

DO WE HAVE A 'GREAT DIVIDE' IN LIFELONG LEARNING? TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL PARTICIPATION BY ADULTS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND, 1977-1996 ¹

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Abstract

Extensive overseas research has raised a variety of policy issues and pointed to a 'great divide' between educational participants and non-participants within the adult population. By comparison we have a patchy record of research on these issues. This paper reviews several surveys of educational participation by adults in Aotearoa New Zealand between the mid-1970s and mid-1990s. Selected methodological and substantive issues are addressed. It concludes, among other things, by pointing to: the continuities and discontinuities within a variety of 'divides' over the period including those of class, gender, cultural background and age; and the radical differences between surveys of the 1970s & 1980s which emphasised social and educational imperatives and were driven by national agendas, and those of the 1990s which emphasised economic and workplace imperatives and were driven by supranational agendas.

Introduction and purposes

Extensive and ongoing survey research in several other countries at a time of considerable expansion in the provision of tertiary and adult education and training has raised a number of policy issues, and in particular has pointed to the continuation of a 'great divide' between educational participants and non-participants within the adult population (See for example Directorate for Education, Employment, Labour, & Social Affairs, 2000; Sargant, 2000; Sargant, Field, Francis, Schuller, & Tuckett, 1997). By comparison with many other countries, New Zealand/Aotearoa has had a patchy record of gathering data on patterns of participation and non-participation by adults in educational activities. This paper argues that further research in this area is

needed, not least in order to identify changes in participation patterns following two decades of policy change. The paper reviews selected methodological issues and findings arising out of previous studies. I hope that this will help future researchers to avoid re-inventing methodological wheels and that it will provide a useful basis for a movement away from 'snap-shot' surveys towards studies which seek to build pictures of participation trends over time (essential if we are to identify the impact of policy changes).

Until about forty years ago nearly all studies of adult participation in education around the world were limited to identifying and describing the characteristics of participants within one or two particular institutions or localities or programme areas. In New Zealand studies of this kind include one by Roger Boshier comparing participants in university extension, WEA and school-based programmes in Wellington in the early 1970s (Boshier, 1970, 1971); a study by Chris Horton of the characteristics of participants in university extension programmes in the Waikato in the mid-1970s (Horton, 1976); and a range of surveys of participation in university, polytechnic and school programmes conducted over the years by such organisations as the University Vice-Chancellor's Committee and the Ministry of Education as well as by a number of government-appointed review bodies. The continuing importance of this kind of study is illustrated by a recent study of students at Victoria University who were 40 and over carried out by Judith Davey (2001).

Internationally the development of large-scale surveys of adult education participation dates back only about 40 years. The first such national study was conducted in the U.S.A. by the National Opinion Research Centre in the early 1960s (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965). This study, which was the first to highlight and quantify the very large scope, diversity and richness of adult learning, proved to be very influential: it provided the inspiration for a large number of similar surveys over the following years both in the U.S.A. and in other countries (See for example Gould, 1974). In New Zealand/Aotearoa the first such study was undertaken on a city-wide basis in 1974 by the Department of Extension Studies, University of Canterbury (Department of

Extension Studies, 1975). This was followed by a national study undertaken in 1977 under the leadership of Denny Garrett who was then Director of Continuing Education in the Department of Education. The publication of this report was however delayed, with a draft report being published in 1979 (Department of Education, 1979) and a final report in 1981 (Bird & Fenwick, 1981).

Despite widespread criticisms of the positivist assumptions underlying large-scale, national sample survey studies of educational participation by adults (See for example Benseman, 1989; Harré Hindmarsh & Davies, 1995; Rockhill, 1982; Tobias, 1998), this paper argues that such studies do serve the purpose of documenting trends and patterns and raising questions for further research. More specifically this article argues that a further national sample survey of adult learning and education is needed to provide additional information to set alongside the findings of qualitative, ethnographic and participatory research in developing policies. In making the case for this, the article draws on the findings of the four national surveys which the writer is aware of in order to illustrate some of the issues and questions that could usefully be addressed by a further study. John Benseman (1979; 1992; 1996) is among many researchers (Courtney, 1992; Cropley, 1989; McGivney, 1993; OECD, 1979) throughout the world who have reached similar conclusions on the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of participants and non-participants in adult education programmes. With regard to New Zealand Benseman points out that:

‘Participants in adult/community education programmes include disproportionately high numbers of:

- those who have attended school more than an average amount of time and passed formal qualifications
- women (although men tend to be in a majority in more vocationally oriented courses)
- those under 40 years of age
- Pakeha
- those who have above-average incomes

- people who are in full-time work and most often in a white-collar occupation.

Conversely, those underrepresented disproportionately include:

- the elderly
- ethnic minorities
- immigrants
- those who left school early
- those on low incomes
- people who are unemployed or work in semi- or unskilled jobs
- women with dependent children.

In a word, the marginalised' (Benseman, 1996 p. 277).

Drawing on the studies referred to above, this paper investigates some of these generalisations about the relationships between educational participation by adults and such factors as their schooling, gender, age and occupation. In particular it examines some of the trends in participation over a twenty year period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. Wherever possible these findings are linked with wider changes in social policy, and an attempt is made to compare some of the New Zealand findings with those in other OECD countries.

Issues of methodology

This paper is based primarily on four surveys. The first was conducted by the Department of Education (DoE) in February 1978 (Bird & Fenwick, 1981; Department of Education, 1979); the second in the latter part of 1987 as a small component of a wide-ranging survey of attitudes and values for the Royal Commission on Social Policy (RCSP) (Richardson, 1988); and the third, which formed part of an international survey conducted for the OECD in March 1996 (IALS), was focused on adult literacy, but included a number of additional questions on adult participation in education and training (O'Connell, 1999; OECD, 1997). Finally, a fourth study, the Education and Training Survey (ETS), was conducted by Statistics New Zealand in September 1996, i.e. only six months after the IALS survey, as a supplement to the quarterly Household

Labour Force Survey (HLFS) (Statistics New Zealand, 1997). In addition some references are made to findings of the 1996 Census.

In view of the fact that four relevant surveys were undertaken within the two decades between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s it might be thought that we would have substantial continuity of data over this period. This is however not the case. The purposes, parameters and policy requirements of each of the surveys have varied, and these have tended to shape the questions asked, the nature of the samples drawn and decisions on other methodological issues. Moreover it would seem that those responsible for each of the surveys were for the most part unaware of the previous ones and failed to take them into account in making design decisions. The following then are some of the variations which have occurred.

Definitions of 'adult' have varied. In studies in the USA and elsewhere dating back to the 1960s 'adults' were often defined as 21 year-olds who were no longer full-time students. Surveys in New Zealand Aotearoa have set a much lower age limit and generally (though not always) included full-time students at secondary and tertiary institutions. In these studies the lower age limit has varied between 15 and 16, and while some surveys have included older adults, others have set an upper age limit of 65. Most but not all of the studies have been limited to the civilian population not resident in institutions who are not living abroad.

The 1977 DoE study drew its sample of 1,500 interviewees from all those 16 and over who were not full-time secondary school students. The RCSP survey by contrast drew its very much larger sample of 22,250 interviewees from all those 15 and over and included full-time school students. The IAL survey sample contrasts in different ways from the previous surveys. It drew its 4,223 interviewees from a population ranging in age from 16 to 65, thus excluding both 15 year-olds and those older than 65. In setting the 65-year age limit the New Zealand government joined the company of governments of such other countries as Germany, Ireland, Poland, the UK and the USA. By contrast Australia included all those between 15 and 74; Canada, Sweden

and Switzerland included all adults 16 and over, and the Netherlands included all between 16 and 74. Finally, the ETS drew its large sample of 22,250 interviewees from a population consisting of those between 15 and 64. Full-time students were thus included and the sample was intended to reflect what was described as the working age population.

By way of contrast with several overseas studies (which have asked respondents about their current learning, their learning over one year or over a three-year period, as well as over the entire period since they left secondary school), all studies reviewed here have asked respondents to think back over a one-year period. In other respects however definitions of 'education' and the approaches and methods used to gather data have varied. The DoE survey is the only one focused exclusively on participation by adults in educational activities. It used an extensive hour-long structured interview. For this survey the definition of education was driven by the fact that the Department of Education (as it then was) was primarily interested in finding out how effectively adults' learning needs & interests were being served by the wide range of organisations and tutorial services that were available. Hence the primary focus was on what were called 'agency directed learning activities'. For an activity to count as an 'agency directed learning activity' it had to meet the following criteria:

- it had to be planned by an 'agency', i.e. an organisation or tutor (excluded were those individual learning projects that were entirely self-planned or self-directed; also excluded were those group or movement-based learning activities that were planned and organised by the groups themselves without recourse to any external agency or tutor);
- the main purpose of the activity had to be that of helping participants to gain knowledge and understanding or to acquire or improve a skill in a subject or area;
- the learning had to take place using one of the following methods: private lessons or one-to-one tuition or coaching, attendance at a class or courses, attending talks or participating in conferences, or being a member of an organised discussion group or taking a correspondence course; and

- the activity had to consist of either a correspondence course or three or more meetings of any length or one or two meetings at least six hours in length altogether.

The purpose of the 1987 RCSP survey's questions on educational participation is not made explicit in the report. However it would seem that the Commission viewed education as an element of social policy and was interested in finding out how effectively various forms of education were meeting the needs of various sections of society. This was however but one aspect of interest. An hour-long interview canvassed a wide range of experiences, attitudes and values, and only one set of questions was relevant to the field of adult learning and education. The key questions were phrased as follows:

"Now some questions about education....

"Have you received any education of any kind in the past 12 months? I mean any sort of learning at courses, at work or elsewhere, or any sort of private lesson?"

"What sort of education was that?"

Interviewers were then instructed to probe and record one or more of the following: Parent involvement in preschool (e.g. Kohanga reo or Playcentre); secondary; Tertiary; On-the-job training (including courses attended outside of work); Hobby, interest, cultural (continuing); Other; and Don't know.

The main purposes of the IAL survey conducted in 1996 were to '... develop measures and scales that would permit useful comparisons of literacy performance among people of a wide range of ability... (and) to describe and compare the demonstrated literacy skills of people from different countries' (OECD, 1997: 12). The lengthy interview process, which was conducted in interviewees' homes, was thus mainly devoted to testing interviewees and obtaining background information. Although the focus of the Survey was on literacy (including prose, document and quantitative literacy) it also included a section dealing with adult education and training. This section was introduced by interviewers as follows: "The following questions will deal

with any education or training which you may have taken in the past 12 months.” The first question in the section was then phrased in the following way:

“During the past 12 months, that is since April 1995, did you receive any education or training, including courses, private lessons, correspondence courses, workshops on-the job training, apprenticeship training, arts, crafts, recreation courses, or any other training or education?”

This was followed by a series of questions on the names of courses or programmes taken (if any), the qualifications sought (if any), the source of financial support (if any), the organisation/s offering the course/s, where it/they were held, their reasons for taking the course/s, the length of the course/s, and any barriers or reasons for not taking courses that respondents said they had wanted to take but hadn’t taken.

The purpose of the 1996 ETS, which formed an extensive supplement to the Household Labour Force Survey, is not made explicit in the report on the survey. However its focus was clearly on identifying data relevant to the promotion of the development of human resource and training. Interviewees were asked about their recent participation (i.e. over the past 12 months) in study towards an educational qualification or in in-house training or external training. This was followed by questions on employment-related courses respondents would like to do, courses stopped before completion, existing post-school qualifications, length of time in education, length of time with employer and annual salary.

The report states that definitions of education and training used were based on work done by the OECD and the Australian Bureau of Statistics in defining education and training. Employment-related training was divided into in-house and external training. In-house training was defined as that organised by an employer primarily to meet the needs of its own employees, conducted in-house or externally, and delivered by the company’s own employees or by external training providers. External training was defined as that organised by training establishments, educational institutions, agencies or consultants other than the respondent’s employer, conducted outside the respondent’s place of employment, and delivered by people other than employees of

the company. Thirdly, for the purpose of identifying study undertaken for an educational qualification, this was defined as an award for attainment of a formally recognised qualification from a recognised provider. It equipped the learner with skills or knowledge that could be identified in terms of the standard attained (i.e. level) and the field (post-school qualifications) to which it related. 'Formally recognised', it was stated, meant 'assessed under the auspices of the New Zealand Qualification Authority (NZQA), or awarded overseas by a recognised authority'.

Finally, reference should be made to the way in which the relevant census data were gathered at the 1996 Census. This Census included the following question: 'In the (7 days before the census), did you: attend or study for a full-time course at school or anywhere else; attend or study for a part-time course at school or anywhere else; neither of these things' (Question 30, Individual Form, Census 1996). The notes defined a full-time course as one which 'you spend 20 hours a week or more on (including times at classes, studying, etc.)' This question was followed by questions on educational qualifications.

Findings

In view of the major methodological differences between the studies it is not surprising to note that the findings of the various surveys are also very different. There are, nevertheless, some findings which are worth highlighting, and in this article I attempt to focus on those themes and issues for which more or less comparable data are available over a period of some years.

(a) What proportion of the overall adult population participated in educational activities? And were there changes in these overall patterns of participation over the twenty year period?

As indicated above, differences in sampling methods, interviewing approaches and questions asked mean that there is only limited comparability between the surveys. Thus for example the 1996 census data suggest that only 6.8% of adults 25 and over were participants. By way of contrast the 1996 IALS study found that 46.4 % of those

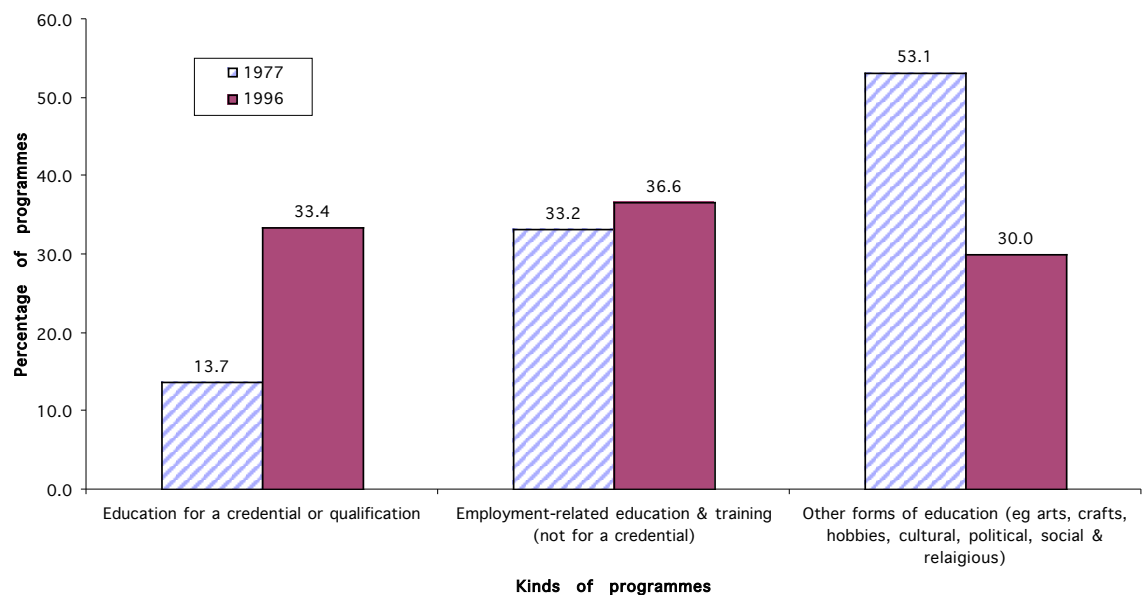
25 and over were participants (O'Connell, 1999). The explanation for these very different findings lies in the methodology. The census data include older adults 65 and over whereas the IALS data were limited to those under 65. More importantly perhaps the census data refer to participation in the seven days prior to the census, whereas the IALS study, in common with the other studies reviewed here, refers to activities undertaken in the 12 months prior to the survey.

In spite of the differences between the other surveys it is possible to draw some comparisons between them. Thus for example we can compare the 1977 DoE and 1996 ETS survey data for adults between 16 and 64 years of age. In 1977 it was found that 34% of the 16 to 65 year age group participated as compared with 40% of the same age-range in 1996. This reflects a marked increase in overall participation. Moreover the latter figure may be an underestimate of the extent of participation in the mid-1990s in view of the fact that the IALS survey conducted six months before the ETS found that 47.5% had participated in the 1994-5 period. On the other hand it is important to note that these figures are five or six years old, that the surveys were undertaken at a time when tertiary fees and the costs of student loans were increasing dramatically, and that these increases may well have had an impact on the patterns of growth in recent years. Certainly the Ministry of Education (2000) has suggested that the growth in participation in tertiary education, which had been a strong feature of the 1980s and early 1990s, had slowed in the latter part of the 1990s and that there were signs that it was leveling off.

(b) What kinds of education did people undertake? And in what ways did this change over the period?

Once again limited comparable data are available. However Figure 1 summarises information from the 1977 DoE and 1996 ETS surveys on the kinds of educational programmes undertaken over a 12-month period. In both cases the data on full-time secondary school students have been excluded. This presents some striking findings which perhaps are not unexpected. In the first place the ETS survey suggests that in 1996 the participants were almost equally divided between those undertaking formal qualifications-oriented tertiary studies, non-credentialed employment-related education

Figure 1
Percentage of various kinds of educational programmes undertaken by participants aged 16 to 64 in 1977 & 1996



and training, and other forms of adult/community education. Secondly, drawing on the findings of both studies, it seems that: the percentage of participants undertaking formal qualifications-oriented tertiary studies increased substantially from 13.7% in 1977 to 33.4% in 1996; the proportion engaged in employment-related education and training programmes remained about the same; and the proportion involved in other kinds of education, including programmes in the arts, crafts, cultural, political, social and religious areas, fell away substantially from 53% in 1977 to 30% in 1996.

The data presented here suggest that the period was marked by a greater degree of instrumentalism and greater pressures towards credentialism. The data support the hypothesis that it was the strengthening of these factors rather than any overall growth in participation that is the most significant feature of the twenty-year period.

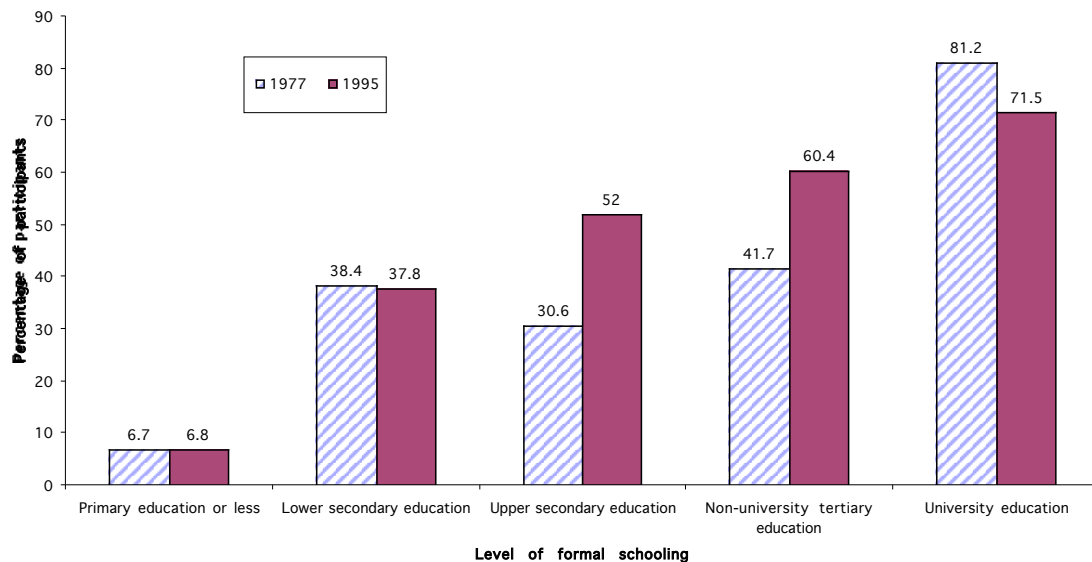
(c) What differences (if any) were there between participants and non-participants in terms of level of formal schooling? And were there any changes in the relationship between level of schooling and participation over the period?

Data from all of the studies confirm that there were clear differences in levels of formal schooling between participants and non-participants in educational programmes. For example the 1995-96 IALS Survey found that the rates of participation by those aged 25 to 64 were related to the amount of formal schooling. Whereas 36.1% of those who had not proceeded beyond School Certificate or 5th Form were participants, 48.8% of those whose highest level of schooling was at the upper secondary or 6th or 7th Form level, and 64% of those who had proceeded to tertiary level education were participants.

In addition to this it seems that the extent of the impact of formal schooling on adult participation changed markedly over the period. Figure 2 presents a summary of the data on those aged 16 to 64 years drawn from the 1977 DoE and 1995-96 IALS surveys. In both cases data on full-time secondary students have been excluded. The picture presented is not surprising. In the first place there is evidence of continuity - a continuation of the educational divide in participation rates between those with relatively little and those with extensive formal schooling. Secondly, however, the extent of this divide varies somewhat and is perhaps not as great as might have been expected. Thirdly the nature of the divide appears to have changed somewhat over the years as an increasing proportion of the population have proceeded on to tertiary education. In 1977 the great divide was between those who had been to university, of whom over 80% had participated in the previous year, and the rest of the population,

of whom less than 40% had participated. By way of contrast in 1995 this deep divide had disappeared and been replaced by a series of smaller divides. About 35% of those who had not proceeded beyond the 5th Form had participated. This compared with 52% of those with 6th or 7th Form qualifications, 60% of those who had undertaken non-university tertiary studies, and 71% of those who had studied at a university. Finally it is important to note that the participation rates of those who had the least formal schooling remained very similar over the twenty-year period.

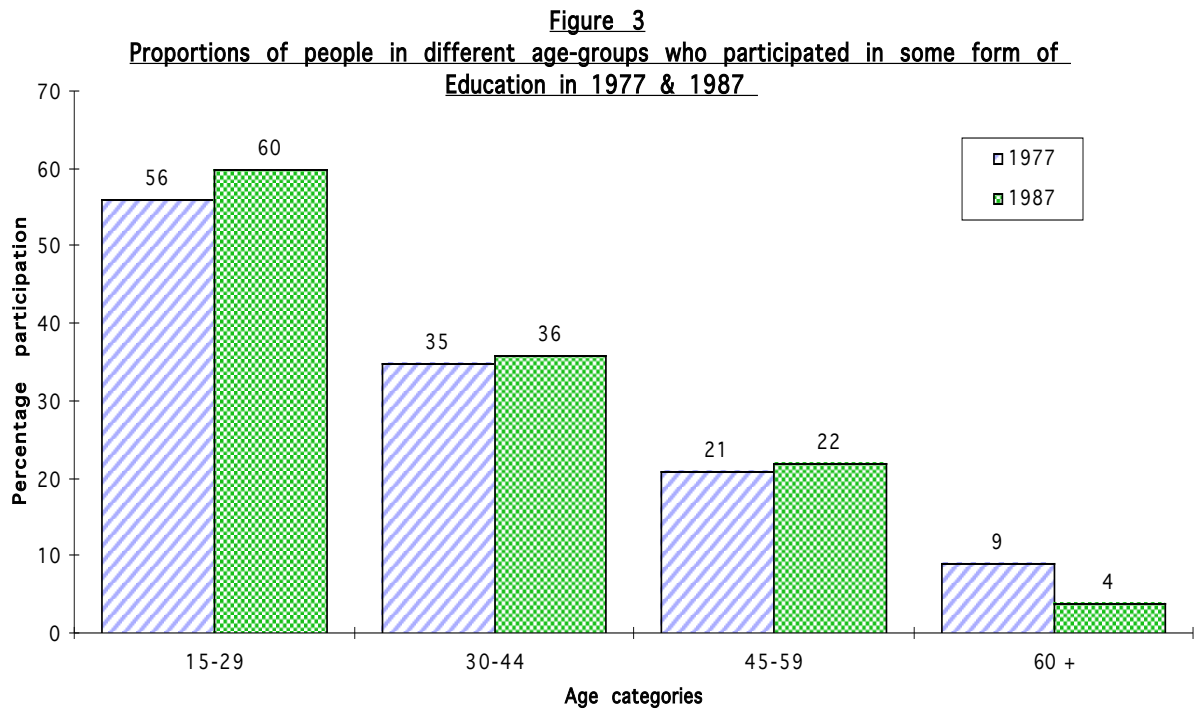
Figure 2
Percentage of participants by level of formal schooling,
1977 & 1995



(d) What were the age differences between participants and non-participants? And were there any changes in the relationship between age and educational participation over the years?

Figures 3 and 4, both of which exclude full-time secondary school students, present data which illustrate the strong relationship between age and education over the period. Each of the surveys suggests that younger adults were very much more likely to engage in educational activities than older adults. The figures also point to the fact that the largest proportionate growth in participation over the period was among younger adults and in particular the 15-19 year age-group.

Figure 3 provides a comparison between the findings of the 1977 DoE and 1987 RCSP surveys. It points to sharp differences in the participation rates between age categories in both surveys. Between 56% and 60% of 15-29 year-olds had participated

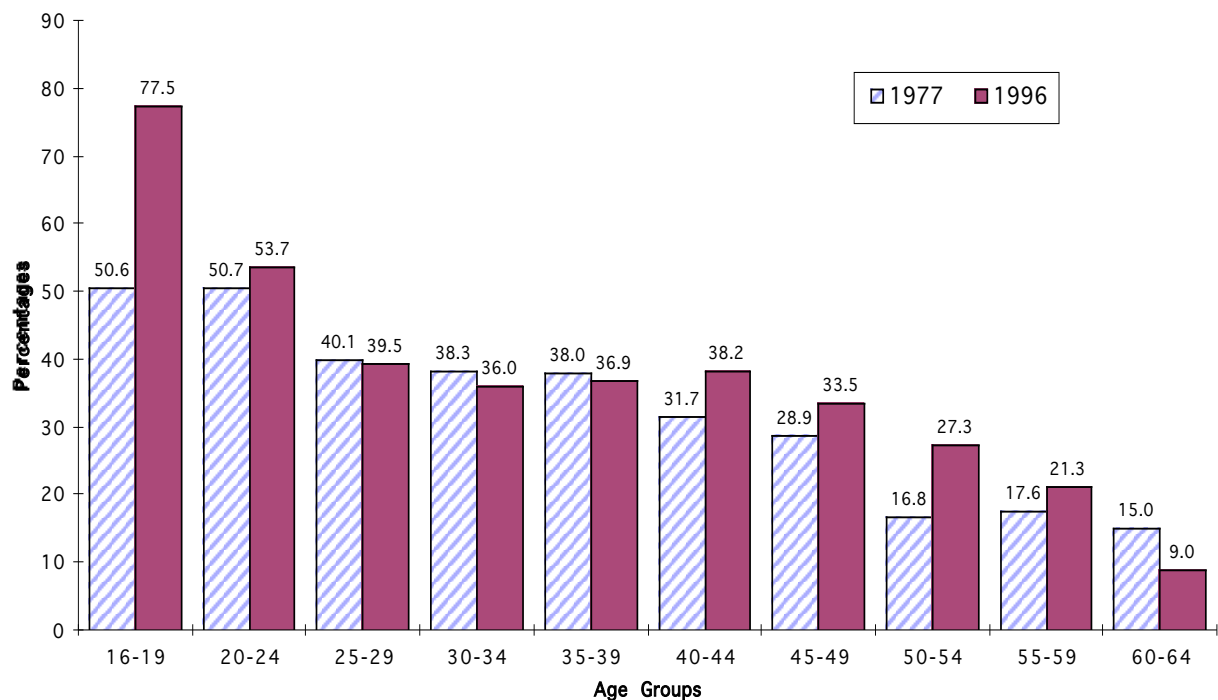


in the previous year, as compared with 35-36% of 30-44 year-olds, 21-22% of 45-59 year-olds, and 4-9% of those 60 and over. One of the most striking findings here is the sharp fall-off in the participation rate of older people over the ten-year period.

Figure 4 provides a somewhat more fine-grained comparison of age profiles drawn from the DoE and IALS surveys. This figure points firstly to a dramatic increase in the proportion of young people proceeding on to tertiary studies over the period. In 1977 a little over 50% of 15-19 year-olds were participants; by 1996 this had grown to 77 %. In addition there also seems to have been a very small increase in participation by 20-24 year-olds. Secondly, by way of contrast the figure suggests that participation rates

among those between 25 and 39 years of age may have fallen away slightly over the period. Thirdly, however, it seems that the rates of participation among those in their 40s and 50s may have increased markedly with the biggest increase occurring among those in the 50-54 year age-group. Fourthly, a marked drop in the rate of participation seems to have occurred among those in the 60-64 year age group in the period between 1977 and 1986.

Figure 4
Proportions of people in different age-groups who participated in some form of Education in 1977 & 1996



(d) What were the occupational and employment differences between participants and non-participants? More specifically were there any differences in participation patterns between those in paid and those not in paid employment, those working in different kinds of jobs, and those working in small and large organisations? And were there any changes in these patterns over the years?

Figure 5 presents data drawn from the responses of 16-64 year olds who responded to the ETS survey. It presents a picture of the differences in participation patterns between women and men who were employed and unemployed, as well as those who were not in the paid labour force in 1996. The first and perhaps most striking finding is that only 27% of women not in the paid labour force, i.e. mainly women working at home in an unpaid capacity, had undertaken any form of education over the previous year. This proportion of participants was very much lower than among women and men who were either employed or unemployed, and it was markedly lower than the comparable figure of 45% for men.

A second striking finding relates to the differences in participation patterns between employed and unemployed people. This difference applies to both women and men. However the difference was greater in the case of women than it was among men. Almost 45% of women in employment had participated as against a little over 36% of unemployed women. By comparison 40.5% of employed men had participated as against 37.8% of unemployed men.

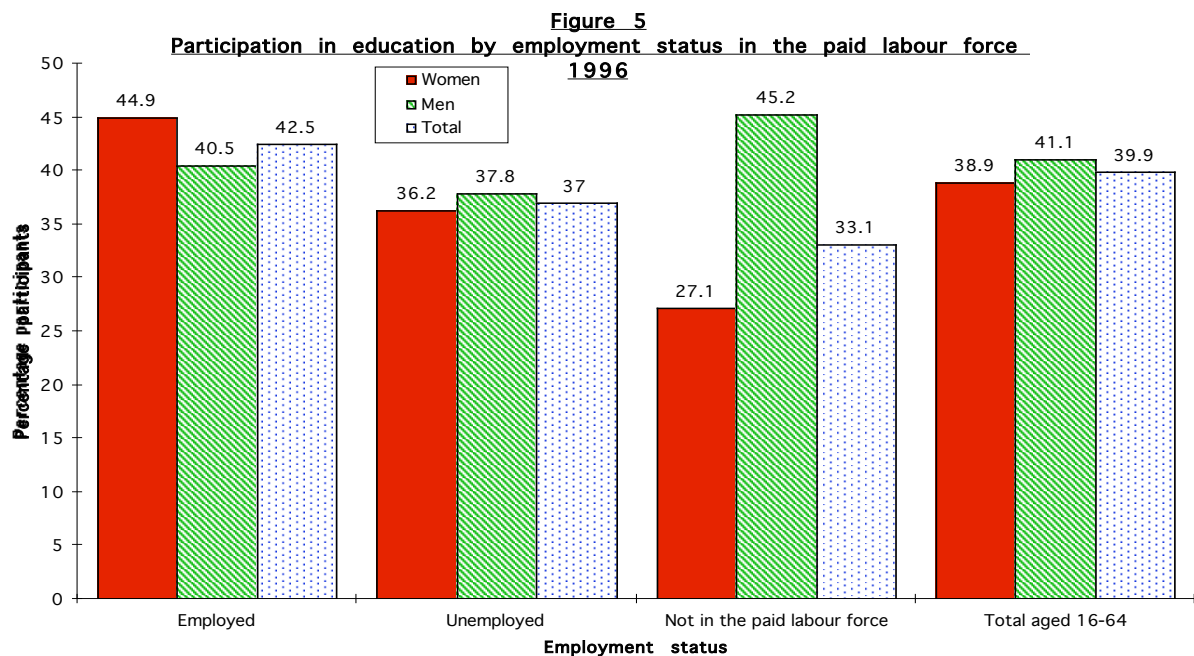


Figure 6 presents data examining in somewhat greater detail the patterns of participation among those in various types of paid occupations. The data are drawn from the DoE, RCSP and ETS surveys of 1977, 1987 and 1996 and the job categories constitute the major occupational divisions used in the New Zealand Occupational Classification. Numerous overseas studies have pointed to relatively high levels of participation among those in professional and technical jobs and relatively low levels of participation among those in production and labouring jobs. For this reason the general picture presented in Figure 6 is not surprising. In each of the years the percentage of participants was very much higher among professional and technical workers (56% in 1977, 73% in 1987 and 59% in 1996) than it was in any other occupational group. In all three years also the percentage of participants was lowest among workers in agriculture and fishing (29% in 1977, 23% in 1987 and 22% in 1996) followed by production and labouring (27% in 1977, 31% in 1987 and 28% in 1996).

What is perhaps somewhat more surprising is that the differences in participation rates between the various job-categories were not as large as might have been expected. Overall the notion that there has been a growing divide between people in 'learning rich' occupations who are engaged in lifelong learning and those in more routinised occupations who tend not to engage in educational activities receives at best only partial support. The picture is more complex and requires closer scrutiny than we can give it here. For example perhaps the divide applies to some forms of education and not to others. There is some qualitative evidence to suggest that much learning takes place outside the formal structures of education and training. Nevertheless it is worth highlighting some of the different trends in participation between the various occupational categories. Between 1977 and 1987 the increase in participation by those in professional, technical, sales and service jobs is striking. This increase seems to have been sustained among sales and service workers over the following decade. However among professional and technical workers the level of participation in 1996 was only marginally higher than it had been in 1977.

Moreover a picture of very little change in the overall level of participation between 1977 and 1996 seems to emerge in the case of most other occupational categories as well. This includes those in administrative and managerial work as well as clerical and production and labouring work. The only exception to this is among agricultural and fisheries workers where it seems there has been some falling away in the overall level of participation.

Figure 6
Percentage participation in educational activities by occupational categories in paid labour force, 1977, 1987 & 1996

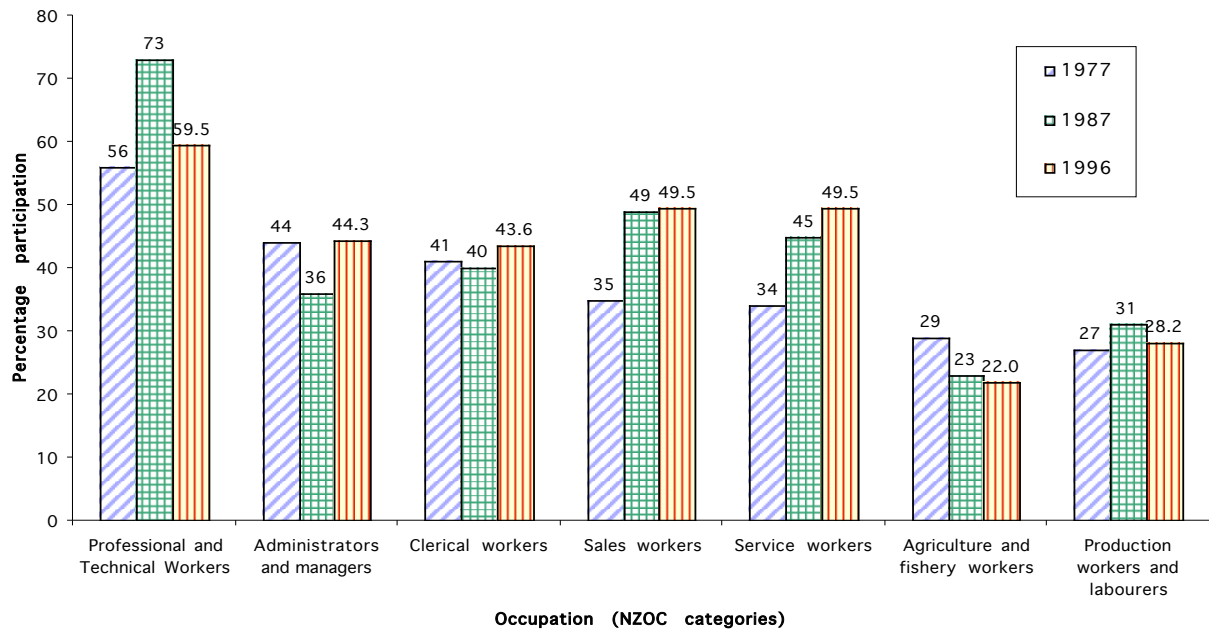


Figure 7
Participation by employed adults aged 25-64 by firm size, 1994-1995

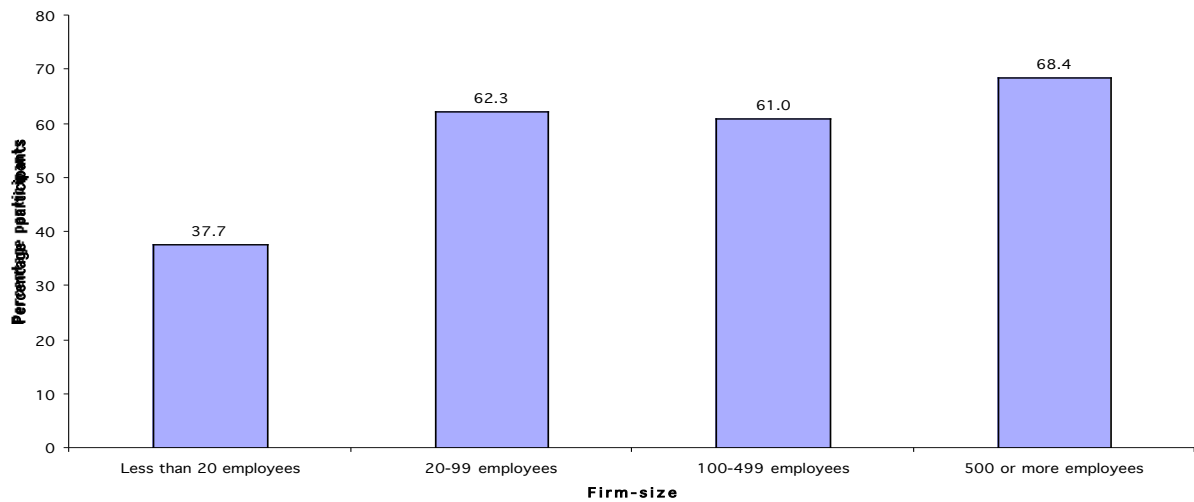


Figure 7 presents data drawn from the IALS survey which looks at the differences in the patterns of participation between those employed in small and large organisations. The sample consists only of those between 25 and 64 years of age. Perhaps not surprisingly employees in large organisations with 500 or more employees (with a percentage participation figure of 68%) are very much more likely to participate in education than those in small organisations with less than 20 employees (where only about 38% were participants). On the other hand it seems that there was not a major difference in the patterns of participation between employees in organisations which employed 20-99 employees and very much larger organisations.

(e) What differences if any were there in the patterns of educational participation between women and men? And did these patterns change over the years?

We have already looked at some of the differences in participation in relation to the employment status of women and men in 1996.

Figure 8 provides a picture of the overall percentage of women and men between 16 and 64 who were participants in 1977, 1987 and 1996. The data here are drawn from

the DoE, RCSP and ETS surveys. It comes as no surprise to note that there was some increase in the proportions of both women and men who participated in each of the years referred to. The percentage increase was however relatively small. What may come as some surprise is the fact that the growth seems to have been greater among men than among women. In 1977 34% of women were participants; by 1996 this had grown to 38.9% - a growth of about 5%. By way of comparison, in 1977 33.4% of men were participants. This figure grew to 37% in 1987 and to 41.1% in 1996 - a growth of about 8%. In 1977 the proportion of women and men who participated in educational activities was very similar; in 1996 this had changed, and a larger proportion of men than women had participated.

This finding pointing to the differences in participation between women and men in 1996 is supported by the analysis of the IALS data on people aged 25-64. This suggests that 45.1% of women between 25 and 64 as against 47.8% of men participated in education or training in 1995-96. In addition this study draws attention to the fact that whereas 34.8% of women had undertaken job-related training, 42.6% of men had done so.

Figure 8
Educational Participation by Women and Men aged 16 to 64,
1977, 1987¹ & 1996

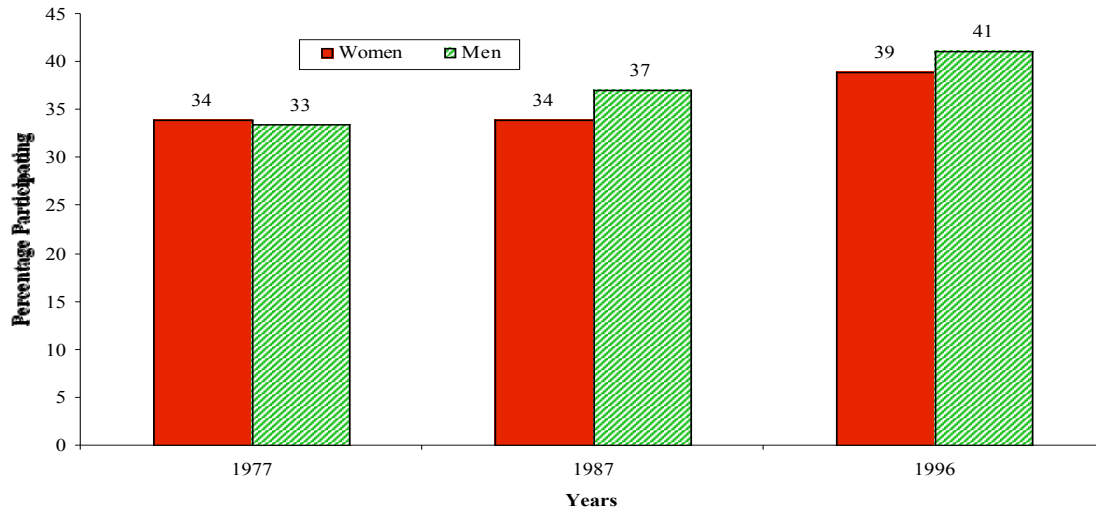
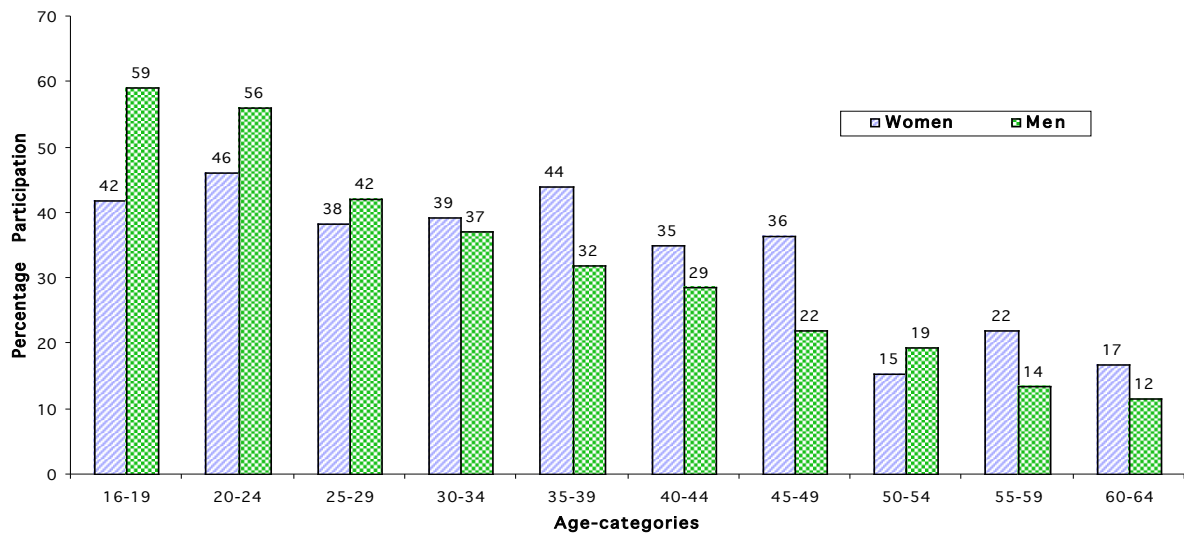


Figure 9 presents a summary of data drawn from the 1977 DoE survey. This provides a somewhat dated picture of the differences in patterns of educational participation by women and men at different ages. Although the data are rather old, they are the only data available at present. The differences are quite striking. The rate of participation by women remained on a plateau from the mid-teens to the late-40s, with a rate of 42% among those in their late-teens, 46% in their late-20s, 44% in their late-30s, and 36% in their late-40s, before dipping in the 50s and reaching 17% among women in their early 60s. By contrast the rate of participation by men fell away steadily throughout their lives from a high point of 59% among men in their late-teens, 42% in their late-20s, 32% in their late-30s, 22% in their late-40s, and reaching a low point of 12% among men in their early 60s.

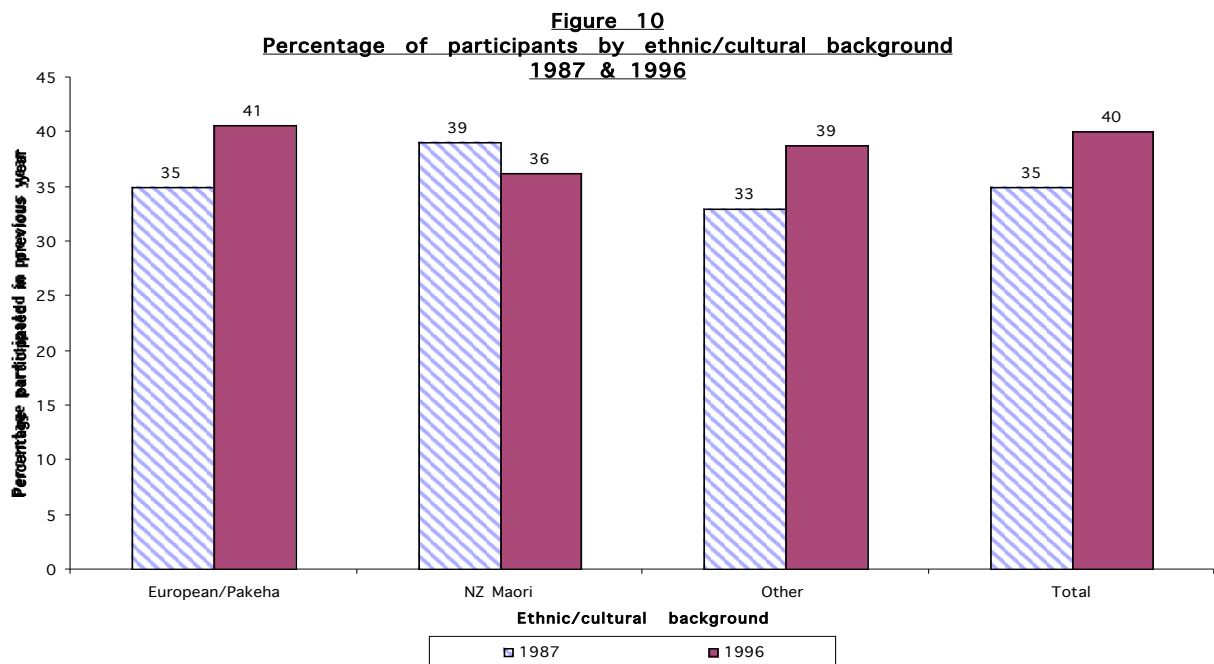
Figure 9
Participation by women and men by age-category
1977



(f) What differences, if any, were there in the patterns of educational participation between people of Maori background and those whose background is Pakeha, European or non-Maori? And did these patterns change over time?

Figure 10 summarises data drawn from the RCSP and ETS surveys. The data are not strictly comparable since the 1987 data include all adults 16 and over, whereas the 1996 data are for those aged 16 to 64. Nevertheless there are some interesting and important findings. Firstly if we look at the picture for 1987, the relatively high rate of participation by Maori is striking especially because Maori people at the time were considerably over-represented among early school-leavers and among workers in relatively routinised jobs in the fishing, forestry, agricultural and manufacturing sectors and under-represented in professional and technical jobs. In spite of this in 1987 39% of Maori had participated in education in the previous twelve months. This compares with 35% for Pakeha/European and 33% for people from other backgrounds.

Secondly however if we turn to the data for 1996 the picture is somewhat different. The rates of participation by Pakeha/European and by people from other backgrounds had increased markedly to 41% and 39% respectively, whilst the Maori participation rate had fallen somewhat to 36%. One can but speculate about the causes of the unexpectedly high levels of participation by Maori in 1987 and the fall off in participation over the subsequent decade. The mid-1980s were characterised by the beginnings of a resurgence of Maori traditions and in particular a growth in educational programmes of various kinds dedicated to teaching Maori language and cultural traditions. There was also a revival of a range of Maori art forms at the time. This cultural revival may well be reflected in the relatively high levels of educational participation in 1987. At the same time over the following decade a relatively high proportion of Maori people remained either unemployed or employed in the marginal and increasingly low-paid kinds of jobs that remained in the immediate aftermath of the large scale restructuring of the political economy in the 1980s and early 1990s.

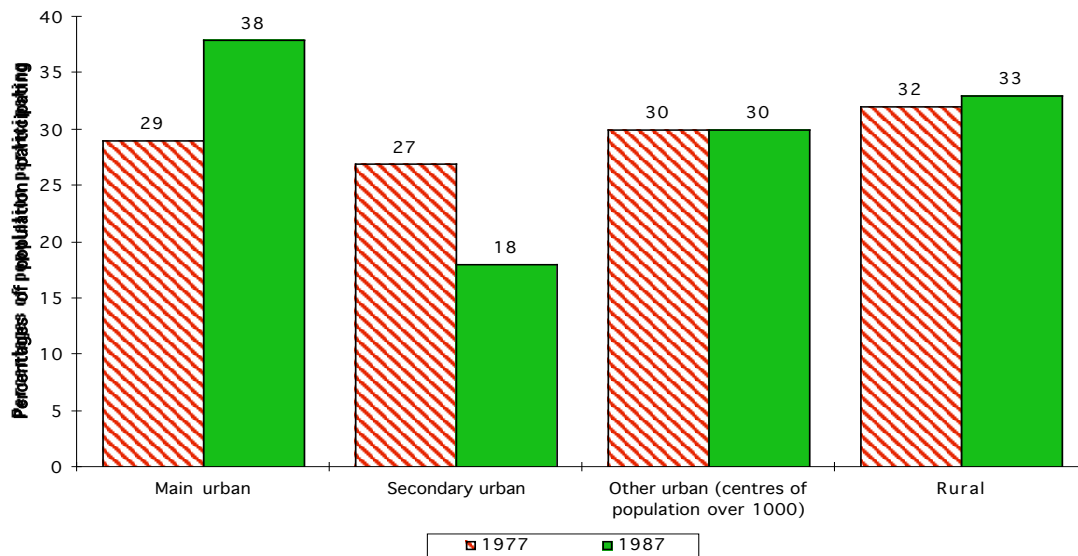


(g) What differences, if any, were there in the patterns of educational participation between people from rural and urban backgrounds? And did these patterns change over time?

Figure 11 presents a summary of the data from the 1977 DoE and 1987 RCSP surveys. The 1977 data suggests that there was at the time very little difference in the overall rates of participation between those who lived in the main urban areas, provincial centres, small towns and rural areas. In contrast with the findings in most studies overseas, the 1977 data also suggest that if there is a difference in overall participation it favours slightly small town and rural residents over those who lived in the cities and especially the provincial centres.

By 1987 this picture seems to have changed considerably. The proportion of those who lived in the main urban centres who were participants had grown substantially from 29% in 1977 to 38% in 1987. By way of sharp contrast the percentage of participants resident in provincial centres had fallen substantially from 27% in 1977 to 18% a decade later. On the other hand the percentage of participants resident in small towns had remained almost constant at 30% and in rural areas it had increased marginally by 1% to 33%. It is difficult to find an explanation for these changes. The mid-1980s was a time of major economic restructuring and both the increase in participation in the main urban areas and the fall-off in participation in provincial centres could be related to the major dislocations which were taking place. On the other hand small towns and rural areas were also subject to the same pressures as those of provincial centres and in these areas the participation rates seem to have been unaffected. Further research is clearly needed.

Figure 11
Proportions of population in rural and urban areas who participated in educational activities, 1977 & 1987



(h) Finally, how did New Zealand compare with other countries in terms of participation patterns? And what if any changes took place over the period?

In order to justify the large-scale restructuring of tertiary education which took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s a number of government and other organisations argued that the levels of education participation by young adults in New Zealand in the mid-1980s were very low in comparison with most other OECD countries (See for example Callister, 1990; Probine & Fargher, 1987). Particular attention was drawn to the low levels of participation by 17 and 18 year-olds and to the relatively small proportion of the paid workforce with secondary and tertiary qualifications. Using OECD figures it was concluded by some "... that our current workforce is ill-equipped for the challenges of the new economy" (Paul Callister, April 1990: 17). At the time I raised some concerns about what I saw as an over-reliance on these OECD figures (Tobias, 1991). In particular it seemed to me that it was a mistake to assume that those without formal qualifications were necessarily less 'skilled' than their counterparts in other countries who had qualifications. Moreover it seemed that it

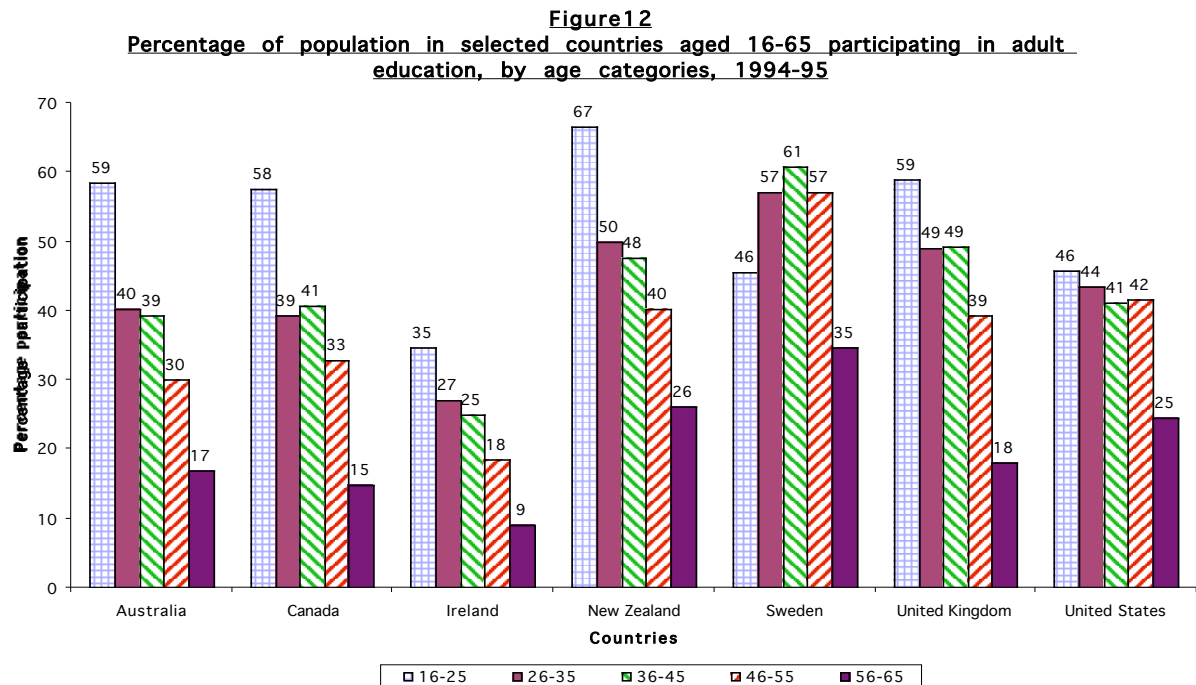
would be useful to investigate the patterns of participation not only of young adults in their late-teens but also people who were older.

Before the IALS survey of the mid-1990s however very few studies existed to provide a basis for such a international comparisons. Nevertheless such data as were available suggested that overall participation rates in New Zealand in the 1970s and 1980s may well have compared very favourably with those in many other OECD countries. Thus for example estimates of the percentages of the adult population who had been educational participants in 1970/1971 in selected OECD countries were as follows: Canada - 23%; Germany - 20%; Sweden - 34% and the United Kingdom - 15% (OECD, 1977 p. 13). In addition, a study undertaken in 1972 by the Education Testing Service in the USA which was based on a stratified national sample of people between the ages of 18 and 60 found that 31% had participated in some form of nonformal education (Gould, 1974). By comparison, as we have seen, in 1977 in New Zealand it was found that 34% of those aged 16-64 had participated - a higher rate than every other country except Sweden.

In what ways then had patterns of participation changed by the mid-1990s? The IALS survey provides the following figures on the percentages of the overall population in selected countries who had participated in education in 1994-1995: Australia - 38.8%; Canada - 37.7%; Ireland 24.3%; Netherlands - 37.4%; Poland - 13.9%; Sweden - 52.5%; United Kingdom - 43.9%; and the USA - 39.7%. By comparison the New Zealand figure was 47.5% - the second highest rate, only exceeded by Sweden.

A further basis for comparison is provided in Figure 12 which draws on the same IALS data base and compares the percentage of participants in the various age groups in selected countries. Of all the countries which took part in the survey, New Zealand had the highest percentage (67%) of 16-25 year-olds who had participated in education in the previous year. In this age-group New Zealand was followed by Australia and the UK (59% each) and Canada (58%). In all the other age-categories Sweden had the highest proportion of participants. However in each case New Zealand's position was

either second or third, and in every age-category the percentage of participants was markedly higher in New Zealand than in Australia and Canada.



Conclusion

This paper has reviewed a number of methodological and substantive issues which have arisen out of four national sample surveys of educational participation by adults conducted between the mid-1970s and mid-1990s. At a methodological level I hope that the discussion will (a) stimulate further quantitative and qualitative studies of participation, (b) help future researchers to avoid re-inventing wheels, and (c) provide a useful basis for a move away from 'snap-shot' surveys toward studies which build pictures of participation trends and patterns over time (essential if we are to identify the impact of policy changes).

A wide range of substantive issues has been discussed. The paper investigates some of the generalisations which derive from previous studies of the relationships between

educational participation by adults and such factors as their schooling, gender, age, employment status, occupation, and cultural backgrounds(See for example Benseman, 1996 p. 277). It also looks at historical trends - continuities and discontinuities in participation patterns over the twenty-year period.

In some cases the evidence presented here merely confirms or reinforces previous findings. Older people, the unemployed, and women with dependent children for example continued to be under-represented. Moreover, schooling continued to have a major impact on educational participation, with very little change over the twenty year period in the rate of participation by those with the least formal schooling.

On the other hand some of the evidence contradicts, modifies or elaborates upon previous findings. Thus the evidence of the relatively high rate of participation by Maori in both 1987 and 1996, but especially in 1987, contrasts sharply with the findings of most other studies, which have painted a negative picture of the position of Maori in the educational system. This evidence emphasises the need for further research which gives full recognition to the place of nonformal education in Maori life and learning. The paper also draws attention to other issues. It suggests that opportunities for educational participation are likely to be greater the larger the organisation one works for. In addition, although the evidence confirms a relatively high level of participation among those in professional and technical jobs and a relatively low level of participation among those in production and labouring jobs, the differences in participation rates between the various job-categories were not as large as might have been expected. The picture is more complex than is sometimes suggested. It would seem that people in more highly paid managerial and administrative jobs have not necessarily been more likely to participate in education than those employed in clerical, sales and service work over the period. Moreover the white-collar/blue-collar participation divide does not appear to have been as large as has sometimes been implied. In addition, by way of contrast with the findings of many studies in North America and elsewhere, many of which have suggested that educational participation

is predominantly a feature of urban rather than rural societies, the evidence of this study points to relatively high rates of participation in rural areas.

The paper also looks at some key historical trends - some continuities and discontinuities over the twenty-year period. In the first place, although the evidence suggests that there was an increase in the proportion of people engaging in educational activities between the mid-1970s and mid-1990s, this increase of around 10%, may not have been as large as has sometimes been implied (See for example Ministry of Education, 1997 p. 9; 2000 p. 30). What appears to have happened is that participation in formal tertiary education increased considerably, while participation in educational programmes oriented to the arts and crafts, and cultural, political and social objectives fell away equally significantly.

Secondly, although the evidence suggests that there was a substantial increase in the number and proportion of young adults, especially those in their late-teens and early 20s, moving into tertiary studies, and some increase in rates of participation among people in their 40s and early 50s, at the same time it seems that the proportion of older people participating in adult education fell away quite sharply. Thirdly, although it seems that the participation rates of both women and men increased over the period, and in particular in the late-1980s and early-1990s, the rate of participation by men increased more substantially than that of women. Whereas in 1977 more women than men were participants; by 1996 this had been reversed with a higher rate of participation by men than women.

Fourthly, although the evidence suggests the continuation of the 'divide' in educational participation rates between those with relatively little and those with extensive formal schooling, the extent and nature of this divide appears to have changed somewhat over the period. In 1977 the great divide was between those who had been to university, of whom over 80% had participated in the previous year, and the rest of the population, of whom less than 40% had participated. By way of contrast, by 1995 this deep divide had disappeared and been replaced by a series of smaller breaks, ranging

from a participation rate of 71% by those who had studied at university to 60% of those who had undertaken non-university tertiary studies and 52% of those with 6th or 7th Form qualifications, while only about 35% of those who had not proceeded beyond the 5th Form had participated.

Finally, the paper has reviewed some of the findings drawing attention to comparative data on educational participation. In spite of all the changes and in spite of a lack of recognition in much of the literature and in particular in many policy documents issued by the state of many of the historical achievements in the field of adult learning in Aotearoa, participation rates in both 1977 and 1996 compared very favourably with those in most other OECD countries. Overall it seems then that the period was marked by a the rise of instrumentalism and greater pressures towards credentialism. The data suggest that it was the strengthening of these factors rather than any overall growth in participation that was the most significant feature of the period.

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