



Global Trends in Lifelong Learning and the Response of the Universities

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ABSTRACT *The argument of this article is that higher education is forced to respond to the dominant social pressures of the day, especially the demands of advanced capitalism. Globalisation has produced an international division of labour with more knowledge-based workers in the West. Higher education in those countries has, consequently, endeavoured to respond to the demands of these workers in innovative ways and these changes point the direction that higher education elsewhere might have to go. However, some countries will not have sufficient knowledge-based workers to force changes in the higher education system and market-orientated Western universities will fill that gap through new means of delivery. Where universities are not responding to the needs of the international division of labour, transnational companies are taking the initiative in creating their own universities.*

Introduction

Globalisation has become a major theme in social discourse in recent years, but it is a difficult phenomenon to comprehend, as the first part of this paper indicates; in the second part, the implications of the term 'lifelong learning' will be discussed in light of the previous argument; finally, some of the trends to which universities need to respond will be highlighted. The overall thesis of the article is that universities need to adapt rapidly to the demands being placed upon them by the new groups of mature learners emerging as a result of these trends in order to retain their position as the major providers of high level learning opportunities.

Globalisation

Globalisation is a complex phenomenon with many books having been written about it (Albrow & 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 globalisation in any depth here, but Weede (1990) has isolated three: Galtung's (1971) 'structural theory of imperialism'; Wallenstein's (1974) 'world system approach' and Bornshier's (1980) idea of 'investment dependence'. In a simple way they all relate to the power of the economic institution and its effects on the whole world, as information technology and rapid transport systems have turned it into a global village, although the term 'village' is also a little misleading since the world cultures are far less homogeneous than those of a single village. Even so, the cultures of the world are affected by

the capitalist market and the international division of labour and, in many ways, there is a process of standardisation (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 create a counter process of fragmentation.

Moreover, the significance of the international division of labour cannot be underestimated for higher education. It is widely recognised 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. This has meant that in the West, the significance of technical knowledge has been widely utilised and the first world has become a knowledge society and a service society, while a great deal of the 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 standardised production procedures), in-person services (person-to-person supervised service occupations) and 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 are 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. But there has been a decline in the manufacturing industries.

In terms of the international division of labour, countries in the non-Western world have not developed as great a proportion of symbolic analysis in their workforce as Western countries and they have been forced to retain a greater proportion of routine production workers. Transnational companies are locating their manufacturing processes in these areas. In addition, many countries in the Third World are developing their service industries, such as tourism, in order to attract people from the first world. Whilst this remains the case, the poorer countries are forced to purchase the services of the knowledge-based worker from the West, but they are endeavouring to generate more symbolic analysts for themselves through their own systems of higher education. However, this creates problems since they often award their highest calibre students scholarships to study abroad. Thereafter, these students are caught in a difficult situation since the international labour market means that highly qualified people, of whatever nationality, might be attracted by the high salaries and the lifestyle of the West, so that the poorer countries are paying for the early education of, but then losing, a proportion of their highest calibre people and potential knowledge workers.

Globalisation might have begun a process of standardisation of cultures but it has also exacerbated the differentiation in the labour market. Moreover, as the transnationals have gained influence in different countries throughout the world both by their power to relocate capital and by their effect on the labour market, some of the power of national governments has been curtailed. Even countries as economically powerful as the UK are being forced to bow to the demands of transnational companies. It is not surprising, therefore, that the education and training of all three levels of the workforce has pre-occupied both the transnational companies and national governments, and this will constitute the topic of the final part of this paper, but before then it is necessary to examine the idea of learning.

Lifelong Learning

The concept of learning, rather than education, has come to the fore in recent years and the change is not mere semantics, although it sometimes appears that adult educators are treating them as synonymous. Indeed, it can be argued that in much of the adult education literature

in the USA, the two were actually synonymous. However, the change towards learning has occurred in the last decade and in this section, the reasons why this change has occurred will be explored. It will be argued here that the terms are far from being synonymous, but have quite profound implications for those educational institutions which place a great deal of emphasis upon teaching. Moreover, the concept of lifelong learning has assumed greater potency within recent years as governments have embraced it, but there is a danger that the term will come to be defined as work-life learning rather than lifelong learning.

In contrast, the idea of teaching assumes that there are truths to be taught and then learned, so that it is not surprising that in the West the first major educational institution was the church. It had truths to teach and many of the first universities were founded by it. After the Enlightenment, when the power of the church was being eroded, the state founded the new universities because it had scientific truths that it wanted to teach. But in the past few decades, the notion of truth, be it scientific or otherwise, has been open to question, and knowledge is being seen as relative. Philosophers and social scientists examining this new era in the West, brought about by globalisation amongst other things, are calling it post-modernity or late-modernity. This new era is also evident in their analyses of the status of knowledge—and therefore truth.

As early as 1924, Scheler (1980) argued, that some forms of positive and technological knowledge were changing ‘hour by hour’. But that was over 70 years ago, and now the speed of change of knowledge has increased to such an extent that Lyotard (1984) has argued that all knowledge is narrative because it changes so rapidly. He modified the ‘all’ in a later writing, although he certainly did not retract his claim entirely. In a similar manner, Foucault (1972) equated knowledge with discourse and ideology rather than truth.

Now this calls into question the matter of truth, and how truth is discovered or knowledge legitimated. It has been deemed that there are three ways of legitimating knowledge (Scheffler, 1965): from logical reasoning, through empiricism or through pragmatism. Philosophy and pure mathematics are subjects that demand logical reasoning. Habermas (1984) has suggested a modification of logical reasoning, arguing that truth can be reached through argumentation and the reaching of an agreement. Even so, the agreement might be regarded as being relative to the context. Empiricism is the recognition of fact through the senses—although no fact has meaning in itself—its meaning is ascribed to it by those who use it. However, both the principles of reason (and therefore philosophy and mathematics) and the facts discovered through scientific research can be taught. Additionally, the meanings given to facts, which are often presented as if they were intrinsic to the fact itself, can also be taught (even though many of them are ideological—in Foucault’s sense). However, it is pragmatism, a philosophy that claims that knowledge is valid if it works, that has come to the fore in recent years. Consequently, a piece of knowledge is only valid for practitioners if it works for them and they have to discover that for themselves—they have to learn it. In addition, some have argued that truth can be reached through revelation, although it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the implications of this position.

What then of teaching, if knowledge is now regarded as pragmatic and only valid for the learners who have to learn it and use it? This is a vital question that universities have to consider in this late modern society. It has been argued elsewhere (Jarvis, 1999) that what universities teach is not knowledge, but information, which only becomes knowledge when it has been learned, and only becomes legitimate knowledge when it has been found to work for the learners. They do this in the work situation, amongst other places, so that the legitimisation of their own knowledge is pragmatic rather than acknowledgement from university authorities that they have learned it correctly. Thus, the concept of practical knowledge—or personal theory—becomes significant.

This is an information age, so this claim is not particularly startling. Indeed, much of the information that the universities teach is founded upon good evidence at the moment in time when it is taught—although some of the knowledge will be out-dated by the following year, since it is now changing so fast. The significant thing, however, in this information age is that the universities are not the only providers of high status information—the mass media, the electronic systems that many people use, businesses and corporations as they undertake the education and training of their own workforces, and the purveyors of books, CD ROM, the World Wide Web and a vast mass of other forms of learning programmes are all providing information.

More significantly, the recipients of this information, from whatever source, including the universities, are learners. In this information society, lifelong learning has become something that affects all, or nearly all, people but universities do not have a monopoly in providing this high status information to adults. Far from it, they are but one provider in what is becoming a learning market. There is a sense in which the learning society is a consumer society and adult learners are consumers of information—and universities and other colleges in the educational system are among the providers in the market (Jarvis, 1998).

Now this is where the theory of globalisation is important. This process has begun in the West but it is only slowly spreading throughout the world, and the speed of change is increasing. What began in the West is spreading, especially as the transnational companies make their demands for education and training of their workforce—but as we have seen, there is an international division of labour and they do not all need as many knowledge-based workers in countries where they are manufacturing their commodities as they do in countries where they are planning their operations and designing their products, etc. But governments also need a knowledge-based workforce and this is also changing as the demands of the global village become more apparent, so they need to train more knowledge-based workers and more service workers, and so on. Consequently, it is possible to detect global trends in adult learning, and this constitutes the subject of the final section of this article.

Trends in Adult Learning

Although it is recognised here that responses to the demands of work are not the only function of education, whether it is school or university, it must be acknowledged that the relationship between work and education is a dominant discourse at the present time, and perhaps has always been. It is argued here that globalisation is producing a standardisation in the way that higher education responds to the pressures of the international division of labour, but since there are more knowledge workers in the West, the structures of higher education in these countries will point the direction in which higher education in less economically developed countries will develop. However, the foregoing argument has implications for higher education at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels and, for the purposes of clarity, these will be dealt with separately here.

Undergraduate Education

Reich (1991) predicted that about one-third of the workforce in the USA would be symbolic analysts by the end of the century, working with knowledge—a knowledge that is rapidly changing. Traditionally, universities have not admitted such a high proportion of the population. However, societies are adapting slowly to these demands, and more higher education places are being created, so that in some Western countries approximately one-third of all young people leaving school have the opportunity for higher education—a

mass higher education system rather like the system that has been operating in the USA for a considerable period of time. However, universities have been élitist institutions and in many countries in the world they remain so. Unless these countries, like Germany, that have parallel systems of higher education, vocational and university, there will be an insufficient number of highly educated individuals to enter a knowledge-based workforce. Consequently, there are considerable pressures being put upon universities to expand their intake and prepare more people for knowledge-based industries. Where this is occurring, however, a new trend is appearing and undergraduate education is becoming regarded as part of the initial education system.

Universities have, however, looked to schools to prepare children for university education and, traditionally, entrance to university has relied upon the level of achievement in school leaving examinations. However, the school system should not be the final arbiter of who gets into university and who remains in routine production work for the remainder of their lives. The school system is socially and culturally reproductive, so that those who start at the bottom of the social hierarchy are likely to fail in the school system, irrespective of their intelligence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). The traditional system of entry to higher education merely re-inforces this process, and many very able people do not get the types of opportunity that they deserve. This is why adult educators, amongst others, have always fought for second chance systems, or an alternative route into higher education, open for mature students to be able to get an opportunity to study. In the UK access-type courses have enabled some people to have that chance—or a second chance—to get a higher education later in life.

One of the social pressures on universities is for them to recognise that the school system has not always enabled the most able children to achieve, and that many people who failed, or had little or no opportunity, in the initial school system, have the ability to make a success in higher education later in life. Once this has been done, universities need to introduce access-type courses, or modular market-type systems, that allow individuals to study at higher education level without having first achieved their school leaving certificates.

Naturally, in countries where the demand for knowledge-based workers is less there are fewer pressures on universities to increase the number of places available—but a global trend is occurring, that as more knowledge-based occupations locate in a country, the greater is the demand for more places to be created in universities for young people to gain qualifications before they enter the workforce. In addition, there is also more demand on the universities to make undergraduate education available to those people who are already in employment but who need to upgrade their knowledge. 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 the 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, but many universities are resisting this since they are geared to teaching through the logical structure of the knowledge of the academic disciplines in full-time undergraduate study.

Post-graduate Education

Once these young people have graduated and entered employment, their education must continue so that they can keep abreast of all the innovations being created by advanced technology and this rapidly changing knowledge. Universities are, therefore, beginning to adapt to the demands for continuing professional education for these workers. There are facilities for them to study 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 American and UK universities. In the UK, for instance, The Higher Education Funding Council reported that there were many more people studying in universities who were over the age of 21 years than there were traditional undergraduate students in 1993. These are not only symbolic analysts, but in-person service workers as well, and they are studying for undergraduate qualifications and for taught masters and taught doctorate degrees—part-time, and even at a distance. Many of these courses have to be relevant to the work-place and are often work-based. A greater proportion of university teaching is becoming post-graduate and vocationally orientated. The significance of this is simply that the role of the universities is changing rapidly in response to the changing world of production and they are 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 post-graduate 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 post-graduate education only occurs 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-orientated Western universities are tending to fill through innovative means of delivery.

The World Wide Web has actually made the world-wide university a real possibility. Indeed, there are mega-universities—some of which are enrolling students from around the world. Moreover, it does not require mega-universities to offer courses world-wide and many smaller universities, such as Surrey, are offering specialist courses, at masters and doctoral level, by distance. In ancient times, teachers used to travel to their students and in the 18th century there were circulating schools. Teachers went to their students. 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 by going and 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 recognise that the marketisation and globalisation of the Western university system poses a threat to the development of their own universities, and they are beginning to make it more difficult for Western universities to operate in their countries by either not recognising distance education degrees or by insisting that some of the course be taught in their own countries.

There is a gradual recognition that since the knowledge that these learners require is pragmatic and integrated, and that much post-graduate education relates specifically to work, courses need to be more project-based, or indeed located in the work-place itself. Consequently, assessment is becoming much more about the successful completion of a project that works in practice than it is about 'correct knowledge', but learners are being required to show an awareness of why it works, or otherwise. The knowledge is practical and since it is work-based and integrated, it tends to be multi-disciplinary rather than orientated to a single discipline. Universities are having to restructure their assessment system and are beginning to place more emphasis upon quality at the point of delivery than ever before.

However, 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 researching for PhDs are

part-time; their research is work-based and they are often funded by their employers. The idea that the doctorate was 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 the researcher's own work. Practitioner researchers are becoming a relatively common phenomenon in the universities of knowledge societies and it is significant that the need for this is felt in other countries by the knowledge workers, so that they are looking to the West for such opportunities. The concept of research is being redefined and democratised as a result of these changes.

It is clear, however, that a great deal of the demand for this change is coming from the large transnational companies and all the other knowledge-based industries. Clearly much of this new knowledge is also emanating from them, rather than from the research being undertaken in university and other research centres. This means that a great deal of this high level information resides in these industries in any case and so other new trends are beginning to occur. Firstly, 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 and universities which ensure a high level of academic content, good educational planning of the material, rigorous research approaches and they award the qualification. This has occurred recently at the University of Surrey. In a partnership between the School of Educational Studies and the Management Consultancy Business School it has created an innovative taught masters 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 masters dissertation. Universities need to recognise that the knowledge-based industries not only have that knowledge but that they are able to disseminate information as efficiently, if not more so, than the universities.

Universities are, therefore, being called upon to adapt to this rapidly changing world. But what happens if they do not do so? Increasingly, the corporation university (Eurich, 1985) is emerging. These are universities that are created by industries or large transnationals themselves, so that both in the USA and the UK large corporations are creating their own universities—from Disney and McDonalds to Motorola in the USA and Body Shop, British Aerospace and BT in the UK. Transnational corporations have the knowledge, the finance and the employees to provide specialised teaching and learning—but significantly they are not only training their own employees and some institutions, such as the Arthur D. Little Institute in the USA, are now engaged in initial preparation of workers without any guarantee that they will get a job in the company on successful completion of the studies. This is a new idea—but throughout the history of the university there have been different founders of universities—the church, the state and now the large corporations. The corporate classroom is another global trend in lifelong learning.

However, some recent studies of the universities (e.g. Cabal, 1993) make no mention of these major changes occurring, since they reflect a static concept of the university, even an idealised one but, unfortunately, not a valid one. Significantly Cabal's analysis stems from the fact that, while he has international expertise, his own university rectorship is in South America. Other studies have, by contrast, focused on this need for change (e.g. Davies, 1997). In contrast to both Cabal's and Davies' perspectives, Kerr *et al.* (1973, p. 47) claimed that higher education is the 'handmaiden of industrialism'. Like many studies predicting the future, their prediction is certainly more than half correct. They expected that throughout the world there would be a convergence and standardisation of practices as industrialism spread, but they made no allowance for the international division of labour. In advanced capitalist

societies employing symbolic analysts this trend will be established first—but it will not remain static whilst the rest of the world catches up with it.

Universities are, however, not only for the study of work-based information—they are also for the study of humanities and culture. Yet, the place of these seems to be declining in such an instrumental society although new trends are occurring, including the increase in the number of older people—retired people who are both seeking to study at universities, or similar institutions, and also seeking to undertake research. Universities of the Third Age, distance teaching universities, and even the more traditional universities are finding an increase in retired people who are seeking both degree and higher level study, and even research. A major policy concern that will face many governments in the next few years, it seems to me, is the extent to which they are prepared to fund the study of the arts and humanities, especially those which are significant for the retention of national cultures and identities. I feel that systems of differential funding will need to be introduced, so that certain parts of the university might be entrepreneurial, working with business and industry, whilst others should be supporting the pursuit of excellence in the study of non-vocational subjects.

Conclusions

Adult educators have always wanted lifelong learning to become part of everyday life. Yeaxlee (1929) was the first to write a major book on lifelong education, but it was not until less than a half a century ago that the idea began to assume significance. By the 1960s and 1970s, there was a lot of concern about recurrent and continuing education and now lifelong learning. The learning society has emerged, but not in the way that those early thinkers anticipated.

Education and knowledge have always been a function of dominant bodies in society—the churches, the state and now the corporations. Adult educators and reformist politicians have always endeavoured to ensure that mature adults gained access to these higher educational institutions for humanistic means. But now the emphasis has changed—the new dominant institutions want more highly educated people for the knowledge-based and service-based industries and want more adults to have that access. The trouble is that some of the institutions of higher education are finding it difficult to recognise the changes that are occurring in the world and adapt to them. Consequently, new corporate universities are appearing, creating new institutions with new emphases and different goals.

The global trends in adult learning are many and complex—but one above all can be seen which is within the pragmatism of late modern society: no educational form or institution is sacrosanct. If universities throughout the world do not adapt to the global trends they will be by-passed and new forms will appear—for the dominant institutions in society demand a more highly educated and learned workforce and, in a strange way, their demands are not that far removed from the aspirations of those early adult educators, except in one thing—those early adult educators saw learning as enriching the humanity of the learners but the new dominant institutions see it as a means of enriching themselves, their shareholders and, then, perhaps the wider world.

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