

BEIJING 101 MIDDLE SCHOOL LECTURE

Two Global Nomads Talk about Education

Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić & Sir John Daniel
DeTao Education Masters

Introduction

Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

It is a great pleasure for Sir John and me to talk to you today. As experts in higher education and distance learning, we usually talk to students and staff at higher education institutions such as Peking University next-door, where we gave lectures. To be here with you is an exceptional pleasure and a refreshing experience. We consider that middle school has the most formative role for the rest of our lives – at least it did for both of us – and this is the focus of our talk.

We will alternate in speaking. We will first talk about our education, then show how it led us into our careers and end with some reflections from our experience that we want to share with you.

Education

I will begin. My name is Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic. I was born in Yugoslavia, a country that no longer exists, in a beautiful town surrounded by mountains, Sarajevo, sadly better known for wars that began or ended there. I never actually lived in Sarajevo and returned to Belgrade, taking my first flight when I was only 10 days old. Sometimes I think I was predestined to travel!

Indeed, as a diplomat's daughter, since the age of five I lived in different countries and attended schools in different languages and systems: Oslo, Norway; Vienna, Austria; Paris, France; Belgrade, Yugoslavia (Serbia) and New Delhi, India. Each of these experiences left a special trace and I will mention them briefly.

When I was in a British pre-school in Oslo in the early fifties, the young Queen Elisabeth visited Norway. We went to see her off as she embarked on her ship to go back to England. She waved at us and I was convinced she was waving at me, which provided plenty of excitement for many days afterwards!

When we moved to Vienna, my lasting memory from my American International School was standing too close to a boy I liked during PE class and getting hit by a baseball bat, luckily getting off with just a little bruise!

My experience in Paris was more complicated. I joined a regular French girls' school, where I was the only foreigner in my class. I did not know a word of French and being competitive I excelled in mathematics, which did not require language skills! I learnt the language quickly, and this is when my love of reading began. I read all the books published in "La petite bibliotheque rose" (The "pink books series"!).

We soon went back to Belgrade and for the first time I went to a school where everyone spoke my mother tongue, which was a nice change. That period was particularly marked by the friendships I acquired which have lasted until this day.

When I was a teenager, we moved to New Delhi, India. As I said earlier, it is the period of adolescence that marks you most and the period in India was marked by three significant events and developments.

First, it was a historically interesting period, during the Cold War, when Yugoslavia, India and Egypt were pioneers of the Non-Aligned Movement, aiming for a more independent way between the superpowers. I had thus the privilege of meeting three famous Presidents, Tito, Nehru and Nasser and later Indira Gandhi, who was often a guest at our house.

Second, as a teenager, more than politics, I was interested in parties, movies and pop-singers. These were the 60s and the time of rock'n-roll. At that time, the Beatles were the absolute idols of young girls and boys of my age all around the world, as Eason is in this part of the world for your generation.

During their first trip to India in 1966 I actually met the Beatles. Being persistent and resourceful, I led my younger friends through the kitchen of the well guarded Hotel "Oberoi" where the Beatles were staying; being ready to spend all day to actually meet them and talk to them – a dream come true that thousands of fans around the world could only have wished for.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, that period of my education may have had the greatest significance in the longer term. I continued studying through correspondence and obtained my secondary school-leaving certificate from the University of London in the 1960s. I sat for my exams in the British Council offices in New Delhi. Wolsey Hall provided the course materials and tutorial support from Oxford. I still remember the blue sheets of paper with assignments and courses, neatly folded in yellow envelopes that would reach my New Delhi home every Monday.

Vivid too, are the elaborate comments by my tutor, a certain Mr. Morley, which he made in black ink on the essays that I had to send back to England. It was a new experience, and one that gave me more personal support than I had ever had in a classroom setting.

As an independent learner and a lover of literature, I continued reading avidly and took out books from the well-endowed library at Gymkhana Club where I also tried to learn tennis and ride horses! Sports, however, were not my strong point!

We returned to Belgrade and there I had the big challenge of choosing *where* to study and *what* to study. I hesitated between Drama and Comparative Literature, and chose the latter. I got my first degree at the University of Belgrade. In the 1970s, I continued my studies in Paris because international mobility was considered to be a 'must' in small countries like mine as it is for you here in China. France was a preferred destination and a family tradition. Studying at the Sorbonne, I spent hours reading in the Bibliothèque Sainte Genevieve, mixing with international students during seminars and refreshing my knowledge of French.

I now invite John to tell you about his education.

Sir John Daniel

Thank you, Stamenka. I was educated in very old institutions but I have spent nearly all my career in new organisations that have been created during my lifetime.

My secondary school is called Christ's Hospital. It is not a medical hospital but a boarding school for boys and girls created 460 years ago, in 1553, by the boy king, Edward VI. Edward was the son of one of England's most famous kings, Henry VIII, who is best known for having six wives. To divorce one of his wives he fought the Church by abolishing the monasteries, which had provided vital health services and education to poorer people.

When Henry VIII died his 14-year old son, Edward VI became king and created three 'hospitals' in London to help the poor. St. Thomas' Hospital was a medical hospital that still exists today. My father died there when I was six. Bridewell Hospital was for the mentally ill and Christ's Hospital was a school for orphans in the City of London. Christ's Hospital has continued to offer education to poorer children for over four centuries. When my father died young my mother had little money and I was admitted to Christ's Hospital.

It had existed for 350 years in the middle of London, and moved out to a new campus in the country in 1902. But its old traditions continued. In particular, we still had the same everyday uniform that the children wore when the school started: a long blue coat with knee britches and yellow stockings.

It is a boarding school where all 800 children live on the campus and we used to march into lunch every day to the music of the school's excellent military band. Once a year the school maintained its link to London by marching through the City to the Lord Mayor's residence, where we each received a small gift of money. I was there for nine years, from age 10 to age 19, and received an excellent education that allowed me to win a scholarship to Oxford University to study metallurgy – the study of metals.

Oxford University is even older than Christ's Hospital. It started in the 13th century and I lived in a college called St. Edmund Hall (the arrow shows my room). It was named after one of the first professors, St. Edmund Rich, who lived from 1175-1240 and was the first person ever to receive the Master of Arts degree. Here am I, with my Mother, receiving my Master of Arts degree nearly eight centuries later.

Oxford also has its traditions. We did not have to wear uniforms all the time, but we did have to dress up in dark suit, white shirt, white bow tie and academic gowns in order to take examinations and receive our degrees. Oxford gives students a lot of freedom. Weekly tutorials between a professor and two students were more important than lectures. The only examinations that counted towards your degree took place after three years of study and were called Finals.

You can imagine that in the last year, before Finals, there was a lot of stress, so afterwards we celebrated by drinking champagne outside the examination hall. Here I am with a tray of glasses.

When I finished at Oxford I wanted a change of scene, so I decided to do my doctorate at the University of Paris. But before that I wanted to see a bit of America. So I got a summer job there. In those days it was very easy to get a Green Card and work in the US, even though I was only going for the summer.

My job was very interesting. I was a junior member of a team that was developing a new sandwich alloy to replace two of America's coins: dimes and quarters. They were made of silver and in 1965 they were worth more as silver than as coins, so it paid you to melt them down. That is not a good situation for coins!

We had to develop a metal that looked like silver but was much cheaper. It also had to have the right electrical properties to work in slot machines. The answer was a sandwich of copper between two thin layers of cupro-nickel. Incidentally the copper penny now costs more than a penny to make, which is why we no longer have pennies in Canada.

At the University of Paris my research topic was the properties of uranium crystals and of course I had to learn French in order to talk to my fellow students and write my thesis. The most exciting moment came in 1968 when there were big student riots in Paris.

Three years later, on his first visit to China, US president Richard Nixon asked your Prime Minister, Zhou Enlai, about the impact of this student revolution in France. Zhou Enlai replied, wisely, that it was too early to tell. But the news media thought that Nixon was asking about the French Revolution of 1789 and this exchange became famous as an example of China's ability for long-term thinking.

I received my doctorate in 1969 and changed countries again by going to teach Metallurgical Engineering, in French, at the University of Montreal in Canada.

But it's time to let Stamenka take up her story again.

Careers

Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

Studying is a pleasant part of your life but once studies are over, you need to face reality and start looking for a job. Returning to Belgrade from Paris, I was quite confident: I spoke foreign languages and had degrees from prestigious universities. What a shock to find out that this was not sufficient! I kept applying for jobs for three months, going from one interview to another and learned about rejection and failure.

My first job seemed disappointing. I started at the Mayor's Office in Belgrade in the department for protocol, organizational and international affairs. From intellectual heights and theory of literature I had to learn practical things, how to organise state visits, how to solve problems. I remember timidly asking my boss how should I do a certain task. He replied: "I don't care how, just get it done!" I resented it then but it made me learn to solve problems and work independently.

I moved then to the Yugoslav National Commission for UNESCO, where I worked as translator, editor of the quarterly magazine, adviser for education and project manager. I was fortunate to meet the best intellectuals from all over Yugoslavia, welcome foreign experts and travel the world.

The beginning of this part of my career was a six weeks' trip to Nairobi to attend UNESCO's 19th General Conference in 1976. I made friends with colleagues from all over the world, including my friends from the Chinese National Commission whom I continued to work with for many years to come.

In the nineteen-eighties, I had the privilege of being the Secretary-General of the Association of Universities of Yugoslavia, a very stimulating period in my professional life. Internationalization was high on the agenda of Yugoslav universities in the late eighties and gave a new focus to the seminar 'University Today'. This traditional seminar had, for over thirty years, brought together scholars from all over the world around lively academic issues. It was organised every summer in Dubrovnik, at the Inter-University Centre for Post-Graduate Studies (IUC) with a multitude of international partners ranging from European and US universities to universities from Ethiopia, China or Iran.

The end of the decade brought the Fall of Berlin Wall, a transformational event for the integration of Europe. It was an exciting time of change, of new beginnings and European integration. It was also the time of new divisions, civil wars and the disintegration of my own country, Yugoslavia.

As a Serbian married to a Croat, I decided that it was time to leave the country for the sake of our two children. We packed our bags and left the country to go to Romania on a temporary posting at CEPES, UNESCO's European Centre for Higher Education in Bucharest, a few

months after the Romanian revolution and the fall of Ceausescu. I was not sure that this would result in a permanent job but it was a risk worth taking.

Luckily, after two years, I got a staff position with UNESCO and began my international career. I had the privilege of working, in one of the most beautiful palaces in Bucharest in which the Centre was located, on many interesting projects that brought countries of Europe closer together.

In 1999 I moved to UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. When I arrived there I asked my bosses: “what do you want me to do now?” The answer was “Go global!” I took this seriously and from my Paris office I worked with universities all around the world to promote reforms and traveled to some 80 countries. It was an extraordinary experience from which I learned a lot.

This was the time when I met and worked with John Daniel, who was appointed as Assistant Director-General of the Education Sector and came from the UK Open University. I remember him particularly for a statement that was revolutionary for UNESCO: “new need not be bad!” In our joint work since those days we have explored many new developments, one of which has brought us to China as Education Masters’ with the DeTao Masters’ Academy, an organisation committed to renewing China’s capacity to innovate.

I now ask John to tell you about his career.

Sir John Daniel

I will take you very briefly through the key moments of my career and recall some important choices.

When I finished my doctorate in Paris I moved to Canada as an assistant professor of Metallurgical Engineering at the University of Montreal.

I realise now that the most important decision I made there was to enrol in a part-time Masters Degree in Educational Technology at Concordia University, another university in Montreal. I took the programme simply because I wanted to learn more about Education and become a better teacher, but the experience changed my life and career.

The programme included an internship for which I spent three months at the brand new Open University in the United Kingdom. I was so inspired by seeing media and technology being used to open up higher education to large numbers of students at a distance that I decided to reorient my career into this new field.

So I joined the new Télé-université, Quebec’s new open university and spent four very interesting years helping to establish that institution. From there I moved to the other side of Canada to Athabasca University, another new open university in Alberta.

After three years in western Canada I went back to Montreal as Vice-Rector of Concordia University, where I had studied Educational Technology, and then, in 1984, I became President of Laurentian University in Northern Ontario. This was a four-campus university serving a large and sparsely populated region. The Hearst campus, near to Hudson’s Bay, was the world’s smallest university, with only thirty students.

From there I moved to the United Kingdom as president of one of the world’s largest universities, the Open University, where I had been inspired to change my career 18 years earlier.

The Open University is a wonderful institution motivated by high ideals of service to students and this was the high point of my career. I was proud that when I left the Open University to

go to UNESCO it ranked number five in England for teaching quality, one place above Oxford University.

So in 2001 I found myself in Paris again as Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO. Stamenka was the Head of Higher Education and we worked together to promote international education.

My deputy was Dr Qian Tang and I am very proud that today he is now the Assistant Director-General for Education, the first Chinese to hold this important post.

In 2004 I moved to Vancouver, Canada as President of the Commonwealth of Learning, which is a small inter-governmental organisation that helps the developing countries of the Commonwealth – the countries in yellow – to use technology to expand and improve education.

Last year I turned 70 and ended my full-time employment. But now I am busier than ever and working with Stamenka again as an Education Master at the DeTao Masters Academy here in China.

Reflections

Before handing you back to Stamenka I offer you four simple pieces of advice derived from my own career.

First, learn other languages. This will enrich your personal and professional lives. When I moved from Paris to Montreal in 1969 I was very pleased to be able to speak both of Canada's official languages.

Second, if some new trend interests you, go to the source. The UK Open University was the pioneer of modern distance learning and going there as an intern in 1972 changed my life and linked me an international network of innovation in education that has taken me to over 100 countries.

Third, take risks and follow your passion. When I left the traditional University of Montreal to go to the new open university of Quebec my colleagues thought I was mad, but it was the best thing I ever did.

Fourth, continue your education all your life. I was a part-time student throughout my career. The extra degrees and diplomas I earned that way have been more useful to me in my work than my original degrees from Oxford and Paris.

I now invite Stamenka to conclude our talk with her own advice to you.

Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić

Let me add to the advice that John has given you by drawing lessons from my own life.

- First, build on your strengths as I did, using my knowledge of mathematics, when I could not speak a word of French.
- Learn languages and travel because that will make you citizens of the world
- Be persistent as I was when finding ways to overcome obstacles and meet the Beatles, which was a huge and unexpected achievement.
- Be prepared for difficulties and failures, because what seems a challenge often turns to your own advantage, as did the organizational skills I acquired in my first job.
- Be bold and look for the next step, using every opportunity that comes your way: a new job, a new country, a new career.

- Take risks: I did that when I moved from Belgrade to Bucharest, with two young children, taking a temporary job, which I was not sure would lead to full-time employment.
- But most of all, seek a balanced life, interact with your environment, engage with life, have friends, take walks, listen to music, read books, have fun, communicate...

Conclusion

No one can foresee the future but do realize that being young in China today, you have a tremendous opportunity because YOU are its future! One of our fellow Masters said that China is the “place to be”.

Enjoy it and build your future. We wish you all success.