

## **Address at the Funeral of Peter Jarvis:**

***Methodist Church, Thatcham, England, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018***

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I first met Peter Jarvis in the autumn of 1985. I was starting Surrey University's part-time M.Sc. course in Educational Studies, mainly because a colleague – who had recently finished an equivalent course in London – told me Peter was the rising star in Adult Education. For the next two years I studied in his classes every Wednesday afternoon and evening. I discovered that Peter's reputation was well-founded. He proved a remarkable teacher, partly because he encouraged his students to discover for themselves. Peter encouraged us to follow ideas wherever they took us – and to see learning as a collective endeavour. He was also a teacher who learned from his students: in this he followed the "great tradition" of adult educators. R.H. Tawney, the great historian and social theorist, remarked that he could "never be sufficiently grateful for the lessons learned from the adult students whom I was supposed to teach, but who in fact taught me". Peter said much the same, many times, but – unlike Tawney – he also used his adult students to help understand how adult learning happened.

Although Peter and I worked together for many years, and shared a deep commitment to adult education, I never really shared his interest in learning processes as such. There are friends of his

here today far better qualified to explain it. Famously, he developed a theoretical model of the learning process, and represented it in a diagram: I remember teasing him about how the diagram mystified me! ... But of course what mattered was that it had quite the opposite effect for many of his students – and for many thousands of his readers. As Professor Martin Dyke of at the University of Southampton, another of his former students has written, Peter’s model “has proven a valuable tool for reflection ... with educational practitioners ... contexts across the world”.

Because, of course, what also made Peter’s work different was that he shared his insights not only with his students, but with his readership. As Kierra has mentioned, Peter wrote; as she also vividly recalled, writing became a central part of his life. By the end, he had written over 20 books, and edited dozens more. Not to mention the articles. The story of Peter’s writing is, in fact, pretty remarkable in itself. Although he’d written a bit – a few academic articles, and for the Methodist press – Peter’s first book wasn’t published until he was in his mid-40s. That was a textbook on *Professional Education*. Two more textbooks followed. They were grounded, of course, in his teaching; they were influential; they connected with readers. One of them, *Adult and Continuing Education: Theory and Practice*, is now in its fourth edition.

Peter had a phenomenal capacity for work. I recall one time when he, Colin Griffin and I were working on a book. Colin and I bumped into each other in the departmental post-room the evening before we were to meet to discuss our contributions. Neither of us had written our chapters. “The good news”, said Colin, “ is that Peter hasn’t done his either.” But the next morning he had; and it was good.

Textbooks are a fundamental part of education: they help students make sense of what is already known. Mapping, organising and explaining existing knowledge well is no mean achievement in itself. Through his textbooks Peter became well-recognised in caring professions such as nursing, as well as adult education. But when he was around 50, Peter began to publish books that made a genuinely original contribution to human knowledge. The first of these, *Adult Learning in the Social Context*, rebutted behaviouristic approaches to understanding learning, which, he said, “artificialised the normal, natural processes of learning and ... failed to examine the richness and completeness of the human learning process.” It was there that the diagram I found so mystifying first appeared. In fact, of course, the mystification was entirely mine: the book won Peter the Cyril Houle Award of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education – a prize given for an “outstanding” book that “reflects universal concerns of adult educators”. Peter was to receive the prize

again twenty years later for his book on *Globalisation, Lifelong Learning and the Learning Society*.

Teaching, and writing influential textbooks, and award-winning contributions to theory, were only part of Peter's scholarly contribution in the 1980s. He became a remarkable academic entrepreneur. In 1981 he co-founded the *International Journal of Lifelong Education*. He continued to edit it – with help, over the years, from colleagues and friends, some of whom are here today – for 35 years. In 1987 his first major edited book appeared. Around the same time he launched two book series. All these brought other people's work into the public realm. Of course, some were written by established "names". But many authors were "nurtured" by Peter, and some of the work he encouraged proved really important. One of his great talents was spotting talent – among students and academic colleagues.

Peter didn't only spot talent in people: he was also adept at spotting potential in ideas. Michael Newman, now one of Australia's leading adult education scholars, recalls Peter pronouncing: "These are the books you should be reading." And going out the next day to buy them at the university bookshop.

This capacity to see what mattered in new ideas went hand in hand with enthusiasm for them. Peter was constantly engaging with new work from across the social sciences: especially Sociology,

Philosophy, Political Theory and Ethics, and Psychology. Sometimes it could be a bit overpowering: Peter seemed to have digested and critically evaluated authors I had hardly heard of, let alone read. This engagement with the new meant that his work ranged well beyond learning theory: the titles of a couple of his later works give a flavour: *Ethics and the Education of Adults; Learning in Later Life; The Practitioner Researcher*.

But I suspect Peter's most permanent contribution will be in his development of a deeply moral, humane, and democratic, theory of learning: that theory has, I think, entered into the subsoil of the field of adult education (and of related fields such as professional and higher education). It will be fertilising good growth, and flourishing, when not only he, but we, are long gone.

Peter was, of course, famously a glutton for international travel. I remember teasing him by calculating what proportion of his life had been spent in airports! But travel meant that he was constantly meeting new people, engaging with different environments, being influenced by new perspectives, and encouraging people to write. Let me quote Professor Akpovire Oduaran of South Africa's North West University: "Peter gave us hope when nobody wanted to hear the voices of adult educators from the so-called developing and poor countries of the world." His ability to take a global view was remarkable: it was for that reason

that he was so much valued by comparative and international educators. Professor Han Soonghee of Seoul National University in Korea says Peter also left “a huge footprint in Asia, ... promoting dialogues between ... East and West.” It’s no accident that one of Peter’s last published articles was entitled “Learning to be a person: East and West”.

Peter spent much of his professional life at the University of Surrey. When he joined it in the 1970s, Surrey was new: concrete, plate glass, Portakabins and lots of mud. He devoted decades to it, including several years as head of the Department of Educational Studies. With others here today, he designed curricula and developed new courses. Among his smaller achievements was encouraging me to return to Surrey. The result was that we worked very closely together on research projects, taught together, organised seminars and conferences, occasionally wrote together. We didn’t always agree. But we learned to disagree in friendship, and I came to know him as a loyal and steady friend as well as an acute mind. Some people have the talent to turn even irritation into pearls: Surrey could irritate, but Peter was one of ITS pearls.

Let me finish by quoting two other leaders of adult education. Professor Bill Williamson of Durham University remembers Peter’s “commitment to democracy [and] dialogue, and [his] deeply rooted concern for the ‘other’ whoever they were”. Some of you may recall

Professor Lalage Bown, who spoke so movingly at Peter's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday about his decision to donate his books – when he had at last finished with them – to Gulu University in Uganda. (Lalage devoted her professional life to adult education in Africa: she knew how important that gift was for a new university in a developing country.) Peter, she writes, was “a lovely man and utterly dedicated to a humane view of adult education”.

I'm not sure I can better that as an epitaph. Peter was an outstanding scholar and adult educator. He loved his family, Maureen, Frazer and Kierra, and his grandchildren, and often spoke of his pride in them. Above all he was a good and kind man – and that shone through in his scholarship and permeated his writing and teaching.