

## Thriving and surviving on the fringe: Whither adult and community education in the 1990s?

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### ABSTRACT

This paper looks at adult and community education (hereafter ACE), and in particular, the dimensions of, and reasons for, its marginal status as an education sector; its role, principally measured in its educational achievements, as a field in Aotearoa; and possible future directions for it in a political environment which is predominantly hostile to much of its central ethos and tenets.

Adult education has always belonged to another world: voluntarist, sometimes critical, and always marginal in its educational impact, its legal position and its funding (Yarnitt, 1995: 72).

### Introduction

This paper looks at adult and community education (hereafter ACE), and in particular, the dimensions of, and reasons for, its marginal status as an education sector; its role, principally measured in its educational achievements, as a field in Aotearoa; and possible future directions for it in a political environment which is predominantly hostile to much of its central ethos and tenets.

The defining of ACE is inevitably seen as problematic by writers in the field - and indeed, it is probably a factor that contributes to it remaining a marginal area, while comparable sectors such as early childhood and Maori education have made significant strides towards widespread acceptance over recent decades. I do not wish to become embroiled in the various definitions of ACE (see for example, Tobias, 1992 and 1996 and Harre Hindmarsh, 1996 for more extensive discussions of this issue), so for the purposes of the present discussion, I will delineate the parameters largely by reference to a combination of educational content and the type of provider. In terms of content, ACE refers to non-credentialled educational programmes for adults which are predominantly learner-centred and learner-controlled<sup>1</sup>. The programmes are usually offered through non-formal or community-based groups<sup>2</sup> and generally cover the following fields:

- adult basic education, such as the adult literacy work carried out by Adult Reading and Learning Assistance Federation (ARLA) member schemes,
- second chance programmes that enable learners to enter formal educational programmes to gain formal qualifications such as those offered by universities and polytechnics,
- personal development programmes which are oriented to people's family, community or leisure roles (eg. te reo classes offered by Te Ataarangi and the community education programmes offered through many secondary schools),

- social action programmes aimed at achieving social change, such as Project Waitangi and the new Kotare Research and Education Centre being developed by a coalition of social justice groups.

In addition to the groups mentioned above, these types of programmes are offered by groups such as Rural Education Activities Programmes (REAP), the Workers Education Association (WEA), community centres and houses, cultural organisations, the Country Women's Coordinating Committee, Women's Studies Association, Men for Non-Violence, Relationships Services and Parents' Centres. Although they are often included in discussions on the 'Fourth Sector' (see Benseman, Findsen and Scott, 1996), I am not including any reference to programmes that are predominantly for vocational purposes, such as Training Opportunity Programmes (TOP), or educational programmes for adults offered by organisations whose primary purpose is not educational, but which utilise education as a means of achieving their goals such as health education.

### Historical perspective

Although it is almost inherently marginal, ACE has also experienced periods when it has been more to the fore than it is at the moment. From the late 1800s to early this century<sup>3</sup> groups such as the Mechanics Institutes and the WEA vied with university colleges and technical schools as the main providers of educational opportunities for adults. In later decades, formal provision became much more prominent with the establishment of autonomous universities in 1959 and the provision of technical education under the Apprentices' Act in 1948 (although technical institutes were not set up until the early 60s). ACE provision was still prominent in these periods however (even within the formal institutions themselves), and recognised in legislation such as the Education Amendment Act in 1938. It was also prominent in developing new forms of educational programmes such as the 'box system' which was a forerunner of modern distance education, the travelling library in Canterbury which later became the Country Library Service, WEA Summer Schools and community centres in many small towns (see Benseman, 1996). Prominent educationalists such as James Shelley, Gwen and Crawford Somerset, Matiu Te Hau, J.C. Beaglehole, Arnold Hely, George Fowlds and Norman Richmond were all prominent in ACE programmes as well as making their marks in other educational areas. However it was not until the late 1960s and 70s that ACE became especially prominent, and with it, innovative. Internationally, the publication of the Faure Report in 1972 by UNESCO enunciated a set of principles of *lifelong education* (and its equivalent term *recurrent education* in the OECD) and the World Conferences on Adult Education by UNESCO in Tokyo in 1972 and Nairobi in 1976 and in New Zealand, the Educational Development Conference in Wellington all helped give ACE a prominence within education that it had never really enjoyed prior to this period, or since. Tobias (1996) identifies a number of major social and political debates and developments occurring during this period which provided the context to facilitate this prominence including: decolonisation; the growth of international capitalism, and in particular, changes in systems and methods of capitalist production associated with new technologies; increasing power of mass media, especially television; the development of a global economy; the increasing internationalisation of the division of labour; increasing questioning of the possibility of solving problems of wealth, poverty, war and peace; and the challenging of welfare state provisions for these issues.

Alongside these issues, there was a questioning of the adequacy of schooling, upheavals in universities and the proposition proposed by groups such as UNESCO and OECD that ACE, as part of a philosophy of lifelong education could, and indeed should, be central to national educational provision, rather than a peripheral and optional extra. A strong element of this philosophy found in most of the policies and recommendations from this period was that ACE had a particularly important role of accessing and catering for adults who had slipped through the net of formal education - the so-called 'forgotten people'<sup>4</sup> This social justice element aroused a missionary-like

zeal in many people who became involved in it during this period and which has permeated its work since, even when this element has largely since disappeared from official policy and dogma.

This social and political acceptance led to a widespread increase of funding and support for ACE. Universities and polytechnics increased their ACE-type provision; community-based providers gained funding in their own right; a national membership organisation (NZ Association for Community and Continuing Education, later ACEA, the Adult and Community Education Association) was formed; the National Council of Adult Education (NCAE) received substantial increases in funding; research and writing about the field became respectable and more accessible, including the publishing of the first academic journal, *'Continuing Education in New Zealand'* in 1970; the WEA gained independence from the universities; and key players such as the Department of Education included ACE more visibly in their debates, policy and departmental structures, especially with the appointment of Denny Garrett as the first Continuing Education Officer in the Department's new Continuing Education Division.

The battle may have been won, but certainly not the war. For even during this period of intense activity and apparent respectability, many writers still felt that ACE was never really accepted into the educational mainstream. Deleon (1978: 170), a key UNESCO figure in these developments stated,

Adult education was and still remains, in spite of all its achievements, only a marginal educational and societal activity. ... The formal education system, as a time-bound and place-bound activity, as a once-for-all process, as a 'preparation of life' corresponds fully to and is justified by the fundamental parameters of our life frame. In these circumstances, adult education is still an unnecessary and apparently superfluous activity.

And again (ibid.: 172),

How could it be otherwise? Social and political forces in power cannot and will not permit an educational process and educational experiences which will modify the 'divine order' of the 'established relations'. It is even something more than that: the world of education, as built and conceived now, is certainly not favourable to the development of adult education: the belief is still deep-rooted that childhood is the only period propitious to learning; all learning which happens outside the school system is suspect; education is, for many practitioners and learners, a once-for-all process; knowledge has to be delivered by a specialised profession; education and work have to be separated.

## A period of innovation

Writing about community education in Britain, Jackson (1995: 182) argues that " ... marginality brought a kind of strength. New practices which eventually become part of the professional mainstream frequently emerge on the margins of economic and political organisations, where it is possible for radical spirits to explore and experiment." This observation is certainly true of ACE in Aotearoa during the 1970s. Innovative developments included:

- the establishment of ACE provision in four 'pilot scheme' schools in Auckland; seven further schools were designated Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in the late 70s. A key feature of these programmes was the introduction of flexible 'tutor hours' which could be used for the first time to fund courses of any length, on any topic, in contrast to the much more rigid structure hitherto, where course length and content were both permanently pre-determined and could only be changed after protracted negotiation with the Department of Education.
- the Broadcasting Act of 1973 included 'education' (including adults) in its functions; a separate Continuing Education Unit was later set up by Radio NZ in 1976
- adults were given formal access to secondary schools



- innovative local community education programmes, such as the Wairarapa Community Action Programme (CAP) (see Hennansson, 1987) and the Nelson Community Education Service (NCES) with local autonomy and independent funding
- the National Council of Adult Education funded outreach workers to promote adult literacy, Maori adult education, broadcasting and professional training for adult educators
- the first Community College was opened in Hawkes Bay with an explicit commitment of extending provision for target groups and approximately one third of its programme identified as community education; other community colleges opened (predominantly in smaller provincial towns) in subsequent years
- the first Rural Education Activities Programmes (REAP) were established including a full-time community education worker for each programme'
- the expansion of prison education
- pioneering efforts to make ACE organisations and their programmes reflect the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and meet Maori demands for tino rangatiratanga
- the setting up of community-based learning exchanges
- Te Ataarangi began its teaching of te reo Maori to Maori adults
- the expansion of adult literacy schemes throughout the country from the first few programmes in Hawkes Bay and Auckland: a national body, the Adult Reading and Learning Assistance Federation (ARLA) was formed in 1982 and later gained funding from government in its own right
- Women's Studies programmes were developed and offered by ACE groups, especially the WEA.

Many of the developments from this period (and earlier times) such as Women's Studies, prison education, distance education and second-chance programmes have subsequently become educationally acceptable and moved from their ACE origins into more mainstream educational providers. While it is not in any way unique to ACE, it is certainly true that the sector has played a significant role as an educational 'ice-breaker' throughout its history, and that this is particularly true of periods when it enjoys reasonable levels of recognition and financial support.

This period also saw the expansion of many part-time and even full-time paid positions in ACE for the first time. These positions were supplemented by considerable contributions from volunteers<sup>5</sup> (almost exclusively women) and extensive utilisation of paid workers through a plethora of government-financed programmes for the unemployed - Voluntary Organisation Training Programme (VOTP), Pre-employment Programme (PEP) etc. The latter schemes were made available to community groups for a wide range of tasks which were often liberally interpreted by the people involved for work in social action projects which would never have received official forms of funding. For example, some of the prominent figures involved in the anti-Springbok tour movement and the educational programmes that arose around it were employed by some ACE groups through these schemes.

### Party politics and the rise and fall of ace

ACE has traditionally had close links with the: Labour Party - many of the first Labour government were prominent in the WEA for example<sup>6</sup>, and the field had therefore tended to benefit from these links during the few periods that Labour held the Treasury benches (12 of the 46 years since 1950). It is certainly true that many of the developments and innovations described above were initiated or occurred during the three years that Phil Amos was Minister of Education from 1972 to 1975. But many also arose during times when the National Party was in power and especially under the direction of Les Gandar as Minister of Education. In addition, during much of the 1970s, key figures such as Bill Renwick as Director-General of Education and Denny Garrett as Continuing Education

Officer helped maintain a positive momentum for ACE in the Department of Education during much of this period.

With a few momentary blips here and there, the following two decades have largely been a period of increasing decline for ACE. The re-election of a National government in 1975 with Robert Muldoon as Prime Minister and Merv Wellington as Minister of Education, proved to be a turning point for ACE. Although the National Party had never had close links with most elements of ACE, there had been, nonetheless, a tradition of tolerance of, and even modest levels of funding for, ACE under previous conservative governments. Although successive Muldoon governments were branded as 'more socialist than the Labour Party' by some observers such as Bob Jones and his New Zealand Party supporters because of their level of support for the Welfare State, ACE did not fare well with Wellington as Minister of Education.

Unlike his National predecessors, Wellington as Minister was openly hostile to what he saw as the more overtly political elements within ACE. The hostility manifested itself in the funding cuts to the WEA<sup>7</sup>, the NCAE and community education provision (including CAP in Masterton and NCES in Nelson) in 1982. The ACE field responded to these moves with a 'Save adult education' campaign, but it proved to be largely ineffective in stemming the changes over coming years.

The election of another Labour government in 1984 therefore, appeared to signal a new era of hope for ACE. Russell Marshall as the Minister of Education in the incoming government had had, as he termed it, 'a long apprenticeship' as shadow minister during which he was well briefed on the issues and aspirations of the field. Marshall was certainly openly supportive of the ACE field and very well known to many of the key people involved. The hopes riding on his back however were largely never realised<sup>8</sup>. Although he managed to secure the restoration of funding for the WEA, increased funding for adult literacy and initiated the setting up of the Trade Union Educational Authority (TUEA), it was Marshall as minister who directed the dissolution of NCAE. Even if this was largely due to his frustrations with its performance than a desire to diminish the activities of ACE, as had been the case under Merv Wellington, the dissolution of the only national body was a body blow to ACE at the time and has been detrimental in the longer term. With the demise of NCAE, Marshall commissioned the IAGNE 'He Tangata' report (1987) under the chairing of Jack Shallcross. But the intentions of this report and that of the 'Stella Maris' (1985) report which preceded 'He Tangata' (initiated by ACE personnel) were largely ignored by Marshall as the 'Red Reverend' became increasingly isolated in a cabinet which was increasingly dominated openly by the New Right zealots of Roger Douglas, Richard Prebble and their cohorts<sup>9</sup>.

With the appointment of David Lange, and later Phil Goff, as subsequent Ministers of Education, the golden glimmers of hope for ACE all but vanished as the storms of the New Right with its philosophy centred on credentialism and vocationalism, became ascendant in New Zealand politics.

It is interesting to note that the key policy document of this period produced under the name of Phil Goff as Minister, 'Leaming for Life', gave prominent recognition to ACE,

...for the first time, policy development will be able to encompass all aspects of the post-compulsory sector: it will include the universities, the polytechnics, colleges of education, *non-formal education and training*, on-the- job training, the labour market training programmes of Access and also the apprenticeship system (Minister of Education, 1989: 8).

...education at a university, training at a polytechnic, on-the-job training at the workplace and *non-formal education at a rural location are of equal value* in their personal, social and economic worth... (emphases added) (Minister of Education, 1989: 12),

Fine sentiments and intentions, but like the promise of Marshall earlier, little of any substance ever eventuated from the document for ACE, either from the latter days of this Labour government or from the incoming National governments after 1990. Later, the Minister of Education Lockwood Smith did not oppose the development of ACE in the way that Merv Wellington had, but appeared to have constant difficulty in trying to understand the nature and scope of ACE and its programmes.

Delegations to the Minister from the National Resource Centre, Community Learning Aotearoa New Zealand (CLANZ) and NZACCE consistently reported cordial, but frustrating sessions with the Minister in which a great deal of time was spent explaining their organisations' goals and work. Benign neglect rather than hostile opposition is probably the best description of Smith's reign as Minister.

The swing to the New Right mirrored the sorts of changes that most Western economies (and their education systems) were undergoing at this time. Writing about a comparable shift in Australia, McIntyre quotes Yeatman (1990: 3) regarding the results of the shift from welfare states to corporate states - "The new corporate state must be smaller, freeing resources for private corporations to compete in the global economy." As the shift of the burden of services (including ACE) moves from government organisations to voluntary organisations (with little or reduced funding allocated via contractual agreements - ironically with greater demands of accountability) there is an increasing climate of uncertainty and constant change. Marginal activities like ACE become even more marginal. Resources are increasingly targeted at making private enterprises more efficient and therefore more competitive internationally in order to secure a place for New Zealand in the turmoil of international markets. Education, including ACE, in this environment, is dominated by the need to contribute to individuals' working lives and therefore, the national economy and the marketplace. There is little room, if not outright hostility, to education of a liberal or social justice ilk.<sup>10</sup>

### Ace in retreat

In this environment it was inevitable that ACE would suffer a period of diminishing resources and outright hostility from government, its allies and its agencies. In Britain, ACE was able to counter a concerted attack on it and other Fourth Sector programmes only after a protracted and skilful defence of the field's value - especially in its ability to contribute to the national economy (Tuckett, no date). As has happened in other attacks on ACE in Britain and elsewhere, scorn was poured on ACE's image as nothing but 'underwater macramé and flower arranging'. The National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) was able to counter this stereotype in one instance by publicising the case of a flower arranging class in Brixton (the scene of recent race riots) where the majority of participants were able to either gain jobs or open small businesses as a result of their attending the class. Defending such a course in terms of anything but the dominant paradigm is of little use in the current environment!

In New Zealand, there were considerable downstream effects of the New Right era for ACE<sup>11</sup> which included:

- the disappearance of personnel within the re-vamped Ministry (now an advisory body) with explicit responsibility or interest in ACE
- the complete ignoring of ACE in key educational policy documents such as 'Education in the 21st Century'
- the abolition of the Trade Union Educational Authority (TUEA) and provision for paid educational leave for workers
- withdrawal of all funding for the WEA for a second time and a reduction in funding for other ACE providers; in a field that already received minimal government funding,<sup>12</sup> the 1991-92 budget (termed the 'mother of all budgets' by the Minister of Finance, Ruth Richardson) cuts were devastating - a 78.7% reduction of non-EFTS funding for community-based ACE organisations was the most dramatic of these cuts, but were not the only ones during this period. Summarising the effects of the cuts, Harré Hindmarsh (1993 :24) wrote, "Relative to other providers in the tertiary education sector, between 1990 and 1992 community organisations have been the most severely cut, in a context where polytechnics and universities, as a whole, have received funding increases."

- decreased interest in ACE activities by universities (see article by Brian Findsen in this issue) and polytechnics, as symbolised in the disappearance of the term 'community college' and the move towards 'institutes of technology' - a move that is increasing even further the latter's move to allocating more resources towards degree programmes
- reduced funds for CLANZ used to support small community-based programmes and the abolition of its role as ACE adviser to the Minister of Education
- the absorption of CAP and NCES into their local polytechnics with a resulting restriction and re-direction of their programmes and resources
- a refusal to fund the National Resource Centre beyond an initial small grant allocated by CLANZ
- reductions in the allowances for adult students enrolled in secondary schools.

Inevitably, another downstream effect during this period was the reduction of innovative and new developments in ACE. Publications like *Akina* and NCAE's *Breaking Ground* which once abounded with accounts of new programmes and innovations no longer contain such accounts (the latter ceased publication with the demise of NCAE). A sector under threat, if not in retreat, is less likely to put scarce resources into new developments at the probable expense of existing programmes.

### Where does ACE stand now?

So where does ACE stand at present? It is undoubtedly a field that has an extremely low profile and minimal recognition in terms of policy and funding. Some of the agencies such as the WEA are functioning at minimal levels in most cases, totally reliant on voluntary support and occasional small grants (and without the access to the liberal unemployed programmes of the 70s and 80s). Policy-wise, ACE has to all intents and purposes become invisible and rarely features in any Ministry of Education documentation, let alone policy. An attempt by ACEA to formulate a national policy for ACE was carried out using a UNESCO grant. Although the initial document to consult groups included a supportive letter from the Minister of Education on the need for such a policy, this too, has gone the way of its predecessors in the 1980s and has held no sway with the Minister of Education or his ministry.

The ACE agencies which have weathered the storm most effectively to date are probably REAP, ARLA and school-based community education. In general, they have managed to sustain their levels of funding, although usually without full adjustments for inflation. It is interesting to speculate why these groups have managed to avoid the funding losses that have devastated other ACE providers, but is probably related mainly to their full-time staffing resources and the nature of the clientele they serve (e.g. REAPs' location in rural seats usually held by National; the emotional appeal of working with adult 'illiterates' for ARLA and the middle-class clientele of most community education programmes in schools). For all three groups however, the most important issue looming is how they will relate to the New Zealand Qualifications Framework which is anathema to many people working in these three agencies who see the Framework as a very narrow interpretation of their fields and prefer to work in terms of a social justice philosophy.

Research and writing on the field has continued at a level at least comparable to previous decades. A new publication aimed at ACE practitioners (in addition to ACEA's publication *Akina*), *Lifelong Learning in Aotearoa*, was published three times a year from 1992 to 1995 by the National Resource Centre, but has since been reduced to the status of a newsletter as a budget-saving measure. *The New Zealand Journal of Adult Learning* was re-vived in 1992 and continues to publish material related to ACE, although little of it is written by ACE practitioners themselves. An edited book on the Fourth Sector (Benseman, Findsen and Scott, 1996) including much material on ACE, has recently been published the first significant publication since Roger Boshier's edited book, *Towards a Learning Society* in 1980.

Overall however, the vigour and the level of activity in ACE is probably best reflected in the low number of educational innovations and new developments occurring within the field. Although it is not easy to quantify this type of measure accurately, it is difficult to find much evidence of innovations and developments (even with curriculum development which tends to be more easily developed than whole new forms of provision) comparable to those outlined earlier in this paper that grew in the previous decades of more bountiful funding and patronage.

### ACE's marginal status

Despite 'golden eras' such as the 1970s, ACE is consistently a marginal enterprise within educational circles. While some ACE supporters actually relish this marginal status, others see it as very restrictive in preventing the spread and development of a form of provision that warrants a place in the educational sun as much as any other. It is interesting therefore to look at why ACE has such a marginal status within education in order to identify possible strategies to change its status.

Writing about ACE in Britain, Purvis (1976) identified three broad factors to account for the low status of the field. They included:

#### (a) the content of adult education

- the problem of defining the territory of activity (as discussed at the beginning of this paper) - " ... the position of adult education outside the examination world adds to its image as a leisure-time activity, *an educational exercise that is not geared to the essential, core activities of life.*" (ibid.: 14, emphasis added).
- the paucity of knowledge and research, and in particular, the lack of theoretical analysis and discussion - " ... few attempts have been made to synthesise or integrate into some kind of theoretical, analytical framework what has been previously said by other writers of relevance to the topic under discussion." (ibid.: 16)

(b) the structure of adult education - as in New Zealand, ACE in Britain has "no obvious place in the administrative structure" of government, is structurally isolated from other sectors of the educational community and receives minuscule proportions of the overall education budget (less than 1% in this case).

#### (c) aspects of the adult educational process, including,

the high degree of student control, in contrast to other educational sectors where content, and therefore the overall educational process, is controlled primarily by teachers, national curricula and/or examinations with a concomitant perception of power for the teachers concerned, the dominance of part-time teaching staff whose motivation is as often the extrinsic, economic gain of teaching as the wish to teach their subject (and a 'side-line' to their main occupation). With so few full-time paid positions in the field and a resulting lack of career opportunities<sup>13</sup>, there is a high turnover of staff, both full- and part-timers. The lack of opportunity means also that few practitioners are prepared to commit themselves to professional training beyond a rudimentary level, as it is unlikely to lead anywhere careerwise long-term (see Findsen, 1996 for further discussion on the education of adults).



## Additional factors

In addition to the factors identified by Purvis, I believe that there are a number of other factors which have contributed to ACE's marginal status, both at a general level and in terms of what has occurred specifically over recent years in New Zealand.<sup>14</sup> They include the following,

### *Lack of policy accepted and implemented by government*

While there have been any number of policy documents produced by government officials (e.g. Waite's 'Return Education and Training' document<sup>15</sup>), international documents that New Zealand has been a signatory to such as those produced at World Conferences on Adult Education and policy statements produced by ACE personnel (e.g. the 'He Tangata' report), the simple truth is that none of these policies has ever been accepted as government policy. The net result of this situation is that ACE lacks official status in Ministry documentation and operations - and ultimately, budget considerations. For example, there is no imperative for ACE to be included in the Ministry of Education's annual statements of outcomes such as 'Full participation and achievement of Maori in all areas of education' for Maori education and 'Success in learning for those with special needs' for special education (Ministry of Education, 1994: 5).

The failure to achieve statutory recognition by way of appropriate legislation relating to ACE was probably the most significant failing of the period when Russell Marshall was Minister of Education. For whatever reason, he was not able to carry through on the 'He Tangata' report (see below), and Marshall did not do for ACE what he managed to achieve in trade union education with the Union Representatives' Educational Leave Act which established the Trade Union Educational Authority and introduced widespread paid educational leave. Similar disappointments occurred in relation to adult literacy which was initially included in language policy only to be watered down in a subsequent version and left to languish along with other discarded policy (see Sutton and Benseman, 1996). ACE is forever the bridesmaid of policy and never the bride.

### *Resistance to respectability*

As indicated earlier in this discussion, there has always been some resistance within ACE to becoming more mainstream. Much of the resistance is couched in terms of 'selling out to the system' (both the mainstream education and capitalist systems) and is especially strong in relation to vocationally-oriented programmes such as adult literacy programmes offered in the workplace (see Alison Sutton's article in this volume). In brief, there are a number of fears about where this road will lead to. First, there is the fear that, by becoming involved in vocationally-oriented programmes, ACE groups and their learners will no longer control the content and orientation of their programmes as the 'purchasers' (management) of the programmes will dictate only conditions (including curriculum) which are conducive to their main aim of profit-making. This will therefore go against the interests of the workers, who the providers generally see as their prime clients, rather than management.

Second, there is a fear that the vocational programmes would take priority over their more traditional programmes within agencies to the latter's detriment, if not eventual demise. Third, that the split between the vocational and the traditional programmes would lead to a substantial status differentiation within a field that is already marginal, with the former programmes earning considerable income, being accredited on the Framework and be seen as the more serious (related to real life and work) and therefore more worthy of recognition. Fourth, there is the simple frustration that education does not always have to have a vocational justification - that personal self-development and the joy of learning are motives enough for adult learners.

### *Lack of influential allies*

Ultimately, changing the status of ACE will depend on the degree of political clout that its supporters can muster to influence key policies and decisions. In both Australia and Britain, national ACE people (especially through the national bodies of AAACE and NIACE) have fostered and utilised political support on both sides of the political fence. For example, when the field in Britain was under threat from the 1991 White Paper (Department of Education and Science and Employment Department Group, 1991) and the preceding bill in the House of Commons, there was a counterbalance of support not only from ACE's allies in universities, other educational institutions, public bodies and an organised campaign from ACE learners<sup>16</sup> - but also from members from both sides of the House of Lords who recounted personal experiences of careers which had been initiated and cultivated by ACE participation. The subsequent legislation was altered considerably in favour of ACE principles.

In Aotearoa, ACE enjoys support from the Labour Party (as reflected in the formulation of a separate policy and discussion statement issued in November 1995 and the fact that three former ACE workers are now Labour MPs)<sup>17</sup>, but has few other political allies in Parliament - especially among current power-brokers. In educational circles it fares little better. While most Western countries have strong academic adult education departments, they are small in number in this country (there are only seven academics who identify themselves as primarily adult educators) and have often been engaged in rear-guard actions themselves to survive policy changes over the past two decades. It is difficult to identify any other obvious sources of political support of any real consequence.

### *Lack of a national body*

Since the demise of the National Council of Adult Education, ACE has effectively lacked a national voice that carries any political weight in the corridors of power. While the National Resource Centre and CLANZ (both arising from the He Tangata report in the place of NCAE) theoretically cover the role of the old NCAE, the reality is that neither has had the funds to carry out the role. CLANZ also had its Ministerial advice role removed from its list of functions in 1991. The national ACE membership organisation, ACEA is also limited by a lack of resources and is seen by government as too partisan in its positions.

It is useful to look to both Australia and Britain to see the role that national bodies can play in gaining credibility and resources. Both AAACE and NIACE have played major roles in gaining politicians' ears to put the case for adult learning outside formal provisions. Both groups have had notable success in influencing relevant legislation, initiating and disseminating research, promoting professional education for their practitioners and above all, promoting a credible, high-profile for the field through activities such as Adult Learners' Week on the national media.

### *Poor public image*

Related to a number of the above factors is the poor public image of ACE. The image is exemplified on the few occasions when issues relating to ACE are debated in Parliament. Such occasions are riddled with jaunts of 'flower arranging and cake decorating' which belittle and stereotype the field which its supporters then find difficult to counter. Probably the only time ACE ever makes headlines is when scandals occur, further perpetuating the dubious image of the whole field. For example, the recent controversy at Nga Tapuwae College where the community education department was accused of being "nothing but a housie centre" spawned more than 160 cm of text in the New Zealand Herald, most of which was on the front page (New Zealand Herald, 11, 12 January, 1996). It is difficult to recall a single item on any other ACE issue ever having anywhere near this coverage.

### *Shifting the high jump bar*

One of the more noticeable changes that has occurred in the New Right environment is the increased demand on agencies to provide documentation of their present and proposed activities (see Harre Hindmarsh, 1992) - for example in funding applications, developing new course proposals and programmes and registering as a private training establishment in order to teach Qualification Authority unit standards. While medium and large agencies such as mainstream educational providers have the resources and expertise to provide these data, most of the smaller agencies (i.e. a large proportion of ACE) find it increasingly difficult to comply with these demands. However, unless they are able to do so, they are increasingly likely to not be able to compete with other agencies for the lifeblood of their work - funding. The high jump bar's first height is beyond many and is being raised higher all the time.

### *Changing social factors*

While some changes in social factors (e.g. the 'ageing' of the total population) augur well for ACE in terms of its future clientele, other social factors have acted to its detriment. For example, the increasing proportion of women who are now in paid work, both part- and fulltime, means that there are decreasing numbers of these women available for programmes during the day and even more importantly, as volunteers to staff ACE agencies (see Benseman, 1993) - the 'unpaid army' of foot soldiers that many agencies can no longer rely on. At a more general level, there is certainly more competition for ACE from the mass media, large-scale commercial activities and well-publicised mainstream educational programmes, that makes it increasingly difficult to attract and retain viable numbers of learners in ACE programmes. In addition, many agencies (e.g. disabled groups, environmental groups, churches) which once looked to ACE agencies to satisfy their educational needs now run their own 'in-house' educational programmes.

### *Internal conflicts*

Although it is difficult to gauge whether it is substantially different to any other form of education, in my own experience ACE has had its fair share of internal conflicts (both within and between agencies), if not internecine strife. While some of this is inevitable when differences in philosophy occur (see Benseman, 1984), the degree of conflict appears to have increased almost in proportion to the degree that the field has suffered cut-backs. However, such conflict is not new, and is the main reason given to me by Russell Marshall as to why he did not pursue legislative changes for ACE in the way he originally intended.

### *Downward spiral*

Finally, it is probably true that ACE has become entangled in a downward spiral which it increasingly finds difficult to break out of. ~The more it loses resources, the fewer people are available to run the programmes and promote the field, the more the morale of those involved in the field plummets, the more difficult it is to command political influence, which in turn leads to reductions in resources - and on it goes.

### *Whither now?*

The question now remains, where to from here for ACE? Crystal ball-gazing is a notoriously difficult exercise and not for the faint-hearted, but some general observations can be offered about possible future scenarios. Probably the greatest environmental factor to influence which of these scenarios comes to pass is the influence of the first government elected under Mixed Member Proportional

(MMP) system later this year. At this stage, it appears inevitable that there will be some form of coalition government of a conservative nature, which will probably temper some of the political extremes of New Right moves that have been the norm for the past decade.

Internationally in most Western countries, there is also likely to be a continuation of similar New Right-type policies to varying degrees, with the demands of international capital still setting the agenda for governments (including New Zealand) in their educational policies. The recent election of a conservative government in Australia for example is likely to lead to cutbacks in that country's ACE programmes, both for the national body (AAACE) 18 and local level programmes.

In particular, probably the key factor influencing ACE agencies' future in this country is their position in relation to the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. If the Framework becomes as all-pervasive as is anticipated when fully implemented (especially if the universities' qualifications are included under its umbrella), then there will be tremendous pressure on all parts of ACE to either join the Framework or become totally marginalised, as it is likely that funding sources will be dependent on educational programmes being linked directly to the Framework.

With these factors in mind, several broad scenarios can be envisaged.

*(i) Restoration of government grants to a 1970s level*

If a straw poll were taken amongst ACE personnel, a clear majority would probably favour a return to the situation where government-funded grants were restored to their previous levels, if not increased significantly and with minimal demands of control over the types of programmes that could be offered with these resources. It is difficult to assess the realism of this option. On the one hand, and in the light of the political changes over the past decade (and especially under a conservative government), it has an optimistic 'cargo cult' air to it, with alienated groups waiting for their funding ship to appear on the horizon - and hopefully, with a larger cargo than was anticipated. On the other hand, a restoration of a left wing government of a Labour/Alliance coalition could conceivably re-introduce this type of arrangement if Labour's recent Discussion and Policy paper on ACE (Burton, 1996) is any indication. On balance, it is probably not a very likely scenario with a conservative coalition, because of their opposition to funding 'fringe' educational services such as ACE and with a Labour/ Alliance coalition, and also because of the odds against their winning the Treasury benches.

*(ii) Learning to live with credentialism and vocationalism*

A second broad scenario would involve ACE agencies seeking some form of accommodation with the twin philosophies of credentialism and vocationalism. This would invariably involve ACE agencies becoming NZQA-accredited, assessing Framework unit standards and generally gearing their programmes towards vocational outcomes. In many ways, these accommodations would then make ACE largely indistinguishable from other educational groups such as Private Training Establishments (PTEs) and their more formal tertiary counterparts. ACE agencies would need to develop their distinctiveness in order to survive in what is already a competitive arena, although their ability to deliver programmes at a local community level and recruit non-traditional students could be turned to their advantage. Whether they could also continue to offer non-QA accredited programme alongside the vocationally-oriented ones is debatable. What is more debatable is whether the ACE groups could live with such a large compromise on their part, given their traditional social justice roots and abhorrence of 'selling out' to what could be seen as purely vocational demands.

In this respect, Aotearoa could do well to study the experience of their British, and Australian ACE counterparts. In both countries ACE has sought to work within an 'educational rationalism' where at the national level NIACE and AAACE have lobbied government and other key groups,

promoting themselves as having a significant contribution not only to national policies such as the Training Reform Agenda, but also high-profile social issues such as blue-green algae, justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and euthanasia. In demonstrating their social and economic contributions, the argument is also made for more conventional programmes such as liberal studies offered traditionally by many ACE agencies (Crombie, 1993). AAACE has commissioned research to document and publicise the contributions made by ACE with some key reports - 'The Vocational Scope of ACE' (McIntyre, 1993) and 'ACE Works - the Vocational Outcomes of ACE Courses' (McIntyre, 1995) for example. In Britain, NIACE has highlighted the extent of adult learning among the British population, the nature and extent of non-participation and the role of ACE in recruiting these people on 'learning pathways' to further education, including vocational programmes. It has also promoted findings from workplace programmes such as Ford's (EDAP) and other large industrial plants where workers are free to choose the content of their education (i.e. an ACE-type approach) and the impact of these programmes (Tuckett, 1995).

Inevitably, these types of strategies are branded as 'sleeping with the enemy' by some (see Mayo and Thompson, 1995, Newman, 1994), while their promoters see them in the light of the Chinese proverb that the bamboo survives the harshest of hurricanes, because it has learnt to bend with the wind, while maintaining its roots in the soil from where it grew. In New Zealand, some ACE agencies such as ARLA schemes have already headed down this route (see the paper by Alison Sutton in this volume), while others have steadfastly refused to step outside the traditional mould of provision.

### *(iii) Standing outside the mainstream altogether*

A third possibility is for ACE agencies to forego what little status and resources they have and become more extensively involved with the 'new social movements' in their struggles for social justice. While it is difficult to envisage the traditional state programmes such as community centres in schools and REAPs doing this, it is a viable option for the voluntary ACE organisations, who to all intents and purposes, have lost what few resources they ever had and are in real danger of becoming historical entities only unless they find themselves a viable role in the future. There are already some indications of some ACE agencies moving in this direction with their involvement in the new Kotare Research and Education Centre.

It is difficult not to sound somewhat pessimistic when reviewing the possibilities for ACE's future development in the present climate. The irony is that while ACE in: most countries is struggling to make its voice heard, participation and provision in the Fourth Sector (i.e. including vocationally-oriented programmes and provision that relies on educating adults as part of their mission) is booming (Belanger, 1993) and the term *lifelong education* has become even more widespread in New Zealand than in the 1970s, thanks to the work of NZQA. The simple fact is that the boom is being fuelled by economic arguments for upskilling the workforce and retaining international competitiveness and that this environment has little sympathy, let alone funding for educational programmes based on any other premise - be they liberal or radical. The dilemma for ACE therefore is whether to bend with the winds of economic and educational rationalism (whilst strategising to retain its integrity) and survive to find a more sympathetic environment another day - or cling to its ideals in a hostile environment and risk further marginalisation.

## Notes

1. The degree to which ACE learners control or direct the content of their programmes is probably largely in the realms of educational myth; it does however, enjoy at least a theoretical freedom to determine curriculum (either by the learner or those administering the programmes) that differs markedly from the 'top-down' approaches of most secondary and tertiary programmes.

2. Some aspects of formal tertiary educational institutions (eg. New Start programmes at universities and literacy programmes at polytechnics) have more in common with ACE than their more formal, academic counterparts in these institutions.
3. For a more extensive coverage of the history of adult education see Thompson, 1950, Hall, 1970, Williams, 1978, Carter, 1993 and Dakin, 1996.
4. This period spawned the Russell Report (1973) in England and Wales and the Alexander Report (1975) in Scotland - the former, ironically endorsed by the then Minister of Education, Margaret Thatcher (see Mayo and Thompson, 1995).
5. Volunteers have always played an important part in ACE; a recent study (Gunn, 1995) of community organisations calculated that a total of \$6.9m labour was contributed by volunteers in the Nelson/Tasman area annually - \$1.5m greater than the amount distributed to paid workers.
6. Although many WEA stalwarts believed that they were largely abandoned by their former comrades once they were in power and never gained the degree of support that they had hoped for (see Shuker, 1984: 100).
7. Very few of the WEAs at this time had any links with the trade union movement or provided 'worker education', but the title Workers Education Association was still anathema to Wellington.
8. For a detailed account of these events, especially as they relate to the various policy documents of this period, see Tobias, 1990.
9. The failure to achieve significant progress during the period of Marshall's office is a matter worthy of further study. Personal communication with the Minister about this issue indicates that he was frustrated with what he saw as the vindictive infighting within some elements of ACE, although this is surely not peculiar to ACE alone and could certainly be said of some other sectors with which Marshall worked closely during his period of office.
10. Jane Thompson (1995: 125) argues that the dominance of the liberal tradition in ACE with its emphasis on individualism, made the transfer of New Right policies even easier than if there had been a stronger tradition of radical ACE in place.
11. For a fuller listing and discussion of the changes that have occurred over recent years see Harre Hindmarsh, 1993 and Tobias, 1996.
12. In broad terms (ACE funding has always been notoriously difficult to isolate in funding documents) ACE in New Zealand receives .71 % of Vote Education and 2.80% of tertiary education funding (Harre Hindmarsh, 1993: 22), while a country like Sweden spends 7.9% of its educational budget in this area (OECD, 1995: 83).
13. The career structure of ACE is best described as 'flat' (in contrast to a more conventional pyramid structure in most occupations) with most practitioners working on their own, or in very small groups, with very few positions available above an initial level.
14. Based on my experience as an ACE practitioner, researcher and administrator for more than 20 years.
15. This report was never officially released by the Ministry of Education.
16. The identity and organisation of ACE learners has been boosted substantially by the high profile 'Adult Learners' Week' initiated by NIACE; a similar campaign has been expanded using two full-time workers in Australia, while New Zealand's equivalent remains low-key and confined to pockets of activity in only some parts of the country.
17. The first time the Party has issued a separate, comprehensive policy for the sector (Introduction by Helen Clark, p. 1).
18. In comparison with the comparable body in Britain, the National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE) has survived under decades of Conservative government - mainly by undertaking research contracts and consultancies.

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