

Universities as Institutions of Lifelong Learning: Epistemological Dilemmas

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Abstract

Both adult education and universities are being forced to change to respond to globalization and the pressures of knowledge societies. This is proving difficult for some universities that have traditionally taught discipline-based knowledge and whose main student body has been young adults. Now the demands for continuing education for adults are coming from a knowledge-based workforce. Universities are being forced to become institutions of lifelong learning with a greater proportion of adult students than young adult undergraduates. These social conditions are generating epistemological problems, including the nature of accepted and legitimated knowledge, which is also changing the way universities teach and assess knowledge. Two major epistemological dilemmas are explored here—and some “solutions” are offered:

- Following the work of Scheler, local and universal (modern) knowledge is examined
- Knowledge is becoming more practical and the relationship between theory and practice redefined. Universities have traditionally taught theory but now they are faced with the demand for practical knowledge.

Consequently, it will be shown here that one of the new paradigms for adult education for the twenty-first century must also be one of the new paradigms for higher education.

The boundaries between different branches of education are crumbling; school education, further education, adult education, higher education, and vocational education all used to be separate branches of education, but with the advent of lifelong education the boundaries between the different branches have been breached. But another boundary has also been broken down: that between education and learning. Educators were once concerned about the content that they included in their lessons because they assumed that that was what the students would learn; now this assumption is being questioned and we are more concerned about what people know and even more about what they can do. New paradigms of education are appearing, but distinct branches like adult education and higher education are beginning to disappear,

or in this instance they are all merging into lifelong education and institutions of lifelong learning. Hence, what I want to discuss here is a new paradigm for a major sector of the education of adults. I want to explore why institutions of higher education are being forced to change and embrace lifelong learning, incorporating elements of education for adults and vocational education. That universities are being forced to do this has many repercussions for them, and in the final section of the paper I want to explore two of these, both of which focus on epistemological questions. Before this, however, it is necessary to explore the social conditions that have brought about these changes, and this is done in two sections: the first examines globalization and the demand for an educated work force, and the second records one trend in adult learning with the universities gradually becoming institutions of lifelong learning.

Part 1. Globalization and an Educated Work Force

Globalization is a complex phenomenon about which many books have been written (*Albrow and King 1990; Robertson 1992; Friedman 1994, inter alia*). Fundamentally, it is an economic phenomenon, the effects of which spread from the West throughout the whole of the culture of society—of which education forms but one part. It is inappropriate to explore the various theories of globalization in any depth here, but Weede (1990) has isolated three: Galtung's (1971) structural theory of imperialism; Wallenstein's (1974) world system approach, and Bornschier's (1980) idea of investment dependence. In a way they all relate to the power of the economic institution and its effects on the whole world, as it and information technology and rapid transport systems have turned it into a global village. (The term "village" is somewhat misleading since the world's cultures are far less homogeneous than those of a single village.) Even so, the capitalist system and the international division of labor do affect the cultures of the world. In many ways, there is a process of standardization (*Beck 1992*) or McDonaldization (*Ritzer 1993*). At the same time, this process is not unidirectional since peoples and cultures seek to re-establish their own identities in this world process, and to create a counter-process of fragmentation. Robertson (1995) also recognizes that there is an interplay between the global and the local, and he introduces us to the concept of glocalization—a point to which we shall return in the final section.

Moreover, the significance of the international division of labor cannot be underestimated for adult or higher education. It is widely

recognized that transnational companies relocate their production in the countries that are most likely to generate greater returns on their capital investment, but with the development of information technology and rapid transportation, they are able to operate as single entities in policy terms. At the same time, this has not occurred totally; no manufacturing company, for instance, has totally deserted the First World for the Third for a variety of reasons—one of which might be the standard of education and training of the workforce.

This has meant, however, that in the West, the significance of technical knowledge has been widely utilized and the First World has become to a considerable extent a knowledge society and a service society, while a great deal of its actual manufacturing has been relocated elsewhere in the world. Indeed, Reich (1991) has divided work into three main categories: routine production services (repetitive jobs following standardized production procedures), in-person services (person-to-person supervised service occupations),

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and services performed by symbolic analysts (knowledge workers, researchers, designers, and so forth). The first undertake routine production, the second are involved in the service occupations, and the third employ knowledge-based workers. In the West, the knowledge-based jobs

are growing in number and in proportion to the workforce as the workers' expertise is being used, but since it is also a service society there is also a growth in these occupations. However, the nature of the knowledge used is changing at a tremendously rapid rate. The speed of knowledge change is increasing as knowledge is generated by the forces of the competitive global market.

In terms of the international division of labor, countries in the non-Western world have not developed as great a proportion of symbolic analysts in their workforce as Western countries, and they have been forced to retain a greater proportion of routine production workers. Transnational companies are locating some of their manufacturing processes in these areas. In addition, many countries throughout the world are developing their service industries, such as tourism, in order to attract people especially from the First World.

Globalization began as an economic process that exacerbated the differentiation in the labor market, but it also began to lead to the standardization of cultures. Moreover, as transnational companies have gained influence in different countries throughout the world both by their power to relocate capital and by their effect on the labor market, some of the power of national governments has been curtailed. Even countries as economically powerful as the United Kingdom are being forced to bow to the demands of transnational companies. But the large companies are also aware that they have to bend to the pressures of local culture. Indeed, Beck (2000, 11) defines globalization as the processes through which sovereign national states are crisscrossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities, and networks.

Since one of the driving forces of the global competitive market is knowledge, which has traditionally been the province of the universities, it is not surprising that they are having to adapt to the idea of lifelong learning and that the adult workforce is having to continue its education. Consequently, traditional higher education and adult or vocational education are beginning to merge, and lifelong education (or lifelong learning) is becoming a significant factor in countries' educational systems.

Part 2. Trends in Adult Learning

Although it is recognized here that responses to the demands of work are not the only function of education, whether it is school or university, the relationship between work and education is part of the dominant discourse at the present time. Perhaps it has always been, although its focus has now moved to the whole of the work life since the nature of work is changing extremely rapidly. Globalization is producing a standardization in the way that higher education responds to the pressures of the international division of labor, but since there are more knowledge workers in the West, the changes in the structures of higher education in these countries will point the direction in which higher education may develop in less economically developed countries. However, the foregoing argument has implications for higher education at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels and, for the purposes of clarity, these will be dealt with separately.

First-level higher education: Reich (1993) predicted that about one-third of the workforce in the United States would be symbolic

analysts by the end of the twentieth century, working with knowledge—a knowledge that is rapidly changing. Traditionally, the workforce has not needed this proportion of young people, so higher education has had no need to admit so many young people. However, higher education is gradually adapting to these demands, and more than one-third of all young people leaving high school now have the opportunity for higher education. A mass higher education system is being created worldwide, rather like the one that has been operating in the United States for a considerable period of time. However, universities have been elitist institutions, and in many countries they endeavor to remain so. Unless these countries, like Germany, have parallel systems of higher education, vocational and university, there will be an insufficient number of highly educated individuals prepared to enter a knowledge-based workforce. Consequently, there are considerable pressures being put on governments to change the structures so that higher education might prepare more people for knowledge-based industries.

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Naturally, in countries where the demands for knowledge-based workers are fewer there is less pressure on governments and higher education institutions to increase the number of places available. But a global trend is occurring: as more knowledge-based occupations locate in a country, the demand increases for places in universities where young people can gain qualifications before they enter the workforce. Initial education is now being extended to include studying for the first degree, and the degree resembles the school-leaving certificate.

In addition, there is also more demand that universities make undergraduate education available to those people who are already in employment but who need to upgrade their knowledge, like adults returning to education in order to gain their school-leaving certificate later in life. Since they are workers, it is hard for them to leave their work, and while experiments in paid educational leave have been tried in the West, they have not largely been geared to upgrading of a workforce. Pressures are now being placed upon universities to restructure their courses, to make them part-time and modular, thus allowing an increased number of people opportunities to gain their

undergraduate degrees later in life. Many universities are resisting since they are geared to teaching through the logical structure of the knowledge of the academic disciplines in full-time undergraduate study.

Postgraduate education: Once young people have graduated from mass higher education systems and entered employment, their education must continue so that they can keep abreast of all the innovations being created by advanced technology and rapidly changing knowledge. Universities are, therefore, beginning to adapt to the demands for continuing professional education for these workers. There are facilities where they may work part-time for higher degrees, many of which are work-based. For instance, Campbell (1984) records that since 1974 there have been more adults in universities in Canada than undergraduates. This is true of most North

U.K. universities.

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American and For instance, the Funding Council were many more U.K. universities the age of 21 years traditional under- in 1993. These are analysts, but in-

person service workers as well, and they are studying not only for undergraduate qualifications but for master’s and doctoral degrees part-time, and at a distance. Adult education is being merged into higher education.

Most of the programs that these adults follow are relevant to the workplace and are often work-based. A greater proportion of university teaching is becoming postgraduate and vocationally oriented: the role of universities is changing rapidly in response to the changing world of production, and they are teaching adults and becoming institutions of lifelong learning. Universities in the West are beginning to place a great deal more emphasis on higher degrees, of a work-based learning format, that can be studied part-time, and even at a distance. New postgraduate courses are springing up for different knowledge-based industries—from management to consultancy, from medicine to journalism, and so on. However, this trend is not occurring quite so widely in many countries of the world, where entrance to postgraduate education occurs only after students have successfully completed an undergraduate degree in the same subject and can find the time to study a subject that is not

always completely relevant to their work. This is creating a gap that more market-oriented Western universities are tending to fill through innovative means of delivery.

The World Wide Web has actually made the global university a real possibility. Indeed, there are mega-universities, some of which are enrolling students from around the world. Moreover, recent developments in information technology mean that not only mega-universities can offer courses worldwide; many smaller universities, such as Surrey, are offering specialist courses, at master's and doctoral level, by distance. In ancient times, teachers used to travel to their students and in the eighteenth century there were circulating schools. Significantly, in the learning market, a new version of this is appearing, as universities reach out into the market and offer their courses in other countries—by distance, or teaching in another country by having outposts, or through franchising arrangements. Consequently, some universities have created global markets for their courses. This is especially true in those countries where English is widely spoken, where the universities are still driven by the traditional demands of the structures of the academic disciplines, or where they do not have the need to change their structures since they are still funded fully by their national governments. National governments are, however, gradually beginning to recognize that the commodification and globalization of Western higher education

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poses a threat to the development of their own universities, and a few are beginning to make it more difficult for Western universities to operate in their countries by either not recognizing distance education degrees or by insisting that some courses be taught in their own countries.

This expansion of higher education into lifelong learning is not just a trend for taught courses; it is also a trend in research. Increasingly, people doing research to complete their Ph.D.s are part-time students; their research is work-based, and is often funded by the employers. The idea that the doctorate is a route into university employment is changing. Doctorates are being undertaken during, and even at the end of, work life and much of the research is based on their researcher's own work. Practitioner researchers (Jarvis 1999)

are becoming a relatively common phenomenon in the universities and practitioner doctorates have been created to respond to this demand. It is significant that the need for these is felt by knowledge-workers in other countries, so that they are looking to the West for such opportunities. The concept of research is being redefined and democratized as a result of these changes.

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It is clear, however, that a great deal of the demand for this change is coming from the large transnational companies and other knowledge-based industries. Clearly also, much of this new knowledge is also emanating from them, rather than from the research being undertaken in university and research centers. This

means that a great deal of this high-level information resides in these industries and other new trends are beginning to occur. In some cases, partnerships are being formed between universities and knowledge-based industries, allowing for higher degrees to be prepared and taught, and for research to be undertaken in a collaborative manner. Occasionally, it is the industry that prepares the teaching and learning materials while universities ensure a high level of academic content, good educational planning of the material, and rigorous research approaches before degrees are awarded. This has occurred recently at the University of Surrey. A partnership between the School of Educational Studies and the Management Consultancy Business School has created an innovative master's degree. The industry has prepared a great deal of the teaching material in conjunction with academics from the university, while the latter is responsible for the research for the master's dissertation. Universities need to recognize that knowledge-based industries not only have knowledge but they are able to disseminate information as efficiently as the university, if not more so.

Universities are, therefore, being called upon to adapt to this rapidly changing world. But what happens if they do not do so? Increasingly, the corporate university (*Eurich 1985*) is emerging. These are universities that are created by industries or large transnationals in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Examples include

Disney, McDonalds, and Motorola (U.S.A.) and Body Shop, British Aerospace, and British Telecom (U.K.). Transnational corporations have the knowledge, the financing, and the employees to provide specialized teaching and learning. Significantly, they are not only training their own employees, but some are now offering their courses to a wider public. This is a new idea, but throughout the history of the university there have been different founders of universities: the religious institutions, the state, and now the large corporations. The corporate classroom is another global trend in lifelong learning.

Part 3. Epistemological Dilemmas for the University

Knowledge is the fundamental business of the university, but if a great deal of new knowledge resides in the corporations, epistemological dilemmas exist for universities as we know them. In this final section two such dilemmas are examined. Both have been chosen because they raise questions about the future of the university. Indeed, this paper is

asking fundamental questions about both adult education and higher education as they are merging into lifelong learning: the first dilemma raises questions about scientific knowledge and the second about theoretical and work-based knowledge.

Scientific Knowledge: Sociologists have long been concerned about the structure of society,

but one thesis that attracted considerable attention in the 1960s and 1970s was that of the logic of industrialization. This was first published at the beginning of the 1960s in *Industrialism and Industrial Man* (Kerr et al. 1973). Like Marx, but from an entirely different viewpoint, these authors implied that each society has a substructure and a superstructure. They argued that the substructural driving force of change was the industrialization process itself. However, it was the identification of this substructural force that was to prove a major weakness in their thesis; they did not foresee the changes that would occur in the 1970s with the introduction of information technology that would alter the face of the industry and commerce itself. I have explored this elsewhere (Jarvis 2000) and do not want to pursue it here.

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But another aspect of their argument that is also important is where they located higher education in their framework: part of the superstructure, as the handmaiden of industrialism:

The higher educational system of the industrial society stresses the natural sciences, engineering, medicine, managerial training—whether private or public—and administrative law. It must steadily adapt to new disciplines and fields of specialization. There is a relatively smaller place for the humanities and the arts, while the social sciences are strongly related to the training of the managerial groups and technicians for the enterprise and for government. The increased leisure time, however, can afford a broader public appreciation of the humanities and the arts. (*Kerr et al. 1973, 47*)

They claimed that the higher education system would have to expand to meet the needs of industrialization, and this would create an increasing level of education for all citizens, albeit greater emphasis on those subjects relevant to the substructural demands. In this paper, we have seen that although Kerr and his colleagues misread the driving forces of change, they actually had focused on precisely the direction that higher education would be forced to take. They recognized that certain forms of knowledge would become prevalent in the higher education of the latter part of the twentieth century; these were the sciences, law, and relevant social sciences.

Many years before Kerr and his colleagues wrote their influential book, Max Scheler (1980, 76) suggested that there are seven types of knowledge:

- myth and legend—undifferentiated religious, metaphysical, natural, and historical
- knowledge implicit in everyday language—as opposed to learned, poetic, or technical
- religious—from pious to dogmatic
- mystical
- philosophic-metaphysical
- positive knowledge—mathematics, the natural sciences, and the humanities
- technological

Scheler regarded his final two forms of knowledge as artificial because they changed so rapidly. His analysis was a little over-

simplified; while people still think of scientific knowledge as unchanging fact, they also recognize that technological knowledge is changing rapidly. However, not all scientific knowledge is changing rapidly—the speed of light, for instance, has not changed, whereas our understanding of the nature of light changed several times before scientists decided that they had begun to understand it. Hence Scheler's typology, while useful for our discussion represents only some aspects of our understanding of the complex nature of knowledge itself. We might also dispute with Scheler that the humanities should be coupled with mathematics and the natural sciences—indeed, I would place them in the same category as philosophical and metaphysical knowledge.

While Scheler was not totally correct, he did isolate certain forms of knowledge that related to the driving forces of globalization. It is these forms of knowledge, many of which are changing rapidly—such as technological knowledge—that are functional to the contemporary world and with which the universities are trying to keep abreast by introducing new courses, and so on. Many, but by no means all, of these forms of knowledge are universal and, therefore, affect all universities.

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However, it is not only technological knowledge that is universal; knowledge stemming from the dominant ideology, Western capitalism, is treated as if it were universal by Western institutions such as the World Bank, and by other knowledge workers such as management consultants. The forces of globalization are, therefore, generating changes in the universities that will, I suspect, also raise fundamental ethical problems in the coming days. Universities are becoming institutions of lifelong learning and many adults are returning to study. In fact, in the ways that universities are changing, we see one of the ways in which adult education is developing. Both knowledge and service workers are being forced to continue with their learning in order to be employable.

But we are left with a problem, as Scheler's typology implies—there are other forms of knowledge that are also the business of the universities. They are local and non-scientific, and change less rapidly. Kerr and colleagues suggest that these should become leisure-time pursuits. Herein lies the problem—these forms of

knowledge are also the business of the universities. They also need to be taught and researched. They are also subjects that some adults may want to study, but which may be seen as more important to society in another age. However, the question remains: should they be relegated to leisure-time pursuits?

Many academics would agree that the business of the university is all forms of knowledge and so these local cultural forms of knowledge should constitute an integral part of university activities. They would agree that universities are in the business of glocalization (Robertson 1995) rather than globalization. But when there are problems of funding, it is these forms of knowledge that will not attract financial support from industry and commerce and increasingly from government;

whereas those forms demanded by the substructures of global society will attract it. The first epistemological dilemma for universities lies in the fact that at this moment in time society does not ap-

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pear to need all forms of knowledge, and yet all forms of knowledge are the business of the universities. Indeed, it is more than just the business of universities—it is fundamental to civilized society that all forms of knowledge be studied and be available to society.

If the study of all forms of knowledge is not funded, then some of them may just disappear, and then at least two questions arise:

- Can civilized society allow the forces of globalization to destroy the study of some forms of knowledge that form the basis of its own civilization?
- Can an institution of higher education actually be called a university if it does not study all forms of knowledge? Is the business of universities all forms of knowledge or merely that of providing higher levels of learning in a few chosen areas? We are already calling institutions “universities” even though they do not study all forms of knowledge. Conversely, we are seeing corporate universities and in China and elsewhere occupational universities. Are they actually universities?

In response to the first question, I think that it is fair to say that people, like Allan Bloom (1987), have criticized American society for closing the minds of its people. It will be a sad reflection on the

remainder of global society if similar books can be written about other societies.

In response to the second question: it may well be that universities will be changed as a result of the way that they are identified. However, there is another alternative, and this is more realistic—that the concept of the university in its traditional form will disappear and the broad term of “higher education” will take its place. Higher education institutions will incorporate all forms of higher learning but in different organizations, reflecting the fragmentation of society. These different educational institutions might relate to one or more fragments of the whole society. The term “university” will become titular or synonymous with “higher education,” but be qualified by “corporate” or the like in the same way that previous generations did for education by qualifying it with such terms as

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“adult” education. The education of adults should be possible in a variety of institutions at different times in people’s lives as they study for their work and for all the other aspects of their lives. But there is a danger with this approach: issues like the ethics of global capitalism may never be examined in institutions that exist to continue the education of working adults.

Work-based Knowledge: Traditionally, universities have existed to teach knowledge, but the place of research has also been universities. They have taught theory, but practice has not really been their major concern. Over the years it has been recognized that there has been a growing gap between theory and practice, and in a way this has led employers to demand that universities become more relevant to the world of work. In addition, philosophers such as Lyotard (1984) have pointed to the fact that in this age, knowledge will be legitimated by its ability to perform.

At the same time, the knowledge society has grown, and research institutions producing new knowledge have developed outside the universities. Private corporations have owned some research institutions, and the knowledge they have produced has not been freely available to the public. Indeed, it has not constituted part of any curriculum in universities and only when it is no longer commercially valuable has it become more widely available.

We now live in a society where many knowledge workers are producing new knowledge in the process of their everyday working lives. It is not just rapidly changing scientific knowledge about which Scheler wrote—it is about management and marketing techniques, about production techniques in different cultures, and so on. It is about consultancy and social science. It is knowledge being produced by working adults during their daily lives. Much of this knowledge is commercially secret. Indeed, a consultant working for McKinsey's has to sign an agreement to keep all knowledge gained during employment with the company private (Rastel 1998). Yet a new corporate university, Ahrens University, is making the following claim:

We are constantly trying to locate and evaluate new and rapidly growing fields of business, in order to package this knowledge in faculties and programmes. (Ahrens University Web Site)

The problems that new knowledge being produced outside the university produce are immense. I want to suggest four.

First, knowledge is becoming commercial, so that it can be patented and owned by private institutions. McKinsey is no exception in the commercial world where much knowledge cannot be

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freely taught in the higher education system. Consequently, we can see that this immediately undermines the traditional idea of the university since it will only have access to some aspects of knowledge. Much of the new knowledge will lie outside its domain. This points to

the movement of university education, especially undergraduate education, in the direction of being education received before one starts work—or in other words, the first degree will become the equivalent of the school-leaving certificate. Continuing education for adults will be postgraduate in nature.

Second, universities have traditionally been involved in teaching knowledge rather than practice. Hence, theory was taught in the university and practical skills were taught and learned in the workplace. Now the gap between theory and practice has been seen

as too large, and a great deal of theory development now follows practice rather than preceding it (Jarvis 1999). This demands that the term “theory” be re-conceptualized, and that practice be raised to a higher status in university thinking. Practical knowledge now constitutes a great deal of what the world of work is demanding from universities, but they have traditionally shunned practice and practical knowledge. Their world has been the world of theoretical knowledge, so that they are being forced either to be seen as pre-employment institutions or to change their understanding of knowledge and what they teach.

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A direct consequence of this is that universities are being forced to change the way in which they teach practical knowledge.

Medicine has led the way, in a sense, by introducing teaching approaches such as problem-based learning, work-based learning, and so on (Boud 1992; Kwan 2000). In the new approaches to teaching, a greater emphasis is being placed on what the students learn. This means that the teacher’s role changes from being the fount of all wisdom prescribing knowledge to that of facilitator of learning. University teachers are being forced to learn new roles and also to become trained in the arts of teaching adults.

Third, these changes mean that the nature of assessment also changes. How can one assess learning that is practical and achieves its desired ends? Is it necessarily correct because it works? How can one decide what graduate level is, if we are trying to assess practice? We need to discover new ways of assessing reflective learning rather than employing the traditional written examination.

Finally, we can see that reflective learning actually produces new ways of doing things and new knowledge about why those procedures were carried out. Practitioners are actually producing new knowledge and procedures. Many Ph.D. students, as we pointed out earlier in this paper, are actually undertaking research in and about their own work. Their research is practical and often relevant to their work at the time they undertake it. Perhaps it is even more relevant than that of outside researchers who come in as consultants,

although it may become outdated within a few years. Consequently, we can see that the nature of research is changing, and universities have to adapt to the fact that they may be producing some new knowledge incidentally through their students.

Knowledge may have been the business chiefly of the university, but now this is no longer completely true. Now it is the business of the knowledge-based society, of which the university forms but one part. Universities are being forced to change to retain a place in this rapidly changing world of higher learning. In order to do so, they are being forced to recognize that an ever-growing portion of their new student body will be adults.

Conclusions

Books are now being written about the need for universities to become adult institutions (Sinnott and Johnson 1996; Bourgeois et al. 1999). We have explored the way that universities must become institutions of lifelong education in order to survive; elsewhere we have explored how the future of adult education must become lifelong learning (Jarvis, Holford, and Griffin 1998). The forces of globalization are actually causing the two to merge and are bringing down the boundaries between adult education and higher education. At the same time, the way forward is far from straightforward as universities are being forced into a paradigm far removed from their traditional one in which a great deal of the education of adults is finding an uneasy place.

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About the Author

Peter Jarvis is currently chair of the Centre for Research in Life Long Learning at the University of Surrey and adjunct professor, Department of Adult Education, University of Georgia. He has received a variety of academic honors, such as: being president of the British Association of International and Comparative Education (BAICE) in the year 1999-2000; the Cyril O. Houle World Award for Adult Education Literature from the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education; the Comenius Award—International ESVA Foundation (Outstanding Adult Educator in Europe—first holder); he was also the first non-North American to be elected to the International Hall of Fame of Adult and Continuing Education in USA, which is located in

University of Oklahoma. He was also awarded a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science research fellowship at the University of Tokyo. He was noted scholar at the University of British Columbia, and has been a Visiting Professor at the Universities of Ljubljana, Pedagogical University of Tallinn, Tennessee, Alaska at Anchorage and Maryland. He is also a frequent speaker, lecturer and consultant on all aspects of lifelong learning throughout the world.