

**Zsuzsa Mátrai**

University of West Hungary  
[matraiz@t-online.hu](mailto:matraiz@t-online.hu)

## **On the Threshold of a New Period: Survival Pedagogy**

### **Abstract**

Because of the “revolution of money” the social-economic environment of education has been changed rapidly in the last 10-15 years in the western type societies. The enterprises can be collapsed or sold from one day to another one; the safety of people on working places does not depend on their own achievement at all. The “self-destructive” state has been withdrawing the money from the public services, especially from health service and public education. In spite the extension of higher education the degree does not guarantee a professional way in the appropriate direction. By the everyday experience of people everything became uncertain both existentially and mentally; the future became uncalculated.

In these circumstances the education needs to face to the new challenges. How can it help the survival of people? What kind of general and transfer competencies needs to be developed in them including such survival techniques like ability of reversibility, leaving routine, role ex-change, and attitude of co-operation between the people instead of ousting and struggling.

### **Key words**

revolution of money, survival, reversibility, shifting roles, abandoning routines

## **Introduction**

Not very long ago I got a copy of a book on the “Revolution of Money” by Miklós Almasi (Almasi, 1995), which had a powerful influence on me, affecting my thinking as much as did János Kornai’s work entitled “Shortage” (Kornai, 1982)

The economist Kornai went against the spirit of the age, proving that a centrally planned economy did not and could not have a future, since the concept of deficit was naturally and organically embedded in the system, just like capital in a free market economy. Since then I was of the opinion, like many others, that economic reform was insufficient, that there was a need for structural changes. Several years later, unexpectedly, the economic change did happen, alongside political structural changes, and, without a doubt, this gave hope for a better future.

### **I. On the threshold of a new period**

More than 20 years have passed since the changes in political regime took place and we have been living in the “Brave New World”. We began to gain experience initially with satisfaction, later increasingly less, that we have become part of Europe, or rather the Atlantic Centre or even the Globalised World. Why then is there dissatisfaction?

1. Overwhelmed by new phenomena and yet still looking towards the West, it became more and more difficult to find our way. In the newly established free market economy we soon started to feel that we were faced with familiar concepts from the old times. Replacing the old 3- or 5-year plans, in the private sector new monthly or quarterly plans started to become the norm, where planned figures hardly ever matched the real data, due to the ever growing demand to produce a surplus. Therefore, in medium and large enterprises "development", which has to do with growth, and “slimming”, which has to do with cuts, kept alternating hectically. On the other hand, in the public sector, where each government increased the burden on employers by introducing a stream of increasingly innovative taxes and various other requirements, most income seemed to disappeared into the bottomless pit of the repayment of debt (nobody knew what the loans were for), “feasibility studies” that were of little public value, as well as company and bank consolidation procedures or other incomprehensible activities. As a result little remained, or to be more precise, less and less money remained for public services and for the maintenance of state services. This is what was called "monetary restrictions", and the increasingly drastic cutting of public services was called "structural reform politics".

The common belief was that this only occurred in the so-called "new democracies" and it only happened where the government has no money. It was believed that by reducing the debts and directing the economy towards growth - which is dependent on well designed economic policies and occasional restrictive measures - we would be able to catch up with the developed countries. Since "all (is) quiet on the Western front", there is everything unchanged.

The well known GDP-based argument against demands for the immediate redistribution of wealth was a shocking experience of déjau for the people socialised in the Eastern Block: “we can only distribute what we have already produced”.

Then Miklós Almasi proved, through international examples in the book mentioned above, that capitalism is not capitalism any more even in the West. Money, which took the form of capital and served investment and the development of production, had by now been divorced from production and began to live a life of its own, becoming self-serving because investors showed that one can earn a lot of money from money and not from production. Thus the philosopher Almasi went against the spirit of the age, just like the economist Kornai before. According to him, he did not have much influence, especially amongst economists. The “story of production” stubbornly continued to persist.

Ever since his thoughts struck me, I started to see the world with different eyes. Here we have, for instance, competition, which is clearly a feature of a free market economy. What we knew was that, a market economy meant the huge production of consumer goods, and as a result of competition consumers could obtain better quality goods and services they needed at favourable prices.

Is it still the case? Some of our recent experiences would certainly deny this. Plenty of goods are available, but it is no longer the customer who dictates, but the market. We have to buy what is offered, yet often we cannot find what we really want. Shops selling mass produced goods are stuffed with the same kinds of goods from South Africa to Northern Europe – whether they are clothes, shoes, electronic equipment or children's games. Naturally, exclusive shops also exist, but their prices are extremely high. The quality of the cheaper products is often poor – they may only last for a season or two. Therefore, unsurprisingly, we have to buy new ones. Some prices may drop drastically, like cheap flight tickets (although their conditions have all sorts of restrictions), but at the same time very expensive airport taxes have been introduced. How very imaginative and innovative! Take the example of the non-professional investors. For them what matters is to make as much profit as possible, regardless of what brings profit. If a business does not make enough money, the owner sells it and buys a different one. But it is often the case, even if the business goes well because they sell goods for more than they spent, they are more likely to enter the stock market to earn more rather than to reinvest in production. Even the major professional investors have not the same aspects than before. If production needs major development, investors would rather abandon production so that they have new markets for their existing enterprises.

Further examples are unnecessary. Instead I would like to share my conclusions. Competition, which was thought to encourage quality production and economic growth, is disappearing. Instead, what we experience is exclusion and the withdrawal of funds. The victims of the policy of exclusion are those small and medium enterprises that have invested or plan to invest in production. The victims of the massive withdrawal of funds away from production are large enterprises or even national economies. If production and economy lose control over finances and virtual capital takes over, which has no relation with production, and which expands without production, there is a constant threat of crises in national economies, and all this can make the direction of the world economy process irreversible.

2. We may not yet be at the final stage of the period of the "revolution of money", but there are clear signs of the consequences it has exerted on the historical-social process. I will be so bold as to modify the concept of what historians called the "long 19<sup>th</sup> century" because in my view it has only just ended rather than at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, I believe that evolutionism, characterised by the term "long 19<sup>th</sup> century" and the notion of linear progress based on quality selection and quality competition have finally come to an end. By historical metaphor the West-Roman Empire has now come to an end (leaving aside the question of where the Visigoths are coming from), since it is very clear that the states of the Atlantic centre (Hungary amongst them) are abandoning everything they have achieved through civilization. Endre Kiss labels this phenomenon "self-destructive societies" in the context of his globalization theory (Kiss, 2008). In our everyday life this can be experienced in the drastic cuts in social, healthcare and education expenditure. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the public to have access to the achievements of civilization partly because the state is constantly reducing public sector expenditure, but also because public functions now operate on a market basis and public services, which should be financed from taxes, are openly exposed to the uncontrolled profit-making endeavours of the private sector or virtual capital. In this regard, I have always been amazed, for example, by the concept of "deficit hospitals" and if this were not a matter of life-and-death, I would even find this a clever economic-philosophical metaphor (see also neoliberalism as an economic-philosophical apology of privatization).

3. The influence of the "revolution of money" and the "self-destructive society" on the mentality of people is more dangerous than the historical-social consequences. Doubtless, we live in an insecure world, but this does not fully describe the way we feel. It is more accurate to say that in a world where "everything is uncertain" we have to cope somehow: we have to be prepared to race on a borderless track where obstacles are repositioned during the race. Today's rules are changed by tomorrow; the

ditch was here yesterday but it will be somewhere else tomorrow. One cannot count on the uncountable. One cannot get used to unpredictability.

Human being is a teleological creature. He/she has concept of his/her own aims. This is the essence of the human race. In the life of the individual, evolution means progress towards his own aims. For instance, one studies to obtain profession; he works to have a better quality of life. He develops so that he can achieve more. Current experiences are different. He studies but it does not necessarily guarantee a profession, let alone a job. He works if he can but even a great deal of work will not guarantee a better life. And it will be quite painful to realize that even hard work has not much to do with success. What can a loyal employee do to contribute to the success of his company or office? The answer is what he could do in the past: he tries his best to work to the required standards and do his job efficiently. But all of a sudden everything changes. The company is sold, the office is closed, he gets a different job or, worse, he is made redundant. He feels that decisions are made by external forces over which his work or his loyalty has absolutely no influence. Nothing he can do will make a difference.

He lives under a constant threat, always alert. What can he see around him? Not competition but exclusion and bullying; everybody is confronted by others: the young with the elderly, the elderly with the young, producers turn against consumers and consumers turn against producers; employers against employees and employees against employers; doctors against patients and patients against doctors; teachers against students and students against teachers; the state against its citizens and citizens against the state.

In the life of the individual long term plans make no sense. The individual has to prepare for survival.

## **II. Survival pedagogy**

For a long time I was a determinist in the sense that I believed that school always reflects society, it cannot go beyond its framework. Surveys have confirmed this, for instance those by Coleman (Coleman, 1968), which showed that even the schools of the American grass-roots democracy reproduced the white-Anglo-Saxon-protestant middle class and thus preserved the existing social strata. The determinist views were somewhat challenged by surveys that examined social mobility; studies analyzing the correlation between students' achievements and their socio-cultural background showed that the socio-cultural background does not always determine students' achievement. In some Northern European countries, Sweden for example, the influence of educational policy to guarantee equal opportunities was apparent. Swedish schools in the 1980s seemed to be able to counterbalance disadvantages: survey findings showed that the achievement of Swedish students were not determined only by advantaged or disadvantaged family background or local social subculture (Báthory, 1989). On the other hand, the determinist view was further strengthened by a continuous emphasis on the socializing function of education, i.e. the requirements, in the educational literature as well as in the pedagogical thinking, that schools should prepare youth for social life: in two senses, namely that the socializing function partly serves integration into society, and partly an acceptance of the present social structure.

Now, however, on the threshold of a new period, this is where pedagogy has problems. What should it socialize for? What we have now? Exclusion, bullying and fighting against each other?

I do not believe this. On the contrary. I believe we should go against the flow. Specifically, against the *Zeitgeist*, against the current thinking. We have to change the mentality of the "hero of our age", which is considered natural these days, that you do something to others what you would not want others to do to you. Whereas it is the exact opposite that should be the norm: do not do things to others that you would not want others to do to you!

I remember the term "poor in spirit" was created in ancient Christianity before the big turn by Paulus. It applied to those rich people who joined with all their wealth some ancient Christian congregation, because they felt sympathy with the poor. It is about the ancient rich who volunteered to become "poor in spirit". It is this mentality that should be revived: the young should become old, the elderly should become young; the producer a consumer, the consumer a producer; the employer an employee, the employee an employer; the doctor a patient, the patient a doctor; the teacher a student and the student a teacher in their spirits.

But here I must stop. I have to admit that I cannot continue the list of examples with the state and the citizen: the state does not have spirit. Nevertheless I hope it is clear what I am talking about: cooperation, reducing self-destruction, stopping total self-destruction. In brief: about the counter socialization, about the unique, unprecedented role of pedagogy to change direction. But in order to do that, pedagogy should be thematized differently. To give an example, I underline three major topics, three educational techniques that have the power to change mentality.

### *1. Reversibility*

This term was introduced in the psychological-pedagogical literature by Piaget on the basis of experiments distinguishing four different phases in the development of thinking, when he showed that the ability to reverse concepts develops in the third phase, between ages 7-11/12 (Piaget 1970). It seems that the majority of adult society or even the influential part of the intelligentsia has put this ability out of practice, to revisit the basic questions and redirect the answers if necessary, as Copernicus and Schliemann did. Is it true that the Sun rotates around the Earth? Is the epic by Homer just fiction? The fact that Copernicus reversed the thousand year old belief opened new ways in cosmology. Schliemann, to the dismay of archaeologists did indeed excavate Troy, following Homer's descriptions.

And now I also reverse something: the well-known Hegelian thesis. Is it true that all that is real is necessary? Is it true that there is no alternative to the revolution of money and self-destructive society? Is it really necessary that people in the pursuit of their own happiness will turn against one another instead of cooperating? But we could ask numerous other questions of a more limited nature. What, for instance, is the relationship between law and truth? Is it really sufficient for a procedure just to be "legitimate"? Should not law serve the truth?

There are many questions to be revisited. This is perhaps sufficient to indicate the importance of reversibility and the possible role pedagogy could fulfill in the process of counter-socialization and in the changing of mentality. There are numerous options in instruction and education to re-establish the possibility of reversibility: from the selection of teaching material to tasks developing thinking in any school subject, at any level and in any type of school, including and emphasizing adult education.

### *2. Shifting roles*

This educational technique I consider as important as reversibility, partly because the two are connected, partly because it can have an important role in the development of cooperative thinking and in the practising of role plays. The revolution of money and the self-destructive society both suggest the feeling that "top" and "bottom" are constant, that the hierarchy of power and wealth in the society are eternal. This is certainly not true (we experience this in the change of political regime), but people get stuck in their role, often giving up their identity in order to live up to the roles they have to fulfill. This way such socializing techniques and behaviour patterns get fixed that would only operate in the given roles, therefore creating a wall between people at the "top" and "bottom".

Furthermore, we should not just think of so-called hierarchy-roles, like those in power and those who are excluded, or the rich and the poor. The importance of the ability to shift roles in everyday life is much bigger. It is possible to abuse a role or to be bossy as a shop assistant or an office worker or even as a parking attendant. So it is not only the vertical relations that are affected by the lack of awareness of shifting roles, but also the horizontal ones: the one who is a shop assistant now, will be a buyer in the evening, the worker in one office will be a client in the other. And, naturally, everybody parks

his/her car (except for the parking attendants, perhaps). If people were more aware at least of the horizontal relations, that it is not "top" or "bottom", but "once at the top and then at the bottom", behaviour patterns might change as a result of shifting roles, in the direction of mutuality and cooperation. There are numerous opportunities to practice the ability to shift roles, too, in education. Only if the topic is in the focus of teaching materials and the related tasks are part of the requirements.

### *3. Abandoning routine*

Effective teaching and training develop routines: well-established techniques that can be successfully applied in related situations. In mathematics, for instance, an example is the equation formula, which can be easily applied in situations given in textual mathematical problems. Or when we install new software on our computer, we will know which menu list will provide the functions needed. Similarly, our everyday life is full of routines. We know how many duties we can complete in a day, or we know which part of the day is the busy time on the motorway to the Balaton, or where we find shops or post offices that stay open late or which pharmacy or hospital would be on night duty.

To be precise we used to know these, when we were living in a world that was functioning on routines. But we do not live in such a world any more. The formulae have not changed, but the majority of micro- and macro circumstances which influence our lives radically have changed. We do not really know what obstacles we may encounter if we need to arrange something and when we set off in the morning in Budapest or on the motorway, and we cannot be sure whether the office hours are still the same. We have to build in our lives alternative routes and we have to cope with unexpected situations on a daily basis. The only way to do this is to abandon routine, if we should not insist on doing what we used to do before.

To survive the unexpected changes of the micro-circumstances is a daily task. But in a broader perspective, if we think about how to survive the revolution of money and the self-destructive society, we should completely abandon the routine of being alerted. Instead we should apply the routine of changing viewpoint, considering others' interests and values alongside ours. Without a real reconciliation of interests it will not be possible to solve conflicts, and without cooperation there is no sustainable social cohesion.

So it is not sufficient to teach routines. We also have to teach people to abandon those routines that do not work anymore and which would reproduce self-destruction. I believe this is a new task for pedagogy, and one of the basic tasks of survival pedagogy in changing attitudes and developing new skills.



Finally, two personal comments. I am aware that there may well be those who accuse me of idealism. I do not mind: I would rather be an idealist than a determinist. In idealism at least there are ideas, aims. In other words I want to regain my basic features as a human being. I am also aware that what I am talking about is not yet a crystallized theory or even an idea thought through in every detail. It is rather a collection of reflections, thoughts and sensations. Law is the thing that "speaks clearly". The fact is that it does not. Laws keep changing at the speed of editing video clips, and so far there has been no sign of a law that would at least to some extent slow down the complete takeover of money and self-destruction.

We need a new order! To replace the order of money and self-destruction we need the law of cooperation and a network of interrelations. And this is where pedagogy, by encouraging rethinking could fulfill a revolutionary role.

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