transfer to others, either by writing it down or by verbalising it (Baron et al., 2000). Because it is not

intentional and frequently unconscious, it often remains unknown and, thus, invisible. Accordingly, the challenge in exploring this special form of learning is that it takes place unconsciously (Eraut, 2000). Against this background, Sabina Jelenc Krašovec differentiates between two forms of tacit knowledge:

> The two forms of knowledge being produced are 'knowledge as emancipation' and 'knowledge as regulation' (control), where knowledge as emancipation vacillates between colonialism (state of ignorance) and solidarity (state of knowledge), while knowledge as regulation is constituted between chaos (state of ignorance) and order (state of knowledge). (Jelenc Krašovec, 2017, p. 9)

Her aim is to show that this form of learning is particularly well suited to overcoming politically imposed knowledge, to critically reconsider neoliberal pressures and errors as well as the consequences they have for our everyday lives: it also includes the transfer of economic principles to areas of life beyond work and economic activity. The normative freedom of the individual vis-à-vis collectives is emphasised, especially with regard to freedom as a comprehensive social value that is revealed in the public space through the reduced power of the state (Jelenc Krašovec, 2017, p. 10).

The learning environment in educational institutions is usually structured and regulated, shaped by prescribed goals and authoritarian relationships. In contrast to institutionalised learning settings, learning in public spaces, formed by citizens through discussion, is changeable and open. In this way, it is comparatively free from forms of regulation and control. Such learning is unpredictable, multi-layered, natural, experiential and based on the problems experienced by the citizens. Invisible learning in public space can be described as "emancipatory, democratic, civic and bottom-up" (Jelenc Krašovec, 2015, p. 113; Jelenc Krašovec et al., 2017, p. 58).

If problems of the community are tackled together in public space, then a learning process takes place that can be closely linked to self-reflection and perspective transformation (Jelenc Krašovec, 2015, p. 113; Jelenc Krašovec et al., 2017). However, it should be kept in mind that it is also "in a way more demanding, because its course and results are dependent on a participant's skills to perform it" (Jelenc Krašovec et al., 2017, p. 58). In addition, learning experiences in public spaces are not always comfortable and joyful, "but can be defined by hesitation, disjunction, discontinuity and conflict between participants" (Jelenc Krašovec et al., 2017, p. 58). Skills for interacting with others, for negotiating and conducting dialogues, are therefore particularly important. These skills allow for private topics or interests

to be translated into public and common concerns (Jelenc Krašovec, 2015, p. 114). These demands on the learners become even more evident once it is taken into account that, in the special learning context of the open space, those involved take on a double educational role: "Participants are teachers and learners at the same time" (Jelenc Krašovec, 2015, p. 110). It might thus be said that in this way, but perhaps only in this way, informal learning in open spaces could quite possibly be considered informal education.

9.4 Conclusion

In most cases, informal learning is different from informal education. However, the work of Sabina Jelenc Krašovec points to a certain idea of learning in the community that seems to dissolve the boundaries between informal learning and informal education, as both happen simultaneously and seem to be inseparable. What does this imply with regard to these two concepts? The theoretical differentiation of learning and education – as two separate activities – is in many ways fruitful and rewarding. Nevertheless, it remains an analytical one and there are empirically cases and situations in which this distinction is no longer applicable, nor would it be helpful. It would appear that learning in the community is in fact such a case. However, through the lenses of educational research, a reflection on differences between informal learning and education seems to be helpful here, too. The recognition of the inseparability of learning and education in the context of learning in the community itself is relevant to understanding the specificity of this learning environment. Learning in the community is characterised by blurred boundaries between learning and education, and between learning and teaching, respectively. This, in itself, is an important finding which allows us to better understand the learning processes taking place in this context.

In addition to the blurred boundaries between learning and education, another boundary seems to be up for discussion – namely that between researchers and those who are the objects of research. In a context in which the traditional roles in learning and teaching are broken down, the distinction between researchers and respondents has to be called into question. Sabina Jelenc Krašovec did just that with her understanding of research not as a neutral view from the outside, but rather as a process of involvement or – following a systematics outlined by Creswell (2003) – by adopting an advocatory approach to research. The idea of research being a part of its own research object necessarily challenges the differentiation of the roles of researchers and respondents, leading to an approach which is currently discussed under the label of "participatory action research"

(Visser & Kremers, 2020). From that perspective, Sabina Jelenc Krašovec to some extent blurred the boundaries between doing research and learning when, for example, she practiced her field research together with students: "First of all, the student-led research conducted in both public spaces was a learning process, which also holds true of the process of writing this article" (Jelenc Krašovec et al., 2017, p. 68). In her approach, the researcher is first of all a learner, learning from engaging in the field, from interacting with other people and writing down ideas on personal experiences. In doing so, researchers not only promote their own learning and become aware of it, they also try to verbalise their thoughts, to share and discuss them with other researchers in the network. By leveraging these forms of communication, writing, and encouraging learning, adult education researchers become "public andragogues":

> If we now try to define the role of the 'public andragogue', this is to be a person who speaks and listens but at the same time also learns and writes about the importance of keeping the public and learning through public communication and acting. (Jelenc Krašovec, 2017, p. 12)

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