In his article Where have all the flowers gone? Martin discusses the effects of a shift from adult education to the learning paradigm. He identifies three underlying processes in current social and educational policy. Respectable-isation concerns the shift to professionalisation in education, evident in the ‘mainstreaming’ of adult education and in a focus on, for example, teaching and learning and professional development. Demoralisation refers to the way in which educational activities are more often concerned with helping people to cope in society than in changing the society: a deficit discourse that emphasises what people lack, or can’t do rather than what they can contribute to society. Martin’s third underlying process is responsible-isation, a process which shifts responsibility from ‘the provider state to consumer citizen’ (Martin, 2006, pp.17), a person who makes choices in a marketised economy and is responsible for the outcomes of those choices. This view of adult education has echoes in recent policy developments in Adult and Community Education (ACE) in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In this paper I summarise these policy developments, analyse them to identify the extent to which they reflect these three processes and suggest possible future directions.

Background: a little history

Prior to the turn of the century the ACE sector was often marginalised, usually overlooked in policy developments and funding allocations in post-school education. Dakin (1996) provides an overview of the history of the ‘fourth sector’, beginning with the oral traditions of Maori (indigenous people of New Zealand) as well as British immigrants’ importation of institutions such as the Mechanics Institutes, Mutual Improvement Societies and the Workers Educational Association. Fortunes fluctuated with wars and the depression. He notes a post war period of expansion, including the establishment of the National Council of Adult Education in 1947 and one of optimism in the 1970s under Labour governments, as does Benseman (2005a). But this changed quickly. Dakin (1996, pp.33) refers to the 1980s and beyond as ‘years of crisis’: for example, funding of the WEA and the Trade Union Education Authority was discontinued under a National government in 1992.

Meantime major changes in the sector were taking place. A series of reports on the state of post-school education led to Learning for Life and Learning for Life Two which signalled increased autonomy for formal education institutions. The 1990 Education Amendment Act legally enshrined the changes. In 1997 and 1998 Green and White Papers on proposals for a tertiary education review were produced by a National government. These policies tended to overlook the ACE sector. Indeed, Benseman (2005a, pp.16) argues that in the 1990s ‘in terms of policy, the sector once again became largely invisible’ and the Adult Education and Community Learning Working Party (Ministry of Education, 2001, pp.19) claimed ‘there has been a fundamental weakening of the sector’. Arguably these changes were part of the shift Martin (2006) refers to – from social purpose adult education to the learning paradigm.
Policy development 2000-2007

An election in 1999 saw a Labour-led government returned and a flurry of policy developments which impacted directly and explicitly on the ACE sector. A Tertiary Education Advisory Commission (TEAC) was established and its four major reports set the scene for momentous changes. First came Shaping a Shared Vision (TEAC, 2000) which signalled the integration of the ACE sector in the mainstream tertiary sector. Discussing the nature and scope of tertiary education TEAC (2000) stated:

This definition includes learning at all levels within public tertiary institutions (i.e. polytechnics, universities, colleges of education and wananga), programmes provided by private and government training establishments, business-based education, industry training, and all lifelong learning beyond the compulsory school system. It thus includes both formal and non-formal education, and what is often termed ‘second-chance’ education (pp.9).

Integrating non-formal education, such as industry training, ‘second chance education’, and non-formal learning, with the rest of the system was seen as a ‘critical task’ (pp.27).

The second report, Shaping the System (TEAC, 2001a) acknowledged the role ACE played in education outside the compulsory school system as an ‘integral element of lifelong learning’ (pp.23); its role in bridging into tertiary education those who have not benefited from formal education; and its culture of ‘democratic participation, cultural development and increased control over the future for individuals and communities’ (pp.23). Lack of adequate steering mechanisms was identified as a problem and instruments to steer the sector were proposed - functional classifications (including community education and training), charters and profiles which would set out the business of an organisation and establish the basis for its funding. Without an agreed charter an organisation would not receive Government funding. The emphasis for ACE in Shaping the Strategy (TEAC, 2001b) was the focus on the integration of the ACE sector into the system, its role serving educationally disadvantaged people, bridging them into tertiary education, and the need for better links to the rest of the system. Also signalled were national strategic goals, emphasis on quality improvement, and a desirability test – a means to determine whether ‘a proposal generates sufficient net benefit’ (ibid, pp.45). The final report Shaping the Funding Framework, (TEAC, 2001c) proposed a unified funding framework, though it did suggest a dedicated, ring-fenced fund be set aside for ACE - in recognition of its qualitative difference and special characteristics. Perceived weak accountability measures were to be addressed by ‘mechanisms to improve the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the system’ (TEAC, 2001d, pp.7). Throughout these documents there is an emphasis on the knowledge economy and the need for education to prepare people for ‘effective participation in the modern workforce or in further education’ (TEAC, 2001b, pp.21).

At the same time as the TEAC Reports were being published a review of the ACE sector was being undertaken. In its report (Ministry of Education, 2001) the Working Party identified, for example, the need to revitalise the sector; provide statutory recognition for it; develop national goals; provide effective monitoring; ring fence funding; provide discrete funding for government national strategies; and establish national criteria for funding. It also suggested that accountability for funding be through charters and profiles; that there be a planned approach to professional development within the sector; and that local ACE Networks be established. This report has been the basis of many of the recent developments in the sector.
Under the Labour-led government the post-school sector was consolidated into a new ‘tertiary landscape’ overseen by a Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) (TEC, 2002). ACE was included in this landscape. Its integration was promoted in the Tertiary Education Strategy 2002-2007 (Ministry of Education, 2002) when the need for ACE sector to ‘become more cohesive and … better connected to the rest of the tertiary education system’ (pp.21) was identified. ACE collaborative networks were to be established and workers’ professional development requirements addressed. National goals for tertiary education are listed and six strategies for achieving those goals identified. In the Tertiary Education Strategy 2007-2012 (Ministry of Education, 2006) ACE continues to be recognised as part of the tertiary education sector (pp.6) with a responsibility for contributing to national goals. Tertiary education is expected to contribute to: success for all New Zealanders through lifelong learning; creating and applying knowledge to drive innovation; strong connections between tertiary education organisations and the communities they serve (pp.5). However, different types of tertiary education organisations are expected to make ‘distinctive contributions’ (pp.14). The diversity of ACE providers is recognised but all are expected to align to the five national ACE priorities:

1) targeting learners whose initial learning was not successful
2) raising foundation skills
3) encouraging lifelong learning
4) strengthening communities by meeting identified community needs
5) strengthening social cohesion (TEC, 2005a).

Other policies were specific to the ACE sector and developed in consultation with the sector. The years 2005 and 2006 were especially important, with three major policy developments. First, the ACE funding framework policy was produced (TEC, 2005b; TEC, 2006a). This includes a base rate, a learner hour rate and a brokerage services rate as a way of recognising the different costs and different activities of individual providers. Second was the quality assurance policy which was to be implemented by a variety of quality assurance agencies within the tertiary sector. The process identifies six ‘quality assurance arrangements’ for areas of provider activity: goals and objectives; systems to achieve goals and objectives; personnel; physical and learning resources; learner information, needs and objectives; and the development, delivery and review of ACE activities (NZQA, 2005). Third was the professional development policy (TEC, 2006b). Designed to build ACE sector capability the strategy is ‘for the sector by the sector’ (pp.7). It covers five years, incorporates professional development for managers, coordinators, tutors and those in governance roles and identifies four professional development strategies: identifying the skills and strategies needed, building on ACE Networks and conferences, forming a core group of professional development supporters and developing a coordinating mechanism. These policies are now being implemented and ACE providers are adjusting to a new regime. In the second part of this paper I analyse these policies in light of Martin’s processes of respectable-isation, demoralisation and responsible-isation.

Respectable-isation, demoralisation and responsible-isation

According to Martin (2006) respectable-isation is linked to professionalisation, to a movement from the margins to centre stage and being mainstreamed, to a transmogrification from adult education to teaching and learning and professional development, both of which are part of widening participation and massification of higher education. The outline of policy developments above shows that, since 2000, ACE has certainly been respectable-ised in Aotearoa/New Zealand. After the optimism of the 1970s, the 1980s and 1990s saw ACE marginalised, invisible and weak (Dakin, 1996; Benseman 2005a; Ministry of Education, 2001). But the major tertiary reforms post 2000
have resulted in ACE being accorded a valued place in the new ‘tertiary landscape’ (TEC, 2002), in short, being mainstreamed. An ACE funding framework was created; funding is ring-fenced for ACE provision; the contribution ACE makes to achieving national economic and social goals is valued as a ‘distinctive contribution’ (Ministry of Education, 2006) and ACE is included in tertiary education policies. But that mainstreaming comes at a cost. To be ‘respectable’ ACE programmes must now fit government generated ACE priorities or they are not eligible for funding; they must submit to prescribed quality assurance procedures and engage in professional development activities. This requirement for quality assurance and professional development is also evidence of a professionalisation process, as are the recently registered qualifications for some teachers in the sector. One example is the National Certificate in Adult Literacy Education (Educator). The description of the qualification states: ‘It is a professional qualification for adult literacy educator competence in Aotearoa New Zealand’ (NZQA, 2005a, pp.1). The professionalisation agenda is made explicit in a following statement: ‘It is intended to be the recognised minimum standard of professional competence for adult literacy educators in Aotearoa New Zealand, at a higher level than most current practice’ (ibid.). This professionalisation process is also evident in the Adult Literacy Strategy (Ministry of Education, 2005). Two of the three key goals are:

- Developing capability to ensure adult literacy providers deliver quality learning through a highly skilled workforce with high quality teaching resources;
- Improving quality systems to ensure that New Zealand programmes are world class (Ministry of Education, 2005, pp.6).

It is important to note that respectable-isation was invited by the ACE sector, not just imposed by government. In their report the Adult Education and Community Learning Working Party (Ministry of Education, 2001) called for sector recognition, policy direction, new structures and processes to ensure providers were of a high standard, monitoring and evaluation of provision, funding criteria, improved sector capability. Similarly, the policies on funding, quality assurance and professional development were developed in consultation with the sector, not imposed.

Most policy developments produce gains and losses. While mainstreaming and professionalisation have brought benefits to the ACE sector Martin (2006, pp.17) is right to ask ‘What has been gained and lost in this process of becoming respectable?’ It is interesting to note that some losses were evident in the consultation process for the development of the funding framework. In its response to submissions the TEC (2005c, pp.4) notes that 667 submissions were received, then comments:

> The vast majority of these submissions did not directly address specific proposals. Rather, they focused on describing the benefits of access to affordable adult and community education, and expressed concern that the proposed funding framework would reduce the ability of learners to participate in community education.

But this ‘vast majority of submissions’ was ignored and the funding framework policy development was pursued. How many adults no longer have access to the forms of community education they want is, of course, unknown. This may be a hidden cost of respectable-isation.

Martin’s (2006) second process is demoralisation. This entails the development of a social pathology, a process in which contradictions of context are ascribed to individuals and their characteristics. He cites Ecclestone’s ideas that some education helps people to cope and survive rather than to challenge the social structures, to adapt rather than to transform,
resulting in a diminished autonomy. In other literature a similar process is referred to as a ‘deficit discourse’ (Bishop, 2003). Like Martin, Bishop uses the concept of pathology.

Deficit theories:

... blame the victims and see the locus of the problem as either lack of inherent ability, lack of cultural appropriateness or limited resources; in short, some deficiency at best, a ‘pathology’ at worst. The general pattern of the solutions that they propose suggests that the ‘victims’ need to change, usually to become more like the proponents of the theories (Bishop, 2003, pp.223).

Arguably a form of deficit thinking and demoralisation is evident in tertiary education policies in Aotearoa/New Zealand, for example, in both Tertiary Education Strategy documents (Ministry of Education, 2002, 2006). In the 2002-2007 document one of the six strategies stresses the need to raise foundation skills, in part because businesses require higher levels of literacy skills than in the past and skill development would enable people to contribute more to the economy. This notion is developed further in the 2007-2012 Strategy where low foundation skills in the workforce are identified as ‘one of the critical issues that needs to be addressed if we are to develop the high-performing economy we need ...’ (Ministry of Education, 2006, pp.34). While not explicit, there is a ‘blame the victim’ approach here, a focus on individuals adapting rather than society transforming. It is the adult who is at fault, who needs to be ‘fixed’ so s/he can become a ‘proper’ worker, contributing to the economy and improving their life chances. So, Maori, Pasifika (people of Pacific Island origins) and low skill workers are targeted to have their deficits fixed, to be changed so they can better fit into and cope with society and the economy. On the other hand, policy documents also emphasise self-determination for Maori (Ministry of Education, 2001); responsiveness to Maori values; and increased capability and capacity for authority and leadership in tertiary education (Ministry of Education, 2002), revealing a tension in policy directions and intentions.

The implications of deficit theory for the ACE sector are immense. If ACE buys into a deficit approach, it risks being party to demoralisation – ascribing to individuals characteristics which have their roots in wider contextual issues and requiring them to change to be more like the policy makers, thus reducing their autonomy. Of course, ACE providers and practitioners can subvert the deficit discourse. They can access funding to help people to develop their foundation skills, to cope in society, while at the same time enabling them to learn about their identity, social structures and oppression, thus potentially leading to increased autonomy and social transformation – to engage in social purpose adult education.

Martin’s (2006) third process, responsible-isation, produces socially constructed citizens, empowered to make choices but also to take responsibility for the choices they make. Analysis of the policy documents suggests responsible-isation is less evident in tertiary education policy in Aotearoa/New Zealand than respectable-isation and demoralisation. Yet, choice has underpinned both Neo-Liberal and Third Way policies in this country in the last two decades. It emerges in discussions about choice of schools and choices about tertiary education and employment. But analysis reveals that it is not a strong thread in recent tertiary education policy documents.

The future?

The future cannot be predicted but we can use projection to suggest possible directions (Assakul, nd). Aotearoa/New Zealand faces parliamentary elections late in 2008. Should the Labour-led government be returned, ACE policy is likely to keep to a ‘business as
usual’ direction. Labour policies have been enacted over the last nine years and are likely to continue. So ACE could expect to continue to be mainstreamed, professionalized and demoralised, helping targeted adults to develop their skills so they can cope in society and contribute to the economy. However, current polls suggest there may be a change of government – from centre-left to centre-right. Should a National-led government be returned, the projection changes. National has announced no education policies as yet and it has been out of office for nine years so it is difficult to project possible directions. The economy is likely to be an even more important focus for tertiary education. Respectable-isation and demoralisation may well continue. The ‘tertiary landscape’ is well embedded now and would be difficult to change. The biggest danger to ACE may well be funding. National-led governments have instituted massive funding cuts in the past. Unless ACE is seen as contributing to economic development, funding could be endangered. Responsible-isation fits more closely with National policy and directions than Labour ones so there could be an increased focus on choice and responsibility for choices – always with an eye to contributions to the economy and society, and accountability for ensuring that. All will be revealed from 2009!

Conclusion

An analysis of tertiary education policy documents 2000-2007 suggests that respectable-isation and demoralization are alive and well in Aotearoa/New Zealand ACE policies, though responsible-isation is less evident currently. All are likely to continue into the future, with responsible-isation more possible under a National-led government. Educators in the ACE sector need to be aware of these three processes and to find strategic ways of countering them in order to retain the soul of adult education (Martin, 2006).

References


Martin I (2006) ‘Where have all the flowers gone?’ Adults Learning, October, pp.15-18.


*This document was added to the Education-line database in June 2008*