

The Impact of Adult and Community Education  
on Women's Lives

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Jennifer Alison Leahy  
University of Canterbury

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## **Abstract**

Adult and Community Education (ACE) in Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ) is part of the tertiary education sector and takes place alongside the formal sector. This research project focuses on what prompts women to engage in ACE and the subsequent impact on their lives. Furthermore, it will define the features of successful learning environments within ACE as identified by the women participants. In particular, the research concentrates on women who participated in non-accredited and non-vocational ACE programmes in a range of community-based contexts. Underpinned by social constructionist and interpretivist understandings, this inquiry focuses primarily on particular impacts in the social and personal development of women involved in ACE.

Qualitative data collection methods were used, by exploring women's experiences in face-to-face interviews. Key themes highlighted women's involvement in ACE was an opportunity for women to meet new people, manage the impact of social isolation and to experience and/or enjoy the mutual support of other women. ACE was also undertaken for practical reasons such as financial accessibility and fewer barriers to participation. Other themes identified were around opportunities available for women to develop their confidence and enhance their personal development. For some women, this subsequently had positive impacts on their families.

An unexpected finding from these results was, for some women, participation in ACE was primarily for social and personal development as opposed to a focus on credentialing and vocational skills. In contrast to previous literature, the research project provides little evidence of limitations imposed by conventional ideas of women's roles or a lack of participants' confidence restricting their participation in ACE courses. These results have provided a new picture of the meaning of ACE in women's lives. The study is a reminder of the importance of diverse programme provision which women value for various reasons.

### *Dedication*

This research is dedicated to the memory of my mother Alison Leahy and friend and former colleague, Cecelia Lashlie. You both have influenced my life in so many incredible ways and my life is richer because of the positive impact you have had on my life. It has been a privilege to have spent many happy years with you.

For my children, Millie and Jack Osborne. Thank you for your patience and inspiration so that I want to try to do my best always for you both. Even though you couldn't see the point of my constant commitment to completing this work Jack, I hope one day you will recognise the importance of being able to complete a project you feel strongly about despite any challenges. Thank you Millie for being so positive about my work and so wise. You are both a constant joy in my life, I am so proud of you and I am reminded every day how lucky I am to be your mother.

*Whakatauki (Proverb)*

This thesis takes inspiration from three whakatauki which reflect the focus of the thesis.

Me aro koe ki te ha

Hineahuone

Pay heed to the dignity of women

Ma te mohio ka ora

Ma te ora ka mohio

Through learning there is life

Through life here is learning

Ko te piko o te māhuri, ko tērā te tupu o te rākau

The way in which the sapling is nurtured, determines how the tree will grow

In my study of women and their involvement in adult and community education, it was evident that many of these learners had not experienced the quality of educational experiences early in their lives which enabled them to have confidence in their future pathways. The thesis identifies the ways in which women choose to engage in a wide variety of Adult and Community education courses which may impact on their own lives and the lives of their whanau (family).

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### ***Background to the research***

The focus of my interest on the issues of women and their education has developed from my work as an adult educator over the past thirty years. I have worked principally with women in a variety of settings since 1988. I have taught women incarcerated at Christchurch Women's Prison, facilitated parent support groups for partners and family members of people in prison (the majority of these group members were women) and taught and learned alongside mothers from a local kindergarten and primary school. In addition, I have taught groups of students in the college and university setting, and again the majority of these group members were women. My professional experience has, in turn, shaped my underlying belief that education may act as a catalyst for personal change for women. Through these various experiences I have witnessed the impact that involvement in education activities has appeared to have on them as people. Additionally, women have told me of the changes that participation in education has helped them to effect in their lives. Therefore, as a practitioner and teacher, I have been keen to know what the impact of their involvement in education has been on the course of their lives.

### ***The importance of researching women's involvement in ACE***

The women whose perspectives I wish to explore are those who do not appear to have benefitted from previous formal learning, but who have been involved in adult and community education (ACE) in the context of a community setting. ACE focuses primarily on the personal and social development of the learner, rather than on accreditation or vocational outcomes. I chose to focus on women's involvement in ACE, as I was keen to take the opportunity to examine and theorise my experiences with women participating in a range of community based educational contexts. I was also motivated to undertake this research as I wanted to identify what worked about ACE for the participants.

My observation of ACE programmes was that they worked with individuals to identify their learning needs and the programme started where the learner is at. I wanted to find out if there were reasons that women chose to participate in ACE as well as the impact of their involvement. I also recognised that accessibility, learner engagement and the positive, interactive and experiential learning approaches that women experienced through ACE may have been attractive for women. In particular, I wanted to identify the features of an ACE environment that had specific appeal to women.

### ***The context for the research***

The Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector in Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ) takes place alongside the formal sector and is part of the ANZ tertiary sector. At the time of the research, 2008-2012 the Tertiary Education Commission Te Amorangi Maturanga (TEC), established by the Ministry of Education in 2003 had responsibility for ACE. In 2008, the Ministry of Education defined ACE as 'non-formal' education as it did not contribute towards a recognised qualification. However ACE was described as complementing the formal education system (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2008, National Report). Three core roles were attributed to ACE at this time: to serve learners whose first learning experience had been unsuccessful, to assist those seeking pathways into tertiary learning, and to assist people who lacked the literacy, language and numeracy skills for work and further study (MOE, 2010, P. 20).

One of the key influences on my research was the impact of the Labour/Alliance Government's attempts to rebuild the ACE sector in 1999. A significant outcome of their support was the implementation of an adult education and community learning working party to provide Government with suggestions for new policy and recommendations for a new funding framework. The strengths of the Working Party were that it consisted of thirteen experienced practitioners, consulted widely with the sector and was committed to the inclusion of Maori and Pacific views. This working party consisted of academics, researchers and people who held key roles in

ACE at that time and who were from different organisations within ACE i.e. Worker's Education Association (WEA), Literacy Aotearoa, Rural Education Activities Programme (REAP). Whilst the Working Party's focus was on adult learning opportunities provided by education providers, it aimed to broaden the concept of ACE by considering issues of community learning priorities, community relevance, community involvement, and family and whanau(family) learning (TEC, 2001, P. 7). One of the priorities that the Chair of the Working Party, Mary-Jane Rivers, articulated regarding their vision for an effective ACE sector was the idea that there needed to be "wider recognition that learning does not only take place within four walls, does not stop at a certain age, is not just for the individual and does not count only if it leads to a formal qualification" (TEC, 2001, P. 7). This statement of the Working Party's philosophy offers a context for ACE at the beginning of my research. The definition from 2001 provides a broad outline of how ACE was perceived by the Working Party at this time.

*Adult and Community Education (ACE) is a process whereby adults choose to engage in a range of educational activities within the community. The practice fosters individual and group learning which promote empowerment, equity, active citizenship, critical and social awareness and sustainable development. In Aotearoa New Zealand, ACE is based upon the unique relationships reflected in the Treaty of Waitangi*

(Adult Education and Community Learning Working Party, 2001, P. 10).

The policy focus then shifted to an expectation that ACE would engage learners who had not been well served by education in the past, improve literacy, language and numeracy skills for individuals and whanau (family) and so contribute to the overall cohesiveness of the community (MOE, 2010, P. 20). Following this definition of ACE, the Government focused its efforts on promoting and facilitating "the engagement of adults in lifelong learning with few barriers to participation, and saw ACE as contributing to the government's goals of strengthening communities and raising foundation skills" (MOE, ACE Reference Group, 2002, P. 4). This focus emphasised the need for adults to be trained to achieve qualifications and to be prepared for the

labour market (Tobias, 2004). It highlights the Government's emphasis on the deficit status of adult learners at this time as Government's recognition of a skill shortage concentrated on the need to up-skill adults in literacy/numeracy in particular and on raising foundation skills. As Tobias (2005, P. 16) argues, the concept of the "deficits" of individuals can be seen as problematic, as it ignores any competence that people may have in the broader aspects of their lives, and instead concentrates only on the educational deficits of people who are unable to read or write.

With these expectations in mind, the Government set the national priorities for ACE as in 2007 as –

1. Targeting learners whose initial learning had not been not successful
2. Raising foundation skills
3. Encouraging lifelong learning
4. Strengthening communities by meeting identified community needs
5. Strengthening social cohesion

(Ministry of Education, 2007, P. 17).

However, in 2008, the change of Government to a centre-right coalition led by the National Party created substantial changes in the sector. Funding for staff in the TEC and ACE was reduced. In particular, the funding for school-based adult education, non-accredited and general interest courses or "hobby classes" (Tolley, 2009) as the new Minister of Education called them, were a specific target (Bowl, Tobias and Leahy, 2010, P. 6). These changes were seen by the sector as a reaction to the economic downturn, as well as a shift in focus to a more instrumental approach which connected ACE courses to economic outcomes and training for employment, rather than the social improvement and personal development emphasis that had previously been its focus (Bowl, Tobias and Leahy, 2010, P. 5). Despite national protests, funding for ACE was reduced and the subsidies that had supported "hobby classes" were completely cut, which meant that in order to be able to participate in personal development and recreation/leisure programmes, participants had to pay full fees. It was the beginning of the "user pays" approach to adult education (Bowl and Tobias, 2012, P. 278). This shift was implemented by a reduction in funding for

ACE in schools, which was instead redirected to the priority areas of literacy, language and numeracy (Tobias, 2016, P. 72; Bowl, 2011, P. ii94).

The MOE 2010 definition of ACE reduced the 2007 Government priorities to three. These were: targeting learners whose initial learning was not successful; encouraging lifelong learning; and strengthening communities by meeting identified community needs. The aims of raising foundation skills and strengthening social cohesion were omitted from the definition. This therefore limited the definition of the sector, and according to Tobias it highlighted the failure by the Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) to recognise the potential value of ACE or the breadth of the sector or the number of adult learners (Tobias, 2010). Tobias argued for a broader contribution from tertiary education, rather than a focus solely on programmes which helped adults to achieve credentials. He contends that at this time there was an “apparent failure to recognise that the contribution of tertiary education institutions should go beyond the constraints of credentialing and include ACE programmes which are credential-free” (Tobias, 2010, P. 81).

At the completion of my fieldwork for this study in 2012, the priorities for the ACE sector proposed that subsidies for personal development and leisure/recreation courses should disappear. The emphasis on education for adults, now focused on “employment and increased productivity rather than personal or social enhancement”, resulted in a narrowing in scope of ACE courses, and a shift in the provision of ACE courses for adults (Ministry of Education, 2010). The following section will outline the changing context of ACE that impacted on the years that I conducted my research.

### ***Key organisations in the ACE context***

Organisations that provided ACE at the time of my research were a mix of formal and informal providers. Specifically, these were secondary schools, community education centres, regional and national organisations such as Literacy Aotearoa and English Language Partners, the Workers’ Education Association (WEAs), and Rural Education

Activities Programmes (REAPs), as well as Tertiary Education institutions (TEIs) and Private Training Establishments (PTEs) (ACEA, 2016: Bowl, 2011 P. ii85). In particular, the types of courses that were available from 2008-2012 were: programmes in adult literacy and numeracy; English language and social support: Te reo and tikanga Maori (Maori language and culture); personal development; community development; and promotion of civil society (MOE, 2008, P. 33). In 2008, ACE programmes provided both individual and group learning, and were promoted as flexible and responsive to the educational needs of individual learners and communities (MOE, 2008, P. 33). There was also an emphasis at this time on 'taking learning to the learner' (MOE, 2008, P. 34), and providing opportunities for adults to gain unit standards within the National Qualifications Framework, which enabled learners to take a "first step to on-going learning" (MOE, 2008, P. 34). This was a departure from the non-formal and non-accredited definitions of ACE, and meant that ACE was able to assist Government to encourage adults in working towards attaining qualifications and in becoming able to contribute to the work force. This resulted in ACE providers needing to meet ACE funding requirements, as well as complying with ACE national priorities of the Tertiary Education Commission (MOE 2010).

An argument in support of ACE is that it provides opportunities for adult learners to participate either individually or in groups, and that adults choose to pursue their cultural, social, political or economic visions and aspirations (Tobias, 2005, P. 18). Furthermore, Tobias argues that adults are most likely to participate in educational opportunities which appeal to them and offer an opportunity to transform themselves and their conditions (Tobias, 2005, P. 18).

At this time, as Slater contends, adults would participate in courses such as assertiveness training, anger management and other courses that they chose, rather than agree to "external dictums" (Slater 2009, P. 711). Furthermore, ACE has tended to respond to communities in identifying learner needs, as it has been in a position to respond to these needs. However, as Bowl (2014, P. 44) argues, these types of "individual remediation" courses are a response to a subtle shift in focus of adult

education away from social action and towards the development of the individual through personal problem solving.

### ***Features of ACE policy***

It is clear from the definitions of ACE outlined earlier in the document that there have been policy changes and the subsequent definitions of its nature have changed over the course of time that I undertook my research. During that time, there was a shift in funding arrangements for ACE that meant that subsidies for non-targeted programmes were withdrawn, so adults needed to pay to attend social and personal development programmes that had been previously funded. Moreover, there was a move towards an emphasis on more programmes that focused on “credentialing, and labour-market functions” (Tobias, 2010, P. 85). At the time of my research, similarly to the position in the UK and the USA, policy in ANZ had been influenced by the focus of a post-compulsory education emphasised that responsibility for an individual’s future was through the collection of educational credentials, which ultimately led to benefits for the national economy (Bowl and Tobias, 2012, P. 276). As a consequence of the economic recession, growing unemployment and a demand from Government for a larger proportion of learners with higher qualifications, the need for a “broader and more inclusive” approach to ACE was expressed (Tobias, 2016, P. 80).

A feature of the policy context of adult and community education has been the lack of on-going support by Government for the ACE sector. Notably, there is no dedicated legislation for ACE in ANZ (ACEA, 2013, P. 1). The implications of this have been that ACE has not received due recognition or legitimation, resulting in an absence of statutory provision and mechanisms (Tobias, 2016, P. 30). ACE in ANZ has suffered from the differing ideological stance of each party as it has come to power, and the varying degree of interest each has shown and the amount of funding it has provided. In recent years, a new focus has emerged which seems more restrictive than previous approaches to ACE, underpinned by the government’s belief that an

improvement in literacy levels would mean increased productivity and employment (Tobias, 2016, P. 72).

In 2008, adults were offered the opportunity to participate in learning opportunities that the community desired, as opposed to the classes that the Government thought that the community should have (NZFGW, 2011, P. 9). According to ACEA, the lead organisation of ACE practitioners, one of the key differences between ACE and other forms of education is that it has had a tendency to attract people who have experienced failure in the compulsory education sector, and learners who like the informal style that it offers (ACEA, 2013, P. 3). ACEA claims “people who come to ACE gain the skills and knowledge that will keep them up to date for full participation in their whanau (family), communities and society” (ACEA, 2013, P. 11). A further key difference between ACE and other forms of education are the different ideological underpinnings of ACE. As Tobias (1996, P. 8) notes, “certain forms of ACE have historically played a key role in the struggles of oppressed and exploited people to challenge the dominant ideologies in society and to effect change in the structures of inequality”

The contribution that technology makes to learning environments was not explored in this thesis. There is no doubt that technology is changing the way people learn and engage with knowledge (Mentis, 2008, P. 1). The on-going challenges between technology and the learning context in all education presents a number of opportunities and challenges. As identified by Johnson (2011, P. 82), socially connected learning where learners and teachers have the opportunity to interact is seen to be the most effective way to learn. This opportunity to interact and connect socially is seen to reduce the isolation and assist learners to feel more connected with others (Johnson, 2011, P. 83). Whilst research (Johnson, 2011, P. 89) on gender differences in the e-learning environment has focused on the disadvantages for women it has identified the importance of maintaining an interactive and social environment for the e-learning environment. Just as higher education is changing in delivery methods, the use of technology will impact on ACE in the future. Whilst this is not a key focus of this dissertation, it does have an impact on any discussion of

successful learning environments. As other research identifies (Rovai & Jordan, 2004), the implication of the introduction of technologies also highlights the need to create an ideal learning environment for students with increasing attention to encouraging students to connect with a “strong sense of community” and a sense of belonging to a group. As Tinto (1993) argues the risk is that students may feel isolated and are at risk of dropping out. ACE could be the supportive community that could help keep students connected to a community.

Experts and educators (NZFGW, 2011; Tobias, 2010) have promoted the importance of ACE courses in supporting self-confidence, and in the social networking that they provide for participants; they have also pointed out that some recreation and leisure courses have the potential to encourage people to subsequently undertake more the formal learning that the Government proposes. But despite these counter-arguments, and although this model is more restrictive than the range of programmes previously provided, policy has remained the same. The Government continues to enforce their belief in the need to encourage people to participate in literacy and numeracy courses with little consideration of the importance of encouraging a connection with a learning community in support of a shift in the future towards e-learning.

### ***What did I hope to learn?***

The target group for this research has emerged, from observations, during my work over the last twenty-five years, of the impact of ACE on women's lives. These women were participants in non-accredited and non-vocational ACE programmes in the community. The women from various ACE centres that were involved in the research covered a variety of age groups, ethnicities and backgrounds, predominantly on women-focused courses.

I was keen to explore what motivated the choices women made with regard to this education, and what observable changes resulted. I was interested further in identifying the features of successful learning environments within ACE, which could

in turn promote more effective policy and practice development. In my view, this is an important subject, because there has been relatively little research on women's experiences of ACE in ANZ, in terms of what works and what changes need to be made to improve effectiveness.

### ***Aims and objectives of the research***

The aim of the research was to explore by face-to-face interviews the reasons for, and the impacts of women's participation in Adult and Community Education (ACE). The research also identified the features of a successful ACE learning environment. It is hoped that the knowledge gained through this research will assist in an academic understanding of women's experiences of ACE, which may inform policy and practice in the education of adults.

### ***Structure of the thesis***

The first chapter of the dissertation has introduced the purpose and objectives of the research. This chapter has also provided an overview of the background to the research and the important education policies and changes in the sector that impact on adult education. Chapter two explores the literature that defines adult education and women's experiences of involvement in ACE. It will also examine the different types of education which are referred to as "adult education" in the literature. This will involve a focus on the definitions both of adult education and formal, informal and non-formal education as well. My focus has been on the organised but non-accredited provision of education which is recognised in Aotearoa New Zealand as Adult and Community Education. The literature review will also discuss and evaluate the research evidence which will explain why people become involved in ACE. Importantly, it will discuss why this type of adult education particularly attracts women participants. The final section of the literature review will discuss and evaluate the research-based literature which explores what women gain from their participation in ACE, specifically as individuals, as family members and as members of society. The third chapter discusses the methodology, research design and data

collection methods I have employed to support the underpinning philosophy of my chosen approach.

Chapters four and five report on the findings collected from the research. The first of the two findings chapters explains the reasons why the women in this research project participated in ACE, , and includes a discussion of what it is about ACE as a form of provision which specifically attracts women. Women identified that their reasons for participation in ACE were to take the opportunity to meet others to moderate the impact of social isolation, to enjoy mutual support on the courses as well as for practical reasons. In addition, women were motivated to attend courses for development of their confidence and for their personal development as well as for their children. The second of the findings chapters will report on the various impacts of ACE on these women's personal and family lives. This chapter highlights women's development in confidence and their emphasis on their personal development. The impact on women's families highlights the changes that women have appeared to make that had a positive influence on their families.

Chapter five discusses the findings in relation to previous literature and the identification of answers to my research questions. This chapter provides evidence that there is a broad range of reasons for, and impacts from, women's participation in ACE. In addition, it identifies the attributes of successful learning environments. Analysis of the findings highlight women's interest in participating in ACE courses for personal and social reasons as opposed to the policy emphasis on the attainment of qualifications and future employment. In particular, this chapter focuses on the fourth research question on any new learning that may inform policy and practice.

Finally, the concluding chapter highlights the implications of this research. It also outlines areas for further research. The chapter draws attention to the lack of academic studies on ACE in ANZ. The chapter also highlights the need for more research in the area of the impact of teachers and the learning environment. Unlike much of the academic literature, there is little evidence that women understood themselves from a deficit perspective. The dissertation has emphasised the

importance of the features of a successful learning environment. Important to continue to provide programmes in ACE for personal and social reasons, but mostly to provide a range of different programmes which provide appeal to different women involved.

## **Chapter Two: A review of the literature on women's involvement in Adult and Community Education**

This chapter begins with an introduction to the literature on social constructionism, the theory that underpins my research. I will then present and analyse literature that discusses the nature and purpose of adult education and adult learning. These terms will be defined along with the definitions of formal, informal, and non-formal education. This will be followed by a brief review of the theoretical framework of social constructionism.

The second section of the literature review examines the literature that specifically pertains to women and education, and the reasons suggested in the literature as to why women become involved in ACE. This is followed by an examination of the literature which helps to understand what women say they gain from participating in ACE. The final section will present and review the literature on education environments which, it has been suggested, work best for adults. The final part of the review. The review of the literature will signal the current understandings of ACE that tend to focus on the formal education sector. The literature has a tendency to focus on the benefits for women with little examination of the reasons that women may participate in ACE. The literature has concentrated on the increase in women's confidence, which is a claim that I will challenge as there is a need to closely examine what is meant by the term confidence and whether it is context specific. I will also interrogate the claims that focus on a deficit discourse regarding women's involvement in adult education.

One of the complexities of the ACE sector that will be discussed in my research is the shift in focus from the range of ACE courses that were available for women to join in 2008 to the limited focus on programmes that concentrate on literacy, language and numeracy requirements as the Government has directed. Along with this shift is the development of technology that implies that ACE may be delivered through other media rather than the focus of face-to-face interactions. Whilst the directive from policy is on learning for qualifications and employment, this research will argue for

the continued availability of courses that offer a range of courses particularly those with a personal and social focus and that are delivered in a learning environment that is seen to be successful.

### ***Social constructionism***

Social constructionist theory offers a way of understanding society which will be a useful theory to assist in analysing the perspectives of the women in my research. According to Burr (1995, p. 1), social constructionism is a “theoretical orientation” which suggests that there is no single interpretation of people and the world. As Burr argues, an understanding of people can only be acquired by observation of the world (Burr, 1995, p.5). Importantly, Burr argues that knowledge is produced through communication of shared understandings of the world (Burr, 1995, p.5). Specifically, Burr argues that it is through daily interactions between people in everyday life that knowledge becomes constructed (Burr, 1995, p.3). Furthermore, the two key assumptions of social constructionism, the need to critically examine taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world and the emphasis placed on the use of language will be considered.

In particular, social constructionist theory links with my study as the women have constructed narratives on their experiences in ACE. Throughout my study it is important to recognise that the language that the women choose to use is shaped by their particular context as well as by gender constructs. An example of how this is enacted is in the complexity of the use of the word “*confidence*” in my research. The women in the research project self-report on their experiences of confidence and their construction of what confidence means to them. The problem with the use of the term “*confidence*” will be discussed throughout the thesis in more detail but essentially the use of the term is complicated. Confidence is not a transferable concept as people may state they feel confident in one context but may not feel confident in another context. As Burr has identified, people are able to understand their experience through other people’s feelings and will be shaped by the construction of what confidence is.

### **Adult education and adult learning**

This section will distinguish between the two terms 'adult education' and 'adult learning' and provide explanations of the difference between these two names. Further discussion in this chapter will focus on the influence of these concepts on adult education policy and practice. It is important to clarify at the outset of my thesis the difference in adult education and adult learning in order to understand the impact of women's experiences in education. A reading of the literature suggests some confusion between the definitions of adult education and adult learning as both of these terms tend to be elided. In addition, there appears to be a tension in the literature between education which aims to reproduce current work and societal relationships and education that aim to challenge the status quo. Biesta argues, that he sees the tension as a clash between the "culture of technology and economy on the one hand and the culture of humanity and the humanities on the other (Biesta, 2014, P. 14).

Adult education is often defined as encompassing a broad range of opportunities to up-skill and to effect change in knowledge and attitudes as well as an emphasis on improvement (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982; Knowles et al, 2011; Jarvis, 2010; Merriam and Grace, 2011). Since the sixties, a common theme is evident in these definitions: systematic and sustained learning (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982), organised activities (Knowles, 1980), a planned series of incidents (Jarvis, 2010) and involving planned and purposeful activities for adults that aim to increase their understanding and knowledge (Merriam & Brockett, 1997, P. 6). It appears that the research to date has tended to define adult education as planned and purposeful actions that enable the adult to create a change in their knowledge.

Although both Lindeman and Knowles saw adult education as non-vocational and non-academic (Stewart, 1998, P. 106; Knowles, 1970, P. 20) other more recent definitions (Merriam and Brockett, 1997; Brookfield and Holst, 2011; restrict adult education to a focus on training for employment or attaining qualifications. The purpose of adult education has shifted from a humanist belief where people had an opportunity to change and continue learning to enhance their personal growth to a

behaviourist focus which has focused on an adult education where change is enacted by a deliberate change in the environment (Burns, 2002, P. 227). According to some of the literature (Merriam and Brockett, 1997; Bowl, 2014; Brookfield and Holst, 2011), the economic pressure to train for employment now shapes the type of learning that adults are undertaking. This change in educational priorities has meant that there is now an emphasis on training for work and employment with the intention of fulfilling economic reasons and reproducing current work and societal influences (Biesta, 2014, P. 2; McGivney, 1999, P. 2). This change has resulted in a reduction in government subsidies, a number of ACE programmes have been reduced as well as the expectation that the learner must pay (Bowl, 2014, P. 2). All of these changes suggest that the emphasis on gaining qualifications and employment means that in order for people to be able to affect change in their own knowledge, attitudes and skills, learners need to pay.

Another strand of the argument of the value and purpose of adult education is that adult education is seen as providing education that is perceived as having a “remedial role” (Stuart and Thomson, 1995; Merriam and Brockett, 1997) where adults are given the opportunity to succeed after failing in the compulsory education sector. A final argument is provided by Biesta (2010, P. 19) who argues that education may perform three different but connected functions. He identifies these as: qualification, socialisation and subjectification. According to Biesta (2013, pp. 19-20; Biesta, 2010, P. 18), qualification focuses on providing individuals with the knowledge and skills that enable people to “do something” which can range from training for a particular job to the teaching of life skills. This function is particularly connected to economic arguments for the value of adult education. The ‘socialisation’ function, according to Biesta, highlights the ways that, through education, people learn about existing cultural, social and political practices which, in turn contributes to the continuation of traditions and cultures (2013, P. 21). The final function of education is subjectification which focuses on the importance of the individual’s becoming more independent and autonomous in their thinking and ways of being (Biesta, 2013, P. 21). Biesta believes that it is important for learners to

engage with all three dimensions of education and that effective education needs to perform all three functions of qualification, socialisation and subjectification.

*Adult learning* is seen as a change in behaviour, knowledge, skills or attitudes (Knowles et al., 2011, P. 13; Biesta, 2009). It is also defined as a process of experience resulting in behaviour change (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). According to Biesta (2009), Biesta (2014) and Jarvis (2014) “learning” is an individualistic concept, and refers to what individuals do and to the process or activity where individuals acquire knowledge and skills. Biesta argues that the use of the word “*learning*” and the rise of the “*learnification*” of educational practice and discourse is problematic (Biesta, 2014, P. 62). According to Biesta, there has been a tendency for a preference for the word “learners” instead of students, a preference for “teaching and learning” instead of education and the use of the words “facilitators of learning” instead of teachers (Biesta, 2014, P. 62). The problem with this shift in educational policy, research and practice is that it has focused on the individualistic and individualising nature of learning and has moved attention away from the value of relationships in educational practice (Biesta, 2014, P. 63). Not only has this made it problematic to identify what the particular responsibilities of the adult educator are but in contrast to the definitions for adult education, there appears to be a lack of a relationship with others (Biesta, 2009, P. 14; Biesta, 2014, P. 63).

### ***The confusion around the nature and purpose of education and learning***

One of the problems evident in the literature is confusion between the definitions of adult learning and adult education, as there is a tendency to conflate the two terms in educational policy, practice and research (Biesta, 2014, P. 62). Much of the confusion has developed from the debate over the use of the terms, as according to Biesta, this debate stems from the fact that there has been an emphasis on the use of the term *learning* over the past two decades (Biesta, 2013, P. 17). As acknowledged earlier in the chapter, Biesta argues that the transformation of an educational vocabulary into a language of learning has meant that the opportunity to question the “purpose, value and goodness” of education has been lost (Biesta, 2014, P. 62). The assumptions that have driven this shift are the beliefs that

“learning is inevitable, something we have to do and cannot not do” (Biesta, 2014, P. 61). According to Biesta there is an absence of explicit attention to the aims of education which has resulted in a reliance on what he terms “common-sense” views of the purpose of education. Furthermore, he argues that this approach has a tendency to reproduce social inequality through education as it is in the interest of the *status quo* to keep things as they are, rather than encouraging discussion about what education could be (Biesta, 2013, P. 16). Biesta suggests that people who benefit from the current situation often collude to keep things as they are rather than suggest any changes. Unfortunately, people in positions of disadvantage often tend to support the *status quo* on the basis of the mistaken expectation that they will eventually benefit in the same way that people in a more privileged position do (Biesta, 2013, P. 116).

### ***The different types of education***

Adult education takes place in a diverse range of contexts, from the highly structured to the less structured settings for learning (Bowl, 2014, P.5; Stewart, 1987, P.13; Jarvis, 1983, P. 39; Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). Within these settings there are a range of learning activities that adults participate in, which include workplace training and self-directed informal activities (Tough, 1979; Kasworm, Rose and Ross-Gordon, 2010, P. 16; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, P. 24). The terms *formal*, *non-formal* and *informal education* are used as a way to categorise the broad range of adult education activities.

*Formal education* consists of courses with a defined curriculum that mostly lead to a qualification (Cross, 1981; Foley, 2004; Burns, 2002; Merriam and Brockett, 1997; McGivney, 1999) and takes place in an organised and teacher-directed environment, usually an education institution (Bowl, Walters & Tobias, 2008, P. 47). Whilst it is possible for education to be formally organised but not formally assessed, formal education is usually focussed on outcomes for employment rather than personal change (Jarvis, 1983, P. 45). *Informal education* refers to independent and incidental learning that is related to another activity which does not necessarily include the

awarding of a qualification (Cross, 2009; Foley, 2004; Jarvis, 1983; Merriam and Brockett, 1997). Similarly, Burns (2002, P. 222) describes informal education as a “by-product” of adults main activity and as a “secondary priority for the organisation” (Cross, 1981, P. 135). Likewise, Merriam and Brockett (1997, P. 14) define informal education as “any organised and educational activity outside the established formal system”. The strengths of informal education are that it is seen as being more incidental and spontaneous in comparison to other definitions (Bowl, Walters and Tobias, 2008). In contrast to formal and informal education, *non-formal education* is viewed as taking a middle position between both, as it is responsive to local needs of adults and is described as being flexible and less structured (Field, 2006, P. 53; Merriam and Brockett, 1997, P.4; McGivney, 1999, P. 1). Furthermore, non-formal education is seen as any organised educational activity outside of the formal system, which is initiated and responsive to learners and described as being flexible and less structured (Field, 2006; Merriam and Brockett, 1997). Non-formal education is often delivered in local settings where no qualifications are awarded through participation (McGivney, 1999, P. 1).

My focus in this research is on the organised but non-accredited educational provision which is recognised as Adult and Community Education in Aotearoa New Zealand. Whilst it is only known by this term in Aotearoa New Zealand, the concept has similarities with definitions of community education. Community education has been defined as responding to experiences and interests of people in communities and enabling people to influence the issues that affect them and their communities (Jarvis, 1983, P. 57). Equally, Merriam and Caffarella (1999, P. 29) describe community education as offering people a chance to meet to overcome a particular problem or issue that people believe to be important in improving life in their community. Whilst the breadth of the definition of community education can be useful, it can also cause problems as people attempt to determine the needs of their community as often communities have a range of “needs” which are not always recognised as a “need” (McGivney, 1999, P. 3). As Tett (2010, P. 1) maintains, community education grows out of people’s experiences and their social interests so

it is therefore important to encourage and engage people throughout life into learning that is based on what they are interested in.

Keeping all of these definitions in mind it is useful to consider where Adult and Community Education might lie on the continuum between formal and non-formal education. Whilst Adult and Community Education had predominantly maintained a focus on the needs of the community and a lack of an emphasis on the need to gain qualifications, increasingly ACE is being pushed into more formal modes as outcomes for learning have become the focus of some adult education courses (Bowl, 2014). These changes in definition reflect the shifts in economic and political priorities that appear to influence the categorisation of ACE. Equally, the diverse nature of ACE means that it is often unclear where ACE might fit on a spectrum of adult education terms.

A review of the academic literature has highlighted the focus of recent shifts in the purpose of education that sees the increase in vocational or academic skills being viewed as of more value than education in its own right. In addition, the use of the terms *education* and *learning* throughout the literature is problematic as there has been some confusion with the exact use of the terms. This is likely to be a result of the shift in the discourse which may have been in some instances a deliberate act. This suggests that the deliberate intent of Government may have shifted to an emphasis on training for work and employment with the purpose of fulfilling economic influences (Biesta, 2014, P. 2). As Biesta has argued, this creates a “culture clash” between the economy and humanity (Biesta, 2014, P. 14). Additionally, the range of adult education definitions that are presented in the academic literature were discussed. It became clear that there is a tendency for some cross-over particularly with a definition of Adult and Community Education.

### ***The gains for women from their participation in adult education***

The arguments that will be presented in this chapter will explore women’s sense of confidence as well as their mutual experiences of ACE on their own lives as well as

the influence on their family. Some of the academic literature identifies a narrow view of women's involvement in adult education that required women to take responsibility for childcare and domestic tasks and therefore impacts on women's availability. Particular learning environments appeared to display specific features which enabled women to feel a sense of success from their participation in ACE.

### ***Individual gains from participation in ACE***

Self-esteem and confidence are discussed in much of the literature of women's participation in adult education (Hammond, 2004; Desira, 2004; McGivney, 1993). According to Gordon (1996), women feel that their participation in adult education may increase their confidence and self esteem. She claims that participation in a university course restored women's confidence which they believed had been "lost or diminished" from years of raising a family (Gordon, 1996, P. 14). Similarly, research undertaken by Desira (2004) in the United Kingdom on young mothers, identified that an increase in self esteem and confidence enabled them to gain qualifications, to do something different and to meet others or to improve their education for their children's sake, therefore significantly improving outcomes for themselves and their families (Desira, 2004, P. 17). A number of the women in Desira's research stated that their involvement in their adult education course made them more confident in their role as a mother. Other women in Desira's research claimed that participation in the course kept them occupied and meant that they were not engaging in crime (Desira, 2004, P. 8).

A further example is evident in Deere's work (1988) as she describes how Wider Opportunities for Women courses in the UK appear to help to reduce women's sense of inadequacy after years of socialisation as housewives. She argues that: "So many women return to education with two dominant feelings: a total lack of confidence in themselves and a need for positive change in their lives" (Deere, 1988, P. 63). Women did not only value meeting other women with children but, according to Maidment and MacFarlane (2009), appreciated the chance to develop new friendships from their participation in adult education. Their research study of women who participated in adult education craft groups in Australia identified that

the experience of being in an adult education group made a difference to the lives of the women involved because it fostered social connectedness, enduring friendships and a sense of belonging (Maidment and MacFarlane, 2009, P. 13).

Numerous studies have argued that women's participation in adult education appears to enable women to develop in confidence and to create friendships, which makes them relevant to my study. Although Gordon's research concentrates on university students, the research from Deere (1988), and Maidment and MacFarlane (2009) offer useful explanations on the impact of adult education on women's lives, though one of the limitations of both Gordon's and Maidment and MacFarlane's research is that they conducted it with small numbers of women (23 women on Gordon's research and nine women in Maidment and MacFarlane's study).

The evidence offered in the literature for defining a growth in self-confidence is drawn from the observations that when women felt that they had more control of their lives, they were enabled to speak up for themselves, take on a more active role in the community, progress to other courses and apply for new jobs (Hammond, 2004, P. 43). In addition, evidence from Desira's study of young women described an increase in confidence as enabling them to achieve qualifications, helping them to plan further study; furthermore, these women noticed that they took more interest in their children's education (Desira, 2004, P. 8). Parr suggests that women in her study gained confidence from returning to adult education and that education provided a space where women could reconstruct their identities.

Hammond's (2004) research is helpful to consider with regard to my study, as Hammond identifies four key factors that may be evident in my data. Desira's (2004) study also provides useful factors that may be present in my data. However, as Desira's study was undertaken with women with children, the research does not take into account all women. Similarly, this approach is followed by Parr (2001) who generalises about mothers and their learning and the assumption that women who are mothers have not had or are not involved in educational activities of any form. Conversely, Parr's (2001) research is useful as her project focuses on women's

participation in community education. Furthermore, Parr's study is one of a few studies that define confidence as "the ability to define and assert one's own needs" (Parr, 2001, p.58) and observes that returning to education enabled women to prioritise their own needs and to take control over the way their identity has been defined. Hammond, (2004), Desira, (2004), McGivney, (1993), Gordon, (1996) and Deere, (1988) offer no definitions of the terms *self-esteem* or *confidence*, which means that it is difficult to assess their claims for the relationship between education and improvement and/or increases in either of these areas. Despite these limitations, it is clear that confidence and self-esteem are consistent themes in the literature and therefore they will be key concepts to explore in my work.

Much of the focus of the literature also appears to concentrate on what the authors refer to as "the little home-maker" approach to women's education (Jarvis, 1992, P. 200) and the constraints this imposes on the life choices or the perception of life choices that women have. They label women as in need of what Aird (1998) claims is "collective nurturing", which focuses on giving women a sense of purpose to help them overcome the negative self-esteem that arises from the lack of value placed on these roles (Aird, 1985; Parr, 2001; Jackson, 2012; Edwards, Hanson & Raggatt, 1996; Nanton, 2009; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014). Although McGivney (1993) and Thompson (2007) argue that irrespective of educational background, occupation or ethnicity women mentioned a growth in self-esteem and confidence as outcomes of their learning (McGivney, 1993), there is a tendency for some of the literature to emphasise a deficit discourse around women. Regardless of their educational background, occupation or ethnicity, according to McGivney (1993) and Thompson (2007) women mentioned that a growth in self-esteem and confidence were outcomes of their learning (McGivney, 1993).

In these studies, women reported their need to be recognised as individuals in their own right, of wanting to succeed in education, to take control of their lives and reconstruct their identity. Education was the mechanism by which these women felt that they could change, "shedding stigma from the past" (Parr, 2001, p.65). As Parr notes, education offers people a sense of who they are and where they belong in

society as she defines identity as “the way people see themselves in the world” (2001, p. 94). A key problem with this definition is that Parr does not elaborate on the details of how identity might be changed. The chance for women to become involved in adult education appears to have the potential to influence women’s sense of self, according to Biesta (2011) and Ecclestone (2007). Biesta’s (2011, p. 13) claim provides clarification of the impact of adult education on women’s identity. These claims provide a limited analysis of women’s participation in adult education, particularly as women’s education experiences tend to be drawn from education which is based on a deficit model of women’s development.

Research studies from Galvan, 2001, Horsman, 1990, Boshier et al., 2006, Prins et al. 2009 and Stromquist, 1997 have identified that women in literacy programmes within a range of settings use community and education groups as a social space for creating friendships, sharing advice, releasing emotions and disrupting monotonous housework (Prins, Toso and Schafft, 2009, P. 337). As Prins et al. (2001) emphasise, women in literacy programmes found that community and education groups provided a number of positive opportunities for women to socialise and to undertake learning for themselves.

In particular, Prins et al. (2009) identifies four social dimensions of women’s participation in family literacy programmes in the USA. These are, first, that women use adult education programmes to escape the isolation and boredom of being “stuck in the house” by enjoying the opportunity to meet people (Prins et al., 2009, P. 342). The second dimension is characterised by women’s need to meet people and make friends. The third dimension consists of the supportive relationships with teachers, since care, encouragement, understanding, non-judgmental behaviour and an open-minded approach are an important source of emotional support. The final dimension they have described as self-discovery and development. They identify that a number of women in their research made sacrifices or put off their own education for the sake of their family, as the women tended to see their time in education courses as an opportunity to do something for themselves (Prins et al., 2009, P. 346).

A considerable amount of literature has been published on the growth in women's self-esteem and confidence from their involvement in adult education (McGivney, 1993; Jarvis 1992; Nanton, 2009; Hayes & Flannery, 2000; Clisby & Holdsworth, 2014, Prins et al., 2009, Edwards, Hanson & Raggatt, 1999). Whilst these research studies focus on the positive impact on women, there is also a tendency in the literature to highlight a deficit discourse around women (Thompson, 2007; McGivney, 1993). Despite this, the evidence from a range of studies identifies the value to women of their participation in adult education.

In addition, the concept of agency will be considered from a number of perspectives which have been identified in the literature (Ecclestone, 2007 and 2009; Ecclestone, Biesta & Hughes, 2009; Biesta, 2010; Biesta, 2014; Biesta, 2015; Biesta, 2011; Biesta & Tedder, 2007). The definition of *agency* that I have chosen to utilise is that it can be seen to be the way in which women aim to shape their lives, exerting control over them and giving direction to them (Biesta, 2011, pp. 3-14). This definition is particularly useful as it describes specific characteristics of agency and offers a broad context. Moreover, agency can be seen to be something that can be achieved in particular contexts and situations at particular points in time. As a number of researchers state, agency is not something that people have, but something that people need to enact (Ecclestone, 2009; Biesta and Hughes, 2009, P. 11; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998, P. 970). This implies that women may be supported by their involvement in adult education to enact agency.

### ***Impact on family members from women's participation in ACE***

The literature suggests that there are a number of positive influences for family members from women's participation in adult education (Hammond, 2004; Brassett-Grundy, 2004; Schuller et al., 2004; Edwards, 1993, Stalker, 2001, and Gouthro, 2005). In Schuller et al's research, women report that their participation in adult education has provided them with the opportunity to offer direct support to their children; they have been able to involve their children in learning about social issues

from family discussions and become more involved in their children's school (Schuller et al., 2004, P. 86). Furthermore, involvement in adult education has provided a means of overcoming the isolation that women sometimes experience in their homes (Hayes and Flannery, 2000, P. 33). As Prins et al. (2009, pp. 344-345) note in their research, the interactions that women enjoyed both inside and outside the classroom were crucial, as the friendship and support appeared to mitigate the stress, anxiety and depression that some women experienced at home.

Furthermore, research from Schuller et al., (2004) and Hammond, (2004) suggests that women appreciated the opportunity to learn with other mothers, especially those who experienced the same pressures such as domestic responsibilities for child care as they did such as domestic responsibilities for child care as they felt it was helpful to share common concerns. According to Hammond, the opportunity to meet other people reminds mothers caring for young children of "the adult world they had been involved with before having children" (Hammond, 2004, P. 53). Moreover, Hammond argues that participation in adult education allowed women with childcare and domestic responsibilities to get away from what she referred to as a "Postman Pat mentality" and "to use their brain" (Hammond, 2004, P51).

Some of the research literature highlights the changes that women appeared to have to make to accommodate and prioritise the co-ordination of domestic tasks and child-care so that they could spend time on their education (Gouthro, 2005, P. 8). There is still a perception that women who are parents need to organise child-care and other domestic responsibilities (Gouthro, 2005 P. 8; Pascall and Cox, 1993). Stalker (2001) and Edwards (1993) argue that women were expected to prioritise household tasks and focus their time on others' concerns. As Coser (1974) claims, female students often had to satisfy two "greedy institutions" as demands were placed on women from both their studies as well as their families. There is a tendency in the literature to claim that women are limited (mostly women with children) by their position of housewife, mother or child-carer (McGivney, 1993, P25). Some women still felt that they were essential to the organisation of family

activities and therefore needed to remain at home, which sometimes constrained women's availability for participation in adult education (McGivney, 1993, P.25).

Whilst women's participation in education had an impact on their family, Vaccaro and Lovell's (2010) study contends that family members could, in some instances, inspire women to complete educational qualifications and to continue with their studies. Vaccaro and Lovell's qualitative study was undertaken with 28 female university students in the United States of America (USA) and they claim that "everyday familial stressors were outweighed by support and inspiration gleaned from family" (Vaccaro and Lovell, 2010, P. 170). Most of the literature has not focused on this aspect, which may not be relevant to my research.

Studies in the UK and USA undertaken predominantly with university students highlight the gap in the research to examine the impact of women's involvement in ACE in ANZ on their families. A number of studies have highlight that the support gained from women's participation in adult education courses (Schuller et al., 2004; Hammond, 2004; Prins et al., 2009) also impacted on their family members. Several studies reveal a deficit view of women as some of the research reinforces the tendency in the literature to describe women as needy, and may tend towards pathologising women. It will be useful to examine the evidence in my research to see if the word *needy* applies to the women in my research.

These studies provide an understanding of the challenges for women who have participated in community education in the USA and UK. In particular, the literature raises issues that impact on women who are mothers of young children, as it argues that women are considered to still need to take the responsibility for childcare and domestic tasks. Whilst most of the studies were undertaken in the nineties and there is often a focus on a narrow view of women, the literature provides a useful background to my study.

### ***Features of successful learning environments***

This section of the review of the literature analyses the features of a successful learning environment. A learning environment can refer to a physical setting, cultural context or educational approach where teaching and learning take place. In this context it refers to the physical space where education courses are held. Four features are dominant in the literature which appear to contribute to women's participation in ACE. These areas were environmental features, the role of the adult educator, the provision of support and friendships and the provision of the childcare.

### ***Environmental features***

Research from Cooley, (2007), McGivney, (1993), Hutchinson (1986) and Hayes and Flannery, (2000) from interview with women provides evidence from interviews with women of the importance of the learning environment needing to be easily accessible for all women without the need for an entrance test, and for the learning being held at times that suited the participants. Cooley's (2007) research with women in the USA identifies that the group experience of gathering together in a female-only environment has a positive impact on women's lives. In addition, in Cooley's research, women claimed that the combination of a safe education setting and open communication within the environment appeared to present them with the opportunity to establish trust and deep friendships (Cooley, 2007, P. 312). According to Prins et al., (2009, P. 348) community education facilities provide access to emotional support, social networks and relief from loneliness and emotional distress. They are a place where women can exchange advice, information, encouragement and other resources in the same way as child-care centres can. The provision of an environment where women felt safe in non-threatening surroundings which are a positive place where women feel supported and can develop friendships is also mentioned in McGivney's (1993) research gathered from interviews with women returning to adult education in the UK. McGivney (1993, P. 60) maintains that the features of "good community education" are that it does not see women as deficient, and that the environment is safe and friendly, "where members can step back comfortably into education". McGivney also

identifies that “good community education” takes account of the nature of women’s lives, and adult education providers subsequently organised community education to fit with family commitments (McGivney, 1993, P.60). The final point that she makes is that the women interviewed in her research were supportive of community education because it required no entry conditions and was therefore open to all. McGivney and Cooley’s research with women in the UK and the USA may provide an explanation that will be useful for understanding my research. A limitation with other research projects is that there is a lack of evidence concerning women’s experience in community education. This gap in the evidence suggests that it was important that my research should be conducted with women in community education in particular.

### ***The role of the adult educator***

A second theme of the features of successful learning environments identified in the literature is the impact of adult educators on women’s experience of a successful learning environment. Cranton (2006) and Hammond (2004) both emphasise the role of the adult educator in influencing women’s participation in adult education. Cranton suggests that adult educators need to ensure that they help students with their learning by being readily available to provide support, including ongoing follow-up (2006, P. 162-163). She states that when the educator is “authentic, open and genuine in their caring” (Cranton, 2006, P. 178), strong positive relationships develop, including support among the learners. Likewise, research from McGivney (1993) suggests that the skills of listening, empathy and of having knowledge of opportunities for women are particularly valuable in the adult educator. According to Prins et al., (2009, P. 349) educators need to recognise the social purpose of participation in ACE, as they often can create opportunities to develop friendships which lead to informal learning.

Nevertheless, a problem with these studies is that there is a tendency to reinforce the rhetoric around the characteristics of adult educators. Often they fail to discuss

the specific characteristics needed in the role of the adult educator in their interaction with their students.

### ***The opportunities for support and friendship***

A third factor that the literature suggests contributes to women's successful participation in adult education is that of mutual support between learners. The features that are evident in the literature are the development of friendships and on-going support. Two research studies that emphasise the opportunity for women to share their concerns and enjoy mutual support as well as the opportunity to socialise with others comes from Maidment and MacFarlane (2009) and Cooley's (2007) study. Maidment and MacFarlane's (2009) study was undertaken with nine women participating in an adult education craft group in Australia, and Cooley's (2007) study of eight American women in a women's group both emphasise the opportunities women in the research had to share concerns and enjoy the opportunity to socialise with others. The features that women highlighted from these experiences were friendship, trust, self-identity and the validation of feelings were positive features that women highlighted from their experiences in adult education (Cooley, 2007, P. 312/313). A notable focus in the literature is offered from Belenky et al. (1986) who highlight the importance of a safe classroom where participants support each other.

Similarly, Hammond's (2004, P. 6) study stresses the development of supportive relationships that emerged from what she describes as "good community education". She argues that the more supportive, open and cohesive the group is, the more effective the education course was in enabling some women to have a positive experience. A limitation of Hammond's (2004) research is that her focus is on analysis of interviews with 124 men and women with no clear distinction between men or women's responses.

The main limitations of Maidment and MacFarlane (2009), and of Cooley's study (2007) are that their research is conducted with small groups of women.

### ***Chapter conclusion***

Consideration of all of the literature on women's participation in adult education reveals a gap in the evidence, as much of the focus has been on women's participation in formal learning activities (McGivney, 1993). There has been relatively little literature published on women's involvement in ACE and specifically a lack of research undertaken on the reasons that women choose to engage in adult education and insufficient research on the impacts of women's participation in ACE. Research studies have identified the apparent benefits of the opportunities that women experience from their participation in adult education. However they do not identify the reasons women became involved in community education, or provide details of the impact of their participation on themselves or on their families. There is insufficient research into the features of successful learning environments, which I want to rectify by exploring. My study intends to provide an account of women's experiences of their participation in adult and community education, and the impact of these experiences.

### **Chapter Three: Research methodology and design**

My research has focused on women's participation in ACE. In the previous chapter I have reviewed the literature. In particular the chapter has concentrated on the reasons for and impacts of women's involvement in ACE. It has also identified various features of the learning environment which help to make participation in ACE a successful experience for women. This chapter explains the overall approach to my research and why an interpretive study was felt to be most appropriate. It goes on to detail the research design and the methods of data collection, and explain how the research was carried out and the data were analysed. I also discuss the ethical issues involved in undertaking research involving semi-structured interviews with women and how I dealt with these. As explained in the introductory chapter, my active involvement in adult and community education as a teacher and learner led me to the following research questions:

- What prompts women to participate in adult and community education (ACE) provision?
- What are the impacts of women's participation in adult and community education?
- What do women identify as features of successful learning environments within ACE?
- What can be learned from women's experiences of ACE participation which may inform theory, policy and practice in the education of adults?

#### ***Methodology***

My overall methodological approach to the research was an interpretive one. Interpretivism has been described as an approach in which: "Research is guided by the researcher's desire to understand (and therefore interpret) social reality" (Bhattacharya, 2012, P. 8). Interpretive approaches are underpinned by a belief that reality is "socially constructed within a given context, and therefore events and actions may have multiple meanings or interpretations depending on that context, and on the beliefs, values and emotions of the individual who is experiencing and describing those events or actions" (Hurworth, 2011, P. 2). Thus, as, Briggs and

Coleman (2012, P. 24) argue, “reality is not ‘out there’ – an external phenomenon waiting to be revealed as ‘facts’, but a social construct which different people may understand in different ways.

Adopting an interpretive approach to research implies that as the researcher I was involved in the research study as the interpreter of meaning (Briggs and Coleman, 2012, P. 24). This meant that it was my responsibility to view the research participants as research subjects in order to explore the “meanings” of events from the subject’s perspective (Briggs and Coleman, 2007, P. 24). Moreover, according to Briggs and Coleman it was critical that I tried to understand and empathise with the research subjects, and gained an understanding of their perspective (Briggs and Coleman, 2012, P. 23).

My focus was on women’s experiences, as I recognised that women appear to be particularly drawn to less formal approaches to education (such as Adult and Community Education) and therefore a specific focus on women’s perspectives regarding the role of ACE was warranted (Philbin, Meier, Huffman & Boverie, 1995; Benn, Elliot and Whaley, 1998; Clisby and Holdsworth, 2014). In broad terms a feminist approach to research implies a commitment to focusing on the meaning of events and actions in women’s lives as a counterbalance to what has been characterised as the dominant focus of exploring the lives of men (Harding, 1987; Hall and Hall, 1996: 52).

The implications of these approaches are that feminist research has utilised semi-structured interviews in order to achieve active involvement of participants to provide data about their lives (Punch, 2009, P. 148). Reinharz (1992, P. 18) argues that the use of semi-structured interviews has been one of the foremost techniques that feminists have used in response to a need for redefining of the traditional interview, which is often seen to focus on the masculine paradigm (Punch, 2009, P. 148). Feminist interviewing requires trust, openness and emotional engagement (Punch, 2009); therefore, the use of semi-structured interviews seemed the most relevant approach to use in my research. The advantages of using a semi-structured

interviewing technique was that using a list of questions as a guide as well as the possibility of utilising follow-up questions allows conversations to flow without needing to keep to pre-defined questions. In particular, the use of semi-structured interviewing is particularly useful as researchers often have little knowledge of the participant's circumstances prior to the interview.

### *Ethical considerations*

In accordance with the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee requirements, I ensured that prior to the interview, all interview participants received an information sheet, covering letter, consent form and the question sheet.

At the start of the interviews, I asked each participant if they had any questions and then asked them to sign the consent form. I also explained that in keeping with ethical guidelines, I could assure the participants of privacy and confidentiality, as I guaranteed that no information about the participant would be shared with anyone else. I also assured the participants that their own names would not be used in the research.

### *Research Design*

The reason for using a qualitative design is that I wanted to take an in depth research approach to understanding women's perspectives on their involvement in ACE in a number of different settings. I aimed to collect data through semi-structured interviews, and selected this approach in order to find out more about women's lives. I based my methods of interviewing on the suggestions of Ann Oakley's (1981, P.41) feminist redefinition of the interview process. The implication of this was that my intention was to gain a cross-section of perspectives from women participating in ACE from a range of contexts.

As Oakley (1981) has identified, a feminist redefinition of the interview process requires a shift "whereby the aim is for a non-hierarchical relationship where the interviewer and the interviewee consider themselves to be co-equals who are engaged in a mutually relevant conversation" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, P. 354)

With all of this in mind, I devised interview questions that were open-ended, in order to encourage women to share their knowledge and experience on the topic of ACE (de Marrais and Lapan, 2004, P. 52). The semi-structured interview technique is particularly useful as it is described as a “guided conversation whose goal is to elicit from the interviewee, rich, detailed materials that can be used in qualitative analysis” (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, P.18).

Using the interview questions I had devised (Appendix 1), my goal was to construct a picture of women’s experiences of ACE.

In the design of the study, I needed to consider what would be the most appropriate group of women to contact. Given my research questions, it was clear that I needed to interview women from a range of settings. I wanted to include a diverse group of women from a range of ACE providers, so I needed to establish criteria for the selection of participants and settings.

#### *Selection of ACE centres involved in the research*

I initially decided that I would contact four ACE centres in Christchurch, the town where I live, as I hoped that the interviews would produce an array of responses from a range of women.

I aimed to involve ACE providers, based on the range of ACE organisations identified in the definition of ACE from *The Report of the Adult Education and Community Learning Working Party* (2001, P. 10). This meant that the range of providers therefore focused on English language programmes, personal development education, education for social and environmental justice, and education to facilitate group and community development, as well as some adult literacy and numeracy provision and cultural retention programmes.

In essence, I wanted to provide a broad cross-section of ACE providers, which meant that there was a range of types of ACE provider and a span of providers.

Importantly, I also wanted to make sure that there was a mix of provider type, a mix of what they provided and a range of how provision was funded. The mix of types I chose at first was a community education provider, a social service agency that provided ACE and a secondary school that provided ACE.

Two sites were added later, the Personal Development Centre and Teen Parent Centre. I also attempted to include a range of ACE centres from different geographical locations around Christchurch city. I was able to select six sites from a total of twenty ACE centres that I had information on through the Christchurch ACE Network. (See Table 1 for selection criteria).

The sites that I selected were –

Parent Learning Centre – parent education courses

Creative Skills Centre – recreation and leisure courses

Women’s Learning Centre – women-only personal development courses

Personal Development Centre – anger management courses

Teen Parent Centre – school for teen parents and child-care centre

English Language Centre – English language courses

The first step in identifying the participants was to set the criteria of which women it would be important to interview. I chose the criteria of ACE centre, age and ethnicity so that a diverse group of women would be represented in the research. The identification of each of the ACE Centres provided me with an indication of the type of learner who would be participating at each site.

- The criteria for selection were that participants: Had been or were involved in Adult and Community Education
- And had either not been involved in or successful in (according to their definition) formal or accredited tertiary education
- Or had a gap of ten-plus years since their last involvement in formal accredited learning.

I also ensured that I included providers who offered programmes for men and women as well as one who provided for women only. Although most of the providers offered ACE for both men and women, I was careful also to choose ones which ran programmes for women only, to be sure of including a women-centred perspective.

I decided to contact the manager of each site to inform them about my research and to request permission to contact the women who were involved in ACE at their centre. I contacted managers through email and phone. I knew three of them personally, which made it easier for communication purposes. All three were prompt in their replies and very supportive of my proposal.

At each centre there were several different ACE programmes available so I needed to ask the manager at each site for a particular type of class, as I was keen on interviewing women from a range of different programmes

(All names have been changed to ensure anonymity of the ACE centres, as due to the limited number of ACE participants and ACE centres, it could be possible to identify either).

I planned to undertake research with between 30-60 participants over a period of 9-12 months. Given the difficulties over response rates for any research, I was aware that I would need to aim for more women than I expected. I was hopeful that I would interview at least thirty women. I identified the following descriptions of the settings from which I sought to involve participants in the research.

- Women recently or currently undertaking education opportunities through their children's primary school (7-10 women).
- Women recently or currently involved in adult and community education courses at a community education provider (suburban)(7-10 women)
- Women recently or currently involved in adult and community education courses at a community education provider (central city) (7-10 women).

- Women recently or currently involved in adult and community education courses for refugee women to learn English (7-10 women).
- Women recently or currently involved in an adult and community education context as a result of directives from Youth Justice or Social Service Agencies (7-10 women).
- Women recently excluded from secondary school due to pregnancy and the birth of a child but wanting to continue with school programmes (7-10 women).

Site	Key Activity	Provider	Funders	Gender of Learners	Age of Learners	Location of Centre	Ethnicity
Women's Learning Centre	Personal Development courses	Women-only	ACC/Mixed	Women only	Mixed Young	Central city	Pakeha/ Other Ethnicities
Personal Development Centre	Anger Management	Non-traditional	ACE	Women only	Young	Western Suburbs	Maori Pakeha
Creative Skills Centre	Leisure	Traditional ACE	ACE, Charity, Mixed	Men and Women	Older adults	Southern Suburbs	Pakeha
Parent Learning Centre	Child Education	Education	Education	Men and Women	Young	Northern Suburbs	Other Ethnicities
English Language Centre	English Language	Community School	ACE	Women only	Range	City central	Afghanistan Bhutan
Teen Parent Centre	Education	Community School	Ministry of Education	Women only	Young	Eastern Suburbs	Maori Pakeha

Table 1: Criteria for Interview Sites

Table 1 provides details of the site name, key activity, provider, funders, gender of learners, age of learners, location of the majority of learners, and ethnicity. I was able to gain this information from the sites' websites or the documentation that I obtained from my first visit to each site. I was also able to ask the managers of each for some details. I asked participants at the start of the interview for details of their age and ethnicity. Women were allowed did not need to provide this information if they did not want to and to indicate an age range rather than a specific age (i.e. 40+ / 50+).

In my efforts to include young Maori women who were not attending formal tertiary education institutions, I interviewed women at the Teen Parent Centre (TPC) who are considered to be part of the formal education system. Although TPC are units run by state secondary schools under the Ministry of Education, my rationale for their inclusion was that this group of women met the national priorities for ACE at this time (MOE, 2007) of targeting learners whose initial learning was not successful, raising foundation skills, encouraging lifelong learning, strengthening communities by meeting identified community needs and strengthening social cohesion. It is important to state here that one of the key differences between the TPC and the other centres discussed in the research is that the women at the TPC were all working towards gaining secondary school qualifications.

#### *Access issues that impacted on the interview process*

Three problems impacted on my access to women throughout the course of the interview process. The first issue was the difficulty in gaining access to the sort of women that I was keen to interview. As I had worked in the ANZ Corrections system at Christchurch Women's Prison for twelve years, I was keen to contact women who had been released from prison. However, I could not access the contact details of applicants through the Department of Corrections or through other contacts.

A further problem with obtaining access was that I was unable to gain responses from a diverse range of women, as most of the women I was given the contact

details for to interview were over forty and Pakeha. An example of the difficulties I encountered was my experience at the Parent Learning Centre (PLC). In consultation with the manager at the PLC I decided that the best method to attract participation was to “post” letters to parents in the parent communication pockets at the centre. I posted sixty letters to parents in this way and also contacted women by meeting face to face as they waited to collect their children at the end of class. However, I had only two responses from this centre.

A third difficulty that prevented access to women to interview was the impact of various “gate-keepers” from a number of the ACE centres in the research. Although I acknowledge that various managers and tutors were attempting to assist me with my research, there was a tendency for some people to act as “gate-keepers”.

I chose not to change my approach as I was appreciative of the chance to interview women at the centres I had contacted and I wanted the managers to be fully aware of my research. This meant that some of the women who were suggested to me for interview were women that had been selected on the basis that the manager or tutor felt that they would be “good” subjects. As Reeves (2008, P. 317) found from her experience with gatekeepers in her research:

*“These people can help or hinder research depending upon their personal thoughts on the validity of the research and its value, as well as their approach to the welfare of the people under their charge”.*

The impact of the “gatekeepers” role may have had an impact on the validity of the research as the range of women that I could have interviewed may have been restricted by the names that the manager had decided on. However, each of the managers passed on a number of names which meant that I was able to interview a random group of women. For a range of reasons which the manager may not have been conscious of, the names that they selected may have been women for example of a particular age or ethnicity. This could have meant that the selection of certain women would change the direction of the research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison,

(2013), but the implications of this were not as problematic as I had envisaged, as I interviewed a broad cross-section of women as I had intended. Moreover, by adding the two further centres I had the opportunity to contact women individually.

The final problem that had an impact on the data collection was the effect of the series of earthquakes that occurred in Christchurch in 2010 and 2011. This meant that the process of conducting interviews was affected by the problems that followed. The effects on my research were that I was unable to access ACE centres or contact women to interview during this time as a state of emergency was declared, with ACE centres closed for many weeks and people often afraid to leave their homes. As there were over 10,000 after-shocks, I was not able to continue with my interviews again for at least six months.

I overcame these access problems by adding two further centres to the original four identified for the research. Since I had noticed that there was a lack of young or Maori women in my first selection, and as a result of the lack of contact with women on release from prison and the difficulties contacting parents from the PLC, I contacted the Personal Development Centre and the Teen Parent Centre for my interviews. As I had flexibility with the time frame for the data collection, I was able to wait until late 2011/2012 to begin the interviews again.

#### *Preparation for the Interviews*

I designed the ten questions for the interviews based on the aims of the research. I aimed to include a range of open questions and tried to provide a range of types of question so that there was a mixture of what, why, how questions. I did this as it made the interview investigative and provided a variety of ways of getting the information.

Prior to undertaking these interviews, I conducted three pilot interviews, two with women I knew, and one with a staff member so that I could practice interviewing someone unknown to me. I conducted each of the interviews under the same

procedures as I had planned for the “real” interviews. Each of the pilot interviews provided me with valuable information to consider prior to undertaking the rest. Following feedback from the pilots, I increased the font size of the question sheet as one of the women I interviewed told me it was too hard to read and I wanted to ensure that it was easy for all women to read. I also prepared a few examples to explain what ACE, was, as the pilot interviewees had suggested. They felt that it would help remind other women of ACE courses that they may have done as well as clarify what an ACE course was. Whilst ACE was very familiar to me, it is not that clear to most people. Based on my reflection on the pilot interviews I needed to ensure that I followed up more on the leads that women gave me in order to frame questions, as well as probing more, and trying to gain more in-depth comments from the participants. In my reflection on my first interviews, I was aware that I had kept too strictly to the “question script”, so I tried to ask more probing questions to improve my interview technique to ensure that I gained more data.

I considered the best order for the questions and trialled this with the pilot interviews. After the second pilot interview with “Karen” I made the decision, acting on her advice, to change the wording of some of the questions as well as the order so as to ensure the most effective “flow” during the interview. I changed the wording from “What if anything, do you feel you have gained from attending these courses?” to “What do you feel you gained from attending these courses?” feeling that it had sounded negative in the first version. I changed the letters of each of the questions to a number system as the feedback from the pilot interviews suggested that numbers would be easier to use than letters of the alphabet. I decided to add the eleventh question, as the topic of women and learning had been the focus of conversations in the pilot interviews, so I decided that it warranted its own question.

### *Conducting interviews in ACE settings*

The first four settings in the interview process were the Women’s Learning Centre (WLC), the Parent Learning Centre (PLC), the English Language Centre (ELC) and the

Creative Skills Centre (CSC). In each of these four centres and later in the Teen Parent Centre (TPC) and Personal Development Centre (PDC)), I sent the manager a letter outlining my research and seeking permission to conduct it at their centre. After gaining their approval, I asked the manager for names and contact details of women who had let them know they would be willing to be interviewed. I also sent letters to the interviewees (Appendix 2), further information letters (Appendix 3), and the interview questions (Appendix 1) and an interviewee consent form (Appendix 4) to each manager so that they knew of all the procedures and paperwork. Feedback from the first manager (Nita) I contacted at the WLC prompted me to adapt the letter to the interviewees as Nita thought that it was too “wordy and difficult”. Consequently I simplified the letter and used this letter for all interviewees. I asked the Manager to give me a list of any women who they felt might be available and willing to participate in the research. Due to the conditions of the Privacy Act the Managers asked each of the women before they passed on their contact details to me. Then I contacted women by phone or email and arranged to meet them.

#### *My role in the interview process*

I aimed to conduct each interview in a private and quiet space. Most of the interviews were conducted at the ACE centres, although several were held in women’s homes, since my intentions were to try to arrange the interviews so that they were as convenient as possible for the participants, in terms of time and place. At each interview I introduced myself and talked a little about the research project and tried to build rapport with each woman. I gave each woman an information sheet about my research (Appendix 2). I also told them verbally about the research and the steps I would take to protect their privacy, that I would not use their real names and that I would change any details that might identify them, such as the names of their children or some of the specific details they disclosed. I asked if they had any questions and I then asked each of them to sign consent forms, (Appendix 4) which they were all willing to do. I checked with each woman that she was happy to be audio recorded and then asked for each woman’s address so that I could send

them a transcript of the interview. On completion of the transcript I sent the transcript and a self-addressed envelope so that each woman was given the opportunity to send back the transcript to me with the changes that they may have wanted made to the final transcript.

At times during the interviews I shared my personal experiences and comments, as appropriate, as I felt that this assisted with building rapport. However I was aware of trying to limit my involvement in the interview process so that the person I interviewed was able to tell her story. There were interviews where I knew the interviewee, and whilst this made rapport building easier, I was also conscious of the impact on the validity of my research. It may have been that women who knew me may have felt too self-conscious to reply to all questions and therefore may have controlled the amount of information they disclosed in the interview. Equally, as the women knew me they may have been more relaxed so they were able to disclose more information in the interview. My intention was to focus on the participant's views and experiences (de Marrais and Lapan, 2004, P. 54) and ensure that the person being interviewed was able to share her story. Therefore, this meant that I did not speak much, so the women could talk as much as possible. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003, P. 96) highlight, an interview is not seen as qualitative if this does not happen.

I was keen to gather rich data so I tried to ensure that the participant was as specific as possible during the interview. I also ensured that I used non-verbal communication cues such as smiling and head nodding to encourage the participant to continue talking, and made sure I listened effectively.

I recorded each of the interviews on a small hand-held audio-recorder, and checked for permission with each of the women prior to recording the interview. I also took notes during the interview. Once the interviews were completed, I transcribed them verbatim. Whilst this was a time-consuming process, I felt that it was important to document the exact words of the participants in order to ensure accuracy. The full

details of the interview were transcribed, with various aspects of non-verbal communication such as laughs and whispers included as well.

### *Reflection on the interview process*

Looking back on the forty interviews that I conducted, I can see that there were a number of ways I could have improved them. On reflection, I did not always follow up on leads that women gave me in questions. Additionally, I needed to allow more time for follow-up comments, and to encourage bigger blocks of time where women could share their experiences. Further limitations of my interview techniques were that there were a number of processes that I would be more vigilant about in future interviews. Whilst I took every precaution to ensure that I had new batteries for each interview, there were still a number of occasions where I needed to change the batteries of the tape-recorder during the interview. Each time this happened it seemed to distract the participant from their focus on the interview. Whilst I had thought that the places that I had conducted the interviews were distraction-free spaces, there were some interviews with background noise, which meant that the tape was inaudible in some places and made it difficult for transcribing. In future interviews, I would check that the place where I conducted the interview was a private space which was free from distraction from others and free from background noise. I would also ensure I gathered more personal data, such as age and ethnicity, at the start of each interview as there were times that I did not do this.

### *Data analysis*

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994, P. 503):

*... Fieldworkers can neither make sense of nor understand what has been learned until they sit down and write the interpretative text, telling the story first to themselves and then to their significant others and then to the public".*

My first task was to become familiar with the data. This involved reading and re-reading the transcripts. As I read I identified words and phrases that suggested specific themes. As Braun and Clarke (2006, P. 82) suggest "A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and

represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.” In my initial analysis of the data I identified eighteen separate themes. The themes that were the most common were those that I had initially labelled as “the Advantages” – the Advantages of ACE, Women and Learning, Impact on Family, Learning New Skills, Change, and Meeting New People. These first six themes were clear from the initial stages of analysis and have remained key themes throughout the process. I continually reviewed the themes checking that they enabled me to answer the research questions and to tell a convincing story of the data. Over the process of analysis, a number of themes were discarded or refined and some were combined. One example of this was the theme, “Advantages of ACE” as this theme was later discarded. After further analysis, I decided that there were other themes that I had not identified in my first readings of the data. Some themes such as “policy problems”, I could focus on in other sections of the thesis such as the Policy context. After analysing the data on a regular basis, I reduced the themes to the nine which are identified in the Findings section. I used a number of techniques to simplify the theme analysis such as colour coding, numerical coding and a grid analysis.

#### *Collapsed themes*

One of the techniques that I utilised for verification of my data analysis was that I presented a workshop at the 2012 ACE Conference and invited the workshop participants to provide feedback on the themes. The process of discussion with others enabled me to verify the decisions that I had made regarding the themes that were present in the data. The workshop participants identified thirteen themes from the whole group brainstorm. I then considered these themes, comparing them with the ones that I had identified and selected the final nine themes that I confirmed in the Findings chapters.

## Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology and research design issues involved in conducting the research. Four research questions have guided the design of this qualitative study. The research design section outlined each step of the interview process and identified ethical considerations. The research design also outlined the pilot interview process, the process for conducting the research and the reflection on the interview process. I have confirmed the criteria for each of the six interview sites, and established criteria for selecting the research participants. During the course of the research there were a number of access issues which I have discussed, as well as my efforts to overcome these difficulties. The final section in this chapter will present the approach to data analysis.

The next two chapters will present the findings from my analysis of the data. The first findings chapter will present an analysis of the reasons the women gave for participating in ACE courses and what particularly attracted them to participate in ACE programmes. The second findings chapter will present findings on the impacts of women's participation in ACE.

## Chapter Four: First findings

*So it's this invisible thing, the fabric of our lives – which actually makes life what it is.*

*Deana, Women's Learning Centre*

This chapter presents evidence gathered from the face-to-face interviews with the women who cooperated with this study. A key question of the research was: *What were the reasons that women chose to participate in ACE?* Women were asked (question two) “What motivated you to take part in these courses?”

The evidence concludes that women gave a range of different reasons for participation, notably:

- (a) the opportunity to meet new people;
- (b) as a means of managing the impact of social isolation;
- (c) to enjoy and/or experience the mutual support of other women;
- (d) practical reasons, such as low cost and accessibility.

These are discussed in detail below.

### ***Participation in ACE enables women to meet new people***

A number of women from a range of backgrounds provided evidence that they attended ACE courses primarily for social reasons. Women reported that ACE courses provided the opportunity to meet and make new friendships with others, primarily other women.

Deana (50+, Pakeha) from the Women's Learning Centre:

*I enjoy meeting a wide cross section of people. I enjoy working in that social sphere – so just the connection with people – that's great – a meeting beyond the individual needs as well and you can support other people like that as well.*

Madeleine (40+, Puerto Rican/Philipino) from the Women's Learning Centre:

*I got to meet people I would not normally meet.*

*I think I tend to hang around with “like” people, people who have a certain level of education and who read the same kinds of books that you do and who are at least interested in books.*

Diana (40+, Pakeha) from the Creative Skills Centre:

*Both the courses I do, there are a lot of older people, and I actually haven't got grandparents around so that's been really neat, it's like a sort of family atmosphere when I go to class, I feel like I've got twenty grandparents around me and they're very supportive and caring and I love that.*

Aroha (24, Maori) from the Personal Development Centre:

*You get to meet a lot of different people from lots of walks of life and you hear a lot of different stories that you don't think is possible.*

Jane (60+, Pakeha):

*Well I think it was really the chance to meet a different group of women who actually shared quite deeply. That wasn't really part of the course, but in the break, we actually had some very deep sharing, and it's always a privilege isn't it, and of interest to hear other women's stories? So that was quite a highlight of the course really – and I hadn't expected it.*

Some women valued this connection with others because it provided the opportunity to meet people in the same or similar situation as themselves. For example, Atawhai (18, Maori) from the Teen Parent Centre reported that she met other young mothers who she perceived were in a similar situation to her.

*Just meeting new people and being able to do what I like doing around people that are going through the same as what I'm going through. Like coming here and like young mothers – being around them.*

Hine (18, Maori) from the Teen Parent Centre:

*It's really nice being around people that are in the same situation. It's also really refreshing just to be around people in the same boat, not judging you.*

Other women valued the opportunity provided by ACE to meet others they would not normally have come into contact with. For example, Madeleine (40+, Puerto Rican/Philipino) recognised that the women that she met on the courses were different from the women that she usually met as she reported that she tended “to hang around with ‘like’ people”.

*I know that this may sound quite prejudiced, but I don't normally hang around with a lot of people who have tattoos but of course I did at the Women's Learning Centre, there were lesbians, there were tattooed women, there were women who go to the battered women's refuge – you know, these are women that I wouldn't normally meet.*

The information provided by the women interviewees supports the findings in Prins et al. (2009), Parr, (1993 & 2000), Jarvis (1992), Aird, (1998), Jackson, (2012), Edwards, (1993), Hanson, Hanson and Raggatt, (1999), Hayes and Flannery (2000), Clisby and Holdsworth (2014), Maidment and MacFarlane (2009) and Cooley (2007). For example, Prins et al. (2009) and Maidment and MacFarlane (2009) reported that women found that belonging to a community education course provided them with an opportunity to meet people and create friendships.

### ***Participation in ACE as a tool for managing social isolation***

A number of the women interviewees reported feelings of social isolation. This isolation appeared to manifest in two distinct ways:

- (a) new arrivals or not knowing anyone in the community or neighbourhood;
- and
- (b) being at home with young children.

For these women, participating in ACE provided an opportunity to manage these feelings of isolation.

#### *New arrivals*

Tracey (40+, Pakeha) from the Women's Learning Centre:

*For my own well being and for social reasons 'cos I come from La Porte Ville about six years ago, but it's sort of hard to find friends.*

Tracey described herself as being new to the city, and as a consequence did not know many people. She reported that participating in ACE courses was a means to manage her social isolation by providing an opportunity to meet and make friends.

Carmel (50+, Pakeha) Creative Skills Centre:

*It was a big factor going to courses, as it meant that with all the shifting around we did, I could meet some people that I might otherwise not have met and had something in common with them and it did help tremendously.*

Carmel said she had moved home many times. Joining ACE courses in each of the new places that she lived was a way of finding support.

Mo, (50+, Pakeha) Creative Skills Centre:

*I think that women can be very isolated in their lives and to come out and do*

*classes where they are with other adults is so valuable.*

Mo reported that she had been both a student and an ACE tutor. She identified that some of women that she had taught, as well as the women she had learned alongside, had experienced feelings of social isolation, due to being new arrivals to a community.

*At home with children*

Jacqui (35, Pakeha) from the Parent Learning Centre, at the time of the interview was caring for three young children at home:

*Sometimes I go through stages of parenting where I feel I'm really low in my creative juice, I feel really down-trodden, I don't like my job of being a home-maker sometimes, so I do need to do something a little bit frivolous and uplifting with a group of like-minded people and we can all sort of have a good old chuckle and a bit of a whinge and at the same time extending skills.*

For Jacqui, participation in ACE provided a break from the everyday work of parenting and housework.

Aroha (24, Maori) from the Personal Development Centre:

*It's more of an out for me rather than staying at home being in a rut, it's like a way to get out and meet people.*

At the time of the interview, Aroha had one child and was expecting her second. The chance to attend an ACE course provided her with the opportunity to meet regularly with other adults.

Kerrin (50+) Pakeha, Women's Learning Centre, attended various courses at the Centre. Kerrin provides evidence that for some women the opportunity to attend

ACE courses was for reasons other than course content. It seems that Kerrin enjoyed the break away from the responsibilities she had at home:

*I wasn't so much interested with the finished product, just the process of doing it was nice and a relaxing time. It was sometimes frustrating as well, but usually the process was quite nice. Just being away from the daily chores of being part of the family.*

Linda (60+ and Pakeha) had retired from paid work as a technician in a school. She had been participating in the embroidery class at the Creative Skills Centre for over ten years.

*I must admit, when I first retired from schoolwork, I thought, crumbs, I'm not going to sit and drink coffee every morning - I'd get so bored. It's company, friendship and I mean, otherwise, you'd be at home sitting at home alone and that would be awful.*

The women interviewed were at different life stages, and fulfilling different domestic roles. But regardless of this, in circumstances where either they were new arrivals in a community or where they were self-excluding from the community as mothers based at home the opportunity to go to ACE and meet others was a reason, in itself, to attend.

Similar results to my research findings were found in the research literature from Horsman (1990), Hayes and Flannery (2000), Prins et al. (2009) as well as Maidment and Macfarlane (2009) and Cooley (2007). As identified in each of these research studies, women's involvement in adult education enabled women to manage the isolation of being at home by meeting others.

### ***Participation in ACE provided women with mutual support for their learning***

Some women reported that the opportunity, available at ACE courses, for mutual support of their learning was a reason to attend. It seems that women appreciated

the mutual support that was evidenced by their identification of the encouragement, inspiration, enjoyment and help that they received from others.

Maree (40+, Pakeha) from the Creative Skills Centre had been attending Pottery classes for over five years:

*It's very encouraging when there's other adults, you sort of encourage each other and you learn a lot from each other as well as the teachers.*

Michelle (19, Pakeha) from the Personal Development Centre:

*They give you a lot of insight, like both the anger management and the parenting course gave me insight that I wouldn't have even come up with on my own, into situations that you get yourself in and how to resolve them in the best possible manner. And it's good to have other people that are educated to bounce ideas off them and learn different ways.*

Linda (60+, Pakeha) from the Creative Skills Centre:

*Anyway, they're all very nice people and they're all very helpful too, if you need something, they'll tell you where you can get it. There's a lot of give and take in these classes.*

*And also you get inspiration from other people and you see somebody do something and you think, "Oh, I must try that!"*

Mary (50+, Pakeha) from the Creative Skills Centre:

*It's a really valuable outlet for creativity and doing it with other people in the community really, because doing it on my own it would be no fun. Certainly the camaraderie even if you're not communicating with anybody, it's just lovely.*

Furthermore, Mary recognised that her involvement in an ACE course enabled her to connect with others from whom she gained support and inspiration.

*So it's good for people's mental, emotional well-being and connectedness – people who need to create have an opportunity to do it with other people, you get inspired by other people there and what they're creating.*

Jo (40+, Pakeha) from the Creative Skills Centre:

*It's a fellowship with other people who paint and you can see them growing and you can see yourself still growing. And that probably wouldn't happen in quite such a healthy way if I was trying to do this on my own.*

The finding that women looked for and found social connection and mutual support through the ACE experience is supported by other literature from Maidment and MacFarlane (2009) and Cooley (2007). As Maidment and MacFarlane (2009) discovered, women appreciated the sense of belonging and social connectedness they experienced.

For the women identified above, learning in a group was a positive and reinforcing experience. It provided them with an opportunity to feel inspired, motivated and encouraged by others.

### ***Other practical considerations supporting ACE participation***

The reasons for participation identified above can be described in general terms as 'social reasons' for participating in ACE. There are also, however, practical considerations. These include:

- (a) time constraints – course participants were time-poor and 'fitting in' education around other responsibilities such as paid work and family;
- (b) cost – course participants reported having only limited funds to pay for course fees and/or books and equipment;

- (c) informality – some course participants were wary of formal education courses and preferred the relaxed format of many ACE programmes.

Diana (40+, Pakeha) from the Creative Skills Centre appeared to value the chance to participate in an ACE course while her children were at school:

*I realised that I really loved art and wanted to do it far more, so then when the children are at school I had the time available. I'd always been a bit scared of painting and I thought, maybe I should do it just to see if it's not as scary as I thought. I like a challenge! I've been doing that for over five years.*

Jane (60+, Pakeha) from the Women's Learning Centre had compared the costs of a non-ACE course with the costs of an ACE courses and recognised that the ACE course was cheaper:

*They're reasonably priced. You kind of know that it's not a commercial organisation that wants money out of you. Cos when I did the digital camera thing, I have seen others advertised and they were very, very expensive – like the TerryTech. I'm drawn to cheap ones cos if I'm going to do something and I don't know anything about the course, I don't want to fork out \$400 or something and then find it doesn't suit me– so it's often sort of a taster kind of thing – cos I'm not inclined to commit myself for long term, cos I'm a busy person.*

Mo (50+, Pakeha) from the Creative Skills Centre:

*Because they were convenient. They were available and they were convenient, and I believe in learning. Well, they're certainly the cheapest way being taught further skills.*

Kerrie (40+, Japanese) from the Women's Learning Centre:

*They're much cheaper than any other courses. It doesn't mean that they're not properly done - the quality is just as good as any courses.*

Mary (50+, Pakeha) from the Creative Skills Centre:

*I couldn't have the set-up, I couldn't afford the set-up, and I wouldn't want to work on my own anyway, so being with other people doing the same thing, having tuition, and the safety of doing it in a situation like CSC. It's safe because you get taught how to handle the materials and that kind of thing.*

Jacqui (35, Pakeha) from the Parent Learning Centre:

*I think it's a nice thing about these smaller courses is that you can speak more casually and informally and clarify things that you are finding it hard to come to terms with. But when you go to a setting like that with other women it can be a really good leveller and really grounding.*

The women reported these practical considerations attracted them to participate in ACE. ACE provided the opportunity and the materials to enable people to learn in a safe and supportive environment. This is particularly the case where the participants were less confident about their abilities and level of education.

In certain courses, such as those provided at the Creative Skills Centre, the provision of key equipment, such as pottery wheels and a kiln, allowed women to participate in an activity that would otherwise have been unavailable to them. For some women, the availability and affordability of ACE courses had great appeal. For others, the short duration of the courses, as well as the provision of a range of materials were reasons that other women became involved in ACE courses. Whilst it may be an expectation that ACE courses provide all equipment, it was noticeable that women highlighted that these practical requirements were important to them.

### ***Chapter Conclusion***

The analysis reveals that women were prompted to participate in ACE as an opportunity to meet new people, to manage the impact of social isolation, to enjoy and/or experience the mutual opportunity of other women as well as for practical reasons. I have presented evidence that suggests that their participation in ACE courses provided them with an opportunity to reduce their social isolation. But regardless of whether they were a new person to a town, or someone who was at home with young children, or in retirement, it seemed that these were the reasons that women felt encouraged to join an ACE course.

The chance to meet people was one reason that women said that they became involved in an ACE course. Participation on an ACE course appeared to provide some women with the chance to meet others who were in a similar situation as they were – or, in contrast, the chance to meet women who seemed quite different to them. The opportunity to enjoy mutual support on a variety of ACE courses appeared to appeal to a number of women. Women from the Creative Skills Centre, Personal Development Centre and the Teen Parents Centre identified that the reason they became involved in ACE was because they enjoyed the mutual support of being able to feel supported and encouraged by others. Equally, women recognised that learning together in a group was an opportunity for them to feel inspired by others. One final reason that women offered in regard to their participation in ACE was because of practical matters, such as low cost and accessibility.

In response to the research question regarding the reasons that women chose to participate in ACE programmes, it is clear from the findings that the women in the research did so for predominantly personal and social reasons. An examination of the literature has suggested that the interest for women in attending adult education courses was for social reasons however there are a few details of the nature of these interactions. The findings from my research have helped to provide a deeper understanding of the exact nature of social interactions that may appeal to women in community education and specifically Adult and Community Education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

## Chapter Five: Second Findings Chapter

*“I think it’s important for women to be confident in themselves and believe that they can do what they want to do”*

*Deana, Women’s Learning Centre*

### ***The impact of women’s participation in Adult Community Education: effects on personal and family life***

This second chapter presents the findings on the impact of women’s involvement in ACE on women’s personal lives followed by the impact on their family. The first section introduces the themes of the confidence which women seem to imply that they gained from increasing their belief in their own abilities, and the actions that they took regarding this new confidence. The second section provides illustrations of personal development, which some of these women refer to as the process of change that was evident in their lives. The evidence pointed to the following:

- that involvement in ACE had proved to be an influence on some women’s sense of confidence;
- that it had resulted in them making changes in their personal development;
- and that the impact that some women subsequently had on their families had stemmed from their participation in ACE courses.

#### *Confidence*

There is evidence in the data about the effect of participation on what I have termed the women’s *confidence*. This was the term used by a number of women themselves when describing their responses to their academic success or failure, or to having learnt a skill, and also to the increased sense of independence they felt participation had given them. For instance, the notion of *confidence* is defined in the data by Jacqui as her recognition of her response to academic success/failure. Jacqui, (35, Pakeha) from the Parent Learning Centre:

*I think coming from school and doodling a little bit at university, I lacked the confidence and felt quite insecure about my ability to learn, a successful learner. I felt I had real failure baggage for quite a while, so I think that it's (the ACE course) given me the confidence. I think slowly but surely I've gained more of a confidence in my ability to immerse myself in an environment and take the most from it.*

A second notion of confidence is presented by a number of women who present evidence of their developing sense of confidence from learning and performing a new skill.

Diana (37, Pakeha) from the Creative Skills Centre was clear that her participation in an ACE course had enabled her to become confident as a result of participating in specific art classes in acrylic, mixed media and portrait painting that she attended.

*Again, a lot of skills and confidence really and a lot of friends – from attending the courses. Learning new skills and realising that I can do it and what I've always wanted to do I can achieve.*

The opportunity from her attendance on an ACE course to learn new skills in painting appeared to have an impact on how Diana felt about herself.

*Maybe like me, trying out something, they had thought they might like to do but never made the time for or had the confidence to get into.*

Claire (70+, Pakeha, Creative Skills Centre) had also perceived that she had developed in confidence in her ability by improving her embroidery skills.

*If I hadn't done the course, I probably wouldn't have done as much embroidery as I have. Because I've got the skills now, I'm confident to do things. I might have attempted things, I don't know.*

For Madeleine (40+, Puerto Rican/Philipino) the opportunity to learn a new skill in car maintenance and feel that she had become more confident enabled her to become more independent. The data also suggests that the notion of confidence encompasses women's emotional behaviour.

*First, I've grown in confidence and independence. I can now change my own oil filter, I can top up my fluids, I know when to look after my alternator and cam belt, I know when to do them. I even can teach my husband about them cos my husband knows next to nothing about cars.*

For Hine, confidence was evidenced by her opportunity to become a leader.

*Hine (18, Maori), Teen Parents Centre:*

*I've gained a lot of confidence, when I came here I was really shy and stuff. And this year I was the student leader. That was really cool. I don't know, it's just been really cool learning from other girls' experiences and your own experience from being around people.*

For Tracey, confidence meant that her emotional behaviour was more positive.

*Tracey (40+, Pakeha) Women's Learning Centre:*

*More confidence, I think it's (ACE course) starting to change my behaviour, because I feel better about myself, and makes my family life more positive. Yeah, I think one big message is making time for yourself. I've been influenced by the courses and changed my attitude.*

Confidence is referred to by the women in the research in particular contexts.

Desira (2004), Hammond (2004), McGivney (1993), Thompson (2007), Deere (1988), Gordon (1996), Jarvis (1992). For example, McGivney (1993, P. 51) argues that a growth in confidence is one of the most important outcomes of women's participation in education.

### *Personal development*

A growth in personal development by the women was illustrated in the data in a number of ways. The first illustrations are seen in the data from the interviews with Diana and Claire who illustrate their focus to continue with learning. For Diana (37, Pakeha) participation in her ACE painting class at the Creative Skills Centre enabled her to continue with her learning by attending adult education courses:

*I never stop learning. For me, doing portraits, it's a challenging subject, and I can imagine that I will still be learning at 80 or 90 like some of my friends. I'd like to keep improving on what I do, so I just keep doing more of the same.*

Similarly, Claire's personal development was illustrated by her need to continue with learning. Claire referred to herself as being "*in her dotage*", but she did not state that she was thinking about stopping attending classes. On the contrary, her plans for her future emphasised her desire to not "*give up*" and to undertake further courses. Claire's personal development focused on her plans to continue with her learning:

*Claire, (70+, Pakeha), Creative Skills Centre:*

*One course I will be doing is computing, as I've just been given a laptop. So that's something else that I'll have to cope with. ([Whispers] I'm not very bright, it's going to take me a while!) They have courses for older people – Nita-Net – so now that I've got this jolly thing, I'll have to do something. I've got a son in England, so that will be useful to communicate with him.*

Despite her suggestion that she was "*not very bright*", it seems that the impact of completing one course had helped to motivate her to attend a second course where she could learn how to communicate online with her son.

A second notion of personal development was evidenced by women's change in the way they perceived themselves. From Mary's participation in pottery classes at the

Creative Skills Centre, she had changed the way she perceived herself as she was considering the possibilities of becoming a professional artist.

*Mary (60+, Pakeha), Creative Skills Centre:*

*I think that developing the skills further and having them exhibited, hearing what you and others have said – and look, I'd buy that, even one of the guys who worked in the Gallery wanted to buy it! – and it has made me think, well if the chips were down, maybe this could be, I could never live off it, the income I'd make from that kind of thing, but maybe that could be a supplement ... if it became necessary. I wouldn't say, that therefore it would be a change; it feels like an inkling of a change rather than a big change.*

Mary's experience of having her artwork praised by others appears to have provided her with the opportunity to consider developing her artwork and the opportunity to consider making a change to her life.

Similarly, evidence of Anne's personal development was that her perceptions about herself in the future had changed.

*Anne (22, Pakeha), Personal Development Centre:*

*I want to do the Big Brother/Sister thing - you know with the little kids in Social Services Agency care who've lost their parents and things, so I'm gonna do something like that one day too but I had to finish this course first before I could go and do it.*

Personal development was evidenced by all of the women who attended the Personal Development Centre, in their behavioural and emotional development. These women's participation in anger management and parenting courses provided them with an opportunity to positively develop their behaviour and emotions. Behavioural development was evidenced by Helen, Aroha, Anne and Michelle. In particular, all four women reported that they had learnt to manage their anger which signals the development of their self-control.

*Helen (20, Pakeha), Personal Development Centre:*

*I don't argue as much – I just let it go. I try not to listen to it. I'm more relaxed. I've got a lot more respect for my parents. We always used to argue – we still argue but not as much.*

*Aroha (24, Maori), Personal Development Centre:*

*They used to tell you to think about what you would do if you got angry, I tend to get really hot and shake. I know that's one of my early warning signs now and when I get to that point I know it's time to walk away*

*Going to these courses, it makes you more aware and they give you advice or at least try to help you find some solutions to your problems, or alternatives. I've definitely gained more respect for myself and for others, more self-awareness. I'm just starting to feel like I'm beginning to be a person again – my own person.*

*Michelle (19, Pakeha), Personal Development Centre:*

*Yeah, I look at life with a more positive attitude; I just daydream and stuff. I've got different techniques in daily life and problems and issues that occur. They give you a lot of insight, like both the anger management and the parenting course gave me insight that I wouldn't have even come up with on my own, into situations that you get yourself in and how to resolve them in the best possible manner.*

*Anne (22, Pakeha), Personal Development Centre*

*Yes, it's definitely helped. Like when I first started here, I was real bad drinking and stuff, but then I did the Smashed and Stoned workshop and within a month, I'd cut down completely. I haven't got into a fight either. I've withheld my anger and walked away from it rather than just punched them over and getting arrested.*

As well as behavioural development, emotional development was presented by two women, Pauline and Michelle. In particular, Pauline appeared to appreciate the changes that she had made to her personal relationship with her partner as a result of all she had learned from the anger management course.

*Pauline (19, Pakeha), Personal Development Centre:*

*I'm happier and we have a better environment, it's always happy. It's not like we're arguing or not talking to each other because we're grumpy with each other, we just get over it more. We just have a little disagreement, because I don't bite back or I just let him – "Err, whatever, you've had your little say" – and then it's all good.*

Pauline seemed to be proud of her course completion as well as the impact that attending the course had had on her life.

*Pauline (19, Pakeha), Personal Development Centre:*

*I've learnt more off this course, because I didn't stick to the other course, but I've learnt more off this course and it's impacted more on my life. It's actually something that I needed to do.*

Michelle was equally positive.

*Michelle (19, Pakeha), Personal Development Centre:*

*I've got a lot more control over my emotions now and I find it easier to handle my son's misbehaviour and stuff, pretty well.*

Women's participation in ACE courses has appeared to have an impact on various aspects of their personal development, such as continuing with their learning and making changes to the way they perceived themselves, as well as their behavioural and emotional development. This evidence supports the findings in the literature from Prins et al., 2009 on women's experiences in family literacy programmes.

A number of the illustrations of women's development were evident from those who attended the Personal Development Centre and had completed an anger management course, addictions or parenting course. All five of the women interviewed at the PDC presented evidence that demonstrated the impact that attending these particular ACE courses had on their personal development. As the content of the anger management courses will have been focused on behaviour change, it is positive to see that women appear to have gained a number of specific behaviour management skills that they learned from attending the course that they believed they could implement into their lives.

### ***The impact on women's family lives***

Emotional development was also a theme in the data that illustrates the positive impact that women's involvement in ACE had on their family lives.

*Pauline (19, Pakeha) from the Personal Development Centre:*

*It's a better environment for the kids, instead of seeing her mum and dad fight now I can tell before I get angry.*

*Maree (40+, Pakeha), Creative Skills Centre:*

*Well, I'm a better person for having done it and that reflects a happier mother and happier partner with her own life and own skills.*

*Mindu (40+, Bhutanese), English Language Centre:*

*I didn't know how to get the bus before the course at ELC. I might learn to go other place, but not to ELC. My family is really happy to see me make out a shopping list. Sometimes I don't go to the shopping and my husband does. If he asks me to make a shopping list, I can do this now.*

Each of the following examples from the data present illustrations of the positive impact that women's involvement in ACE had on their families. Pauline's (19, Pakeha) participation on an ACE course at the PDC provided her with an opportunity to gain a Diploma because she wanted her children to be proud of her:

*The Diploma – it will take me four years. I just want my children to be proud of me and I just don't want to not have a qualification and any work, and it's a Diploma. And to be honest, I don't know where I'm going with it, but there's so much within the industry, you know, I can do anything, so it's good and it's level five.*

Jacqui (35, Pakeha), Parent Learning Centre described a happier household:

*I think by and large it's just my general equilibrium in the house, with my husband and my kids – if I'm happy, we're all happier. I mean families are so tightly intermeshed.*

In contrast to her families expectations of her, Amiria (16, Maori), Teen Parent Centre,

*My family was surprised that I continued with my education as well. Cos there are a lot of people in my family that have kids and just sit on the dole and so they were surprised.*

One of the impacts of completing the ACE courses for Michelle (19, Pakeha) from the Personal Development Centre was how other people now saw her. This may have had a specific impact on her son. Michelle noticed that her son appeared to recognise that she was less stressed and seemed to be more positive:

*My son can see it now because I'm a more peaceful mother to be around, because I'm not getting stressed by little things. Look at life in a more positive way - different attitude, different techniques with daily life.*

A number of Michelle's family and friends noticed the helpful impact that participating in the course had made to her life:

*Most of my family and friends have noticed that I'm a more pleasant person to be around. I noticed that I focus on the positive and looking forward and don't dwell on the problems and issues in the present.*

In addition, Jacqui recognised that her involvement in an ACE course meant that her children could see that she was a learner which was she perceived was a positive role that Jacqui was aware she modelled:

*I tell you what, my kids, when I come home and I can impart some random, peculiar things that I've learnt to them, they see that I'm a learner. My son who's at school sees that your life is a lifetime of learning – your whole life.*

Tracey (40+, Pakeha) from the Women's Learning Centre recognised the positive impact that the changes she was making in her life specifically her attitude and behaviour were having on her family.

*I think it's starting to change my behaviour, because I feel better about myself and it makes my family life more positive. I've been influenced by the courses and changed my attitude. Yeah, I think one big message is making time for yourself. I've been influenced by the courses and changed my attitude.*

The finding that women found their participation in ACE provided them with an opportunity to make changes to their personal development is supported by other literature from Prins et al. (2009). They identified that personal development was recognised as a social dimension of women's participation in literacy programmes.

Women's participation in some ACE courses appeared to impact on lives of their family in a number of ways, often from having acquired the skills of emotional and

behavioural development. As Jacqui recognised, “families are so tightly intermeshed” that the new learning that women embraced had an effect on family life.

***Women’s experiences with their ACE teachers were positive***

There were a number of women interviewed who stressed the positive value of their relationships with their teachers on ACE courses. In particular, women from the Teen Parent Centre reflected on their experiences at school and highlighted the specific differences that they noticed. For Paikea (20, Maori) it was a lack of a positive relationship with her teachers at school.

*When you’re at school and you don’t have a conversation with a teacher about how your day is and your weekend was or general information about stuff in life. Whereas a teacher, they come across too much as a teacher, you don’t really learn off that.*

Atawhai (18, Maori), also identified a lack of a constructive relationship with her teachers at high school.

*‘Cos at school I never got along with any of my teachers.*

Despite their negative experiences at school, a number of the women from the TPC identified the positive relationships that they had formed with the staff at the TPC.

Paikea (20, Maori)

*The cool thing is that you have a relationship with them, not just as a teacher, but as a friend. Like you’re their friend and they’re a friend of the family. So, here, we’re like a big family. Because you have the bond with them (teachers) so you trust them as a person, you trust them.*

Jan (20, Pakeha)

*It's very loving here. It's like a wee family – you know like you can joke around with the teachers and they come out and play games and stuff, so it's not like you come here, work, go home. And your children are involved as well.*

As well as feeling that staff were “friends”, Jan noticed that the environment was a lot more supportive.

Jan (20, Pakeha)

*It was a more relaxed environment, say at school, you're under everybody else kind of thing, but like on a course, everybody, including the teachers are more supportive, it's a more safer environment to work in.*

The women at the TPC also identified the ways that their teachers worked which was helpful and in contrast to the ways they had experienced their teachers worked at high school.

Paikea (20, Maori)

*One, the way the teachers work, how there's normally three in a classroom at a time, so you get a lot more one-on-one. They're very motivating.*

Atawhai (18, Maori)

*The help...the teachers here are good, and all the teachers here help, you know they sit you down and make you do it all by yourself and they explain what you do.*

Jan (20, Pakeha)

*So coming here, I feel like I can just be myself and the teachers work at your level and they work one-on-one as well. So, I actually feel like I've been noticed. You know, like, they're actually taking my learning seriously.*

It is clear from the evidence from the young women at the TPC that they had noticed a number of differences between their teachers at secondary school and the teaches

at the TPC. The opportunity to form a positive relationship with their teachers and benefit from the teaching techniques that the teachers used at the TPC appealed to the women interviewed. In addition, women perceived that they were accepted, noticed and included in a way that reminded some of the women of a family or friend relationship.

The final example is from Jane (60+, Pakeha) who illustrates the benefits for her of attending a course at the Creative Skills Centre. As well as meeting a different group of women she enjoyed the chance to hear women's stories. In addition she recognised the value of the close personal social interactions and the skill of the tutor to facilitate this.

*There was a bit of sharing in the class, she (teacher) kind of encouraged it to be a holistic class, and because we'd done that in the class, that in the breaks, there was all sorts of personal stuff.*

The findings that highlight the effectiveness of the teachers are supported in the literature from Biesta (2014) who highlights the importance of the adult educator to build relationships with students. Further literature from Cranton (2006), Hammond (2004), McGivney (1993) and Prins et al. (2009) also identify the importance of the positive role that the adult educator can make.

A significant feature of a successful learning environment appears to be the teacher based on comments from a range of women from a number of different contexts. Although not all of the comments regarding the positive aspects of teachers were from the TPC, this group of women responded feely to these questions. Part of their dominance in these responses could be that they were young and will have only recently left school. Their experiences of teacher will presumably have been part of their recent memories.

### ***Chapter Conclusion***

Impacts on women's personal lives as well as on their family lives are key outcomes from women's participation in ACE. Some of the women in my research identified the value of ACE courses, specifically the anger management courses, in assisting a particular group of women to feel inspired to undertake further courses, to practice their skills in self-control and behaviour management techniques and to implement other options to resolve problems with their children.

The two chapters on the findings have presented evidence of the influence on women's sense of confidence, the changes they made to their personal development and the impact that some women subsequently had on their families from their participation in ACE courses. It seems that involvement in ACE courses offered some women the opportunity to develop their confidence and enhance their personal development. This links to current understandings of the benefit of women's involvement in community education. The current research project highlights the impact of ACE, in providing different types of courses that appeared to offer different types of value for the women. This will be discussed in detail in the next section.

## **Chapter Six: Discussion of findings**

*“It’s sort of like a family atmosphere when I go to class”*

Diana, Creative Skills Centre.

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides answers to my research questions by setting my own findings alongside the literature. My aim in conducting this research was to explain and interpret the reasons for women’s participation in adult and community education. I also sought to gain an understanding of the impact of participation on women’s lives. In addition, I have identified the features of successful learning environments within ACE. Furthermore, my intention has been to utilise the knowledge gained from women’s experiences of participation in ACE which may inform policy and practice in the education of adults. This final research question will be discussed in the next chapter.

Overall, my findings are consistent with the research which emphasises a change in women’s confidence as a result of their involvement in community education. In addition, my findings identified that women chose to participate in ACE courses as an opportunity to meet new people, to manage the impact of social isolation and to enjoy and/or experience mutual support of other women and for practical reasons. Furthermore, evidence highlights the impact that women had on their families from their participation in ACE courses as well as the option to enhance their personal development. The chapter also discusses the features of successful learning environments and the impact that teachers appeared to have on women’s experiences in education

### **Why women participate in Adult and Community Education**

The findings suggest four reasons behind women’s participation in ACE. First, they expressed a desire to meet new people and to make friends. The second reason for women’s participation was to manage the impact of their social isolation as

attending ACE courses seemed to provide women with reasons to leave the house as they claimed that their involvement helped them to meet new people when they were new to town or that they wanted a break from young children or being at home alone. The third reason that women were attracted to join ACE courses were the opportunities to experience and/or enjoy the mutual support of other women on the courses. The comments from this group of women highlighted their appreciation of encouragement, insight, inspiration and help that they received from the other course participants. The final reason that some women chose to participate in ACE were practical motives which meant that women were given the chance to join courses as they were accessible and affordable.

My findings present the evidence that some of the women from four of the six ACE centres found that the reason that they participated in ACE courses was to meet others. Regardless of the ACE centre or the ACE programme, this group of women appeared to appreciate the chance to meet and make friends through their involvement. Some of the women were motivated to meet 'like-minded people'; others were motivated by the possibility of broadening their contact with women different from themselves, with varied life experiences and worldviews. My findings appear to be consistent with much of the literature which identifies that adult education programmes provide people with the opportunity to meet and make friends with others (Prins et al., 2009; Jarvis 1983; Aird, 1985; Parr, 2001; Jackson, 2012; Edwards, Hanson, and Raggatt, 1996; Nanton, 2009 ; Hayes and Flannery, 2000; Clisby and Holdsworth, 2014 )In particular, the findings in my study are consistent with findings from Maidment and MacFarlane (2009) and Cooley (2007) who emphasised the opportunities that women had to develop friendships from their involvement in community education programmes. The data in my research also corresponds to research from Prins et al. (2009) who found that women in literacy programmes in the community used education groups as a social space for creating friendships, seeking support and encouragement as well as sharing advice. Furthermore, these findings are in line with research from Schuller et al. (2004) and Hammond (2004) who contend that women appreciated the opportunity to learn

with other women who were mothers as they felt it was helpful to share common concerns.

My findings with regard to the social impacts of ACE are consistent with the findings of previous research over the last two decades. My research confirms findings in this earlier research and extends on this information by identifying the specific social impacts with regard to women's perception of themselves in relationship to each other and their participation in ACE. International research, although mostly limited to the northern hemisphere, also confirms these themes with the exception of Maidment and Macfarlane's work which was undertaken in Australia. It seems that the impact of ACE holds across culture and geographical boundaries.

Secondly, some women in my research emphasised their interest in participation in ACE to manage the impact of social isolation they felt from being at home with young children or on their own due to retirement or as a result of moving towns, or simply to alleviate the boredom of being in the house all day. This group of women from four of the six centres said that their involvement in ACE helped them to meet new people when they were new to town or when they wanted a break from young children or when they felt like a break from being at home. These findings are broadly in line with the research from McGivney (1993), Horsman (1992), Hayes (2000), Maidment and MacFarlane (2009) and Cooley (2007) as some of the women revealed that they felt able to manage their isolation by meeting others and making friends from attending adult education courses. In contrast with some of the academic literature, my findings provide evidence of only two women who claimed that their involvement in ACE courses was a chance to have a break from the home and household responsibilities. Research from McGivney (1993), Horsman (1992), Prins et al. (2009) and Hayes (2000) identified that the women involved in adult education in their research believed that participation was a means of overcoming the isolation that women in the research sometimes experienced in their homes.

Thirdly, some of the women in my research project were attracted to join ACE courses for the opportunities they experienced of mutual support. This is evidenced

from women in my research who experienced their involvement in ACE to be one where they felt encouraged, helped, inspired and supported. Women who ranged in age from 18-60+ stated that they enjoyed the “camaraderie”, “company” and “sharing”. Similar research results were identified by Maidment and MacFarlane (2009) and Cooley (2007) who despite the small scale of their research emphasised the opportunity for women in their research to experience mutual support. In particular, Maidment and MacFarlane (2009) argue that the experience of being in an adult education group made a difference to the lives of the women involved in adult education craft groups because it fostered social connectedness and a sense of belonging. Similarly to the rationale given for the first reason, my research provides consistency across time as my findings add to previous research studies by reinforcing the requirement of mutual support.

Fourthly, some women identified practical aims as the reasons they chose to participate in ACE. The practical reasons that women provided in my research were that the courses were inexpensive and convenient. Others reasons that women offered were because the timing of the course suited them or because the course was short which fitted their personal needs regarding value for money and/or fitted with the needs of their personal timeframe. In contrast to the research literature from Cross (1981) and McGivney (1993) the women in my study did not claim that they were unable to participate in adult education due to a lack of time and to the precedence taken by home and family responsibilities.

Furthermore, there is no evidence from my findings that women were unable to participate in any ACE courses due to lack of child-care as Cross (1981) and McGivney (1993) argue.

My findings are reflective of previous research on women’s participation in adult education. Conversely, the main contribution that my findings make in regard to the reasons for women’s participation in ACE is that meeting new people and mitigating social isolation were the significant reasons that women chose to participate in adult and community education.

### ***The impact of women's participation in Adult and Community Education***

The second research question focused on the identification of the impact of women's participation in adult and community education. The evidence from my research suggests there are two broad areas of impact: the impact on women's personal lives and the impact on their families. In terms of the impact on women's personal lives, two changes were commonly referred to: changes in confidence and the changes in terms of personal development. Some of the women in my research suggested that a gain in confidence was an impact from their involvement in ACE. Whilst the women in my research used the word confidence, the notion was defined in my data by some of the women's responses to their academic success or failure, the opportunity to learn and perform a new skill and their emotional behaviour. These findings are in contrast to much of the literature which does not clearly articulate what is meant by the term confidence in their research (Hammond, 2004; Desira, 2004; McGivney, 1993; Gordon, 1996; Deere, 1993; Brassett-Grundy, 2004). Moreover, studies from Desira (2004) and Hammond (2004) refer to the opportunity for women in their research to apply for new jobs or achieve qualifications as a result of an increase in confidence ; again this is not significantly evidenced in my research.

An inconsistency between my data and the literature is the emphasis in the literature on a deficit construction of the impact of adult education on women's lives. My findings do not support the tendency in some of the literature to claim that some women felt a sense of inadequacy after years of socialisation as housewives (Deere, 1993, P. 63; Gordon, 1996). References to women's involvement in education in some of the literature is discussed as the "the little homemaker" approach (Jarvis,1992, P. 200) whilst Gordon argues that women in her research had lost confidence from being at home for years raising a family (Gordon, 1996). Furthermore, in contrast to some of the literature, my findings do not focus on women needing to commit to family and childcare which may have restricted their involvement in ACE. Other research projects focused on the need for some women to have to take responsibility for the co-ordination of domestic tasks and childcare (Gouthro, 2008; Edwards, 1993; Stalker, 2001) which suggests that gendered

disadvantages still exist for women who are parents. There was no evidence in my research of the assumption that women's participation in adult education is reliant on women's ability to be able to organise child-care and other domestic responsibilities as Gouthro (2008, P. 8) and Pascall and Cox (1993) assume.

In addition to the impact on women's confidence, my research suggests that women's participation in ACE courses provided them with the chance to focus on their personal development. One of the key differences between my research and some of the academic literature is the focus on the specific aspects of personal development in my data. In contrast to Prins et al. (2009), who provides little clarification of the characteristics of personal development in their research, I have evidence of the various attributes of how the women in my research expressed their personal development. Personal development was defined by the women in my research as a chance to continue with their learning, making a change to the perception they had of themselves as well as behavioural and emotional development. There is also little evidence of women making sacrifices in their life so they could attend an ACE course which Prins et al's study (2009, P. 346) identify in their study. One notable difference between my research and the previous research is that much of the academic literature has limited women's roles to that of housewife and child-minder (Gouthro, 2008; Pascall and Cox, 1993). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this not a feature in my research. There are a number of reasons why this may not have been an issue with the women in my research as it could be inferred that particular ACE courses fitted women's needs regarding a need for child-care, for example Diana from the Creative Skills Centre attending portrait painting classes when her children were at school. However, it could also be that the women I interviewed did not have to worry about child-care as they were older women or their children were being cared for in the adjacent pre-school centre in the case of the Teen Parent Centre. Furthermore, some of the research that has focused on the need for child-care was undertaken with students who were full-time and would therefore need childcare as opposed to the part-time nature of the women interviewed in my research.

My research also presents evidence that women felt that their participation in ACE had an impact on their family members. Although I did not interview family members, to establish any potential impact, a number of the women stated that they had gained behaviour management skills that would help them to provide a positive influence for their children. Some women believed that the skills they had learned from their participation on an anger management or parenting course for example, would enable them to manage their children more effectively, by teaching their children specific skills of behaviour as well as providing an environment of love and support which promoted child welfare. This has similarities with the literature that women reported in Schuller et al.'s (2004, P. 86) study where the participants in this study reported that their participation in adult education provided them with the opportunity to offer support to their children and become more involved in their children's schooling. There are further similarities in the research by Hammond (2004), Brassett-Grundy (2004), Stalker (2001) and Gouthro (2005). All of this suggests that an increase in confidence and personal development for women as well as a range of impacts on a women's family are a result of some women's participation in adult education.

### ***Features of successful learning environments***

The third research question focused on the identification of the features of successful learning environments for participants in ACE. I have defined a learning environment in chapter two as a physical setting, cultural context or educational approach where teaching and learning take place. Throughout the interviews, a number of women made reference to particular features of the teaching and learning that appeared to enhance the learning environment. These features were evidenced in chapter four by women's enjoyment of meeting others as well as the opportunity to mitigate their social isolation and the offer of mutual support. Women from a range of various ACE settings in the research recognised the value of the social interactions in the learning environment. Moreover, women's developing

sense of confidence and enhanced personal development also appeared to contribute to a successful learning environment within ACE.

Women discussed their positive experiences of their teachers in chapter five. The opportunities that teachers provided for women to learn in a group and the positive impact from the way that the teachers interacted with women was mentioned by the younger women at the Teen Parent Centre. As this group of women had recently left school, this may account for the majority of the evidence regarding the impact of teachers coming being presented from this group. Some of the women in my research identified that teachers provided care, encouragement, understanding, an open-minded approach and non-judgemental behaviour which they valued as important sources of emotional support. Whilst it could be argued that this is not limited to the ACE sector, the provision of small courses, more than one teacher for some classes and specific characteristics of the ACE educator appeared to create a successful learning environment for these women. In particular, the women from the TPC noted that their teachers were different to the 'school-teacher' type they had experienced at school as they felt that they had a close and positive relationship with their teachers at the TPC. Moreover, the women from this centre valued the chance to converse with their teachers as they claimed that they felt noticed, accepted, encouraged and trusted. The women from the TPC described their teachers as being like their friends or family members as they appeared to interact with them in a supportive, warm and friendly way and as one woman stated, she could trust her teachers at the TPC. Each of these women noted that this was different to the way that they had been treated at school. Women from the TPC also focused on the teaching techniques that their teachers used that they appreciated such as breaking learning into manageable chunks, self-directed learning, games, and appropriate teaching techniques (one-on-one teaching). The attributes of the adult educator that impact on a successful learning environment that are identified in my research are similar to the attributes that Cranton (2006), Hammond (2004), McGivney (1993) and Prins et al. (2009) identified in their research. My data also highlights the role of adult education that promotes the idea that education involves a positive relationship based on equal and supportive relationships with others as

opposed to adult learning which has more of an individualistic focus (Biesta, 2009, 2014).

### ***Chapter Conclusion***

From analysis of the data, the evidence suggests that the women in my research project appeared to value the opportunity to participate in ACE for personal and social reasons. This is in contrast with the more instrumental outcomes of gaining qualifications and obtaining employment that current adult education policy supports. The interviews with the forty women involved in ACE in this research have shown that women appreciated the social interactions they experienced from participation in a diverse range of ACE programmes and the opportunities to enhance their personal development. Similar to other academic research, some women involved in the research project recognised the opportunity to develop their confidence and enhance their personal development. In addition, the evidence suggests that some women's participation in ACE courses had an influence on their personal lives by developing their confidence as well as an influence on their families. Furthermore, the research project has also identified the impact of providing a different type of courses that appealed to offer different types of value for women. The research project has been a reminder that although cuts to funding have decreased the opportunity for women to engage in some personal and social programmes in ACE, this does not take into consideration the importance of the need for a diverse range of programme options to be available in ACE for some women.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion: The meaning of Adult and Community Education in women's lives**

At the start of this research, I was eager to understand whether women's participation in adult and community education made a difference to their lives. The previous chapter discussed the first three research questions:

1. What prompts women to participate in adult and community education provision?
2. What are the impacts of women's participation in adult and community education?
3. What do women identify as features of successful learning environments within ACE?

Beginning with a summary of the key findings, the major focus of this concluding chapter will be on the potential implications of these key findings, addressing the fourth question – What can be learned from women's experiences of ACE participation which may inform policy and practice in the education of adults?

My research identifies that ACE appeals to the participants in the study in a number of ways. Firstly, my research with forty women across a range of ACE settings identified that some of these women appeared to be prompted to join an ACE course for a range of reasons. The women I interviewed participated in an English language class, an embroidery class, an anger management class, a parenting course and a personal development programme. There were a number of reasons that women chose to join adult and community education courses which were the opportunity to meet new people, to manage the impact of social isolation, to enjoy and/or experience the mutual support of other women and practical reasons such as low cost and accessibility. In addition, women's involvement in ACE proved to be an influence on women's sense of confidence and their personal development as well as an impact on their families. Additionally, some women stated that their rationale for joining ACE courses was for practical reasons as courses were inexpensive (at

that time), easily available (even in small country towns) and provided a way to find out about courses before committing to a longer-term programme.

My research also identifies that some of the women in the research project emphasised that their involvement in ACE had an impact on their personal lives and members of their family. In particular, these women recognised an increase in their confidence in terms of their responses to their academic success or failure, and their increased sense of independence as well as their responses to having learnt a skill.

Equally, a third of the women in the research project identified the impact that participation in ACE courses had on their personal development. In particular, all of the women from the Personal Development Centre who had completed ACE anger management and parenting courses provided some of the most compelling responses to the question of impact from their involvement in ACE courses. It was apparent that the course content had an impact on their lives not only their personal development. These young women recognised that they had learned new techniques from their courses in their behavioural and emotional development, specifically the management of their anger, learning techniques in self-control as well as for problem solving and self-awareness and for studying how to change their attitudes. Some of these skills in personal development appeared to have an impact on their lives as well as their partners and children's lives.

Some of the women in the research recounted the effect that they believed their new learning had on their families. In particular, some women perceived that their emotional development had a positive impact on the members of their family, as evidenced by the skills and behaviours they had learned from their involvement with ACE courses which enabled them to be more positive. In addition, family members appeared to recognise that women's behaviour and emotions were managed more effectively than they had been prior to completing an ACE course. The implications from these results suggest that women's involvement in ACE has an impact on family as at least one woman from each of the six centres commented on the impact that their involvement in ACE courses had on the members of their family. Notably, it was

not just the women who had participated in a course where the ostensible outcomes were personal development who identified that there was an impact on their family. Women who participated in English language classes, pottery, teen parent, well being as well as anger management also commented on the impact that their participation in ACE appeared to have on their family.

There were a number of features of successful learning environments identified in this research. As defined in chapter two, a learning environment can refer to a physical setting, cultural context or educational approach where teaching and learning take place. The first feature was the opportunity to meet others; the second was the positive impact of teachers and the third feature was the encouraging effect that the learning environment appeared to have on some of the women. Similar to their reasons for participating in ACE, women recognised that one of the strongest features that they appreciated was being able to meet people. In addition, the opportunity to make friends, to have company and to be encouraged by others were all aspects of the environment that were appreciated by the women in the research. Furthermore, a number of women emphasised the positive impact that the teachers had on the learning environment which enabled women to experience success in their learning. The women in my research recognised the positive impact that the teachers at the Teen Parent Centre seemed to have on their lives, enabling these young women to enjoy their experience of learning in contrast to their secondary school experiences. Notably, a number of the women valued the positive relationships they developed with their teachers. The implications of these points are that women appeared to find ACE courses appealing in a broad range of ways. Women cited multiple reasons for their involvement in ACE as well as numerous impacts on their lives from their participation in ACE courses.

This research confirms the value that women have placed on their opportunities to participate in adult and community education programmes. Whilst the study began in a time when women could choose to participate in a wide range of programmes, over the time of the research programmes options have become increasingly restricted. In 2009, just as my research was beginning, the Government cut ACE

funding. In the seven years since, this funding has remained the same and has resulted in a decrease in the support of programmes that provide personal and social development for the learner (Bowl, 2014, P. 2; NZFGW, 2011, P. 8). The Government's current focus on increasing employment and qualifications as well as on the removal of funding for personal development and recreation/leisure courses means that the range of positive experiences and results that were identified in the Findings section may become increasingly rare.

There is however, an important task that this project has begun. As this project is one of a limited number of academic studies that have focused on ACE in Aotearoa New Zealand, it suggests that there is a need for more research in this area. A specific focus may be to examine how ACE Centres and the Teen Parent Centres might be able to influence other education providers to optimise the educational experience for young people at school and in adult education. My research with the young women at the TPC highlighted a number of problems that young women had experienced from a lack of relationships with their teachers at secondary school. A recommendation from this study is to suggest that practitioners may find that the feedback these women shared about their experiences at the Teen Parent Centre and the Personal Development Centre could provide valuable insight into the creation of successful learning environments. It is clear that there were specific features in these centres that attracted women to ACE which would be good to promote as examples to other educators.

Although the shifts in policy have meant that the opportunity for women to participate in ACE courses is changing, the findings from this research study have a number of important implications, which could be used to inform practitioners. The National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence, Ako Aotearoa delivers professional development workshops for practitioners and provides opportunities to share research. It is possible that the results from this research could be shared with practitioners in ANZ through an Ako Aotearoa workshop.

Another implication is for the opportunity for ACE courses to provide a chance for women to meet others. It seems that across the data, this was a preference expressed by the women in my research to meet and work with others whilst undertaking learning. Some of the academic research (Hammond, 2004; Stalker, 2001) states that women understand themselves in terms of a deficit. Whilst my evidence presents women who identified their need to participate in ACE to help manage the impact of social isolation or to meet people or for mutual support, my findings suggest that learning with others was a preference more than a recognised need. Belenky (1986 & 1997) and Gilligan (1977, 1980, 1982) highlight the importance of the relationships with others as an important approach to learning for women (English & Mayo, 2012). However, there was no evidence in my research that women understood themselves in these terms.

Finally, this research has reinforced the need for the provision of ACE programmes that do not just target employment and qualification options. ACE has been seen to provide women in the research project with a number of benefits, in particular, the opportunity for social interactions and relationships was evidenced in the findings. These findings are in contrast with the current trend towards the individual and potentially isolating nature of on-line learning in education. As Tinto (1975 & 1993) and Roval and Jordan (2004) contend, students need to feel a sense of belonging with their education as a lack of a sense of community can mean that some students feel isolated and choose to discontinue with their studies. Furthermore, the role of ACE is that it enables some students to gain a sense of belonging and choose to continue with their education. Due to the lack of research of the benefits or disadvantages for learners in an ACE context, there is a need to research strategies on the impact of e-learning technologies which may become an accepted provision of adult and community education in the future.

The aims and objectives of the research have been met, as through interviews with forty women, the reasons for and the impacts of women's participation in Adult and Community Education have been identified. In addition, the features of a successful

learning environment within ACE have been acknowledged. Each of the research questions has been fully discussed in the dissertation. The final research question highlights women's experiences during their participation and is the focus of the next section.

***Information drawn from women's experiences of ACE, which may inform policy and practice in the education of adults***

The fourth research question focuses on the suggestions from the research of women's experiences that may inform policy and practice in the education of adults. Whilst the implications from my research might have been useful for policy, it is highly unlikely to think that there may be any changes made to policy in Aotearoa New Zealand regarding Adult and Community Education based on this research. It is possible to inform practice and as mentioned in the previous section, it may be possible to share this research in an Ako Aotearoa workshop for practitioners. With ACE policy currently focused on the achievement of qualifications and employment, the evidence from this research has been a reminder that there are other reasons that some people participate in ACE. In particular, the research project is a reminder that for the majority of the women in this research project, their involvement in ACE has supported their personal and social reasons requirements. Furthermore, the impact of women's participation is not as policy expectations would suggest, that is to say, not focused on accreditation or vocational outcomes. As identified in the evidence, the women in this research found different types of courses appeared to offer different types of value for the women; for example, in chapter four Diana had the opportunity to meet people who she felt were like grandparents for her children in her portrait painting class and in chapter five Aroha had the chance to develop in self awareness and self-respect for herself and others from her participation in the anger management courses.

The evidence in this research has implications for the provision of ACE courses, as this research shows that it is useful to recognise these wide-ranging needs as identified in the previous chapters that could contribute to ACE programme planning. Whilst there are policy requirements for ACE providers to offer

programmes focused on literacy, language and numeracy, my research identifies the additional need for the provision of other programmes, particularly programmes that provide the opportunity to participate in ACE for personal and social reasons which do not only focus on literacy, language and numeracy needs. Women in this research have expressed the value for them personally as well as their families from participating in a wide range of ACE programmes. The research project has also provided evidence of the features of a successful learning environment in the field of ACE. Again, this evidence is useful for ACE providers and practitioners as a reminder of the value of ACE.

The research project presents a diverse range of women who share their experiences of adult and community education in a range of contexts. My research emphasises that women's experiences in ACE create opportunities for personal change and are important in their own right over and above the economic imperatives of acquiring qualifications leading to employment opportunities. ACE programmes appear to have considerable appeal for the women in the research project, as women valued the opportunity that ACE courses provided for social interactions and relationships. As I had theorised at the start of the thesis, the research project illustrates the impact of ACE on some women's lives, and confirms that the provision of a diverse range of courses can offer different types of value for the women involved.

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Appendix 1:

**PhD Study: Women and Learning: Women's perspectives on the impact of their involvement in adult and community education.**

**QUESTIONS**

1. Have you done any adult and community education courses? (If yes, what were they?)
2. What motivated you to take part in this [these] course[s]?
3. Why have you chosen and completed particular courses?
4. What was the best thing about attending these courses?
5. What do you feel you gained from attending this [these] courses?
6. What changes have participating in ACE courses made in your life? Have you made any changes to your life? Can you tell me about these changes?
7. Do you feel that attending adult and community education courses has impacted on your family in any way? In what way?
8. What do you think could be the value of these courses for others?
9. Do you see yourself carrying on with lifelong learning? What are you planning to do next?
10. What advice would you give to someone who's thinking of taking up a course?
- 11.

Extra Question – Anything you'd like to say about women and learning?

February 2011

Appendix 2:

**Women and Learning: Women's perspectives on the impact of their involvement in adult and community education.**

Dear

I am currently undertaking research on women's experiences of adult and community education for my PhD study at the University of Canterbury. In order to do this I would like to interview women who have been involved in adult and community education activities in a range of settings, including [.....]. I am therefore writing to request your participation in a short taped interview designed to gather information about your involvement in learning as an adult.

I would be grateful if you would consent to taking part in a taped interview of about 30 minutes duration. The questions I would like you to consider in this interview are:

- What adult and community education courses have you attended recently?
- What motivated you to take part in this [these] course[s]?
- What was the best thing about attending these courses?
- What, if anything, do you feel you gained from attending this [these] courses?
- Do you feel that attending adult and community education courses has impacted on your family in any way?
- Have you made any changes to your life or have you changed as a result of attending courses? Can you tell me about these changes?
- What other courses, if any, would you like to [do you plan to] undertake in the future?
- What do you think is the value of adult and community education for women?

Any information I collect from you will be anonymised and I will make every effort to ensure that you will not be personally identified in any way. I will send you a transcript of the interview to check and approve before using any information

contained within it. You have the right to withdraw your cooperation at any point or to ask for information you have provided not to be included in my study. As I will be using email to send out information and transcripts, please know that any email address that you may use will not be disclosed to any other party and that all emails will be sent through the secure University of Canterbury server.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Canterbury.

I enclose some further information about my research and a consent form to be signed before the interview takes place. I will be in touch with you shortly to arrange a convenient time and place for an interview. In the meantime, if you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I really hope that you will agree to be interviewed and I do value your support in undertaking my research.

Yours sincerely,

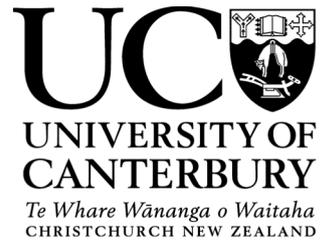
Jennifer Leahy

Appendix 3:

## **Adult Education Teaching and Research**

### **Proposal for PhD research Information Sheet**

#### **Women and Learning: Women's perspectives on the impact of their involvement in adult and community education.**



#### **Introduction**

The focus of the research is to explore the issue of women, their learning and the perceived impact of their learning on themselves and their children. The women whose perspectives I wish to explore are those who do not appear to have benefited from previous formal learning, but who have been involved in adult and community education (ACE) in the context of a prison and/or community setting.

#### **Aims of the Research**

The aim of the proposed research is to explore the meaning of ACE in women's lives and through this to identify how involvement in ACE may impact on their lives and those of their children. It is hoped that the knowledge gained through this research will assist in informing practice and will develop and enhance community-learning environments for women.

The specific question which the project will explore is:

1. What is the impact on women of their participation in adult and community education in Aotearoa/New Zealand?
2. How do women perceive their own learning as impacting on their children?
3. What factors may hinder women using their learning positively?
4. What do women identify as features of successful learning environments?
5. How can these features be incorporated into educational policy and practice?

#### **The researcher**

I am a member of the University of Canterbury Adult Education Teaching and Research team. My interest in the issue of women and learning has developed from my work as an adult educator.

As a practitioner and teacher, I am interested to know how involvement in non-accredited, non-vocational education might be a positive and life-changing experience for women and whether they feel that this in turn has an impact on their children.

I have been an adult educator since 1988, working in a variety of settings, and have principally worked with women throughout this time. I taught women incarcerated at Christchurch Women's Prison and I have also taught and learned alongside mothers at a local kindergarten and primary school as well as being a college and university-based teacher of adults. This has kindled my interest in the types of learning activity that work well for women.

### **The research process**

I want to take an in-depth qualitative research approach to understanding women's own perspectives. The aim of the research will be to illuminate women's perspectives on education involvement in a number of different settings. The process of collecting information will be through face-to-face, telephone and email interviews. I plan to ask the women questions on their experiences of learning, their responses to participation in courses and the impacts (if any) on their lives.

As I will be using email to send out information and transcripts, any email address that will be used will not be disclosed to any other party and all emails will be sent through the secure University of Canterbury server.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Ethics Committee.

For further information contact:  
Jennifer Leahy:  
[Jennifer.leahy@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:Jennifer.leahy@canterbury.ac.nz)

August 2009

Appendix 4:

**CONSENT FORM**

**Women and Learning: Women's perspectives on the impact of their involvement in adult and community education.**

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis I agree to participate in the project, and to be interviewed for this purpose. I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Name (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Thank you to this group of incredible women for sharing your wisdom, time and support of my work – I will be forever grateful.

Dr Marion Bowl, Dr Kathleen Quinlivan, Dr Jessica Ritchie,  
Dr Robyn Chandler, Analiese Robertson

Helen Leahy, Linda Clark, Heather Clark, Marama Rangataua, Debs

Bronwyn Yates, Julie Moon, Maryke Fordyce, Bridget O'Regan,

Ardas Trebus, Celia Lashlie, Therese La Porte, and Sarah Maindonald.

