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# Sixty years of adult learning in Aotearoa New Zealand: Looking back to the 1960s and beyond the 2020s

Diana Amundsen

University of Waikato

*This article offers a historical analysis of the past sixty years of adult learning in Aotearoa New Zealand and critically appraises events which have shaped today's context. Drawing on a substantial body of research by key adult educators, researchers and scholars, the review assesses historical, socio-cultural, and political factors that influenced adult learning policies and practices. First, a brief discussion is given of traditional Māori education, colonisation, bi-culturalism and multi-culturalism for relevance to the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Next, a historical analysis is offered in a decade-by-decade review. Looking back over the past sixty years, this historical analysis exposes key influences which have shaped adult learning in Aotearoa, and discusses trends emerging as significant future directions going into and beyond the 2020s.*

***Keywords:*** *Adult learning, Adult education, Aotearoa New Zealand, Lifelong learning, neo liberalism, equality, social justice*

## Introduction

2020 has been a momentous year, characterised by the global Covid-19

pandemic, Black Lives Matter protests, unprecedented consequences of climate change, a worldwide economic crisis, and a US election, to name just a few significant events! Reviewing the past sixty years of adult learning it is timely to consider how we can understand the key influences that will shape the 2020s and beyond. Events of 2020 have brought significant public attention to global and very real social problems such as inequality, technological divides, and inter-cultural conflicts which urgently demand innovative solutions. Radical change will require radical questions to be asked of those in authority, those in policy and in politics to disrupt the status quo and bring about social transformation.

From its origins, adult learning flourishes within the lifelong learning platform of professional, personal and social development to facilitate real social transformation. As an integral part of society, life-long, life-wide and life-deep learning must be forefront in all citizens' minds, whatever their age. In the first part of this article, the field of adult learning in Aotearoa New Zealand's is reviewed over the past sixty years to critically appraise key historical, socio-cultural, and political events. The second part of this article considers adult learning in the 2020s and examines the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on adult learning. A discussion is presented of how these effects have exacerbated a legacy of existing inequities. Lastly, the rise of the internet and online learning is evaluated in terms of its meaning for adult learning.

## Aotearoa New Zealand context - A legacy of more than 60 years

Over the past sixty years, colonial influences on education in Aotearoa have been significant. Prior to British settlers arriving from the early 1800s, traditional Māori society had in place long-established oral educative philosophies and systems, using Māori language to communicate Māori knowledge (Bishop, 1998; L. Smith, 1999; Pihama et al., 2004). Traditionally (and contemporarily) many Māori adults learnt on the marae (open space; forum for social life) by listening and participating in oratory (Pollock, 2012). Education worked both informally through iwi (tribe) and whānau (family group) relationships, and, formally through systems such as whare wānanga (traditional houses of higher learning) and tōhunga (experts). Numerous researchers have explored, documented and discussed the ways in which pre-colonial education operated in traditional Māori society (Hiroa, 1950; Hōhepa, 1978; Mead, 2003; Pere, 1994; Zepke, 2009).

Colonial settlers aimed to recreate British educational oral and literacy traditions through establishing education institutions modelled on their home country. The earliest adult education example was the Mechanics Institutes established in Wellington and Auckland in 1842 offering evening classes to working men (Dakin, 1996). A later example was the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) formed by labour leaders and university teachers. WEA became the main adult education provider for working men and women in English literature, economics, psychology and arts from 1915 (Dakin, 1996; Pollock, 2012). Further still, the Adult Education Act of 1947 established a National Council of Adult Education (NCAE) with the express purpose to foster adult education and cultivate the arts.

Quite clearly, the 1900s' governmental strategies of assimilation and integration disclose an unofficially mono-cultural nation favouring the dominant New Zealand European culture (Hayward, 2012). For Māori, the injustices of colonisation have resulted in cultural and identity dislocation, and deprivation and subjugation. Injustice and racism have been discussed more as social times have changed, (Hokowhitu et al., 2010; Irwin, 1989; Sullivan, 1994) including presently in conjunction with the Black Lives Matter protests (Rindelaub, 2020). National discussions of bi-culturalism and multi-culturalism particularly came to the forefront from the 1970s, with bi-culturalism playing a key part of adult educational policy development.

## Biculturalism and multiculturalism

Based on the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975, a focus on the partnership between Māori and the Crown began cultivating a national emphasis on bi-culturalism (Liu & Robinson, 2016; Orange, 1988). Māori politics demanded newfound cultural recognition and identity, yet, many European New Zealanders resisted Māori activists' politics (Bidois, 2012). A contested history of identity and cultural politics framed debates around bi-cultural relations in Aotearoa. Bi-culturalism gained momentum as governmental agencies began recognising English and Māori languages, cultures, traditions in policy and in practice (Barrington, 2008; Hayward, 2012). Bi-culturalism was to be about power sharing and mutual respect, based on an anti-racism, cultural pluralist paradigm (Banks, 1988).

Notions of bi-culturalism are challenged by views that Aotearoa should officially become a multi-cultural society to recognise, in policy terms, the diverse ethnic backgrounds of Aotearoa citizens (Hayward, 2012).

Bi-culturalism and multi-culturalism spring from different ideologies and are in principle, separate, although overlaps exist (Walker, 1990). While these perspectives are subject to debate, though not more in this article, a socio-cultural and political backdrop influenced by colonisation underpins the evolution of adult learning in New Zealand.

## Looking back: Decades in review

This article illustrates how the intersection of the history of adult learning provision and the social-cultural and political forces have implications for future practice and provision. In this part of the article historic provision of adult learning is traced and the social, cultural and political forces that have mediated that provision are evaluated. Later, the legacy of these past sixty years is considered for its influences on adult learning in the 2020s and beyond.

## 1960s: Movements and reformations

Around the 1960s, Aotearoa's economic and political connections to Britain began weakening (Bowl & Tobias, 2012). Simultaneously, as on the international scene, social and educational movements began strengthening in Aotearoa, e.g., anti-apartheid (Edmundson, 2011); anti-nuclear movements (Boanas, 1989); peace activism/movements (Locke, 1992); Indigenous movements (Smith, L., 1999); feminism and environmentalism (Tobias, 2016).

This social and political climate led to a growing interest in movement-based education (Benseman, 2005; Locke, 1992). Māori rights was one such movement-based education initiative. Beginning with the formation of the first national Māori organisation in 1951, the Māori Women's Welfare League (MWWL) created a forum for Māori women to air their concerns around detrimental social issues of post-war urban Māori migration (MWWL, 2015). Promotion of activities to improve the position of Māori in health, welfare and education paved the way for later decolonisation initiatives. Ideologically decolonisation initiatives triggered radical thinking about education methods especially adult and community education (Freire, 1970; Illich, 1973; Smith, G. 2000).

Dominant discourses of the 1960s and 1970s in adult education however, generally involved traditional forms of university and WEA

provision (Tobias, 2016). Influentially the Parry Report (Hughes Parry, 1959) recommended that regional councils focus on university-led programmes to enrich professional workers. These actions forced the NCAE to reconsider its future and make significant reformations. Shortly thereafter, in 1961, the University of New Zealand was dissolved and the University Grants Committee (UGC) took over. The newly reformed NCAE had the role of advising the UGC on the annual amounts universities should be paid for their adult education work (Dakin, 1996). Universities were freed up to rearrange into departments of university extension and provide adult education in more specialized and advanced courses. In rural areas, the Community Arts Service (CAS) toured artists and exhibitions and, by means of the NCAE and CAS, many adults took non-work-related courses for personal enjoyment (Pollock, 2012).

In the working sector, the 1960s also saw significant shifts in technical education with the government founding the first technical institutes to assist apprentices gain their trade's qualifications (Dakin, 1996). By 1968 the Vocational Training Council (VTC) was set up and promoted various industrial sectors to establish training boards, many of which received government grants to employ training officers. As ties to Britain loosened during the 1960s, through organisations such as the MWWL, the UGC and the VTC, adult education in Aotearoa began taking on a life of its own.

## 1970s: Booming optimism

The 1960s was a decade of reforms brought on by social movements. Worldwide, adult and community educators stood up for the cause of reducing inequalities (Tobias, 2016). The 1960s had provided fertile ground for the 1970s' booming optimism. Following both the seminal 1972 Faure report (Faure, 1972), and a large subsequent 1976 UNESCO conference in Nairobi (Nyerere, 1978), attention to lifelong education grew from a backing by the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In Aotearoa, the concept of 'lifelong education' emerged as a keen focus (Benseman, 2005; Brown, 2018), and was examined by a committee appointed by the 1970 National Commission for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Dakin, 1996). Following their recommendations for adults to attend classes in daytime secondary school classes, a 1975 Radio New Zealand's Continuing Education Unit was created (Dakin, 1996). The Education Act (No. 2) of 1964 had made it very

clear that the term 'continuing education' was meant to embrace both vocational and non-vocational education. The theme 'lifelong learning' also gained prominence as an idea of education as a community activity.

During this time, Adult Continuing Education (ACE) gained momentum (Bowl & Tobias, 2012). The 1972-1975 left-wing Labour Government facilitated adult education for social democratic as well as vocational purposes. Optimism fuelled by a trade boom energised an expansion in education generally. ACE opportunities were offered widely through community colleges and universities, notably through Centres for Continuing Education (CCE) or departments of extension (Findsen & Hindmarsh, 1996). By 1970, two newly established universities, Massey in Palmerston North and Waikato in Hamilton, took over the central-north island's university extension functions (Dakin, 1996). Through correspondence offerings Massey University helped particularly large numbers of adult learners to access extramural university education. Nationwide community colleges were inaugurated and by 1980 four community colleges were established in Hawke's Bay, Whangarei, Rotorua and Invercargill (Pollock, 2012).

Additionally, voluntary organisations were state funded alongside distance learning organisations. Farming communities were included—the government backed Rural Education Activities Programmes (REAPs) (Pollock, 2012). REAPs were primarily instituted to assist country schools and providers of adult education in rural areas quickly became active promoters nationally (Dakin, 1996). Adult literacy programmes blossomed into more than 180 projects through volunteer organisation the Adult Reading and Learning Assistance Federation (ARLA). Roots remain of ARLA today in the organisation Literacy Aotearoa which is a fully bicultural, Treaty-based organisation (Literacy Aotearoa, n.d.).

The 1970s was an important time in New Zealand's history of adult literacy programmes during which an emphasis towards student-oriented philosophy was developing. The Minister of Education (Gandar, 1977 as cited in Tobias, 2016) pointed out that community education was a form of action, part of the process of controlling social change toward a more just society.

## 1980s: The turning tide - Two trends

The 1980s was marked by two trends of remarkable Māori educational

growth whilst adult community education withered, and the tide turned away from education for social participation towards neoliberalism. Certainly, influences of international trends in lifelong education and ACE were reflected in Aotearoa's 1970s policies and practices. Gradually, technical colleges became divided into standalone upper secondary schools and Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs), and community colleges proliferated regionally, reaching their peak of 25 by 1990 (Mischewski & Kitone, 2018). Nevertheless, needs were not being met among educationally disadvantaged groups, particularly Māori (Boshier, 1970; 1971). The NCAE's Task Force report (Lifelong Learning Task Force, 1985) stressed how non-formal, non-institutional education systems would empower those 'experiencing inequity' to self-determine their educational agendas.

A significant step in 1982 was the formation of Te Ataarangi, an organisation for community and workplace education of and about Māori culture, language, literacy and practices. This organisation is still among those at the forefront of Māori language and culture revitalisation (Te Ataarangi, 2011). During the 1980s, alongside the growth of state-sector bi-culturalism, and driven by tino-rangatiratanga (self-determination), other Māori education initiatives began flourishing. Te Kōhanga Reo (Māori immersion early childhood centres), Kura Kaupapa Māori (Māori immersion primary and secondary schools), three contemporary wānanga (Māori institution of higher learning, like a university) and Māori departments at universities exemplify meaningful education initiatives for and with Māori in what was previously a mono-cultural education system. Meanwhile a totally polar trend to the galvanization of Māori educational initiatives growth occurred. Quite suddenly the brakes were applied to funding for adult education activities. Economic repercussions from rapid oil price rises of 1979-1980 and increasing global capitalism brought on wage and price freezes (Pritchard, 1982) and cuts to educational expenditure. Throughout the 1980s, funding to the NCAE was slashed (Dakin, 1996), damaging its prestige and crippling its effectiveness, resulting in its abolishment by the Education Amendment Act of 1990.

A National Resource Centre (NRC) Trust took over the NCAE assets, but, despite its title, few resources existed beyond the former NCAE Wellington Tinakori Rd building (Dakin, 1996; Tobias, 2016). The NRC was funded by Community Learning Aotearoa New Zealand

(CLANZ), who advised the Minister of Education on criteria for grant distribution for community education. Even so, CLANZ became severely underfunded during the 1990s.

Approaching the 1990s, with the demise of NCAE and other adult education organisations, the New Zealand Association for Community and Continuing Education (NZACCE) became a key voice, supported by professional and voluntary adult educators. These educators waged a 'Save Adult Education' campaign, meeting with some success in saving the WEA despite funding loss. As a result of its involvement in the campaign NZACCE strengthened nationally (NAACCE, 1982, 1983) later changing its name to the Adult and Community Education Association Aotearoa New Zealand (ACEA), and later again changing to become a new organisation in 2002, merging with the NRC, named ACE Aotearoa (ACE Aotearoa.org, 2020).

It is generally agreed (Benseman, 2005; Findsen, 2016; Zepke, 2001) that the late 1980s mark the turning tide during which Aotearoa began to come up against harsh neo-liberalism. Both public and private institutions were fully exposed to the competitive forces of multi-national capitalism "in this radical new neoliberal hegemony" (Tobias, 2016, p. 17). The 1987 election campaign hinged strongly on educational issues and when Labour Prime Minister David Lange was re-elected he also took the education portfolio (McLean, 2017). Amidst great national debates concerning neoliberal economic policies Lange rejected the neoliberalist application to social and educational policies. Despite this, the tide turned away from education for social participation towards neoliberal governance.

## 1990s: Neoliberal governance

The Education Amendment Act 1990 was a major law that heralded the beginning of the neoliberal tertiary education sector as it is today. Until this law passed three distinctions had clearly existed between 'higher education', 'adult education', and 'vocational education'. Although the 1970s concepts of 'lifelong', 'continuing' and 'community' education had first begun blurring some lines it was not until this 1990 Act was passed that 'tertiary education' steadily headed towards becoming an umbrella term for all post-compulsory education activities.

During the 1990s, worldwide and underpinned by neoliberalism, higher education was confronted for being an élitist privilege which stimulated

policy shifts to widen availability for a massive section of society (Leach, 2013; 2014). Technological advances, alongside globalisation and international competition, directed tertiary education from élitism to mass education, or massification (Leach, 2013). Massification was first about increasing participation and next about widening access to 'non-traditional' learners.

In Aotearoa, Māori political and cultural movements gained momentum in mainstream society, backed with academic clout through respected Māori academics (e.g., Sir Ranginui Walker, Sir Hirini Moko Mead, Sir Mason Durie, Graham and Linda Tuhiwai Smith).

Significantly, within tertiary education, the government's formal recognition of three existing wānanga as tertiary education institutions augmented their funding. In 1999 Te Wānanga o Aotearoa had just over 1,000 students enrolled whereas, incredibly, five years later in 2004 there were 63,387 students enrolled and more than 1,200 staff (Strathdee, 2009). Backed by Te Puni Kōkiri (Ministry of Māori Development) Māori made many inroads to change education throughout the 1990s. Despite improvements educational disparities still exist between Māori and non-Māori (Amundsen, 2019a; Walters, 2018).

Under neo-liberal auspices education became the government's major enabler to improve Aotearoa's productivity and enhance economic growth. A perception grew that a more skilled (educated) worker is a more productive worker, and, more skilled people receive higher earnings for their increased productivity (Tholen, 2015). Neo-liberal logic shifted the responsibility for ACE participation and success, and non-participation or failure away from government and onto individuals. Consequently, a focus grew on credentialed, job-outcome-centred education, diminishing social, community and active citizenship education (Bowl & Tobias, 2012).

Neo-liberal societies operate on free market economics and the individual as a rational, economic actor often referred to as homo economicus or an economic human (Bowl & Tobias, 2012; Leach, 2014; Olssen, 2002). Neo-liberal governance depends on individualisation, decentralisation, and privatisation—in short, a minimal role for the state. Under a right-wing National Government for most of the decade, neoliberal policies were steadily implemented.

Individual tertiary institutions were required to compete against each other for student enrolments. Standardised tertiary fees were replaced

by institutional freedom to set fees (Leach, 2013); tertiary grants and bursaries covering costs for students were replaced by student allowances; a student loan scheme was established; and drastic cuts or complete funding withdrawal occurred for many ACE organisations. Despite the ACE sector economic setbacks, Harré Hindmarsh's (1992) research shows the remarkable resilience of community organisations, none of which closed down due to considerable reliance on voluntary and low-paid workers.

When Helen Clark's Labour Government was elected in 1999 (Electoral Commission, 1999) a short-life Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC) was established to undertake a review of post-compulsory education (Boston, 2002). The Labour Party were partially elected on their successful argument that the market-led system had not produced the social and economic benefits promised by the National Party (Strathdee, 2009). Labour, a centre-left political party founded on democratic socialist principles, promised to reform the market-driven tertiary education funding system (Bowl & Tobias, 2012). They were to reconcile neo-liberal and social democratic ideologies and create a socialised market economy on the tail of a decade of neoliberal governance.

## 2000s: Swept under one umbrella of tertiary education

Commentaries on tertiary education during the 2000s continued to discuss connections with neoliberal ideologies (Bowl & Tobias, 2012; Findsen, 2016; Olssen, 2002; Strathdee, 2009; Zepke, 2001; 2009). From 2000 onwards successive Governments' stated emphasis was on aligning tertiary education with New Zealand's socio-economic development. Tertiary education's scope expanded to include the then-existing 8 universities, 20 polytechnics, 4 colleges of education, 3 wānanga, 500+ Private Training Establishments (PTEs), 46 Industry Training Organisations (ITOs), 9 Government Training Establishments (GTEs) and 17 Other Tertiary Education Providers (OTEPs) (MoE, 2002; 2004). Tertiary education also included numerous ACE providers and Rural Education Activities Programmes (REAPs), ACE funded schools, voluntary organisations and community groups. The placement of all post-compulsory education under one umbrella of tertiary education governance and funding was justified as a unique, forward-thinking approach; nowhere else in the world had gathered its academic, vocational and community adult education together in this way (MoE, 2008).

Under advice from TEAC, the Labour Government established the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) funding body to steadily assume responsibilities to oversee, plan, fund and monitor the entire post-compulsory education sector (Goedegebuure, 2012). In theory, this gave ACE equal standing among education institutions such as universities, polytechnics and ITOs. The role of ACE was acknowledged and efforts to re-build got underway (MoE, 2001a). Future visions for ACE were redefined, prioritising lifelong learning, and strengthening social and community life through education. According to Irwin (2008) Māori also laid out their own agenda for ACE based on tino-rangatiratanga. Non-accredited education was to be recognised as having a place within the wider tertiary education sector.

In reality the position of 'non-formal' community education became problematic for the TEC when they brought all funded and accredited post-compulsory education under one umbrella. Academics (Olssen, 2002) warned, justifiably, that ACE would be difficult to integrate into the TEC's vision. Whereas universities and polytechnics had well-established systems to meet TEC requirements ACE had a rather more vague and nebulous structure.

Essentially the TEC ended up narrowing ACE's role in promoting empowerment, equity, active citizenship and sustainable development by relegating it to contributing to governmental goals of raising foundation work-related skills. For instance in 2001, New Zealand's first ever official adult literacy strategy was released (MoE, 2001b), highlighting the interrelationship between adult literacy and the government's strategy to develop a more literate workforce. Overall the TEC's thrust was to meet industry needs through training and improving literacy and numeracy in the workforce.

Since the early 2000s the TEC has released four versions of the Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) as reform centrepieces. Each TES iteration has seen purposeful changes which impacted adult learning. From the get-go the first Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) 2002-2007 (MoE, 2002) provoked a strong, unified reaction among a diverse range of education providers that the document did not express 'their strategy', but instead, the Government's neoliberal aims for taking Aotearoa forward over the next decades.

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC) hit sharply. High interest rates, high food and fuel prices, combined with falling house prices, painted a

bleak picture for Aotearoa's economy. In the 2008 election John Key's National Party overthrew Helen Clark's Labour Government (Electoral Commission, 2008). Under National control TEC staff reductions occurred and the ACE sector underwent more major funding cuts as a result of economic rationalisation (Bowl & Tobias, 2012).

The GFC took its toll on participation in the tertiary sector. In 2009 $NZ500 million of governmental funding was withdrawn from tertiary education and enrolments were capped (Leach, 2013). By 2010 universities were turning away thousands of students. Performance-based criteria on student loans were initiated; loans were restricted and funding became tightly linked to student performance such as course and qualification completion, progression to higher study and retention (Joyce, 2010). Sweeping up all post-compulsory education forms under one umbrella of tertiary education management has been paralleled by a falling participation trend by all tertiary students in Aotearoa during the 2000s (Education Counts, 2017). Sweeping up adult learning under one umbrella of tertiary education to compete for funding alongside universities, polytechnics and other tertiary education organisations has had disastrous financial and other consequences.

## 2010s: Financial squeeze

From 2010 to 2020, under tertiary education auspices, adult learning has been gripped in a financial squeeze. Approaching the end of this decade, confronted by the Covid-19 pandemic and an impending economic crisis, Aotearoa's October 2020 election was significant for the future of adult learning education policy. The decade from 2010 to 2020 was already becoming more economically restrictive for adult learning; there is no doubt that all education funding will be tightly contested going forward.

Blaming budget cuts upon the 2010-2011 Christchurch earthquakes the National Government made a significant decision in 2012 to withdraw funding to universities for ACE provision (Findsen, 2016). Universities' CCEs were practically demolished owing to massive restructuring and cost-cutting. The 2012 Budget also brought about student loan repayment rate increases which began narrowing students' pathways to tertiary education by making them more costly and exclusive.

The TEC continued to expand the types of education encompassed under its control. Cutting back on the funding and availability of 'non-formal'

education, a 'user-pays' ideology developed. Types of education previously viewed as non-formal either largely disappeared (e.g., community education in schools), or were re-directed through Government initiatives to formal tertiary education providers for delivery.

Vocational education, also controlled by the TEC, was subject to tightening control over funding and operational rules with implications nationally and regionally. As with other countries (Goedegebuure, 2012) inter-institution competition, staff reductions and mergers within and across regions occurred among vocational education providers. Under neoliberal auspices successive ITP mergers saw 25 polytechnics in 1990 reduce to 16 by 2018 (Amundsen, 2019b).

Under the management and regulation of the TEC non-formal and formal education steadily and purposefully merged into one formal sector. ACE has been a casualty. Leach (2014) lamented that whereas ACE was considered non-formal education it is now swallowed up into the formal tertiary landscape. Consequently, ACE is "explicitly steered by education policy, its role severely narrowed, its emphasis shifted from empowerment, equity, active citizenship to preparation for employment and skills for work" (Leach, 2014, p.705). Scott (2010) maintains this comes at the expense of sustaining social capital and cultural identity for marginalised populations—namely Māori.

Policy directions of tertiary education have been subject to political forces. From 2008 to 2017 the National Party, in coalition with three smaller parties; United Future, ACT Party and the Māori Party, held governmental power until their defeat in the September 2017 elections. Partially due to campaign promises of 'free' tertiary education Jacinda Ardern's Labour Party became the new Government in coalition with New Zealand First and in confidence and supply agreement with the Green Party (Electoral Commission, 2017).

Immediately Labour ushered in changes to tertiary education. School-leavers became eligible for one year of free provider-based tertiary education or industry training. This extended to adults who had previously studied for less than half a year of full-time tertiary education or industry training (MoE, 2017). These were initial steps in Labour's stated intent to offer a full programme of three years fee-free tertiary education by 2024, although this has been subsequently placed on hold following economic consequences of Covid-19. Other instantaneous

actions included announcements to abandon the tertiary education funding model of the previous government on the basis that it is a "failed ideological experiment" (Chris Hipkins, 2018). Hipkins disagreed with tertiary education providers being forced to bid against each other for funding shares in non-degree post-schooling education and called for a significant review of New Zealand's entire education system in a Cabinet Paper (MoE, 2018). National consultations throughout 2018 and wide sweeping education reformation across all education sectors were recommended and initiated.

As part of the reformations the vocational education proposal the ITP Roadmap 2020 (Mischewski & Kitone, 2018) intends to salvage a financially crippled polytechnic sector by unifying the funding system into a sole organisation currently being established. The 2018 Cabinet paper stated polytechnics were rapidly trending towards an economic crisis and that without halting the present unsustainable financial trend eight ITPs would be in deficit by 2020 (MoE, 2018). The new 'New Zealand Institute of Skills and Technology' intends to consolidate all 16 existing ITPs into one national body headquartered from Hamilton.

All this, and to start off the next decade, in 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic has swept throughout the world, creating significant social, cultural, political and educational disruptions as well as a forecasted economic recession of enormous proportions. Effects of the pandemic completely upend and forever change the landscape looking ahead to a new decade.

## 2020: Effects of Covid-19 on adult learning

On March 25, 2020 Aotearoa went into Level 4 lockdown for a period of 33 days to manage the Covid-19 pandemic (New Zealand Government, 2020). Level 4 has the highest restriction levels requiring citizens to stay at home other than for essential personal movement. Other than essential services such as supermarkets, pharmacies and petrol stations, all businesses shut down. Healthcare services were reprioritised and educational facilities were closed.

Immediate effects of Covid-19 on adult learning have essentially meant a reduction in availability of face-to-face learning opportunities for adult learners. In adult learning spaces libraries closed, learning festivals, training courses, workshops and conferences were all cancelled or postponed indefinitely. Although the Level 4 restrictions have since

eased, uncertainty and unease over public gatherings throughout 2020 has resulted in fewer meetings, less travel, less personal contact and, as a result, less face-to-face learning opportunities for adults.

Simultaneously a rise of online learning opportunities has burst forth in some areas. Tertiary education organisations providing formal education such as universities and polytechnics were well positioned to quickly offer all kinds of webinars, online courses and workshops. Yet, other organisations offering non-formal education such as Literacy Aotearoa, Ako Aotearoa, English Language Partners and REAPs saw their learning activities grind almost to a halt. This was partially due to their systems being geared up for in-person learning delivery and partially due to some of the adult learner base of these organisations being without access to digital devices or internet services. ACE providers saw large drop-offs in attendance at courses as learners also expressed their fear of being in close physical contact with others preferring to take self-isolation precautions (ACE Aotearoa, 2020).

As with other countries the Covid-19 crisis catapulted Aotearoa society into unprecedented internet reliance (for those with access). This unexpected glimpse into how society operates in a more fully online environment shone a light on how access to internet and digital devices is inequitably distributed throughout society. It also highlighted long-present issues of structural inequities, notably for Māori, inherited from previous decades of neoliberal and capitalistic socio-political policies as described earlier in this article.

Limitations of online learning include the prerequisite of access and adequate digital skills, equipment and computer devices, not to mention the struggle of educators accustomed to in-person delivery (OECD, 2020). If issues such as these are squarely addressed, online learning provision in the post-COVID crisis era has the potential to become more inclusive. For instance a greater number of learners could be reached through minimal investment in education infrastructure. Considering the increasing unemployment due to the Covid-19 crisis and associated economic recession online learning opportunities become a meaningful alternative to face-to-face instruction. Yet job-seekers will demand such learning provision to represent high-quality upskilling and reskilling prospects as they will be searching for education that translates into employment possibilities. However as has happened in previous decades this emphasis

may come at the expense of developing social capital and cultural identity for marginalised populations such as Māori (Scott, 2010).

Presently users of online learning are likely to be highly educated adults possessing strong digital skills (OECD, 2020). Equipping adults with basic digital skills prior to the Covid-19 crisis was already a goal for the TEC in Aotearoa but now, more than ever, meeting this goal is urgent. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are an example of zero to low cost online learning options, but they tend to have very low completion rates presently – many as low as 10 per cent (OECD, 2020). Fundamental factors for making online learning a viable option include helping learners to acquire access to digital infrastructure and skills, maintaining motivation for self-directed online learning, and broadening the range of online learning opportunities to become more inclusive and less 'white-collar'. For providers of adult learning going forward raising the quality of online courses and equipping teachers to effectively design and deliver learning opportunities will be paramount.

A recent decision by the NZ government to fund additional investment over four years to the ACE sector (MoE, 2020) was a welcome response to many years of the sector's hard work to emphasize the value of ACE. An allocation of NZ$16 million (US$10.5 million) to focus on social cohesion, well-being and vocational programmes reflects Jacinda Ardern's governmental focus as part of the 2019 Wellbeing Budget. This action reflects the Labour government's decision to move away from the existing tertiary education funding model which it views as a "failed ideological experiment" (Hipkins, 2018). Annual government funding is tied to student enrolment numbers from the previous year. Without guarantee of funding, courses could close and opportunities for adult learning become tighter. The October 2020 election came at a fiscally critical time for ACE providers considering the impacts of Covid-19.

## Beyond 2020: Looking forward

Analysis of the past sixty years exposes historic, cultural, social and political influences which have shaped adult learning in Aotearoa. With a colonial legacy of more than 180 years the Indigenous Māori rights movements have persistently called for justice and equality to address disastrous effects of institutionalised racism for Māori. Though some ground has been made more needs to be done in light of how the

Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequities. It is likely that the field of adult learning can play a significant role in social movement activities for Indigenous Māori rights, for climate change, for women's rights and for digital equality.

Social movements are versions of lifelong learning through the knowledge they create, identities they grow, and learning spaces and educational opportunities they generate. The potential of social movements to generate new knowledge, in turn generating alternative worldviews which can influence collective and individual transformation, cannot be overestimated. Since the 1960s, the concept of lifelong learning has continued to develop and encompass self-motivated learning undertaken by adults in formal, non-formal and informal learning settings. Although the term is widely inclusive of learning for personal development and citizenship governmental funding agencies in Aotearoa have tended to more linearly interpret the concept to mean progression from pre-school, to compulsory primary and secondary school and on to tertiary education. It is timely to broaden these policies to address the reality of adults who are having to learn a whole new range of skills and attitudes including learning at home, being parents as teachers, acquiring new technology skills, growing empathy and compassion for others and stepping up as active citizens to respond to the effects of the pandemic.

The grand scale disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic through travel bans, flight restrictions, sporting, cultural, educational event closures, quarantine and self-isolation measures and economic recession represents a time for adult educators to create innovative and inclusive learning experiences for New Zealanders. The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted almost everyone's sense of normality and brought about great uncertainty. Pronounced inequities between groups of people and between nations have also become clearer. This disruption has triggered a re-examination of expectations of life and perhaps significant transformational learning might be occurring as a result of these dramatic changes. As eloquently stated by the late Sir James Hēnare, (McConnell & McConnell, 2020) and especially relevant for the Black Lives Matter movement presently, "Kua tawhiti ke to haerenga mai, kia kore e haere tonu. He tino nui rawa ou mahi, kia mahi tonu" (We have come too far, not to go further. We have done too much, not to do more).

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## Contact details

*Dr Diana Amundsen*
*Lecturer*
*University of Waikato*
*School of Education*
*101 Durham St*
*Tauranga 3110*

*Email: diana.amundsen@waikato.ac.nz*