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## **Introduction**

Like most other industrialised countries in the world, rural New Zealand has been undergoing substantial and sustained social change for some time now. While the most obvious indicator of these changes is the on-going de-population of most rural areas and small towns, there are a number of other areas of change that have transformed rural life, in both positive and negative ways.

Education has also been changing in fundamental ways over recent years. The 'one-shot, front-loaded' traditional education system based primarily around schooling that has dominated educational policy and practice in countries world-wide during the 20<sup>th</sup> century is rapidly changing into a system where learning is becoming both lifelong and life-wide. This article looks at how lifelong learning is evolving in two small New Zealand towns and their surrounding areas and explores some of the issues arising from these changes.

## **The rural New Zealand context**

New Zealand rural areas and their associated small towns have been caught in the swirl of change for some time, although the forces that have driven the changes have been both intensifying and diversifying over recent years. The causes of these changes are multi-faceted and interlinked, but factors that have been central to rural New Zealand over the past few decades are primarily linked to the mechanical revolution

and its latter day cousins, the technological revolution (especially the use of computer-based technology) and globalisation, where agricultural products are sold in an increasingly competitive international marketplace.

Socially, rural areas have witnessed large-scale de-population, although this change has occurred unevenly across the country and more drastically for some groups. The post-World War Two period in New Zealand for example saw large numbers of Maori<sup>1</sup> and young women move to urban areas, leaving behind higher proportions of older residents than their urban counterparts.

Economically, most of rural New Zealand experienced a sustained period of growth and prosperity up until the mid-1960s. But with the entry of Britain (New Zealand's traditional trading partner) into the European Economic Community (EEC, now the European Community) in 1973, this situation changed considerably. With the loss of this guaranteed market and a subsequent decline in demand of traditional agricultural goods (primarily meat, wool and butter), New Zealand entered a period of uncertainty which resulted in a search for new overseas markets and diversifying into new land-based products ranging from ostriches to providing homestays for the burgeoning numbers of tourists. Some of these 'sunrise industries' have endured, while others have risen and fallen within the span of a few years. Added to this uncertainty, the withdrawal of government financial subsidies under a period of New Right governments and economic liberalism have meant that many rural areas experienced considerable hardship in comparison with the halcyon days of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> The indigenous people of New Zealand comprise approx. 15% of the total population. Historically located in rural areas, their distribution in urban areas is now similar to their rural counterparts.

The late 1980s and early 1990s then were a period of economic consolidation as new markets were built up and a wider range of economic activities were developed. A boom period fuelled mainly by high dairy prices in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought levels of prosperity not experienced for several decades, although it has been accompanied by a strong sense of “not holding our breath for it to last” with it, borne of the difficulties of the preceding decade. The experience of the past 20 years has bred a steely sense of scepticism and guardedness, unlike the heady optimism of post World War II.

All of these events brought about considerable change in the rural landscape and social life of the diminishing number of people still living outside the growing metropolitan areas. In particular, there has been considerable loss of both government and private service agencies such as post offices, schools, shops and hotels. As in the US (Lyson, 2002), the social and economic effects of not having these amenities is considerable for the surrounding communities (Gilling, 1997). Economically, the need to compete in a competitive international marketplace has meant that there have been large reductions in the numbers of agricultural processing plants such as cheese factories and meat-works. Smaller numbers of centralised, larger plants have been made possible by improved transport and communications. The negative impact of these changes has been the lowering of the viability of rural centers and an increasing dependence on more distant towns and cities.

## **The shift to a lifelong learning paradigm**

For the past two decades there has been a substantial change in the way we view education – a change that some educationists have argued, is tantamount to a paradigm shift (Wain, 2001). Historically, the movement first towards universal primary schooling, then universal access to high school, followed by raising the compulsory leaving age to 15 and then 16 were all seen as progressive markers of progress and modernisation. At the time, these achievements were seen as guarantees that like most other Western societies, New Zealand had achieved what official documents referred to as “99.9% literacy rates” for its citizens (Watson, 1999). Subsequent developments in the 1970s and subsequent decades however showed this assumption to be ill-founded (Cain Johnson & Benseman, 2005). Certainly the mandatory 10-year stint in school was commonly perceived as guaranteeing a reasonably informed and skilled population – at least for the great majority of people, as only a small élite group ever accessed a university education and polytechnics<sup>2</sup> were still only minor educational players until the middle of last century.

### *The emergence of lifelong education*

But this traditional, ‘front-loaded’ model of education has increasingly been seen as inadequate and inappropriate for the world of the late 20<sup>th</sup>, let alone the 21<sup>st</sup>, century. The first significant international marker of this change in how we see education occurred with the release in 1972 of the UNESCO report *Learning to be* (Faure et al., 1972). The Faure Report pointed to issues such as the growing expansion of

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<sup>2</sup> Post-school vocational institutions.

technology (computers were starting to make an appearance, but were still cumbersome and largely confined to huge mainframes in a few institutions such as universities and large companies), the documented failings of schools to achieve adequately for all children, growing social issues (such as racism), changes in traditional relationships (such as the emergence of a new generation of the women's movement), demographics (such as the ageing of populations and large-scale migration both within and between countries) and rapid social change (epitomised by Alvin Toffler's book *Future shock*) as factors all necessitating a radical change in how we organise education. Faure advocated a move to *lifelong education*, which his committee saw as the means to achieve a *learning society*.

The report's vision of a learning society (Faure, 1972, p. 160) argued that education should no longer be confined to a particular age or the privilege of a small élite of young adults; rather, it should reach out "to embrace the whole of society and the entire lifespan of the individual." In order to do so, there would need to be fundamental changes in how, when and where education occurred, both in the schooling sector and post-school.

The core components of the Faure committee's proposals are summarised by the diagram below (Boshier, 1997).

[FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE]

Boshier argues that the Faure Report was organised around four key concepts: horizontal integration where education would be promoted in non-formal through to formal settings, vertical integration involving people regardless of age, democratisation of education systems and these would then culminate in the fourth concept, a learning society.

While the diagram below doesn't incorporate the element of democratisation, it is useful for pointing out that how front-end educational models are dominated totally by quadrant four, whereas a system built round lifelong education would see greater recognition and a more equitable distribution of resources across all four quadrants. Boshier also points out that the diagram illustrates the ease with which any learner should be able to move back and forward between the different sectors of the education system. He summed up the report saying - "the impetus for all these events was quite utopian and infused with a feeling of possibility" (Boshier, 1997 p. 11).

The Faure report had considerable impact on New Zealand and many other Western countries, but mainly in the provision of education of adults outside traditional institutions. The report achieved little impact on schools and left many formal institutions such as universities largely untouched. Lifelong education had made a grand entrance into the educational world, but failed to transform many elements of the educational establishment.

### **The (re-)emergence of lifelong learning**

Lifelong education disappeared off the 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, sponsored and promoted largely by the OECD and to a lesser extent, UNESCO. Its re-emergence should not have come as any surprise, as the conditions that led to the emergence of lifelong education in the 1970s and early 1980s had not diminished in the final decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; indeed, they had

gathered momentum along with some new elements, all of which further underlined the inadequacies of traditional education. Some researchers (Sundet & Galbraith, 1991) have also specifically pointed to the inadequacy of traditional adult education to cope with the 'rural crisis' that has occurred as a consequence of these wider forces of social change.

The choice of the term *lifelong learning* in preference to the earlier *lifelong education* was notable for a number of reasons. Firstly, lifelong education had been criticised as being too dependent on mainstream educational institutions and their programs (Deleon, 1996). Secondly, lifelong learning indicated a broader ambit, where promoting learning should not be the responsibility of traditional educational institutions and organisations alone. Rather, a wide range of social institutions, including libraries (Killacky, 1983), local government, employers, cultural groups and other social service agencies should all see themselves as active promoters and providers of learning opportunities for their communities. Hence the development of learning cities, regions and organisations (Ranson, 1998; Retallick, Cocklin, & Coombe, 1999) and the growing interest in non-formal and informal learning generally (Coffield, 2000).

Lifelong learning now underpins the educational policies of many Western countries from Slovenia to Iceland and is the focus of much international work of agencies such as the OECD and UNESCO (OECD, 2000, 2003, 2005). Within New Zealand, a recent overhaul of the national tertiary education system has been couched in terms of lifelong learning ideals (J. Benseman, 2003).

## **Study aims**

Almost all of the literature about lifelong learning internationally to date has focussed on urban settings, with scant recognition of rural contexts. This study therefore sought to review how well two typical New Zealand rural towns and their surrounding catchment areas were faring in relation to the ideals of the lifelong learning paradigm. It sought to map the diversity of provision for these two communities and identify areas of need and related issues.

## **Two towns: a profile**

*Kaikoura* is a small town situated on a peninsula midway between Christchurch and Blenheim on the upper east coast of the South Island. The district's population of 3483 residents is located predominantly in the township itself, although the surrounding rural areas are also an important element of the local community. The area was heavily settled by Maori up to 1000 years ago; Europeans settled in the district in the 1840s, initially attracted to hunt the whales (until 1922) for which the area is famous and later for sheep farming and agriculture. While the district prospered in these early days, its economic development in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was less successful.

Unlike many other rural areas in New Zealand, Kaikoura has been undergoing a period of steady economic development and growth (due primarily to tourism centred on a whale-watching industry), although this situation is relatively recent. In the late 1980s Kaikoura was devastated by cutbacks in rail employment and the collapse of the local fishing industry.

Educational provision in Kaikoura is provided by:

- three early childhood programs and some informal activities aimed at this age group
- four elementary schools, which are competing for a diminishing number of pupils
- one Year 7-13 high school with a roll of 250, also struggling to maintain its roll numbers
- a community education center that runs a range of courses based on perceived needs in the community and acts as an informal advice center
- the Rural Education Activities Program (administered from a town two hours away) runs one-day events on topics such as confidence-building, parenting, arts and crafts and recreation topics
- the local Maori *marae* (community and cultural centre) runs some vocational courses, mainly for its local people
- a range of informal educational programs are also run in workplaces, the local library and community organisations.

The *Central Hawkes Bay District* (population 12,825) is situated mid-way down the east coast of the North Island. There is evidence of Maori settlement in the inland areas of the district dating back to at least the 1300s, although settlement tended to be more concentrated on coastal locations. European settlement of the area started in the mid-1800s.

The district has two main towns - Waipukurau and Waipawa, with around 4,000 and 2,000 residents respectively and a number of smaller towns. Cropping, farming and their associated processing and support industries provide much of the employment in the area. While sheep farming is prevalent, dairying is becoming increasingly significant

and like many other regions, forestry is expected to become a major activity in the future. Economically, Central Hawkes Bay is dominated by farming and its related services and is a fairly typical New Zealand rural area.

Educational provision in Central Hawkes Bay includes:

- nine early childhood programs spread throughout the district
- 19 elementary schools, most of which have rolls of 50-100 pupils
- one Year 7-13 high school with a reasonably stable roll of approx. 650
- two Private Training Establishments (PTEs) offering vocational programs, mainly for unemployed workers
- a Maori trust and the local marae are both very active in offering vocational courses, as well as courses on cultural topics and issues
- informal provision through workplaces, an adult literacy volunteer group, the local libraries and community organisations.

Both areas have residents who are enrolled in distance education programs run by a university, a polytechnic and some private providers.

## **Methodology**

This research consisted of compiling two case studies to illustrate how lifelong learning might be operating in New Zealand rural communities. The case study approach “constitutes a specific way of collecting, organising and analysing data ... [where] their purpose is to gather comprehensive, systematic and in-depth information about each case of interest” (Patton, 2002 p. 447). Case studies are seen as a valuable way of

offering insights into broad issues that can subsequently be explored in a more focussed way in larger, follow-up studies (Sarantakos, 2004 p. 263).

While not representative of rural New Zealand in a definitive sense, the two communities were chosen to approximate overall patterns in these areas: one was chosen from each of the two main islands, and each had population distributions approximating national patterns in terms of ethnicity, incomes, physical isolation and structures (typically, small towns with a hinterland of smaller communities).

In order to meet the research aims outlined earlier, the researcher undertook week-long field visits to each of the communities. Prior to the visits, Internet searches were undertaken to identify as many providers as possible, which were supplemented by information through the researcher's personal networks. The field visits then consisted of making interview appointments with the identified contacts and supplementing these contacts with publicly available brochures and local listings (e.g. phone books, public notice boards). In addition, interviewees were also asked to identify additional informants relevant to the study for additional interviews. This snowball or chain sampling method (Patton, 2002) worked particularly well in these small communities where there is a high degree of awareness of others' activities, although some of the mainstream educational informants were not always aware of their non-formal counterparts.

The interviews were predominantly carried out face-to-face, using a semi-structured interview schedule, which ensured both a standard coverage of core information parameters, but also had the flexibility to follow up additional information or issues. In a few cases where people had limited availability, interviews were done by phone.

Wherever possible, the interviews were audio-taped; where this was not possible, extensive notes were taken during the interview and expanded immediately following the interview.

There was also an element of observation in carrying out the study, involving the researcher seeking information through public spaces and observing providers' promotional activities, which approximates the perspective of potential learners and thereby provided an additional perspective on how provision operated within the communities. These observations were recorded in note form by the researcher.

The final interview list of over 40 interviewees included teachers (at all levels), educational administrators, government agency managers, professional practitioners (doctors, chemists, lawyers, opticians), principals, community educators, employers, apprentices, Modern Apprenticeship co-ordinators, librarians, local government employees, librarians, community activists, Private Training Establishment staff, adult literacy organisers, community organisation personnel and volunteers, tertiary education staff and assorted local people. Some people filled a number of these roles. All interviewees signed a Consent Form, in keeping with the ethical guidelines of the researcher's university's Human Subjects Ethics Committee.

Analysis of the data generated from the interviews was carried out using conventional qualitative methods. The process of analysis included extensive reading of field observations, interview notes and listening to interview tapes; from these sources, broad themes were identified and aggregated, forming the basis for the following presentation of findings.

## **Findings**

Consistent with a move towards lifelong learning, the study identified a diverse and growing range of educational provision for people throughout the lifespan operating in both communities. Much of the provision for adults had emerged only over the past decade, providing learning opportunities for adults that had been very limited (in scope and number) in the past. From mapping the provision and interviewing key informants about its operations, a number of key themes emerged in relation to the development of lifelong learning in rural areas.

### **‘The tyranny of numbers’**

Funding for educational programs in New Zealand is predominantly dependent on ensuring minimum numbers of enrolments. These minimum numbers in turn ensure a provider’s economic viability as well as providing accountability to central funding sources (usually government departments, but predominantly the Ministry of Education). While the days of the Ministry of Education stipulating an immovable minimum number of enrolments have now passed, many providers’ governing bodies still set a minimum figure for each course (typically 10-12) to ensure long-term viability for their organisations. This change has undoubtedly handed providers a greater degree of professional autonomy and flexibility, but the ‘enrolment economy’ is still a significant influence on not only what amount and types of provision are offered, but also how and when.

We do have a greater degree of flexibility than what we used to have, but you still have to satisfy the bean-counters in Wellington at the end of the day. (Private Training Establishment manager)

It's so frustrating to put together an exciting course and then it doesn't 'fly' because we can't get the numbers for it. (Community education organiser)

This issue is nowhere more apparent than in rural areas where small population catchment numbers mean that course organisers constantly teeter on the edge of financial viability because of the need to ensure a minimum number of enrolments.<sup>3</sup> One interviewee referred to this as “the constant tyranny of numbers that just sits there all the time.” This restraint means that courses about issues and topics that are seen as important for the community and/or involving learners with high educational needs are often cancelled because of insufficient numbers.

There are real areas of need that we don't cater for, simply because we can't get enough people, not matter how useful the course is. (marae staff member)

While organisers can choose to offer the courses anyway and carry the financial cost within their overall budgets, there are very real limits to how often this can be done.

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<sup>3</sup> They also lack the opportunities that urban providers have to run some courses with large enrolments that subsidize courses with low numbers.

Sometimes we just decide to go with it and wear the cost. We just hope that we can make up the deficit somewhere else along the line. (Vocational provider)

Rural communities are as socially diverse as most urban areas, which means that their provision needs to cater for a corresponding diversity of educational needs, but they lack the population numbers to draw on for the courses they run in response to these needs.

### **Boundaries and co-ordination of provision**

With its emphasis on being lifelong and life-wide, a system of lifelong learning should lead to a breaking down of traditional boundaries between educational sectors and better co-ordination between them, thereby providing a seamless range of learning opportunities irrespective of learners' circumstances or characteristics. While rural areas have probably been less rigid in the delineation between various education sectors, there was evidence in this study that these boundaries still persist. For example, the issue of course viability discussed above is affected to some degree by a lack of awareness and co-ordination among program organisers. Interviewees reported only finding out about courses similar to what they were planning being organised by other organisations/providers after they have run - or more importantly, after they have been cancelled. In both cases, the financial viability of the course could have been improved if there had been better communication and publicity beforehand and learners could then have been recruited from a wider range of the community.

We organised a small business training course last year and had to cancel because we couldn't get enough enrolments and then we found out that [government department] were offering virtually the same course the following month – and they had to cancel theirs too! (Private training provider)

In a world dominated by economies of scale and bureaucratic regulations, rural areas need to make use of every resource they have. If a course is initiated and planned by a provider (whether they are an 'educational' provider or not), then the ideal scenario would be for all parts of the local community to then be informed of the course and have the opportunity to enrol if they are interested. Lifelong learning provision needs to transcend conventional boundaries of education (including schools), work, leisure and social services.

Learners' educational needs should create an intersection point, rather than organisational 'boundaries' forming various intersection points that hopefully coincide with learners' needs. For example, community classes offered by high schools have traditionally been dominated by middle-aged women pursuing leisure interests. While this pattern is still strong, one organiser of these classes is also endeavouring to diversify their clientele and curricula by initiating contact and liaison with local businesses and workplaces to extend provision to workplace topics. These sorts of initiatives are valuable in breaking the mindset for this form of provision. If programme providers are able to consistently transcend these boundaries, there should be a corresponding increase in the number and diversity of learners recruited and courses offered – as well as making more programs viable in terms of enrolments.

We've been making a real effort to break out of that [traditional] mould.

We've been talking to employers and people in [community organisations] to try and do something really different – but it's hard! (Community class organiser)

There is some evidence of the breaking down of traditional educational boundaries such as that between schools and post-school education. This change was being influenced at least in part by falling rolls in many of the schools in the study's areas. With vacant classrooms available, some of the schools have looked to using these facilities for adult programs for such as SeniorNet (offering computer courses for older adults) and early childhood activities such as informal play-groups.

We had these empty classrooms sitting there not being used, so we thought we should make them available [for community groups]. It's been really good for the school having adults, especially the older ones, round during the day. The kids really like it and I think they do too, I think it's great to see the generations mixing. (School principal)

Opening up school facilities to community groups in this way is also consistent with recent government initiatives to create 'learning communities' where schools are more integrated into their surrounding communities.<sup>4</sup> An Australian study (Falk & Kilpatrick, no date p. 3) of rural communities has shown that adult education activities can make considerable contributions to generating public trust or social capital among citizens.

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=9644&data=l>

Given that social capital includes the building of social values, networks and trust, in every adult and community education (ACE) site this has been shown to be true. ACE contributes to community wellbeing by enhancing and building social capital which is of benefit to community groups, families and individuals. ACE contributes to the development of social capital by, first, calling on existing networks, and second, generating new networks or connections.

### **'Educational inflation'**

While the expansion of educational opportunities has undoubtedly been a positive development in many ways, it should also be noted that there is a degree of cynicism among some people about these changes. Some interviewees expressed doubt that the increasing levels of education expected in some occupations is always justified. For example, meat-works employees were traditionally recruited from non-qualified school-leavers once they reached the leaving age of 15. Now this process occurs very rarely, as preference is now given to those who have completed a 'pre-employment' course (that typically covers such topics as basic hygiene, basic literacy skills) at a local training organisation.

They're still basically the same sorts of people you know? I'm not convinced that it's all that different as a result of everyone running off and doing courses left, right and center. (Employer)

I reckon people will need a degree soon to pick up rubbish the way they're going. (Vocational tutor)

While most educators and their supporters fundamentally work from the premise that ‘there is no such thing as too much education,’ there is a body of literature among some economists that it is possible for a society to ‘over-educate’.<sup>5</sup> This argument of course refers predominantly to education for vocational purposes rather than education in the broad sense, but is an interesting challenge nonetheless to the automatic assumption that ‘more is better.’

It is difficult to ascertain if Borghans’ observations are true for rural New Zealand or New Zealand generally without a detailed study on the issue. However it is also worthy of note that several educators interviewed for this study felt there was still a prevalent attitude among some young people that they could readily walk into jobs with no qualifications and this perception was a strong disincentive to staying on at high school. This perception is probably exacerbated by the fact that the New Zealand economy has been in a buoyant phase over recent years, with unemployment levels lower than they have been over the past decade or so.

It’s really hard to convince them [pupils in high school] that they need qualifications when they can still walk into plenty of jobs without any bits of paper. (High school principal)

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<sup>5</sup> In many OECD countries one may observe the tendency for highly skilled people to be employed in jobs that used to be occupied by people with a lower level of education. This phenomenon is often directly interpreted as under-utilization of skills or over-education, and concerns in many cases substantial fractions of people with a certain skill level, varying from 20-50%. Freeman’s 1976 *The Overeducated American* study suggests that students invest too much in education. This over-education argument challenges the policy of many developed countries to promote further investments in education in order to improve the competitiveness of their economies (Borghans & de Grip, 2000), p.3). Similar concerns can also be seen in the work of the British academic Alison Wolf (2002).

## **Literacy needs**

One argument for the need to move towards a lifelong learning is the need to improve adults' literacy skills to meet the increasing literacy demands of the workplace and community life. The advent of the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) was a major watershed for adult literacy in New Zealand (Cain Johnson & Benseman, 2005). This national study clearly showed that a significant proportion of New Zealand adults have literacy difficulties in their everyday lives and has had considerable impact on the extension of literacy-related provision. A recent study of adult literacy provision in England (Atkin, Rose, & Shier, 2005) for example, showed that literacy needs are as great, if not greater, in rural areas, but that provision was much less readily available than in more populated areas. Because they simply lack the total numbers of potential learners in their areas, rural providers operate under fundamentally different constraints than their urban counterparts.

A number of people interviewed for this study reported that they had encountered a reasonable number of adults in both communities who have literacy difficulties, but who have not been involved in adult literacy tuition. In Kaikoura there have been efforts to provide an adult literacy service, but these had not been successful in recruiting sufficient learners.<sup>6</sup> In Central Hawkes Bay a small group of committed volunteers offers 1:1 tuition throughout the district, although they do not advertise their program as they report that the need is greater than they are able to offer.

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<sup>6</sup> Specific difficulties include confidentiality in small communities, the availability of skilled tutors and transport.

We can't cope with what we get referred to us at the moment, so we don't really do any publicity about what we offer. If we did, I think we'd get swamped and that would really have us running round! (Adult literacy coordinator)

Limited numbers of volunteers and a lack of resources prevent them from actively expanding their present provision. While some of the post-school provision currently offered in both communities includes literacy components, there is a feeling that the issue is not sufficiently catered for by present structures.

Offering skilled tuition for adult literacy learners is not a straightforward task at the best of times. The 'tyranny of numbers' of rural areas discussed above makes the provision of adult literacy even more difficult as low numbers of learners (especially in the early stages of programme development) mean that provision will need to come via a voluntary organisation or as part of integrated tuition in other forms of education, such as Training Opportunities programmes for the unemployed – rather than a specialised adult literacy agency with paid staff. A third option in the short to medium term is the development of Internet-based programmes that are increasingly being used overseas (Askov, Johnston, Petty, & Young, 2003).

### **Farm-gate educators**

One of the implications of the lifelong learning paradigm discussed earlier is that ongoing education opportunities need to become the concern and domain of organisations and people that have historically not seen themselves as having a strong educational role. The involvement of these agencies and individuals outside the

conventional educational institutions means that learning becomes the norm of all sectors of society and increases the potential for increasing the numbers and range of people into active learning.

In the course of this study, interviewees identified a number of these non-conventional educators. These people were often not identified as educators initially, but emerged in discussions about programmes being run in the community. Despite their lack of formal educational status, these individuals were clearly central to ensuring that a large number of adults (for many of whom school had not been a place for success or enjoyment) are actively involved in learning – whether it is at the workplace, in the local community or in formal classes. In Australia, one study (Falk & Kilpatrick, no date) argues that up to 70% of rural adult learning occurs in non-formal settings – a figure similar to pioneering studies of adult learning projects in Canada (Tough, 1971).

Boshier (2002) has argued that a distinctive feature of New Zealand culture has been *farm-gate intellectuals* like Sir Edmund Hilary (the conqueror of Mount Everest) and Bill Hamilton (the inventor of the jet-boat engine) who have been world-class exponents in their various fields – and yet they were largely self-taught and have had minimal or no formal tertiary education or training.

This present study has identified their educational counterparts, the *farm-gate educators*. These people have probably always played an important, albeit unsung, role in education, but their prominence is now greater with the advent of lifelong learning. As a more diverse range of ‘non-educational agencies’ are now actively involved in promoting learning as part of their operations, the educational role in these organisations is sometimes being picked up by people who do not have conventional

educational qualifications and backgrounds. And yet, feedback from the interviews indicated that they are seen as being very successful in their role as educators. Below are some brief profiles of four of these farm-gate educators encountered in this study and the forms of lifelong learning they promote.

*Dot* is the boning supervisor who was responsible for initiating the workplace training programme at a meat-works plant in Central Hawkes Bay. She was made redundant from this job, so as a mature age student, Dot went to university and gained a degree in social work. She then returned to working in the meat industry at another company and qualified as a Qualifications Framework Training Assessor. She encouraged an initial group of 12 boners to gain their National Certificate in Meat Processing; over six hundred have since followed and these qualifications have become an everyday part of life at the works. The road to this achievement was never straightforward however, requiring her constant encouragement for learners who had never passed any form of assessment in their lives and many of whom needed considerable help with their literacy skills. Tutoring sessions around Dot's table at home became a big part of her life, as was being cornered in the pub to talk about the next part of the qualification or for help with literacy skills. Dot featured on a twenty-minute feature on a national television current affairs program.

*Mike* works for a local District Council as the Emergency Management Officer with responsibilities for Civil Defence, Rural Fire, Dangerous Goods, Community Road Safety, Water Monitoring and "anything else that comes along." In his spare time he is also involved in land search and rescue, Marine Search and Rescue (with the Police) and runs weekend courses on outdoor risk management for high schools, Armed Forces, polytechnics and the general public on behalf of the New Zealand Mountain

Safety Council. He is also a warranted firearms, bushcraft, abseil, Day Skipper, Boatmaster and marine radio telephone instructor with two national bodies and the education/training officer with the Kaikoura Coastguard Unit. All of these roles involve various forms of public education and courses, including running road safety campaigns (about speed, driver fatigue, older drivers - running the *Safe with Age* campaign - and child safety), teaching and assessing training standards for volunteer fire-fighters, civil defence teams, ambulance officers and Coastguard rescue crews for the various Industry Training Organisations (ITOs).

*Maureen* lives in a small coastal township where she and her husband are actively involved in the local marae (traditional Maori community centre) and a range of other community activities. She taught courses (mainly for small donations) in other communities for many years before settling in her present community. While she stresses that she is only one of a number of people who are actively involved in many of the activities, Maureen's range of educational involvement is extensive. The list includes occasional teaching at the local school and arts centre and helping arrange the local Maori educational programme and induction programmes for government employees at the local community centre. With her husband, Maureen actively promotes numerous community activities such as guardians of the local environment as well as local knowledge and tikanga Maori.<sup>7</sup>

*John* is a panel-beater by trade, and an engineer by training who manages Innovative Waste Kaikoura Ltd.<sup>8</sup> One of the original founders of the project, John now oversees 15

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<sup>7</sup> Tikanga Maori – Maori way of doing things.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of their activities, see <http://www.zerowaste.co.nz/default,203.sm>

staff and is a key component of the centre's innovative approach. He is involved in the management and teaching for the newly developed National Academy (to train people to develop re-cycling processes and programs). John also works extensively with some of the centre's staff who have been long-term unemployed workers and require considerable personal support and informal training.

### **Distance learning**

Finally, a word about distance education and the role of information technology (IT). IT is often touted as a magic bullet for many modern problems in education (Boshier & Onn, 1999), including rural areas. The realities of its implementation and use tend however to be somewhat less rosy (J Benseman, 1999).

It was difficult to gain an accurate picture of how big a role distance education providers and independent learning play in the two communities in this study. Interviewees reported that there are undoubtedly reasonable numbers of rural residents successfully gaining their first, and even postgraduate, qualifications via well-established distance providers, as well as other less-established providers. How successful these undertakings have been is also difficult to judge, but there was also feedback that completion rates were often very poor and this was particularly true of the less-established providers.

I certainly know of one course where there were ten people from around here who started out doing it together and they all pulled out eventually – some got bored, but most seemed to say that it was just too hard and there

wasn't much backup available when they needed it. (Community center coordinator)

## **Discussion**

The need to transform the traditional 'front-end' model of education into one of lifelong learning is being driven by a range of factors ranging from globalisation to the microchip. As these factors have spread and intensified, the more the inadequacies of traditional education systems have been exposed and the more urgent the call for new ways to educate populations has become. These issues and challenges are as urgent in rural communities as any other sector of society.

The New Zealand dairy industry for example has long held a strong competitive position in the international marketplace despite long distances from its markets and relatively high wage structures. Over the past few years however, its economic competitiveness has been overtaken by countries such as Chile and Argentina and is seriously threatened by others like Poland and Russia. In response, the major players in the dairy industry have formulated a new strategy, *Dairy 21*,<sup>9</sup> that includes a strong educational component to generate and disseminate innovative developments aimed at re-capturing international ascendancy for the industry. In devising the strategy, debate among the industry's stakeholders<sup>10</sup> has also included the need to address issues such as farmers' adult literacy skills and community-building in order to achieve the longer-

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.dairyinsight.co.nz/downloads/Strategic\\_Framework\\_2005\\_2015\\_v1\\_11.pdf](http://www.dairyinsight.co.nz/downloads/Strategic_Framework_2005_2015_v1_11.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The author has been a participant in some of the consultations.

term economic outcomes. In other words, creating a culture of lifelong learning is an integral part of any response to confront major rural issues.

While achieving a culture of lifelong learning may be seen as a key element of rural life in the future, the question arises: to what extent have communities been moving towards this new educational paradigm and what issues need to be resolved in this move? This study of two New Zealand rural communities has shown that there are some aspects of lifelong learning already underway, while others need further development.

There is for example, evidence that the range of learning opportunities available for adults and pre-school children in both of these rural case studies that did not exist previously. The growth of early childhood centres, vocational training centres, on-job training programs, informal programs for older adults, programs run for Maori on local marae and 'outpost' programs from regional polytechnics all mean that this extended provision is recruiting greater numbers of learners throughout the lifespan – a fundamental tenet of achieving a learning society. Schools are no longer the only educational focus in many of the towns in these areas, although they remain the dominant ones.

In addition to increasing the numbers of learners involved in education is the issue of diversifying the clientele of the extended provision – another central tenet of a lifelong learning system. Both of these communities there was clear evidence of involving adults who have historically had little to do with education once they left school. In Kaikoura for example, the local SeniorNet group offers older adults the opportunity to learn how to use computers and the Internet. In Central Hawkes Bay, the recent

establishment of several Private Training Establishments means that young people who left school with no or minimal qualifications now have another opportunity to rectify this problem. The Maori community center in Kaikoura and the Maori Trust in Central Hawkes Bay are active educational centers for teaching not only local Maori traditional skills and knowledge, but also the implications of planning legislation and other commercial development issues. The great majority of freezing workers at the Takapau works have never passed anything in their lives, apart from their driver's licenses, but hundreds have successfully completed formal tertiary qualifications now.

Alongside these success stories of extending traditional patterns of educational participation is the concern that provision is still not reaching some areas of need. The most prominent example is the area of adult literacy, where providers are hampered by funding constraints, lack of suitable volunteers and difficulties in geographical access.

These examples are notable not only because they involve a significant number of people for whom post-school education meant very little previously, but also that a growing proportion of this educational provision is being organised by non-educational organisations – voluntary organisations, local government, marae, private companies and committed community members – showing that education is becoming a strong element of non-educational sectors of rural communities.

There is also some evidence that mainstream educational providers are also changing their conventional modes of operation. For example, schools in these communities are undergoing considerable change in how they cater for the diverse range of abilities and needs among their pupils - especially for those pupils outside conventional academic

programmes.<sup>11</sup> The fact that many young people once left at 15 with no qualifications and this was widely seen as reasonably acceptable and “just the way things are” is usually no longer true. Both of the high schools in this study clearly no longer accept this assumption and are strategising how to retain as high a proportion as possible of each intake through a full five years of high school education. This commitment means devising a range of means to maintain the motivation and involvement of pupils with scant interest in the conventional academic pathways. In both areas, the high schools have developed transition programs aimed at integrating their pupils into the local community more (such as pre-job work placements) and offer qualifications that staircase into tertiary ones when they leave school.

This ‘blurring’ of boundaries is a feature of lifelong learning. As more non-educational organisations take on increasing roles in offering learning opportunities as part of their operations, there has also been a reduction in the delineation between what has historically been a very age-stratified education system. Not only have high school students been increasingly moving out into their communities as part of their education, but high schools also offer second-chance opportunities for adults in their classes. In early childhood education, parents are being strongly encouraged to become involved as learners as well as teachers and helpers.

Some remnants of traditional education systems mean that there are still considerable issues to be resolved. Funding mechanisms devised for urban populations and traditional class formats don’t transfer meaningfully to rural settings or innovative programs. Requiring unrealistic minimum numbers constantly restricts providers in what

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<sup>11</sup> These developments are not entirely new, but are more common and diverse now.

they can offer their catchment populations. Both for economic reasons and the need to develop extensive, seamless forms of provision, there needs to be improved co-ordination and publicity among providers and their learner catchments. Existing arrangement and strategies have led to unnecessary duplication in some cases and program cancellations in others.

The potential of distance education that makes use of new generations of technology now available even in remote areas remains somewhat of an educational enigma. While there is widespread support and advocacy for using IT-based strategies, there is scant evidence of widespread adoption or success, especially among those with the greatest educational needs. There was some evidence in this study that distance programs still suffer from high withdrawal rates, especially when run by less skilled providers. It is undoubtedly a topic in rural New Zealand warranting further exploration.

Writing about the failings of traditional adult education to attract rural populations a decade and a half ago, Sundet & Galbraith (1991, p. 47) concluded that:

... providing services in a 'business as usual' manner will not be effective" and that educators must "adjust content, methodology, marketing and delivery systems if they are to regain their traditional role as central actors in rural community development.

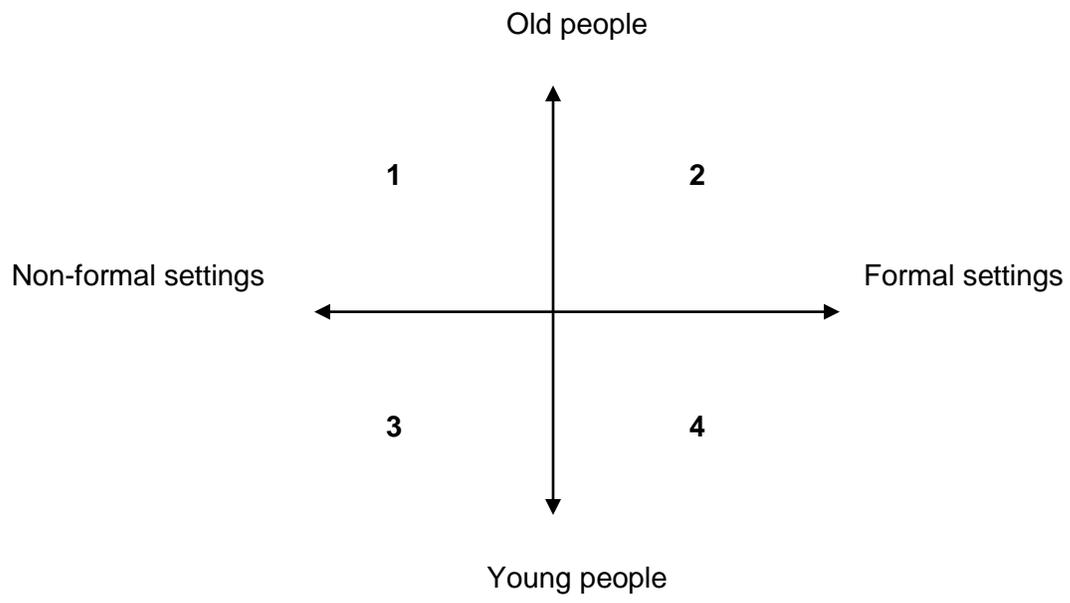
This study has shown that while there has been some progression towards a system of lifelong learning in these two New Zealand rural communities, there remain significant challenges ahead. There is a basic contradiction in the fact that while lifelong learning is undoubtedly central to how rural communities need to act in response to their issues,

the issues themselves (such as de-population) are hampering the development of a lifelong learning system. But it is a contradiction that is worth resolving.

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**Figure 1 – Boshier's representation of the Faure Report**