

Benseman, J. (2005). Paradigm re-gained? The re-emergence of lifelong learning in New Zealand in the late 1990s. *New Zealand Journal of Adult Learning*, 33 (1), 21-39.

*Ma te mohia ka ora - through learning there is life*

*Ma te ora ka mohia - through life there is learning*

As argued in a previous article (ref. to be included), lifelong education disappeared off the mainstream educational agenda in most Western countries, including New Zealand, for most of the 1980s and early 1990s - “the international and intergovernmental bodies found relatively little to say on the topic” (Field, 2000, p. 7). But in the mid-1990s a second generation of interest in lifelong learning (as opposed to lifelong education) re-emerged.<sup>1</sup>

### **Contextual factors**

Just as the initial emergence of lifelong education was strongly influenced by profound changes in the contemporary world, a range of factors (many of which are similar to the initial impetuses, but are now of a more profound and ubiquitous nature), have also fuelled the appearance of lifelong learning. The key factors are discussed briefly below.

#### *The knowledge economy/society*

Like many other Western countries, New Zealand government ministers, their advisers and key people in industry are arguing for moving from a traditional commodity-based (largely agricultural) economy to one based on exploiting knowledge. The Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC) in its first report on proposed changes to the New Zealand tertiary education system argued that the move to a knowledge society is of paramount importance.

Knowledge is vitally important both socially and economically. Unlike other economic inputs it is not a limited resource and can be used to

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<sup>1</sup> As indicated earlier, all three terms *lifelong education*, *lifelong learning* and *learning society* were used in the Faure generation; but the first of these terms has now largely disappeared, and *lifelong learning* and *learning society* now dominate writers’ vocabularies.

generate new knowledge. This highlights the centrality of research and learning, which enable the creation and the critical application of knowledge, including the development of solutions to business, social and environmental problems (TEAC, 2000, p. 8).

This transition is seen as comparable in importance to previous transitions from nomadic to hunting and gathering economies, to sustained agricultural economies and the last great transition, to an industrial-based economy. It is estimated that more than 50% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the major OECD economies is now based on the production and distribution of knowledge, and the Information Technology sector (seen as critical for utilising knowledge) now accounts for 7% of the New Zealand GDP (Ministry of Social Development, 2004). Talking about this new form of economy, Giddens (2000, p. 69) has observed that,

The knowledge economy is not yet all-conquering, but it is well on the way to being so. In combination with the broader aspects of globalisation, it marks a major transition in the nature of economic activity. Information technology, plus communications technology, is the enabling media of the new economy, but its agents are knowledge workers – wired workers and others whose work does not directly produce material goods. The know-how of such workers is the most valuable form of property that firms have.

### *Globalisation*

Globalisation has been interpreted in a variety of ways. The three most influential interpretations are:

1. the global marketplace, where increasingly open trading conditions through international trade agreements and high-tech communications mean that traditional barriers of distance and national borders are less restrictive to trade than has been the case historically
2. unregulated world capitalism based on the dominance of the United States economy that exploits the global marketplace

3. global cultural invasion where economic dominance brings cultural dominance as part of the package – the so-called ‘McDonaldisation’ of the world (Smith & Spurling, 1999, p. 60).

While it is true that the openness of the world economy is not entirely new, the extent of the present form of globalisation involving active participation from most countries (except a few countries such as North Korea and Myanmar) and its potential effects (both positive and negative) are rated by most observers as unprecedented (Castells, 1993). With fewer economic controls in place, international trade is seen as an ultra-competitive enterprise, with potential for huge winnings for the winners and economic oblivion for the losers. Essentially, countries compete in this international marketplace on the basis of cheap labour (such as the shift of most of the clothing industry in New Zealand to Fiji), by constant innovation (the cell phone industry in Finland), creating niche markets for distinctive products (GE-free food) or the more ‘traditional’ mechanism of becoming major players in market sectors.

The ‘cheap labour’ option appears to have limited potential to grow economies, whereas the other three options all potentially lead to export-rich, economies with positive spin-offs for local economies further down the track. These latter economies rely increasingly on the utilisation of knowledge for their competitive advantage, rather than physical plant or even financial advantages.

For a country like New Zealand, these latter options are being promoted as the ideal and can be seen in the promotion of ‘green tourism’ and the amalgamation of the two largest dairy producer groups into New Zealand’s largest company Fonterra, in order to compete internationally with dairy multi-national corporations (MNCs). The alternative to being able to develop an economy along these lines is usually painted in terms of only accessing a few overseas markets (especially poorer countries in contrast to for example, OECD countries) or becoming a low-wage economy, both of which would result in a substantial fall in national living standards.

Operating in such an environment means that the competitive nature of modern capitalism (sometimes referred to as ‘turbo’ or ‘fast’ capitalism) is heightened as companies, and especially large multi-national companies, graze the world looking for competitive advantage in terms of cheaper labour and materials on

the one hand and expansion of high-income markets on the other. As Welton (2001, p. 51) says,

Now mega-business enterprises have the fabulous resources to explode the limits of space, time, national boundaries, custom and ideology. Products are produced anywhere and sold everywhere.

### *The scientific and technological revolution*

As discussed previously, the Faure Report (1972) identified the scientific and technological revolution as one of the main driving forces behind the need for lifelong education 30 years ago. In the intervening years, the tempo of change has greatly increased due to shorter diffusion time from design to widespread utilisation and greater coverage of the population in industrialised countries. The cell phone of today for example has spread faster and more broadly than television did in Faure's era. The sheer capacity of technology and its ever-faster rates of diffusion have also been fuelled by a law of increasing capacity for less cost, so that desktop computers perform functions once confined to massive mainframes for a fraction of the cost of their predecessors. Three laws have combined to produce the current economics of information technology:

1. Moore's Law where the maximum processing power of microchips doubles roughly every 18 months, while its cost halves
2. Gilder's Law where the total bandwidth of communications systems triples every 12 months (with particular implications for the Internet)
3. Metcalfe's Law where the value of a network is proportional to the square of the number of nodes, which means that as a network grows the value of being connected to it grows exponentially, while costs stay the same or even reduce (Ministry of Social Development, 2004).

This rising capacity/decreasing cost phenomenon has meant that small businesses and individuals now have the ability to perform tasks and roles once thought only possible in large corporations and institutions. Desktop publishing and various forms of teleworking for example are all possible, largely because of changes in technology. This development often gives smaller players greater competitiveness with large companies due to their better adaptability – 'the fast eat the slow' as opposed (or perhaps in addition) to the traditional, 'the big eat

the small'. IBM's traditional strength in the computer marketplace was seen as its sheer size; its difficulties in recent years (now largely turned round) were attributed largely to its inability to read current trends and innovate fast enough.

Obviously, these changes in technology and science are intertwined with globalisation, especially as the changes in technology have meant the "death of distance" and New Zealand is potentially "at the centre of the global economy" (Ministry of Social Development, 2004). In many cases, it is technology that makes the global marketplace possible. Just as the advent of refrigerated shipping revolutionised New Zealand's agricultural economy in the early 1900s, contemporary transport innovations are changing a new generation of the New Zealand economy. The meat from local freezing works can be killed, boned and prepared ready for eating and then transported fresh and ready to go on supermarket shelves in overseas markets; fresh-cut flowers and exotic fruits are able to be exported to the discerning Japanese market only because of broad-body jets that operate below an acceptable cost threshold. Conversely, globalisation enables the further development of new generations of technology. Twenty four-hour work schedules on projects involving multiple country teams are increasingly commonplace because of the Internet and associated technology.

### *The world of work*

The downstream effects of the knowledge society, globalisation and the technological and scientific revolution can all be seen in the nature and organisation of work, some of which have been hinted at previously. Firstly, the types of jobs that have evolved since the industrial revolution are proliferating and conventional occupations are evolving constantly. As Field (2000, p. 69) says,

Manual work, once the backbone of every industrial or agrarian economy is in deep decline, particularly in unskilled forms; service occupations are expanding in size and importance. In the remaining core areas of manufacturing, the new production methods require greater individual responsibility and autonomy from the workforce, while traditional skills are disintegrating.

The American economist Robert Reich<sup>2</sup> (1991) maintains that conventional work categories simply no longer match what people actually do. He proposes that future work will be categorised into three broad categories:

1. *symbolic analysts* who manipulate and process information (also known as *knowledge workers*); this category is in the ascendancy, rapidly increasing as a proportion of the overall workforce and garnering a disproportionate amount of society's rewards
2. *in-person service workers* who perform simple and repetitive tasks for others face-to-face (e.g. the hospitality industry); although they are poorly paid, the number of these workers is also increasing
3. *routine production service workers* who perform repetitive tasks of low skill that do not require contact with customers (e.g. factory workers and their supervisors); these jobs are decreasing both in number and remuneration.

The rewards that each of these categories is able to reap vary tremendously and will continue to diverge even further as the knowledge economy expands. Reich warns that unless steps are taken to distribute some of the new work and rewards across the two bottom categories, social divisiveness will expand even further. He argues that this will result in even more of a siege mentality for an ever-decreasing small élite who literally defend their wealth behind high walls and sophisticated security systems.

Although Reich's analysis still has a somewhat futuristic feel to it, the reduction of semi- and unskilled jobs and the expansion of knowledge-oriented jobs can be seen everywhere. Field (2000, p. 71) reports that Britain lost over five million jobs in manufacturing and agriculture in the second half of the last century, while the service industry gained over eight million jobs; ninety per cent of all new jobs created in the future are expected to be in the service industries.

For those low skill workers who hang on to the decreasing number of jobs at the bottom end of the occupational pyramid, the demands being placed on them are also transforming the skills and knowledge necessary to function successfully.

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<sup>2</sup> Reich served as Secretary of Labor for President Clinton and has consulted with other Third Way politicians, including Helen Clark in New Zealand.

This is seen very clearly for example in relation to literacy where workers' jobs are constantly incorporating new forms of technology that require increasingly higher levels of literacy (Cain Johnson & Benseman, 2005).

#### *Other factors*

In addition to the above factors, there are also other factors relevant to this discussion:

- demographic changes, especially the 'greying' of most Western populations (increasing the dependency ratio of young to old), the increasing cultural diversity of populations and the de-population of rural and small towns (Benseman, 2003)
- political changes – including a reduction of the power of the State (due at least in part to the recent influence of the New Right), the emergence of Third Way governments where “the State should not row, but steer; not so much control, as challenge” (Giddens, 2000, p. 6).
- continuing disappointment with the performance of schools in terms of social equity. The main criticisms levelled against schools three decades ago were that they did little to change patterns of social inequality and that they discouraged most people to become learners throughout their lifetime. It would appear that little has changed in the ensuing 30 years. Knapper and Cropley (2000, p. 4), quoting the work of Coombs (1982) maintain that education has been facing a crisis since the late 1960s and that the crisis still continues.
- physical environment - one of the greatest challenges facing the world at present is that of endeavouring to live in harmony with the natural environment (see for example, (Yeo, 1996) in relation to lifelong learning).

All of these factors, both individually and collectively, have provided an environment conducive for the re-emergence of lifelong learning.

#### **Paradigm regained: the second generation of lifelong learning**

Most writers point to the re-emergence of lifelong learning as dating from its adoption in the 1996 *European Year of Lifelong Learning*. Merricks (2001) says

that this development grew out of a 1993 European Union paper entitled *Growth, competitiveness, employment* which not only promoted the need for lifelong learning as a guard against unemployment, but also as a means of promoting 'active citizenship'. In short, the report included justifications for lifelong learning based on both human capital arguments and those around social capital and citizenship (similar to Faure).

As with lifelong education, lifelong learning has been picked up and promoted in various ways by key international agencies as well as national governments. The key international agencies in this generation have been the OECD and UNESCO (both using the same term this time), the European Commission (EC) and to a lesser extent, the Group of Eight. Field (2000, pp. 8-9). argues that the EC and the Group of Eight have pursued a fairly narrow, human capital interpretation of lifelong learning and that the two main players in the debate have been the OECD and UNESCO, both of which have advocated a more balanced approach of human and social capital elements. This time round however, the OECD has been a more prominent advocate of lifelong learning than UNESCO, especially in its influence on national educational policies.

UNESCO's contribution to the contemporary debate has been its report *Learning: the treasure within* authored by the International Taskforce on Education in the XXI<sup>st</sup> Century (chaired by Jacques Delors) and published in the European Year of Lifelong Learning (Delors, 1996). This report is similar in style to the original Faure Report, but has expanded its concerns from 'learning to be' to include 'learning to do' 'learning to become' and 'learning to live together'. The Delors report's scope is very broad and encompasses both human and social capital concerns, but as Field (2000, p. 8) has observed, "in spite of an occasional radicalism of language, it said little in substance that was new or different". UNESCO's lesser involvement may have been because it has lost some of its international prominence since the Faure Report, hamstrung at least in part by funding. Wain (2001, p. 186) also points out that UNESCO gradually withdrew its support for lifelong education and this was a factor in its demise in the 1980s.

Lifelong learning has probably been given extra impetus to its promotion this time round because of the OECD's high degree of influence on member countries compared to the more dissipated influence of UNESCO. Because of

the OECD's historical fixation with economic competitiveness and workforce concerns, the Organisation's association with lifelong learning has led to criticisms of lifelong learning being "human resource development in drag" (Boshier, 1998, p. 4). While it is certainly true that the OECD has strong interest in economic justifications, it has also exhibited considerable interest in non-economic perspectives, usually couched in terms of social capital (CERI/OECD, 2001).

### **Critiques of lifelong learning**

This second generation of interest in lifelong learning has also generated a range of critiques, probably more substantial and vociferous than those of the first generation. These critiques contain a number of themes.

#### *The extreme breadth of lifelong learning*

One of the most frequent criticisms is that because lifelong learning is so incredibly broad<sup>3</sup>, incorporating non-formal and informal forms of learning, it becomes a meaningless concept and is virtually indistinguishable from life itself. The breadth of lifelong learning is reflected in its being linked with other elements of social policy such as promoting social inclusion and economic expansion (Griffin, 2001, p. 43). Along with claiming such a broad area of life under the umbrella of lifelong learning, comes the danger of 'over-promising' what it can deliver. Griffin (op. cit. p. 44) summarises this,

... it has become too strident, and the rhetoric of learning as a universal panacea for social exclusion and inequality has become too far removed from the social and economic realities.

Furthermore, it is a fact that human beings, through the very act of living, are constantly learning, which gives rise to two challenges. If they are constantly learning, why should there be any effort on the part of government or educators

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<sup>3</sup> Lifelong learning underlines the ubiquity of learning, whereas lifelong education always retained connotations of formal provision, despite its recognition of non-formal and informal learning.

to promote what they are already doing?<sup>4</sup> Which raises the second question, can we ever say that someone has learnt enough?

### *Compulsion*

Allied to these issues is the question of whether anyone has a right to not be involved in a world where learning is increasingly presented as a ubiquitous requirement. Can people opt out of a learning society? What subtle, and not so subtle, forces will be incorporated into people's lives to 'encourage' them to learn in the pursuit of the greater good of a learning society?<sup>5</sup> This extreme lifelong learning scenario starts to resemble what Ohliger and Illich had warned about with lifelong education (Illich & Verne, 1976; Ohliger, 1974)

### *Over-emphasis on individualism*

Another common criticism of lifelong learning is that it is predominantly geared to individuals at the expense of collective concerns (Martin, 1999). Coffield (1996) has argued that the focus on individuals which has been paramount in an era dominated by New Right ideology has led to a number of problems.

- an attitude of 'blaming the victim', rather than addressing broader social issues and causes of inequality
- a mis-reading of what is in the best interests of society, as a result of learning being driven only by individual choice
- over-simplifying how people make choices about life decisions
- assuming that training/learning will always ensure employment
- masking the extent of social inequality
- ignoring the value of learning's social aspects
- immorality likened to the 'free-running fox in the free-range chicken pen'.

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<sup>4</sup> This also raises the issue of whether someone is learning 'correctly'. For example people may teach themselves how to do CPR, but in incorrect and harmful ways. The learning may be valued in itself, but the outcomes can certainly be criticised for their potential harmful effects.

<sup>5</sup> This was shown in a recent case of two brothers being banned from swimming competitions for 12 months for swearing at officials; alternatively, they were told they could attend an anger management course and be banned for only six months.

While it is certainly true that much of the debate around lifelong learning focuses on the individual, the criticism has usually been raised in relation to specific lifelong learning policies rather than the concept itself. The emphasis on individuals is countered to some extent by the debate on promoting social inclusion and the ideals of active citizenship, which invariably have a more holistic (and social justice) orientation. Some writers on lifelong learning have also included multiple perspectives on the implications of a learning society – Smith and Spurling (1999, pp. 52-59) for example in their description of the elements of a lifelong learning scenario start with the individual, but then also explore the implications for the family and households, organisations, communities, providers and broader society.

### *Political neutrality*

Another challenge about lifelong learning and the learning society is that they are simply the latest forms of emollient and social control (Coffield, 1997), that they are an “uncritical reification” and therefore constitute “a veneer, glossing over fundamental political and cultural differences that are no longer exposed for critical examination” (Armstrong, 1998, p. 1). There is certainly a large degree of truth in this claim in much of the writing about lifelong learning. There appears to be a simplistic assumption that because the ideals of lifelong learning involve, if not impel, all of a society’s members to participate in learning that it therefore somehow sidesteps the traditional criticisms of conventional education and its demonstrable selectivity and role in perpetuating social inequality (see for example, (Kearney, 2001). Furthermore, lifelong learning usually incorporates debate and strategies to actively seek non-traditional learners and involve them – something that has not been achieved to any great degree previously. While this element of ‘universal participation’ appears to circumvent some of the strongest criticisms of traditional education, and especially post-school forms of education, as being socially élitist, these responses do not confront the issue of the content of the educational provision being offered. For it is in the matter of curriculum that the issue of apparent neutrality comes to the fore most clearly.

Essentially there are two main schools of thought around curriculum and lifelong learning. One school of thought maintains that it does not matter what forms of knowledge are taught, as this maintains ostensible neutrality towards the relative merit of different forms of knowledge. The value of education is seen as

coming from the learning of new knowledge and skills, irrespective of judgements of their supposed educational merit. This 'indirect value' of education is epitomised in Bauer and Elsey's (1992) article on the educational impact achieved in a smocking class for women.

This approach makes no real distinction between education to provide the best of a culture's heritage in literature and the like on the one hand, and 'low status' subjects such as macramé, Appalachian Mountain Clog Dancing or Christmas card making (which Alan Tuckett of NIACE refers to as "seriously useless knowledge" - personal communication). While this position avoids the pitfalls of evaluating the different forms of knowledge, it is somewhat naïve in that these sorts of evaluations occur inevitably with limited resources when educators have to make decisions as to what is taught and what is not. Avoiding judgements of educational value is also open to criticisms of being politically supportive of the status quo, because educators fail to challenge the forces of oppression and hegemony. Among all the rhetoric and momentum of lifelong learning, there is a danger as Martin (1999, p. 181) points out, of not connecting with "the radical impulse that lies at the heart of the social purpose tradition in adult and community education."

The other school of thought about curriculum and lifelong learning contradicts the neutrality of the previous position, and argues that educators should choose some forms of knowledge over others in terms of their ability to achieve broader political aims. This position can be found in the arguments of traditional liberal educationists and those of the political left. For example, feminist Jane Thompson argues that curriculum must be concerned with 'really useful knowledge' that helps lay bare the nature of inequality and help initiate the means to overcome it (Thompson, 1997). All other forms of knowledge she sees as 'fairly useful knowledge' at best. Unless lifelong learning takes a strong position in this respect, it is merely the latest fad to mask, or extend, the perpetuation of injustice and inequity.

#### *Translating lifelong learning into social policy*

Griffin (2001, p. 48) has observed that many policy documents simply treat lifelong learning as "just another name for a more integrated ('joined up'), more accessible, more relevant, more accountable education system." While many

observers would probably be quite happy to achieve these sorts of outcomes for lifelong learning, Griffin argues that it would then not differ to any great degree from traditional education and training systems.

Griffin goes on to argue that because lifelong learning is so broad, it is difficult for governments to write educational policy to achieve it - "... conventional policy analysis is incapable of grasping it and new policy categories are required" (op. cit., p. 44). He claims that educational policy is possible only within the schooling sector where policy's influence is more direct and less dependent on other social agencies. In a lifelong learning environment however, government is only one of many agencies involved – along with business, local government, voluntary organisations and cultural organisations. Therefore, governments can only act as *enablers*, in contrast to more traditional roles of *mandating* and *sanctioning* policy. The reduction of governmental influence in this area has not been helped by the reduction in governmental power in countries such as New Zealand that have been through a period of New Right influence when the reduction of the role of government was seen as a top priority.

#### *Lifelong learning as a myth*

Just as its predecessor lifelong education was criticised as largely rhetoric, lifelong learning has also been criticised along similar lines – in this case as a myth.

Only poets and science fiction writers have imagined what a learning society would look like and how it would differ from today's world (Ainley, quoted in Ranson, 1998, p. 184).

Myths are pervasive in contemporary society, and are both dangerous and necessary (Strain & Field, 1977). The main substance to this form of criticism appears to be based on the large discrepancy between the espoused qualities of lifelong learning and the realities of present societies. While some commentators have endeavoured to identify which countries could be described as (or approximate) learning societies (Makino, 1997; Trivellato, 1996; Williamson, 1995), most would argue that even for countries like Japan and Scandinavia, the ideal is still some distance off. This then raises the question of whether any country, or even regions within a country, could ever claim to 'have

arrived' at the ideal or whether the concept of a learning society forever is a mirage that serves as a long-term goal, but by its very nature, remains unattainable.

The assertion that lifelong learning is a myth also finds some support in research findings. For example, Ranson (1998) in a review of the research on the relationship between productivity and education concludes that there is little evidence to support the assumption that investment in vocational training is closely correlated with the economic performance of a country. If such findings on work or other elements of lifelong learning continue to emerge in the future, then the viability of the new paradigm may well come under serious challenge.

Similarly, the question arises 'how much is enough?' in the pursuit of a long-term goal of lifelong learning? For example, while most people concur that there is a need to increase present rates of participation in all forms of education, there is little agreement as to what constitutes a satisfactory level in this respect. As tertiary education in many countries is heading towards a 50% participation rate (OECD, 2000, p. 152), the traditional argument of tapping the 'reserve of talent', while maintaining high levels of academic standards, will come under increasing pressure. What is the maximum rate of participation in tertiary education, which does not invalidate the academic nature of the programmes and levels of intellectual performance? Answering this question is probably easier than deciding on a satisfactory level of participation for broader programmes of ACE.

Some writers believe that lifelong learning is not just a myth, but also a harmful myth (Hughes & Tight, 1995). Others, however, while acknowledging that such ideals are always going to be constantly challenged to keep the ideals within realistic sight, argue that the myth of lifelong learning acts as a useful reminder of what should be achieved, even if there is slippage 'twixt cup and lip' (Tight, 1994). Summing up this debate, Ranson says,

We may conclude that the function of a learning society myth is to provide a convenient and palatable rationale and packaging for the current and future policies of different power groups within society. As such, it has little impact on the nature, content or implementation of those policies, yet makes those policies appear different and more

interesting, giving the impression to interested outsiders that things are improving. Yet this myth has power. It has power because it is believed by many to be achievable, and is seen as an answer to profound economic and social problems. It can, therefore, be used by a range of interest groups to better articulate and promote their policies. This can be done without supporting emotional evidence or critical analysis; indeed, given the emotional appeal of myth in general, such rationality may be better left out (op. cit., p. 188).

### **Lifelong learning and current educational policy in New Zealand**

Compared with the first generation of lifelong education, it appears that lifelong learning is starting to make greater inroads into the educational policies of many countries, including New Zealand. A recent review of educational policies in terms of lifelong learning (OECD, 2001a) concluded that many OECD member countries are not only incorporating the term into their national educational policies, they are also starting to articulate explicit targets in this direction and introducing reforms aimed at changing fundamental aspects of their education systems. The report also points out, that there is considerable variation between countries in how they have interpreted lifelong learning, with some countries emphasising employability and competitiveness, while others emphasise personal development and citizenship. In his review of lifelong learning as a principle for educational policy however, Rubenson was less convinced of such progress (Rubenson, 1997). He argues that while the term has become commonplace in many governmental papers and reviews, it is yet to make any real impact on core educational policy documents.<sup>6</sup>

Lifelong learning has been somewhat slower to appear in New Zealand than in other countries. This is probably due to political factors that saw a New Right government in power until 1999, and which made only passing reference to lifelong learning ideals while in office. The only policy document it issued relating to lifelong learning, *Bright Futures* (Bradford, 1999), was very limited in its scope, concentrated mainly on supporting gifted scholars and disappeared without trace following the change of government.

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted of course that Rubenson was writing four years before the OECD report.

The Labour government of Helen Clark came to office in 1999 with a strong agenda of reforming education. It is not surprising that this government has shown a strong interest in education, given that most of the key ministers involved had prior careers as educators, including the Minister of Education as an ACE practitioner. Furthermore, Labour came into office with an explicit policy document on ACE. It had been the first New Zealand political party to do so in the previous election and several other parties (United and the Alliance) had followed suit.

In terms of post-school education, the most significant move by Labour in their term of office to date has been to establish the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC), an eight member group (including an ex-university continuing education officer) charged with reviewing all post-school education in New Zealand. TEAC published four reports, detailing its vision (TEAC, 2000), outlining the broad parameters of the new system (TEAC, 2001c), providing a strategy for achieving the vision (TEAC, 2001b) and indicating funding mechanisms for the vision (TEAC, 2001a).

Alongside the Commission, the Minister also instigated a review of ACE by a committee of nominees from the field. This committee's report *Koia! Koia! Towards a learning society: the role of adult and community education* (Rivers, 2001) was formally accepted by the government in November 2001 and has formed the basis for current policy and, in the future, resource allocation. Also of note was the writing of an adult literacy strategy *More than words: the New Zealand adult literacy strategy*<sup>7</sup> released in May 2001 (Ministry of Education, 2001a). This document detailed the government's plans for improving New Zealand's adult literacy rates. This report was written by a Ministry of Education official following consultation with people involved in the field. There have been a series of positions for both adult education and adult literacy created in both the Ministry of Education and the Tertiary Education Commission (although the ACE position in the TEC has since been dis-established), which have not existed since the days of Denny Garrett in the old Ministry of Education.

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<sup>7</sup> The author of this report told me that it was called a strategy rather than a policy because it was seen as having a greater chance of being implemented (in comparison with labelling it as a policy).

In addition to the above reports, there has also been a review of industry training, *Skills for a knowledge economy* (Ministry of Education, 2001b) and considerable interest shown in workplace learning generally. These developments also reflect a lifelong learning orientation, including concerns about changing present patterns of participation, developing literacy skills, recognition of developing a knowledge base among workers and developing a culture of learning in the workplace. Finally, the Ministry of Education has produced a Tertiary Education Strategy, which is another first of its type (Ministry of Education, 2002). This report outlined six key strategies for the tertiary system 2002 – 2007, some of which have since spawned statements of funding priority for ACE in coming years:

- targeting learners whose initial learning was not successful
- raising foundation skills
- strengthening communities by meeting identified community learning needs
- encouraging lifelong learning
- strengthening social cohesion.

The most significant development has been the establishment of the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) in 2003, which was the administrative government department charged with implementing the vision outlined by the Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC). TEC has been charged with the responsibility of funding and administering all post-school education in New Zealand, including ACE. The grouping of all post-school education under one umbrella is certainly unprecedented in this country and is especially significant for the inclusion of ACE alongside the more recognised tertiary sectors.

### *The TEAC reports*

Without providing a detailed analysis of the TEAC reports, it is significant to note some of their content in relation to this discussion about lifelong learning. Firstly, the reports are couched in the terminology of lifelong learning. The first report's opening quote starts with "Education is a lifelong process ..." (TEAC, 2000, p. 8). In the same section it highlights the sentence, "the demands that the knowledge society makes ... will necessitate New Zealand becoming very serious about lifelong learning" (op. cit., p. 11).

Having then discussed the nature of a knowledge society, the first recommendation advocates for a broad definition of the term, thereby validating a broad approach to tertiary education.

A broad definition of the knowledge society should be adopted in the development of policy for tertiary education. This would include a recognition of the potentially valuable contribution of all forms of knowledge" (op. cit., p. 9).

The second recommendation stipulates the inclusion of "non-formal learning outside the school system" (op. cit., p. 10). Conclusion 5 states,

The tertiary education system needs to be designed to respond to the challenge of lifelong learning in a knowledge society, and this may require new ways of organising, delivering and recognising tertiary education and learning (op. cit., p. 12).

Among the guiding principles it lists are 'lifelong equitable access', 'portability' and 'democracy and citizenship' (op. cit., p. 12).

Even this brief account of TEAC's work clearly demonstrates a strong commitment to the ideals of lifelong learning. The term itself is employed widely in the reports, there is recognition of the diversity of knowledge and skills being sought, the full range of educational provision is recognised, including ACE, and both human and social capital elements are endorsed.

### *The review of adult and community education*

The review of ACE (Rivers, 2001) was geared to link into the work of TEAC and the adult literacy. This review was done through meetings with TEAC representatives, on-going liaison and exchanges of reports prior to publication. The publication of the report and its acceptance by government represents a major milestone for ACE in New Zealand, as this step has not ever been achieved at any other time in the history of the field. Several reports were written in the 1980s under previous Labour administrations, but were never adopted formally or implemented in any systematic way. It is not an understatement to claim that the report represents a 'return from Siberia' for the field; a sentiment echoed in the Associate Minister of Education's speech at its launch when she said, "You have made it. You are now part of the educational mainstream."

The *Koia! Koia!* report is essentially aimed at providing some administrative coherence to a field that is probably best described as 'jerry built', the result of historical add-ons that have never been planned or organised in a holistic, coherent manner. It therefore endeavours to provide some consistency of funding and accountability structures and sets a clear direction for prioritising funding. Theoretically at least, community-based providers will be on an equal footing with established mainstream providers such as schools and tertiary institutions, provided they meet the requirements of new regulations to be devised. This move to recognise providers irrespective of formal status was seen as an important part of the new proposals, as the committee felt that too many providers were receiving resources as of right, rather than on educational merit.

The other main feature of the report is its push to provide incentives to involve non-traditional learners and to encourage the field to engage more actively in community issues and debates in the programmes it offers. Finally, it contains a range of strategies to help establish greater credibility and recognition for the field, such as the expansion of research, better data collection and utilisation, the push for greater professional development for practitioners, and recognition of lifelong learning principles in any proposed changes to the Education Act.

## Conclusion

While the experience of the past three decades clearly shows that lifelong learning is anything but secure on the New Zealand educational landscape, there have been a range of developments over the past few years that point to a greater acceptance of lifelong learning ideals.

But 'the jury is still out' as to how pervasive lifelong learning paradigm becomes embedded in the New Zealand education system and truly supplants the old 'front-end' schooling paradigm. At the time of writing Labour is nearing its second term of office and many of its reforms are just starting to be fully implemented. As the events following the first generation of lifelong education have shown, we should always treat the apparent accomplishments to date with cautious optimism and await subsequent developments over the coming decade before reaching any definitive conclusions.

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