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## On the incommensurability of adult education researchers' worlds

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### Abstract

*The article consists of two parts. The first part shows how the idea of lifelong learning turns away from an earlier understanding of adult education, replacing it with a new vision of learning activities as natural processes of participation in culture. For adult education as a research field this means a paradigmatic shift that is radical, thus difficult and costly. A transition from teaching to learning lays the foundations for a discourse that implicates a reconceptualisation of the most basic theoretical categories and methodological competences of research practices.*

*This change of leading research paradigm creates a situation that each discipline finds difficult. Analysis presented in the second part of the paper describes the situation among Polish researchers in the field of the education of adults. Describing the divided research community, the author emphasizes the difficult position of young researchers and proposes a typology of their attitudes towards their professional roles and academic career.*

**Keywords:** adult learning; paradigmatic community; paradigmatic shift; adult education research

### Introduction

It was Kuhn (2000), who introduced the notion of “incommensurability” to the methodology of science to signify incomparability and the mutual untranslatability of scientific theories created within diverse paradigms. Here I use this concept as a metaphor that, in my opinion, is useful in describing the present state of affairs in scholarly reflection on the education of adults.

Today the discipline of the education of adults possesses neither theoretical continuity nor a coherent system of knowledge. On the contrary, the discipline seems cracked and fragmented into separate and incompatible research areas and the community of adult education scholars are torn between research paradigms that reflect

competing intellectual traditions. In other words, theorists and researchers dwell in distinct and mutually irreconcilable worlds. One can evaluate this situation negatively and put effort into making a long list of potential damages to the integrity of the scholarly discipline, appealing to emotions and calling for epistemological unity. One can also see this situation as natural, indeed unavoidable in the process of scientific development. Opting for the latter perspective as potentially more constructive, I therefore suggest defining the situation as one of a paradigmatic turn and a shift “from teaching to learning.”

### Competing paradigms

Drawing on Kuhn’s classic view, one can define paradigm as a set of culturally grounded beliefs shared in a given time by a community of scholars, concerning the reality under study and methodologically legitimate ways of exploring it. This definition, selected for the present argument, emphasises world-view, community-making and regulative aspects of a paradigm. Perhaps the most significant dimension of any paradigm is a set of unspoken ontological assumptions about reality. Gouldner (1970) argues that they usually constitute emotionally loaded cognitive tools, shaped early in the process of socialization to a given culture and built deeply into our mental structures.

These assumptions constitute a specific view or a perspective on reality, bounded by a system of conceptual categories recognized by the community. Each perspective embraces and allows us to see a part of reality, but does not reveal its other elements. These other parts are excluded from the purview and removed beyond the disciplinary research field. The cognitive mechanism outlined here enables the construction of an object of cognition and creates an epistemic community (Manterys, 1997) characterised by sameness of beliefs regarding the real. As Mannheim (1936) rightly put it:

We belong to a group not only because we are born into it, not merely because we profess to belong to it, nor finally because we give it our loyalty and allegiance, but primarily because we see the world and certain things in the world the way it does (i.e. in terms of the meaning of the group in question) (p. 21-22).

Up until late 1980s Polish adult education researchers constituted a well-integrated epistemic community. They believed in an institutionalised system of formal adult education and, without reservation, accepted the underlying idea of continuous education. They argued that formal qualifications were a major component of human capital and contributed to development, progress and common welfare.

One must admit that this belief had some rationale. Indeed, the industrial orientation to social-economic development systematically improved living conditions in material and economic terms, by making social relations more egalitarian and supporting progress and the social advancement of entire groups. That the way towards a better life could only emerge through institutionally grounded education was a common conviction, almost an axiom. Its acceptance legitimised the reduction of adult education to formal relations between the teacher and adult learner, where the central role assigned to teachers and activities of teaching were priority research fields. Adopting such a perspective resulted in reducing the term “learning” to its reactive dimension. As Pólturzycki (1997) wrote:

Learning as a process is organized during teaching. Teaching is a planned and systematic work of a teacher with students, and it is aimed at triggering off desirable and lasting changes in actions, dispositions and the whole personality, through learning and knowledge acquisition, experiencing values as well as practical activities. Teaching is an intentional activity, that is, its intention is to trigger off learning. (p. 90-91)

Making learning a part of the curriculum regime was an act in the pacification of the previously 'autonomous' adult learner. Such declarations masked the reduction of an adult human to student, enclosed in an artificial and intentionally created educational environment. This was an environment where the student was subject to power of school's and teacher's pedagogical authority and channelled in development to preordained qualification standards that were legitimized by an ideology of common good and individual success in life.

Institutional adult education served as a tool for structuring and organizing modern society. Even if we agree that its nature and shape were somehow historically inevitable, it would be hard to accept uncritically the researchers' position concerning its underlying assumptions. It would be particularly difficult to agree with reducing adult learners to their cognitive structures. Especially as the processes of mind-contents formation clearly contradicted the official discourse of respect for adulthood. This latter stressed the importance of adults' life experiences, the need for comprehensive personal development, and necessity for it to stimulate aspirations for self-fulfilment etc. The instrumental-technical notion of knowledge should also raise some doubts. The assumption that the purpose of adult education lies in the adequate matching of means with technical aims, should induce one to pose questions about the rationality of these aims. Furthermore, it should induce one to pose questions and about the interests of the centres of power that legitimise these aims, as well as the consequences for people who are submitted to the effects of instrumental-technical knowledge.

Finally, there comes the question of knowledge as product. This notion is based on two premises. The first premise is that knowledge is objective (i.e. 'true') - it is stable and unchangeable. This allows for the construction of relatively lasting curricula, writing of standard textbooks, measuring of the level of knowledge-acquisition with uniform tests and issuing of diplomas (certificates of educational "processing"). The second premise is that knowledge is a 'finished' - finalised. This assumption of finality can be seen in statements such as that "someone received a good education", "acquired high competence," "was well-educated", and the like. Such expressions conceal not only boundless belief in the right of pedagogical authority to define education, but also the conviction about invariability of the social system, in which the knowledge once acquired and periodically updated (continuous education) should retain its cognitive legitimacy and technological effectiveness.

Comparisons made in Table 1. allow me to state that a socio-cultural approach that uses a proactive notion of learning draws on paradigmatically different assumptions. First and foremost, it rejects the idea that learning is based on sensual data registered as a close reflection of reality, and that knowledge is a configuration of generalisations from these data, built into one's mind. Knowledge is not constructed in a receptive-additive way. As Bruner (1996) argues, knowledge is what becomes collectivised within a discourse, within a "textual" community. This means that knowledge is collective and generated through the social practices of epistemic communities. That is, learning is a function of active participation in worlds of social practices. This kind of perspective focuses on ways in which cultures of practices constantly shape the identities of their adult participants, and at the same time use these identities as tools for an ongoing reproduction of these practices.

*Table 1. Reactive/proactive learning*

Dimensions of differences	Reactive learning (traditional)	Proactive learning (socio-cultural)
Cognitive being	Autonomous mind	Person is becoming
Educational order	Teacher-student	Culture of practice
Nature of knowledge	Objective, realistic	Socially constructed
Type of knowledge	Universal	Contextual (local)
Content of knowledge	Specialist(thematic)	General, holistic
Knowledge-acquisition	Knowledge as product	Knowledge as process
Nature of learning	Individual	Public, social
Nature of cognition	Intentional, artificial	Natural, spontaneous
Cognitive relationship	Spectator from the outside	Actor, role-performer
Cognitive mechanisms	Internalisation	Practice (action)
Learner's identity	Integrated, stable	Developing, fluid
Learner's status	Student	Autonomous practitioner
Development	According to assumed standards	Legitimised socially

Source: author

A socio-cultural approach breaks with the notion of cognition as reflection of reality, and it questions the reductionism of identifying learning with processes of memorising. It maintains that any construction of a system of meanings concerning self, others and the world is possible only within the symbolic universe of a given culture. As Bruner says:

The distinctive feature of human evolution is that human mind developed in a way that allowed using tools of culture. Without these symbolic or material tools the human being would remain not merely “naked monkey”, but empty abstraction. Therefore culture, being a product of human activity, shapes human mind and enables its functioning. According to this view, learning and thinking are always located in some cultural environment and depend on the degree to which its resources are used. (2006, p. 16-17)

The above statement naturalises the process of learning. It tells us to perceive it as a set of communal cognitive activities directed towards acquiring, reshaping and producing the meanings that regulate individuals' and groups' functioning within their local social practices. As these practices possess everlasting dynamics of changes within roles and tasks performed by practitioners, knowledge and competences, then they must be understood as constituted in a process, unfinished and lifelong. In such a perspective, learning practitioners can be seen as people having constantly developing, fluid and always unfinished identities, as persons “deemed” to endless “becoming through being-in-practice” and never-ending learning of practice.

To understand learning as a kind of human “destiny” in the postmodern world means to abolish the dichotomy between teaching and learning. This issue is extremely important for at least two reasons. Firstly, because a broad notion of “learning” incorporates the concept of “teaching”, the latter becomes a set of “auxiliary” endeavours that stimulate and optimise learning efforts. The adult educator loses his or her uncontrolled pedagogical power of judgement. Instead, he or she must accept and adopt a more modest role as that of a consultant and advisor to learning adults. Secondly, because it gives adult learner's subjectivity and the right to agency, i.e. those

distinctive features of adulthood that our culture values particularly high. Each adult person is a student in his or her world of social practices and – we should accept it at last – it is a subjective role.

Dismantling the “teaching-learning” dichotomy redefines relationships between educational institutions and learning adults. Educational institutions have always been a component of the “system.” “Adult learners,” in turn, have always been “atoms” of education, which should be placed on the “right” socially useful track. Freeing adults from requirements for system-imposed qualifications locates learning in the sphere of culture, outside the narrow “teacher-student” order.

Moreover, learning processes are no longer reduced to individual mental acts. Social structures at the meso and micro levels of society engage in learning. Social organisations and institutions, social movements (e.g. feminist, environmentalist, anti-war etc.) as well as local communities become learning subjects. Finally, the society as a whole acquires the capacity to learn and receives the status of a “learning society.” Paradigmatic change “stretches” learning processes beyond individual phenomena and situates them on “higher floors” of the social system. This is possible, on the one hand, because of the deinstitutionalisation of education, and, on the other, because of its individualisation.

Up until recently, educational institutions possessed an unquestionable, state-guaranteed monopoly to educate. They had the right to judge what kinds of knowledge are individually valuable and socially useful. Pedagogical competences assigned to them gave them right to decide about organising education processes, teaching methods and didactic means, forms of control in adult learners’ cognitive progress, assessment criteria etc.

To ground this statement, I suggest looking at how the classic proponents of Polish andragogy perceived school and abridged course forms of adult education. One of them, Urbańczyk (1973) describes it in the following manner:

If a school or a course is to provide its graduate with particular qualifications, it must equip him or her with certain information and skills matching these qualifications. It is clear that a high school for adults, which is a step towards university education..., [must offer curriculum – M. M.] that is uniform for all schools of this type for working adults. Similar is the case of technical secondary schools for working adults, elementary schools and all other kinds of courses... From the perspective of these schools and courses, their curricula must have a high degree of stability, they cannot be changed freely or prepared by their head masters, all the more by teachers. Curriculum constancy implicates similar feature in the way school is organised. Teaching must include predefined number of lesson hours, which means constant and equal number of hours per week in each school (p. 348).

The above quote is unambiguous. The mass-oriented and collective profile of institutionalised adult education that follows standard curricula and stable, indeed ritual, schemes of teacher’s work with a student, had made school the teaching institution. Its activity was legitimised by the scientific status of the content of education, and guaranteed by the experts of those fields of science that corresponded with particular components of the curriculum. Pedagogues, in turn, guaranteed the professionalism of teachers as agents of adult learning. As Półturzycki stated: “Good and effective education depends mainly on knowledge of modern didactics and ability to use it” (1997, p. 30).

Educational institutions served as teaching institutions as elements of the education system, i.e. it was believed that they produced the intended cognitive results in adult students. These institutions themselves had been free of any obligation to learn. Various

forms of teachers' supplementary education and training should have been seen not only as learning in the current understanding of the term, but also as activity optimising the functioning of educational institutions by raising the competence of its functionaries.

Going beyond the "teaching-learning" dichotomy turns educational institutions into learning organisations and increases their numbers. Now all types of institutionalised social practices become learning organisations, the most important among them being associations, the above-mentioned social movement groups or local communities. Efforts are taken to make a systematic and comprehensive list of their features (see Argyris, 1982; Waldo, 1990). Not going into details, significant attributes differentiate these from traditional organisations. The latter focus on current problems and solve them using trial-and-error methods. Their functioning is based on a strict division of tasks and the relevant narrow specialisation of staff. They show little sensibility to external impulses, involve a relatively small number of strict procedures, and display reluctance to risk-taking. Learning organisations often have features that contradict these. The literature stresses their sensitivity to changes in the surrounding environment, ability to anticipate future problems and difficulties, as well as ongoing critical self-analysis. Strong ability to adapt to changes results from flexibility of organisational structures, frequent shifts of tasks and acceptance of risk. Consequently, staff are rewarded for entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, while work is organised in a way that does not limit communication among personnel and creates opportunity for professional cooperation and the sharing of skills and knowledge (Duckett, 2002).

Adult learning processes in intentionally designed and developmentally oriented institutions and organisations should possess at least three characteristics. First, they should be holistic. That is, "...knowledge should have a personal character and should become an active part of the learner's identity" (De Weerd, Cortouts, Martens & Bouwen, 2002, p. 26). Second, learning should be natural. Knowledge should be produced through the interaction between learners and their environment, and based on their experiences and the culture of the milieu (Kolb, 1984). Finally, organisational learning is for a given organisation an ongoing adjustment process of being-in-the-world (ibid.).

The highest level of social structure where learning processes are situated is the society as a whole. This denotes the term "learning society." What is the learning society? Before I provide several answers to this question, I must note that this term is not particularly explored by theorists and researchers in adult education. Quite the contrary, the concept is met with as much scepticism and reluctance and in the case of a modernist category of "continuous education." Ainley says that only poets and science fiction writers can imagine how the learning society would look like and how it would be different from the contemporary world (after: Hughes & Tight, 1995, p. 297).

In their famous article *The Myth of the Learning Society*, Hughes and Tight (1995) argue that the lifelong learning discourse is a modernist myth. Its construction is multilayered. The first and earliest lower level includes the myths of productivity and change, expressing hopes and expectations of people in industrial society. It is on a higher level where myths of lifelong learning and learning organisations have been placed. Dialectical relationships and interdependences between them create strong foundations for another myth, that of the learning society.

The authors argue that the notion of the learning society can be seen as a tool for creating a false consciousness. It is to hide contradiction of interests, mitigate the related tensions between various social groups and power centres, and unite them in artificial alliances made under the pressure of uncertain future and the necessity of life in the risk

society. That is why – as they conclude – the learning society can be understood as an ideological concept serving ideological purposes (ibid.).

Despite the sharp criticism they present, Hughes and Tight do not deny the notion of the learning society and other educational myths some value. They admit that articulating the hopes of the masses, these myths possess enormous potential for social mobilisation, and by serving regulative functions they are able to model collective action towards a socially desirable direction.

According to Wain, the observed rejection of the term “continuous education” and the replacement with the concept of “lifelong learning” indicates the weakening of the power of the “system” and an increase of the subjectiveness of a society that is ready to exercise right to knowledge as a social value (Wain, 1993). Therefore, Wain attempts to see the concept of the learning society in a more descriptive manner:

There is no ‘model’ learning society, there are different forms a learning society could take, just as there are different forms the lifelong education programme could take. What distinguishes learning society from the other is precisely the kind of programme it institutionalises within its particular socio-cultural and political context. The political characteristics of the movement’s learning society are...democratic ... a shared, pluralistic and participatory ‘form of life’ in Dewey’s sense...This means reassessing the role of the school and of childhood learning ... and prioritizing adult learning on the same level. A fundamental strategy with regard to the latter is to sensitize social institutions, the family, the church, political party, trade union, place of employment, etc., to their educational potential... with respect to their members. To encourage these institutions to regard themselves as potential educative agencies for their members and for wider society. (Wain, 1993, p. 68)

The above quote seems to confirm the suggestion of Hughes and Tight, that the notion of the learning society is in part a description of cognitive practices that really exist in the society, and in part a normative vision of the desirable social order that would create favourable conditions for the development of these kinds of practices.

Edwards and Usher (2001, p. 276) opt for this position. They treat the category of the “learning society” as a metaphor, which content changes adequately to changes in the broader society. Edwards (1997) argues that the metaphor of the “learning society” had three forms. The first, historically the earliest one, belonged to the modernist society and it identified the learning society with the educated society. Its hallmark was a relative balance between the qualification potential of the workforce and the qualification demand of the economy. Another version, that of the late modernity, identified the learning society with the learning market, stressing democratisation of access to education and formal equality of the opportunities it offers. The third version of the metaphor, the postmodern one, establishes a link between the learning society and the expansion of new technologies, which makes it take a form of a learning network. Through learning networks, individuals participate in social life on different levels (local, regional, national, global), with which they identify and which shape their identity. Learning loses its instrumental nature. It is no longer the means of truth searching, problems solving or self-realisation. In return, people begin to define themselves through their own cognitive activity. In the learning society, learners take a cognitive relation to their own life, based on a wide range of resources of knowledge and information allowing them to sustain practices of their lifestyles (ibid.).

The term “learning society” arouses discontent and even annoyance. As Coffield (1997) writes, numerous efforts to define it “...quickly becomes a futile task, because each commentator offers a different set of qualities thought essential to such a society” (p. 450). Despite this, the concept is ever more accepted. Boud (2000, p. 152) argues

that: “The notion of learning society widespread in current debate is problematic and elusive, but it is one we have to work within as it is a part of the central discourse of our times”. I doubt this argument can be decisive. Arguments presented by Edwards sound much more seriously.

Human being’s whole existence is based on intellectual constructs created by humans themselves. They are the instruments of cognitive control over the world (understanding) and a necessary condition for effective action upon the world, and in result a condition for life and survival. The notion of “lifelong learning” and related concepts (“learning organisation,” “learning society”) mark a new perspective on the education of adults. We should keep this perspective open, dynamic and relevant to the postmodern world. The point is not to capture and limit the “world that is” to a narrow and rigid definition of Universalist aspirations, even if it was accepted by the majority and offered illusory yet soothing sense of confidence. The point is rather to address the question of the developmental chances for adult education discipline in the paradigmatic perspective of the discourse on adult lifelong learning.

### **On limits of paradigmatic tolerance**

The concept of lifelong learning is an attempt to construct a new categorical perspective able to “capture” dynamic relationships between education and human lives. Contrary to educational tradition, daily experience and common sense, learning is not so much about acquiring new knowledge, as the modernist didactics of adults still tries to convince us to, but about the way of life in the society based on knowledge. That is why learning in postmodernity should be perceived not through its epistemological dimension, but through the ontological one. Learning is an integral feature of daily life in the postmodern world, and recognition of this fact is – as Edwards (1997) insists – one of the basic conditions of the continuation of the postmodern world. If so, the transition “from teaching to learning,” which can be observed in the discourse on the education of adults, means a radical shift in philosophical perspective from which analyses of cognitive practices of adults are made, and in the change of paradigm of the scientific discipline interested in such practices.

Is the discussed shift really necessary? Can’t theoretical reflection on the education of adults exist and develop as a multi-paradigmatic discipline? A question of this kind was asked in relation to pedagogy during the 6<sup>th</sup> Polish Pedagogical Congress. Śliwowski (2007) gave a positive answer saying:

When we formulate the question: What paradigm?, it certainly means acceptance of the fact that the Polish society and humanities that reflect its mental condition are socially and ideologically diverse. Therefore, science should reflect this axionormative diversity; it should talk multiple languages, use tools to read thoughts in a mixture of theories, streams, trends, directions, ideological and worldview doctrines, defending differences, broadening and deepening them or eliminating with the purpose to return to uniformity. We give our attention to diversity of voices and aspects, multiplicity of messages and their interpretations (p. 445).

An ideological framework for the above position was provided by Szahaj (2007). In the paper entitled *Solitude and community*, he distinguished between two opposed kinds of community: organic (unreflexive) and constructionist (reflexive). He described the constructionist community as pluralistic, tolerant, open to critique, respecting subjectivity and individualism of its members, based on their will to belong and

satisfaction gained from being together (ibid.). I have the impression that both authors, by accepting the vision of a constructionist community as complementary to liberal-democratic social order, make it a kind of proto-model for all human collectivities, including the community of theorists and researchers of education. The adopted assumptions inevitably impose only one possible conclusion: pedagogy should be a multi-paradigmatic science.

Thinking about the application of the above conclusion in the theory of adult education, one must notice that it is legitimate to a degree that it is possible to defend its founding premises. So, by asking the “what paradigm” question, Śliwerski assumes that the community of scholars has a choice. I disagree. And, I have equal difficulty with accepting the argument that the community of theorists and researchers within any scientific discipline form (or can form?) a constructionist community. I shall begin with the first problem, and then I will address the second question further in the text.

Paradigm is understood as a set of harmoniously linked ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions; it can be seen as a kind of sub-theoretical matrix that effectively regulates researchers' practices and integrates them in a cognitive community. The source of uniformity of assumptions on reality, nature of knowledge, and methodologically legitimate procedures of fact-finding, lies in the commonality of researchers' generational experiences and the presence of the same socio-cultural elements in their biographies. In this sense, research paradigms are conditioned situationally and historically. As products of their time, they are inevitably particular, fragmented and only temporarily valid, and their changeability usually overlaps generational cycles.

The first post-world war II generation of Polish adult education researchers found themselves living and working in the modernist world created and supervised by an omnipotent ideological state. Their professional competence was formed by the supreme scientific doctrine of scholarship: rigid, dogmatic and – as Adorno (1984) noticed long ago – well suited to the administered world. One of its components was institutionalised adult education. The latter's function was to discipline and impose meanings. Natural learning, being a result of adults' participation in their life-worlds, went beyond this function, and this is why it was made illegal and excluded from the field of education. Its findings received the status of no-knowledge.

At the beginning researchers just assumed that adult education was a system of institutional pedagogical influences upon adult students, and the research should provide instrumental-technical knowledge, able to optimise didactic activities of teachers, and that this knowledge could be effectively accumulated through a diagnostic survey method. It was not only a technical instrument regulating cognition, but also something more. It was a component of the personal and professional identity of researchers from that generation. That is why it is still alive today. In the Polish adult education literature, we can see endless attempts to sustain the vitality of traditional forms of training of adults and to prove the actuality of continuous education, as well as claim to educate adults through andragogic teaching methods. Some of the papers presented during an adult education conference organised in 2006 at the Jagiellonian University illustrate this situation (see: Aleksander & Barwińska, 2007). Also the conference entitled *Andragogue teacher at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, regularly organised in Wrocław, provides numerous examples (see e.g. Horyń & Maciejewski, 2002).

The above analysis brings us closer to an answer to the question of the chances of contemporary adult education theory becoming multi-paradigmatic. Even the greatest openness, tolerance and usefulness of the scholarly community has nothing to do with

the number of research theories or paradigms recognised as significant and legitimate. The paradigm itself, or its ontological dimension, to be precise, imposes limits upon researchers. Ontological premises mark boundaries of the real and they have to be “compatible” with educational practice. Otherwise the paradigm will no longer “capture” the reality under study, will lose its regulative ability and turn into an ideological construct, while its adherents will become a scholarly sect. Thus the answer to the “what paradigm” question cannot be an arbitrary choice of a group of scientists. The choice is always limited by the criterion of its socio-cultural adequacy. Respecting this condition is the basic requirement necessary for keeping its methodological legitimacy.

Transition from modernity to postmodernity implicated numerous changes, including the shift in how adult education is perceived and understood. It is no longer identified with the institutional distribution of knowledge and imposition of meanings. Instead, it becomes a space of learning. It is accompanied by the right to a subjective interpretation of the world and to reflexive being in the world. To sum up briefly, this is the nature of the paradigmatic shift “from teaching to learning.”

### **On the situation of young researchers**

Today Polish researchers of the education of adults are divided. Some are suspended between the discipline’s glorious past and its undetermined and vague future. This situation is difficult for everyone in the field. Followers of the “old” paradigm sense the coming twilight of the hitherto existing model of scholarship. This feeling is usually accompanied by the acute sense of deep professional inappropriateness and fear of the loss of high position in the academic milieu. Adherents of a radical change, tensely await a new paradigm, which is not yet crystallised and which is more of a promise than its fulfilment. Although, as I said, it is a difficult situation for the whole discipline, it is the youngest generation of researchers that experiences its severity the most. Assistants and doctoral students are in a situation of pressure to carry on scientific research, to gain their first or (as in the case of doctors) another scholarly degree. On the other hand, competition between various methodological doctrines and the lack of a common method of research practice (paradigm) leaves them without clear points of orientation.

Searching for the way out of their traumatic predicament, they can take different orientations and attitudes. In order to grasp them, I will make use of two scales. The first is a standard “autonomy-conformity” scale used by researchers for the measurement of behaviour in any social milieu. Another is applied by organisation theorists, and stretches along the “achievements-security” continuum (see: Koralewicz, 2008, part IV). These scales need to be placed in the context of the academic community. It is not a constructionist community in the meaning suggested by Szahaj. Quite the contrary, it is hierarchical. The distribution of positions and statuses, constitutive of the hierarchy of the scientific community, and related distribution of privileges and power, are based on formal criteria of knowledge and competence – scholarly degrees and titles. The oligarchical nature of scientific institutions is somehow neutralised by the system of collegial bodies, equipped with opinion-making and decision-making entitlements. One should not, however, deny that academic democracy is a democracy of professors. Younger scholars participate to a lesser degree. Beginning researchers are practically excluded. In this situation they, understandably, seek security. The source of the latter can be a supervisor or the scientific community.

These scales enable us to create a typology of the major orientations of young researchers in the academic milieu. They are presented in Figure 1.

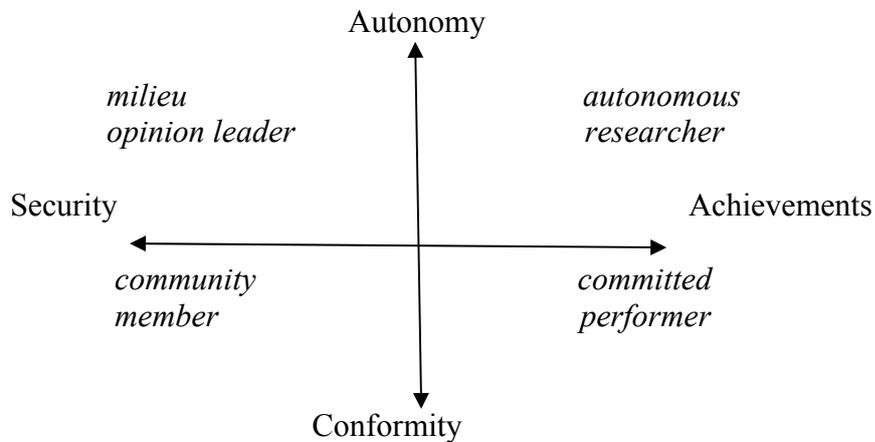


Figure 1. Typology of major orientations of young researchers  
Source: author

Autonomous researchers, oriented towards cognitive tasks and their own scholarly development, represent the first type. High competence for research work allows them to make independent decisions concerning research projects. They listen to their colleagues' comments carefully, but usually do not take them into account. They respect suggestions and recommendations by their supervisors only to the extent that they improve their own research ideas.

*Committed performers* depend on their supervisors. They treat assigned research tasks as their own and realise them carefully and meticulously. They take into account all suggestions and remarks. They believe that under the protection of their scientific authority they will be able to acquire the required professional competences, durable position in the scholarly milieu as well as stable future in life.

Another type of orientation, *community member*, can best be characterised by the need for the sense of security and professional stability. Such persons believe in the academic "milieu." They carefully listen to all stories of "scholarly careers." In their scientific work they tend to take into account opinions and remarks made by their colleagues. They are loyal to group interests of younger scholars. They publicly demonstrate their identification with this group and expect that in a situation where their professional career is in danger, the milieu's opinions will be mobilised in their defence, and that it will guarantee their further presence in the academic science.

The last type of orientation may be represented by people who possess personal influence. Personal characteristics make them *milieu opinion leaders*. Their attributes are the source of their high informal social position, help them become elected to diverse collegial bodies (such as institute and department boards), or become leaders of union organisations or hold other significant social functions. In other words, they enter power structures. They believe that performing administrative functions will guarantee them relative independence from the criteria of scientific assessment and in the worst case allow them liberation from criteria. That is where they rest their current and future sense of security.

In my opinion, the presented typology is of universal value, as it includes situations for candidates entering the field of science in any discipline. However, the requirement of clarity induces me to see it in the perspective of the theory of adults' lifelong

learning. What consequences might the situation of the observed transition “from teaching to learning” have for the pro-scientific orientations of young adult education researchers?

Seeking an answer to this question, one must take into account the fact that the most serious obstacle to build one’s own cognitive activity and strategy for professional development is the lack of disciplinary points of theoretical and methodological orientation, which is typical for the “transition” period. Nothing is certain during a paradigmatic shift. One does not know whether the observed socio-cultural changes are radical enough that they will be able to invalidate “old” scientific theories and question the recognised methodological models of research practice. It is also not certain whether adherents and propagators of the new paradigm will manage to make it acceptable to the “disciplinary majority” and establish new and stable models of scholarship. For young people whose professional future depends on assessment of their scholarly achievements by the establishment of professors, it is an enormously traumatic situation. One can assume that it effectively limits the number of people aspiring to the status of *autonomous researcher* and creates a natural temptation to escape under the supervisor’s protection. By accepting a candidate, the supervisor is formally obliged to direct his or her scientific development in an effective way. From the point of view of the candidate him/herself, this obligation is of the higher nature. It is a moral obligation, a promise of cognitive, scholarly and life success.

I think the above analysis allows me to conclude that adult education theorists’ and researchers’ exist in two competing paradigmatic worlds, reducing the developmental perspectives of the discipline. This reduction involves the limiting of the development-oriented aspirations of the youngest generation of researchers. By giving up the identity of the *autonomous author* and seeking that of the *committed performer* instead, they renounce their freedom for security.

The choices have their further consequences. They depend on the scholarship patterns their supervising professors cherish. If they accept the paradigm treating adult education institutionally and justifying it with the idea of the continuous education, their charges will undertake research on methods and forms of adult training, self-education of certain social categories (e.g. Polish Army officers), or – for what guarantees greater security – the history of adult education in Poland. To put it simply: educational thought will be “enclosed” in the heritage park of its glorious past.

Are there chances to change, or – perhaps even more important – prevent this? This question can be formulated in another way: are there chances for Polish researchers of lifelong learning to adopt and adapt the new research paradigm, which understands adult education as learning in the meaning far from its traditional teacher-oriented formula? To such a question, Kurantowicz (2007) gives a pessimistic answer. As she says, “...for some humanities scholars this revolutionary widening of this category (of learning – M.M.) won’t be possible to accept for a long time to come” (p. 8). Agreeing with this prognosis, I will add that the hope lies in the phrase “for some.” If some researchers are not able to adopt a new paradigm, then “others” will have competences and will to do so. They will find support in the international community of theorists and researchers on the processes of lifelong learning.

## Conclusion

Reflection on lifelong learning brings together multiple narratives on the education of adults. Each of them has its own time-spatial location, its own socio-cultural contexts as

well as its own horizon of validity conditioned by the pace of changes. The situation is on the verge of change when changes in social reality become visible, even in common perception making the current paradigm unable to “grasp” key problems of social praxis, and the community of researchers dealing with these problems realize their helplessness. A perspective of paradigmatic shift bears hope as well as resistance. The present situation in the community of researchers is an example of this.

How can we go beyond the “separateness” of the lifelong learning researchers' worlds and induce theorists and researchers to risk crossing the boundaries of the modernist tradition of adult education, and convince them to accept the cognitive horizon that is offered to their discipline by the perspective of lifelong learning? Attempting to address this question, one reaches a conclusion that the greatest threat to science is the uncritical self-identification of scholars with their discipline as well as an imperative of group solidarity that orders them to defend the discipline from any external critique. Worse than that, this imperative might also concern internal critique. Dialogue, then, becomes a deadly silence, and researchers' activity becomes a set of rituals inside the discipline, serving as a form of group therapy. Conferences and scholarly seminars play only the role of events maintaining group convictions that despite everything “it's all right.” Those who will not believe such assurances can always invoke the truism that the “future belongs to the young ones.” In a prefigurative culture of postmodern world, this banality will surely be met with applause. The point is that professional academic culture is a postfigurative one.

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