

ESREA Active Democratic Citizenship and
Adult Learning Research Network
Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy,
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade

MOVEMENTS FOR DEMOCRACY, CRITICAL LEARNING AND THE LIMITS OF WHAT WE KNOW

Book of Abstracts



Belgrade, 2023

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Performativity and Overcoming the Knowing Paradigm in Adult Education

The question of the importance of education in a democratic system is as old as democracy itself. What makes the connection between democracy and civic education today relevant is an assumption that broad participation of citizens in solving public problems requires education throughout life, including adulthood. It is argued that the ability of people to participate in democracy depends on whether they have acquired certain skills, values and knowledge. On the contrary, in this workshop, I will argue that in order to be better equipped to share our lives together and build more democratic ways to live in the world; we need to abandon the acquisitional approach to education and learning at all. In order to advance and deepen democracy, adult education itself should become more democratic. In order to critically understand the world, it is not required that we turn to knowledge production. Moreover, it does not require that we know at all. Therefore, the abandoning of the knowing paradigm is suggested. By the knowing paradigm I refer to the mainstream belief that we need to know in order to learn, grow and develop. Our culture insists that we need to know how to do things to be capable of doing them. Knowing has been the primary way we have been socialized to engage in the world. Adult education needs to address this epistemological bias. This is not to suggest abandoning the knowledge itself, but it rather suggests that we reject the authority of knowledge that keeps us from growing, by embracing the unknown. What it takes is being with the discomfort and becoming with it (using it for creating with it). A simple way to do that in adult education is to turn to play, performance and improvisation. In the workshop, I will offer a set of improvisational exercises that will show that improvisation is not opposite to knowledge, but rather a radically different way to engage with the world. It enables us to focus simultaneously on the process and result, instead of the result itself (the knowledge). Performative approach to adult education engages creative capacities of everyone involved in the learning process, to be active creators of their learning and living environments. It entails cooperation and exchange by promoting continuous

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acceptance of ideas and experience of others, and at the same time building on those offers. As such, it involves giving mode exchange in which we use our differences and our creativity to discover new ways of relating to each other, in the process of changing ourselves and our world. Acting in the direction of what we do not know, enables us to go beyond what exists and reproduce the *status quo*. It is a creative response to local and global social problems, an approach that is reconstructive and generative of new ways of creating possibility. Performativity is not merely another tool to achieve social change; it is a qualitatively new approach to human growth and social transformation.

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