

Learning and the Third Age in Aotearoa - an historical perspective ¹

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Introduction

The primary purpose of this paper is to provide an historical perspective on the learning and education of people in their middle years and older - people of the 3rd Age. Although chronological age may be a significant factor influencing people's lives and learning experiences and perspectives and providing a marker of common historical experiences of successive cohorts, it is not a factor which determines people's work, welfare or health status or their learning interests or capacities (Withnall, 1997). Class, gender, race, ethnicity, occupation and prior experiences of formal education are likely to exert at least as much influence on the lives and learning interests of people in their middle years and older as that of chronological age (Tobias, 1998). As was pointed out by the Social Advisory Council (Williams et al., 1984) 'The most significant single characteristic of older people is not their age but their diversity'(p 19).

Learning and the 3rd Age can therefore only be understood in the context of the very much wider field of adult education and lifelong learning. And this field, it may be argued, encompasses programmes and activities which have sought to contributed to the following goals:

- the preservation and enhancement of cultural traditions, the promotion of critical awareness, sensitivity and appreciation of cultural, scientific, and artistic traditions, the dissemination of information and understanding of these traditions, and the promotion of creativity and imaginative endeavours;
- the promotion of functional, cultural and critical literacies;
- the promotion, preservation and strengthening of traditions of democracy and active citizenship and the production of social capital and the promotion of civil society;
- the promotion of cultural, educational, economic and political mobilisation of marginalised, exploited or oppressed groups and communities, the promotion and support of community development and capacity building;
- the provision of support and assistance to adults, who for whatever reasons, were 'cooled out' of formal education when they were young, to enable them to achieve their educational, cultural, occupational and social goals;
- the promotion and facilitation of lifelong learning, the promotion of economic development, the maintenance and upgrading of knowledge and skills required in the labour market, and the promotion of organisational effectiveness by providing management, employees' and workers' education, training and development programmes.

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- On this very broad canvas this paper seeks to paint a picture which highlights key aspects of the field viewed from a third Age perspective.

Lifelong learning is nothing new!

The engagement by people in their middle years and older in learning and education is not an entirely new phenomenon. From times immemorial older people have been engaged in learning and education. They have sought to continue their own learning and to support and facilitate the learning of younger people in their communities.

Evidence suggests that lifelong learning was a key feature of life in the whanau, hapu and iwi in pre-colonial Aotearoa, and since the early years of colonisation many new forms of learning and education for older and younger adults have emerged and in some cases disappeared (Walker, 1990). In the 19th Century these new initiatives included the establishment of organisations such as the Mechanics Institutes, Athenaeums, Mutual Improvement Societies, workers' discussion groups, technical classes associations and public libraries (Dakin, 1996). These were followed in the 20th Century by such organisations and programmes as the following: the Workers' Education Associations, the Country Women's Institute, the Women's Division of Federated Farmers, university extension departments, book discussion schemes, pre-retirement programmes, community centres, technical colleges, community colleges, polytechnics, trade union education programmes, adult literacy schemes, school-based community education programmes, Rural Education Activities Programmes and the New Zealand Institute of Management (Tobias, 1996).

What is new is that many more people are living active & healthy lives for so much longer!

What is new is the changing demographic picture and the vast increase in the number of people surviving into old age. We are at the present time in the midst of an historical period of colossal demographic change. In Europe until the 1800s expectation of life at birth is estimated to have ranged from between 30 and 40 over the previous 800-1000 years. Over the past 150 years this expectation of life at birth doubled and although it has temporarily almost plateaued, over the next 400 years or so it is expected to rise gradually to between 85 and 98. Over the same period the proportion of the population over 60 has also risen dramatically from 10% in the 1850s to 22% in the 1990s and is expected to rise to between 32% and 36% over the next 400 years (Laslett, 1995, 1996).

In New Zealand these changes in the population are taking place somewhat more slowly than in Europe. Nevertheless the population is ageing. Expectation of life at birth has risen from between 30 and 40 two hundred years ago to 79 for women and 73 for men in the early 1990s, by which time the proportion of the population over 60 had reached 15.5%. Today women who reach the age of 65 can expect to live to 84 whereas men who reach the age of 65 can expect to live to 80 (Else, 1999; Else & St John, 1998). With this very rapid increase in both life expectancy and in the number and proportion of older people in society it

becomes increasingly important to consider the place of older people as well as their participation in and contribution to all aspects of society including education (Williamson, 1997).

What of the recent history of lifelong learning and the 3rd Age?

Many developments in the field of adult education such as those mentioned above have not been specifically or exclusively intended for adults in the Third Age or for older adults. They have nevertheless been of considerable significance to many people in their middle and later years and this paper focuses on changes over the past thirty years with special attention being given to programmes specifically intended for those in their middle years and older.

Policy developments in the 1970s: In some respects the 1970s may be seen as a golden age in the development of many forms of adult learning and education. In 1972 UNESCO published a very influential report entitled 'Learning to be' (Faure, 1972), and in the same year a committee of the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO picked up and developed many of the innovative ideas that were surfacing around the world in a report on 'Lifelong Education' (Simmonds, 1972). As is implied in its title, this report argued for educational planning and practice to take into account the developmental needs of people throughout their lives. This was followed by a whole series of further conference reports (Advisory Council on Educational Planning, 1974) as well as legislative and administrative action which provided the framework for adult entry to secondary schools and for the establishment of community schools and community learning centres based on secondary schools.

Schools-based community education: It was however particularly through the gradual expansion of schools-based community education, funded partly by grants from the state primarily through a 'tutor-hours' system and partly by fees charged to participants, that schools have made their biggest contribution to meeting the learning interests of adults in their middle years and older over the years. Starting with changes in the regulations governing schools-based community education in 1978, which permitted selected schools to have greater autonomy, schools have gained increasing measures of autonomy in deciding what courses to offer.

This was extended very much further with the passage of the Education Act of 1989. This provided for major changes in the administration of schools, with each school being governed by its own Board of Trustees under a charter negotiated with the newly created Ministry of Education. On the other hand although schools gained greater decision-making authority and hence opportunity to respond to local adult and community education demands, schools' greater financial autonomy put increasing pressures on principals and Boards of Trustees to view their community education programmes primarily as a potential source of additional revenue for schools as a whole, rather than as programmes having their own intrinsic value or identity or as schools' contributions to the kinds of goals referred to earlier. Moreover although the

1990s saw a growth of identity of the community education section in several schools with the establishment of advisory groups along with a steady increase in the professionalisation of the community education coordinator's role which led in 1998 to the formation of the Community Learning Association through Schools (CLASS), an independent professional association of school-based community education co-ordinators, the disestablishment of the Department of Education and its replacement by a Ministry of Education was accompanied by a reduction in the kind of professional support that had been provided by the department through the services of its advisor, Charlie Herbert (Herbert, 1984, 1996).

Polytechnics: The newly emerging framework also allowed for the opening up of technical institutes and community colleges to a much wider range of community programmes for younger and older adults (Garrett & Paterson, 1984). One example of the way in which staff at the Christchurch Polytechnic responded to the challenge of the 1970s to broaden its role was by initiating from the mid-1970s a programme called 'New Outlook' intended to support and help women who were considering returning to the paid workforce in mid-career. So successful was this programme that it has continued to be offered over the years with a steady broadening of its scope to address other development needs of women of all ages. This eventually led in the late-1980s to the establishment of the Next Step Centre which has provided a wider range of programmes for younger and older women.

At the national level the large-scale re-organisation of school administration in 1989 was followed in 1990 by the equally large-scale re-structuring of post-compulsory education in terms of the Education Amendment Act of that year. Among other things this Act provided for the abolition of the University Grants Committee, the establishment of a common system of management, administration and funding of all tertiary institutions on the basis of charters, using an EFTS formula, and the establishment of mechanisms for the registration and accreditation of private training establishments. This act therefore accorded very much greater autonomy to polytechnics and colleges than they had had previously. These changes were designed to allow for greater flexibility of curriculum and programme development at the local and regional level, and it might be anticipated that this flexibility would allow polytechnics to respond more effectively to the needs of different 'communities' including the various 'communities' of older people in their areas. This may have happened in some instances. However financial as well as status and other pressures have tended to encourage polytechnics to move to offer more degree-level and other mainstream programmes at the expense of some of the more risky and innovative programmes that might have attracted older people.

Universities: Historically provision for the admission of adults including older adults who did not meet the formal entry requirements to study at universities was more liberal and open in New Zealand than at universities in most if not all other countries. In addition the establishment of Massey University's extra-mural programme in the 1960s with its distance education programmes increased the accessibility of

university courses. Since that time however university programmes have greatly expanded and in some cases they have sought to include a larger number of 3rd Age adults. In the 1970s the University of Canterbury established a Certificate in Liberal Studies with no formal entry requirements which for twenty years provided a range of liberal arts and sciences courses expressly designed to appeal to people in their middle years and older. It was a part-time programme, consisting of four courses chosen from a wide range of subjects, successful completion of which was recognised as partial completion of a degree. Also in the 1970s the University of Auckland established the first New Start programme designed to provide adults who might be interested in undertaking university studies with encouragement and support and an opportunity to develop study-skills. These New Start programmes were extended to other universities and the first programme at the University of Canterbury was offered in 1981. These programmes have continued to be offered and many thousands of adults of all ages throughout the country have participated in them.

Over the years a gradually increasing number of people in their middle years and older have undertaken degree studies at universities as some of them have offered an increasingly diverse and flexible curriculum, and Judith Davey (2001) is currently undertaking an in-depth study of people 40 and over who are studying at Victoria University. Since the late-1980s some universities have focused particular attention on efforts to provide courses for specific segments of the population. For example Lincoln University has provided re-training programmes for those made redundant in their middle years, while other universities such as Auckland have established M.Phil. degrees and actively recruited retired people to return to study to pursue special interests through this degree framework (Tarling, 1987).

Not all older people interested in attending university wish to do so for degree or diploma purposes. Indeed it is probable that most older people interested in the kinds of knowledge offered in universities do not wish to study for credentials. For this reason many of these people have participated in programmes offered by the universities through their centres of continuing education. The 1980s and 1990s have seen a continuation of traditions of providing liberal adult education programmes for individual development and continuing professional education programmes. However there have been a number of changes in these areas, and some new programme areas have been established, whilst others that were small or marginal ten years ago have grown in size and significance.

Overall the period is one that has provoked diversification. Universities have responded in various ways to the range of pressures and in particular increased financial pressures. One response was to close down centres and withdraw from the general field of adult and community education. In 1995 University Extension at the University of Otago was closed down completely. A more common response was to require centres for continuing education to recover a greater proportion of their costs. At some universities the range and depth of liberal adult education programmes have been reduced as a consequence of wider changes. The number of certificate and diploma courses has grown at some universities, while at others these courses have

been cut back. At other universities, including the University of Canterbury, there has been a growth in the number of short 'general studies' courses, summer schools and other programmes catering to a very wide range of personal, professional and academic interests. In these instances, in spite of fee increases, the number of participants in their middle years and older is likely to have grown considerably.

Colleges of Education: Historically teacher training at colleges of education was largely if not entirely restricted to young adults. Those accepted for teacher training were generally in their mid- and late-teens, coming straight from school. Gradually and in particular from the 1970s this began to change, with a small proportion of people in their 30s and early 40s being accepted for training. It was however not until the mid-1980s that the age-barriers to entry were formally abolished enabling those 45 and over to undertake teacher training, and of course from 1993, when the Human Rights Act became law, all forms of age discrimination in employment, education and training became illegal.

WEA: In 1973 the Canterbury WEA established an experimental 'Wider Horizons' programme for older people under the title 'Knowledge in Retirement'. This programme of daytime classes, initially intended for the 'over 60s', attracted 63 members with 130 enrolments for a total of 11 classes in the first two terms of the first year, and 216 members with 500 enrolments for a total of 19 classes in the first two terms of the second year (Roth, 1974: 112-113). In accordance with WEA traditions members themselves played an active role in planning the programme through their elected committee. In view of the considerable success of the venture and in the light of professional opinion at the time which pointed especially to the way in which the programme might meet the needs of women not in the paid workforce in addition to those of older people, it was decided in 1974 to open the programme to all adults (Roth, 1974; Roth, 1977). That policy has been maintained over the years, and although the WEA daytime programme has continued to attract large numbers of 'over 60s', it has also continued to attract many women and men in their middle years.

In 1995 the daytime programme consisting of 49 classes attracted 916 enrolments and in 1999 25 classes attracted 608 enrolments (WEA Reports). It is not easy to judge whether or not the policy of opening up the daytime programme in the 1970s was a wise one. The reasons referred to by George Roth at the time remain valid to-day. These included the desirability of maintaining a mix of ages and attempting to cater for those from younger age-groups who 'are also starved for semi-formal, non-vocational non-institutionalized daytime sources of knowledge and mental stimulation' (Roth, 1974: 116). Moreover the financial viability of the WEA over the years has hinged on its ability to attract as many participants as possible to all of its programmes. This arose out of the fact that the WEA's somewhat limited grants from the state were withdrawn in 1983, partially restored in the later 1980s and then withdrawn again in the early 1990s. On the other hand the decision to open the programme to all age groups undoubtedly had the effect of reducing the sense of 'ownership' of the programme which had existed in the early years and the open policy did not fit

well with neo-liberal ideologies of state funding which looked to the voluntary sector to contract with the state to provide specified services to target groups in the community.

Social and political issues, employment and unemployment: The 1980s and early 1990s was a period of considerable economic, social and political upheaval. They were years characterised by low levels of capital accumulation and high levels of unemployment and underemployment. They were also years during which successive governments instituted a wide range of policies under the influence of neo-liberal ideologies which were designed among other things to expose New Zealand institutions, both private and public, more fully to the forces of multinational capitalism and hence reduce the level of provision of services by the state and introduce 'user pays' policies for many of those services which continued to be provided or supported by the state. The high levels of unemployment and underemployment had very widespread effects. However younger and older workers were probably the worst affected with many young people struggling to enter the labour market and many older people struggling to re-enter it following massive redundancies and lay-offs especially consequent upon large-scale state sector re-structuring. In the light of this several training and re-training programmes were set up by the state, with ACCESS being launched in 1987 and Training Opportunities Programme (TOP) in 1992. Although some older people participated in these programmes they were primarily intended for young adults.

A large number of voluntary organisations and community groups responded to many of the policy changes during the period and focused on raising public awareness of the issues (Tobias, 2000). Many older people became deeply involved in these organisations and groups, and contributed to and participated in the rise of movement-based education/action programmes. In response to public sector restructuring and the consequent large-scale redundancies of older workers, in 1989 the Mature Employment Service (MES) was established. This voluntary self-help organisation has over the years attempted to highlight issues of age discrimination in the workplace and has argued that forced retirement is one such form of discrimination. Over the past ten years it has worked alongside such organisations as Age Concern to find solutions to problems identified by older workers themselves (Patterson, 1999).

Special programmes for older learners: The 1980s saw a very large number of policy and programme initiatives specifically addressing the position and learning needs of older people. In 1982 the United Nations World Assembly on Ageing provided the first significant international forum to examine the implications of the 'greying of the nations'. Two years later in 1984 Age Concern published a discussion paper in which drew attention to a wide range of overseas programmes of learning for older people and outlined a set of proposals for the development of lifelong learning opportunities in New Zealand (Mackie, 1984). In the same year the New Zealand Social Advisory Council under the chairmanship of the Hon Les Gandar published its report (Williams et al., 1984). Among its many suggestions was a recommendation that the then National Council of Adult Education should 'encourage informed public discussion on attitudes to

later life, taking the initiative to promote this concern through existing networks'. This recommendation and others focused on the importance of providing learning opportunities for older people was supported by Age Concern, and in August 1984 the National Council of Adult Education set up a Working Party on Ageing and Education. Its aims were: to promote appropriate learning opportunities for older people and appropriate training for relevant professionals, volunteers and relatives of older people, to promote positive views of ageing and challenge negative stereotypes. This group chaired by David Battersby and Louis Croot remained in existence for three years until 1987 and promoted a wide range of activities including television and radio programmes and regional seminars to achieve its objectives (Ageing and Education Working Party, 1987).

For many years educational programmes on planning for retirement have been offered by insurance and investment companies and consultants looking to sell their insurance policies or investment portfolios. In addition schools, polytechnics, WEAs etc have offered occasional courses. From time to time however concerns have arisen about the extent and nature of the provision. A number of people and organisations that made submissions to the Social Advisory Council's Working Party in 1984 emphasised the need for more comprehensive provision of pre-retirement programmes. One respondent proposed the establishment of national and local retirement councils (Williams and others, 1984: 67). The Working Party took a view which stressed the fact that preparation for life after retirement should be seen as part of a continuum of training to be offered to employees throughout their working lives. It was suggested therefore that employers including the State Services Commission should take responsibility for planning these programmes of training. In response to these kinds of concerns, in the late-1980s Victor Hindmarsh set up a limited liability company called Retirement Advisory Services (RAS) with its headquarters in Auckland. The aim of RAS was 'to encourage people to plan positively to utilise unstructured time and financial resources in a manner which is rewarding to them (Heppner, 1992). This company, subsequently renamed Retirement Planning Services (NZ) Ltd, continues to offer retirement planning seminars around the country. In the year 2000 fifty-eight seminars were offered, and the fee was \$463.50 per person with the retiree's partner being encouraged to attend at no extra charge. These seminars provide an excellent service for employees of organisations willing to pay the fees and provide the time-off work. Unfortunately the relatively high fees are a very effective barrier to attendance by the increasing number of workers who are in part-time, casual or flexible employment as well as most of those who are self-employed.

At the local level a number of new programmes were launched over the period. In January 1983 the University of Otago offered its first summer school for over 60s (O'Rourke, 1984). In 1986 in Christchurch a group of people, drawn from a wide range of educational institutions, agencies and voluntary organisations working with older people and supported by the Community Services Division of the City Council, met for several months to consider a wide range of issues in relation to learning and older people. This eventually resulted among other things in the production of a series of leaflets designed to inform older people of

existing learning, leisure and recreational opportunities. In Christchurch, as Patterson has pointed out (1999), the City Council maintained its interest in the 1990s and in recent times has worked with the Canterbury Development Corporation in assisting in the development of the Christchurch Third Age Programme.

In 1986 in Dunedin a new organisation called SPAN was set up. The aim of SPAN was to contribute to the task of bridging the generation gap by making more effective use of the skills and knowledge of older people in the community and in particular by establishing links between them and school children (Somerville, 1987). In 1987 in Christchurch the Canterbury WEA set up a group to explore the possibility of establishing one or more locality-based programs. A series of meetings was held in various parts of the city together with a seminar at the WEA which was addressed by Rosalie Somerville. Also in 1987 Hagley Community College was active in piloting a telephone linkup to serve the learning interests of those older and younger people who could not readily get to classes.

The 1980s and 1990s saw the growth of educational travel programmes for older people both internationally and in New Zealand (Russell, 1993). In 1975 in the U.S.A. Elderhostel was launched as a non-profit company with the aim of providing educational travel programmes for older people from North America both within North America and internationally. Over the following years its growth throughout the world was very rapid, and in 1987 the New Zealand College for Seniors, a consortium of tertiary institutions promoting educational travel among older people, was established to provide a New Zealand-wide base for planning and negotiating educational travel programmes for groups of Elderhostel visitors to New Zealand from the U.S.A. and also to promote educational travel programmes by older New Zealanders. Throughout the 1990s the New Zealand College for Seniors continued to organise programmes in New Zealand for North Americans. In the mid-1990s it faced tensions as a consequence of which many of the original sponsoring institutions withdrew from the organisation. The College for Seniors never played a very large role in providing educational travel programmes for New Zealanders. This has been done by a variety of organisations and institutions including the Universities of Canterbury and Waikato acting on their own or in collaboration with other institutions both in New Zealand or elsewhere. Although these programmes have seldom been limited in any way to older people many of the participants have in fact been drawn from among older age-groups.

The establishment and growth of the U3A movement has been a feature of life in many communities throughout New Zealand since the early 1990s. Although it is possible that U3A groups may have been set up in other centres somewhat earlier, it would seem that the first U3A study groups were set up in Auckland in 1989 (Heppner, 1994a, 1994b), and in Christchurch in the early 1990s on the initiative of the University of Canterbury (Swindell, 1999). These groups, which are all completely autonomous and self-funding, have varied widely in their organisation and philosophies. Some are quite formal while others are extremely

informal. Some have focused on research, study and discussion; others have organised regular series of lectures by visiting authorities; and still others have drawn primarily on members themselves to give talks and lectures.

The 1990s also saw the establishment and growth of SeniorNet throughout New Zealand. SeniorNet is a community-based organisation which emerged in 1986 out of a research project in San Francisco in the U.S.A. The aim of the project was to determine whether computers and telecommunications could be used to enhance the lives of older adults. SeniorNet is a 'non-profit community-based organisation which aims to give people over the age of 55 access to computers and training, so that they can become confident and competent at using computers and, hopefully, pass their skills on to other over-55s. As part of SeniorNet's philosophy of peer-training, members are taught by other computer-literate members in courses that range from word-processing to desk-top publishing' (SeniorNet Canterbury, 1996). There seems to be some dispute about the origins of SeniorNet in New Zealand. SeniorNet Canterbury claims that the first centre was established in Wellington in 1992, with support from Telecom New Zealand. Moreover it is claimed that this was not only the first centre in New Zealand but also the first to be set up outside North America. On the other hand Peter Clarke, computer tutor at Pakuranga College and previous chair of SeniorNet, Pakuranga claims that a small SeniorNet Learning Group was commenced at that college in 1986 (Clarke, 1998). Over the following few years SeniorNet centres were established in all major centres in Aotearoa with the Christchurch centre being set up as an incorporated society early in 1996, and by 1998 it seems that there were 23 such learning centres scattered throughout New Zealand.

What are the participation trends and learning interests of people in the 3rd Age?

Finally, in the light of all the developments described above has there been any increase in the proportion of people in the 3rd Age participating in educational programmes and activities? What are their learning interests? And how are we to ensure that they are being met? Very little research has been done to enable us to answer these questions satisfactorily. Elsewhere (Tobias, 2001) I have reviewed the quantitative data on participation trends derived from a number of national sample surveys carried out over the period. This analysis suggests that while there has been some increase in participation rates among those in their forties and fifties there may also have been a decrease in participation rates among those in their sixties.

On the question of the learning interests of people in the 3rd Age, in 1991 I reported the findings of a national sample survey undertaken twelve years previously which shed some light on this. This study (Tobias, 1991a, 1991b) suggested that there was a considerable potential demand for education among older people. Not surprisingly those in their 50s continued to be involved and interested in vocational and work-related education at about the same level as younger adults, while vocational interests tailed off among those who were 60 and over.

The greatest interest among adults of all ages was expressed in the arts and crafts, and these learning interests tended to be even more common among older than among younger people. Areas of learning interest mentioned included the following: sewing, crocheting, knitting, cooking, pottery, bookbinding, candle making, cane work, carving, ceramics, floral art, jewelry making, leather work, linocuts, woodcuts, model and miniature making, picture framing, shell work, wood turning, basketry, furniture restoring, boat building, electronics, ham and amateur radio, metalwork, woodwork, cabinet making, optics, telescopes, restoring and maintaining engines and cars, embroidery, macramé, rug making, soft-toy making, spinning, tapestry, weaving, painting, sketching and printmaking, singing and music making, and creative writing. In addition there was a continuing interest in general educational studies especially in the humanities and social sciences.

Reasons given for wanting to undertake a new learning programme included: spending their spare time more enjoyably; improving their general education; making some contribution to the community; improving some aspect of their family lives; learning more about their special interests; giving them an interest outside their home or job; meeting others with similar interests; and preparing for a new job or helping them in present job. Reasons that were given highest priority more commonly by older than by younger adults were those which involved people:

- (a) wanting to spend their spare time more enjoyably or developing an interest outside the job or home;
- (b) concerned with pursuing a special interest; and
- (c) wanting to increase their capacity to make a greater contribution to the community.

These findings, derived from quantitative survey data, reinforce the view expressed earlier in this paper which emphasises the very wide diversity of interests among older people as well as the very wide diversity and richness of their contributions and potential contributions. Further support for this view is contained in qualitative studies currently being undertaken to explore the formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences and perspectives of people who have had little or no experience of formal post-compulsory education (Tobias, 1998).

Conclusion

In this paper I have pointed to some of the policies, policy proposals, activities and programmes which have emerged over the past thirty years or so. I make no claim to comprehensiveness. Indeed I am very conscious of the many gaps in this paper and am particularly aware that I have focused on Christchurch and that very much more work is needed to tell the stories of other cities and regions. For this reason it is necessary to be more cautious than ever in drawing conclusions. Nevertheless it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions.

It is clear that there has been considerable overall growth in the number and range of programmes for those in their middle years and older. More older people are undoubtedly continuing their education in a number

of ways through a variety of programmes. The importance of lifelong learning and the need to ensure that all older people have opportunities to learn on equal terms and in appropriate ways and that their skills, knowledge and abilities should be used and valued has been widely recognised both locally and interationally (Findsen, 1998; and UNESCO, 1997).

At the same time it seems likely that the divide between the more privileged who are able to gain access to learning opportunities and who are in the position to make a significant contribution and those who have few resources and little opportunity to contribute may well have grown considerably especially over the past fifteen years (UNDP, 1999). In New Zealand and in some other countries the implementation of neo-liberal policies by the state has undoubtedly had a significant effect. There has been a striking absence of leadership by successive governments in the development of policy since the late-1980s, as increased reliance by the state on market mechanisms for the delivery of services has seen a neglect of coordination, and the withdrawal of funds from voluntary organisations and community groups which have attempted to develop their own programmes and gain a sense of ownership of these programmes. Many of the most innovative of the programmes described above have been starved of financial backing and of important forms of recognition which might have been provided by governments less committed to an agenda of privatisation.

Overall it seems to me that future policies should be directed in particular not only at encouraging innovation but also at the task of sustaining voluntary organisations and community groups to enable them to devote their energies to the tasks of offering programmes rather than merely surviving. They should also be directed at providing adequate support for those educational institutions and agencies which demonstrate a genuine commitment to the tasks indicated above.

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