CHAPTER 2

From Adult Education to Lifelong Learning: A Changing Global Landscape

Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the changing landscape in adult education and lifelong learning. It discusses the role of UNESCO (the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) in influencing policy discourses in recent years (Field 2000; Tobias 2004; Ouane 2011; Jarvis 2011; Rivera 2011; Schuller 2011; Milana 2012). It also touches on the contribution of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), the European Union (EU) and the World Bank in shifting the international focus from broadly based adult education for a range of purposes to lifelong learning for more narrowly economic ends. I first briefly sketch the various socio-political and economic shifts which have influenced conceptions of the purpose of adult education. For good or ill, the global discourse of lifelong learning, and the uses to which the term has been put, has crucially influenced adult education in the past 30 years. I therefore draw on the literature of international lifelong learning policy development and discuss its impact on adult education practice globally, before moving on in Chapter 3 to discuss the development and current state of adult education in the two case study countries – England and Aotearoa New Zealand – which are the focus of this book.

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The Importance of History in Understanding Contemporary Adult Education

There are a number of ways in which a reader can understand the history of adult education (Hake 2010). It has been related in the biographies of 'pioneering' individuals, such as Albert Mansbridge, Basil Yeaxlee, R. H. Tawney, John Dewey, Raymond Williams and Paulo Freire (Jarvis 1987; McIlroy and Westwood 1993; Coben 1998; Mayo 1999). But, as is evident from this roll-call, a history of individuals tends to be a history of (mainly middle-class and white) men who came to enjoy power or influence and whose stories therefore have been extensively documented (Purvis 1989). Only relatively recently, for example, has the leadership role of women, particularly in socialist adult education, been rescued from obscurity and their stories recounted (Martin 2010). This history has also been told through literature documenting the work of prominent organisations such as the Mechanics Institutes, University Settlements, the university extension movement and the Workers' Educational Association (Hudson 1851; Pimlott 1935; Allaway 1961; Marriott 1991, 1998; Roberts 2003) which have been important in the development of the organised practice of adult education in the English speaking world. However, such accounts omit the influence of indigenous communities, small, self-organised and sometimes 'underground' movements and groups which have played an important role in contesting dominant and elite notions of adult education (Hake 2010). There have been many histories, too, written on adult education in specific countries of the English speaking world (Thompson 1945; Knowles 1962; Kelly 1970; Harrison 1994; Tobias 1994; Fieldhouse 1996; Bowl and Tobias 2012). These also add to our understanding but perhaps may not offer a full sense of the influences on adult education which have crossed international boundaries and the social and political threads which bind practice in countries which are geographically separate. So below I trace the history of adult education through a chronology of the key social and political influences.

Adult education has developed in the context of diverse, and sometimes conflicting, social and political ideas. Different historical periods have given rise to attempts on the part of those with power to control and direct access to knowledge and understanding. At the same time these attempts have been contested by those who have been subject to them. Educational movements based in resistance and in struggles for self-determination have therefore also arisen. A historical perspective on adult education deepens

one's understanding of its diverse ideological antecedents and how these are echoed in current philosophy, policy and practice. It reveals the extent to which contemporary concerns have their roots in the past and the points at which major shifts in policy or practice took hold. It helps us to see that the present is a product of struggles, over time, between differing views and people in different power relationships (McCulloch 2011). Most important perhaps, it enables us to see that the future can be changed through the actions of people and organisations. This chapter does not attempt to go over the historical ground in detail, but rather to provide an overview of the ways in which adult education practice has been influenced by the global spread of ideas.

Historical Developments in Adult Education

Our understanding of the complexity of human settlement and achievement in prehistoric times enables us to recognise that more or less formalised learning activities must have been undertaken in the past in many parts of the world, though they would not, of course, have been labelled as such (Merriam and Brockett 1997; Tobias 2004). Rubenson (2010), in his overview of adult education, points out that in Egypt, China, India and the Greek and Roman empires adult education and training accompanied technological advances and the development of administrative systems which characterised previous civilisations. Adults have been engaged in forms of education and training for a range of purposes from the earliest times and across the world.

Recognition of the notion of adult education as *formalised provision* is a relatively recent phenomenon. It arose from processes of religious and cultural change, urbanisation, industrialisation and scientific advance as well as colonial expansion – and the struggles against it – beginning in Europe in the mid-sixteenth century and moving with increased rapidity during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Field 2000: 15; Hake 2010). This period of massive social change impacted on the field of adult education, whose development was driven by overlapping, and sometimes divergent, purposes and processes. In the twentieth century the provision of formalised adult education was influenced by liberal, humanist and socialist ideas and the intervention of the state in social affairs, while its philosophy was also influenced by the educational dimensions of anti – and post-colonial struggles. However, particularly since the early 1980s, globalisation of capitalism has intensified, and the discourse of lifelong learning has been implicated in the transmission of

neoliberal ideas to the adult education sector. Hake (2010) outlines some of the key historical periods of change which have impacted on adult education in the United Kingdom, North America, Australia, New Zealand and are therefore of relevance to this book. Following Hake's model, I outline each below.

The Protestant Reformation

From the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries, during the period of Protestant Reformation in Northern and Central Europe, the growth of early forms of adult education was aided by the invention of the printing press and the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. Bible study groups fostered the dissemination of moral and religious ideas to adults by means of the written word – and led to an increase in literacy levels. This in turn stimulated demand for books of other kinds and the initiation of libraries and outlets for book sales. These developments mark the beginning of the idea of adult group learning and of the thirst for learning in groups, beyond the social elite.

The 'Enlightenment' and Revolution

The period of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, popularly known as the 'Age of Enlightenment', resulted in the spread of educational systems throughout Europe and further rapid increases in literacy among men and, to a lesser extent, women and the growth of a reading public. Ideas influenced by developments in scientific understanding began to challenge traditional those based in a largely religious world view. Clubs, coffee houses and libraries developed as focal points for the discussion of politics, science and philosophy and thus became centres for informal and voluntary adult education, if not for all, then within a wider section of the European public life than hitherto. The period of the French Revolution and, in particular, the 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man* also gave stimulus to debate and organisation throughout Europe and beyond around ideas of civil equality, equality and the right to education.

Colonial Expansion

Also beginning in the mid-eighteenth century and gathering pace from the mid-nineteenth century, colonialism's influence on education was characterised by the export of Eurocentric ideas not only for the purpose

of establishing and maintaining political, social, religious and cultural hegemony but also to maintain morale and social control among settler populations. In the English-speaking colonial world this process saw the spread of moral and religious organisations, such as the missionary and temperance movements and institutionalised education such as that later found in university extramural and continuing education departments. The radical political consciousness generated by the French Revolution spread throughout Europe. By the beginning of the twentieth century in the United Kingdom and its colonies in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, self-organised adult education flourished alongside that offered by religious groups, trades unions and philanthropic movements.

Urbanisation and Industrialisation

From the late eighteenth century through to the early 1930s the processes of industrialisation which began in the United Kingdom brought major changes which influenced the development of formalised adult education. Technological advances and the intensification of industrial production signalled the need for training for a more skilled workforce to which some employers responded. The growth of urbanisation which accompanied industrialisation also ushered in concern for the realisation of civic rights and the performance of civic duties. Adult educational organisations (such as Mechanics' Institutes and the Workers' Educational Association and the university extension movement) were established in the late part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries and were exported to Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States and elsewhere. The growing organisation of the working classes, the struggle for women's rights and the revolutionary climates in Europe and North America also gave rise to a range of more radical organisations concerned with the education of adults which were distinct from those inaugurated by the middle and upper classes.

The aftermath of the 1914–1918 war in Europe stimulated a ferment of social and political movements, of the left and the right in which the contestation of ideas and, thus the political and social education of adults played an important part. Of particular importance in contemporary discussion of adult education is the work and writing of Antonio Gramsci in the period between 1926 and 1937 (Gramsci 1971; Coben 1998; Mayo 1999). Gramsci's discussion of *hegemony*, the concept of *organic intellectuals* and of the distinction between *good sense* and *common sense* are central to contemporary radical socialist ideas of the role and purpose of adult education

and the adult educator. This post-war period marked concerns about international solidarity and peaceful coexistence. It also saw the first attempt to link adult education organisations and movements internationally, by means of the 'World Association' for adult education (Fieldhouse 1996).

A Post–World War Two Consensus on Education

By the end of World War Two in 1945 and until the late 1970s, humanistic notions of adult education supported the idea of education for a variety of purposes as a right for individuals as citizens. During this period and in a number of countries the state assumed most responsibility for the education and training of adults. There was a growth in adult education provision for non-vocational ends and support for community-based education activities. At the same time the notion of lifelong education began to be promoted – an idea which was taken up by UNESCO as early as 1949 (UNESCO 2009) but most notably in the early to mid-1970s (Lengrand 1970; Faure 1972; Dave 1976). Implicit in the humanistic perspective was a critique of conventional teaching methods and the introduction of the concept of the 'facilitation' of adults' learning (Rogers 1969; Knowles 1973).

Anti- and Post-Colonialism

The post–World War Two struggles against colonialism strongly influenced the philosophy and practice of adult education worldwide. Here the focus was on self-determination, nation building and social and political development in the context of struggles for liberation from colonial rule – particularly in Africa, Asia and South and Central America. In this way, the post-colonial movements of the 1960s and 1970s have been influential well beyond the decolonising world. Supported by a strong literature base (Freire 1972; Illich 1973; Nyerere 1976) post-colonial educational ideas informed feminist, anti-war, anti-racist and anti-imperialist struggles across the globe and gave rise to the idea of consciousness-raising education as a condition for radical social change.

Globalising Capitalism and Neoliberalisation

However, beginning in the United States and the United Kingdom, the period since the late 1970s has been characterised by the global spread of neoliberal ideologies and their application to the policy sphere. The

dominance of neoliberalism has eclipsed the post-war humanist consensus and the radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s and has had far-reaching consequences for the structuring of publicly funded provision and the organisation of education. It has involved the withdrawal of the state from areas of educational provision formerly regarded as being in the public domain and signalled a shift in post-compulsory education policy from the provision of education for a range of individual, social and vocational purposes to a narrower conception of education and training for primarily instrumental ends. Training for work and the need to accrue qualifications in the service of the 'knowledge economy' and international economic competitiveness is now the central focus of education policy in countries across the world. This shift has had major consequences for adult education practitioners, their perspectives on their work and their job prospects. And ironically, the liberal humanistic concept of lifelong learning has been harnessed to the service of this new economistic world view.

The Global Discourse of Lifelong Learning

Although the origins of the term lifelong education (later re-dubbed lifelong learning) pre-date the post–World War Two era (Lindeman 1926; Yeaxlee 1929), it entered the mainstream of policy discourse in the early 1970s under the auspices of UNESCO (Field 2000; Jarvis 2011). Its emergence was prompted by a range of political, social and economic factors, well summarised as:

> the continuation of 'the cold war' and the ever increasing expenditure on defence and deployment of nuclear weapons, the rapid process of political de-colonization in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the continuing 'booms and busts' of a relatively slowly expanding global capitalist system. In addition they included the rise of 'new social movements' such as environmental, peace, indigenous peoples' and women's movements that raised increasingly questions about the Euro-centred and gendered nature of much of society and about the possibility of solving problems of wealth, poverty, peace and war, or of achieving sustainability of the eco-system within existing political and economic settlements. (Tobias 2004: 570)

Important too was an increasing recognition of the limitations of formal school-based and youth-focused education (Tobias 2004; Jarvis 2011). One of UNESCO's aims, expressed in two key UNESCO-commissioned

reports published in the early 1970s (Lengrand 1970; Faure 1972) was to encourage governments to move away from an exclusive focus on expanding formal schooling and towards promoting education throughout the lifespan and in non-formal settings. All this might well have been an encouragement to adult educators to believe that an era of expanded adult education opportunities was heralded. However as Jarvis (2011: 16) suggests, any optimism they may have entertained at this time is likely to have been dissipated by the way the international discourse of lifelong learning developed subsequently.

For the other players in the international policy field – the OECD, the World Bank and the European Union – economic concerns dominated the adult education agenda. While each of these organisations has a remit beyond economic development – in terms of social and cultural integration and inclusion – education and training for work and international competitiveness have nevertheless trumped social aims. The OECD's remit includes the elimination of social disadvantage as well as employment and economic development. However, the focus of its contribution to policy development in the 1970s (OECD 1973) became *recurrent education* as an answer to rising unemployment and rapid technological change (Rubenson 2011). The capture of lifelong education for economic policy purposes began as long ago as the mid-1970s, but has intensified over the following decades, most notably in the 1990s (OECD 1996; Delors 1996; CEC 2007). Field (2000) discusses this period in detail, drawing attention to the importance of the European Union in confirming lifelong learning as a central feature in education and labour market policies across the wider industrialised world.

Field (2000), Milana (2012) and contributors to Jarvis (2011) draw on the various policy documents produced by the OECD (see Schuller 2011), UNESCO (see Ouane 2011), the European Union (see Jarvis 2011; Milana 2012) and the World Bank (see Rivera 2011) to trace

> the shift from adult education to lifelong learning that political globalization processes have favoured. (Milana 2012: 104)

This shift in language from adult *education*, via lifelong *education* to lifelong *learning* which is apparent in international and national government pronouncements concerns adult educators because of its implications for adult education as a field of practice. It shows that policy expectations have shifted in three main ways:

- From social and individual to primarily economic objectives
- From institutional to individual responsibility for ensuring participation
- From education as public good to education as a market commodity

By means of this shift, now widely reflected in national as well as international policies, adult education has been reconstructed to focus on training for work and away from individual and social development. Furthermore the adult educator has been pushed from centre stage, as the learner is now deemed responsible for directing, planning – and paying for – her own learning.

The Capture of Adult Education for Lifelong Learning Policy Hegemony

> By bringing the agency of the learner to the foreground, public policy shades off the agency of the educator engaged in teaching-learning transactions or broader educative relations, while interfering with the politics of everyday life. (Milana 2012: 105)

Across the world the policy consensus in favour of lifelong learning and adult education for primarily economic ends is now almost unanimous. Governments have borrowed from each other, adapting policies on education and training to their national contexts. The impact of this is that paid employment opportunities for adult educators have been increasingly restricted to training for, or in, work and to credentialised learning. That is not to say that there has been no emphasis at all on education for social inclusion and social cohesion; indeed these concerns are frequently mentioned in national and international policy documents. For example, The European Union's strategic framework 'ET 2020' (EU 2009) laid emphasis on 'promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship' as well as on education and training for employability. However, when it comes to the distribution of resources, the low priority placed on non-work related education is clearly apparent (Field 2000).

The dominance of lifelong learning as a policy discourse raises other problems. As Field (2000: 102) suggests, lifelong learning may not only be guilty of narrowing the possibilities for education, it may also be reproducing inequality through its tendency to emphasise the exclusion of those who have had least access to education. In a situation of

increasing unemployment, coupled with credential inflation (Dore 1997), those without qualifications, in particular those with lower literacy levels, are the least likely to have access to jobs and to meaningful educational opportunities. The promotion of lifelong learning as an individual responsibility and as a panacea for the ills of economy and society has re-cast education increasingly as a compulsory activity on which social acceptance, career advancement or state support may depend (Coffield 1999). The impact for the adult educators is the transformation of their role from the facilitation of willing learners to the management of the successful course completion of educational conscripts.

A further and more subtle aspect of the impact of neoliberalism on adult education has been discussed by Martin (2001, 2005). He argues that the deconstruction of welfare has been predicated on a reconstruction of the notion of citizenship, which in much adult education work is now defined in terms of individuals' responsibility to accept and assume their place in the economic world order. Citizenship education – once a forum for facilitating critical debate and social action – has consequently, Martin suggests, become a vehicle for domestication rather than liberation:

> As the state's role shifts from doing things to enabling them to happen, from intervention to facilitation (i.e. managing the contexts in which citizens make their own autonomous choices) so it is necessary to prepare such 'empowered' citizens for their unaccustomed civic self-sufficiency. (Martin 2005: 575)

Adult educators engaged in active citizenship education social skills training, ESOL teaching and Personal and Community Development Learning (PCDL) are implicated in this process by which the term 'empowerment' has taken on a very different meaning from that proposed by their radical forebears of the 1960s and 1970s (Coare and Johnson 2003; Fryer 2011). As Martin argues, empowerment – defined as the development of political awareness as a precursor to social action which is, in turn, directed to the creation of a more socially just and equal social order – has been denuded of its radical meaning. In its place the neoliberalised notion of 'empowerment' signifies self-efficacy, self-sufficiency and personal responsibility for ensuring one's own economic and personal well-being.

Adult Education in the Current Context

> Everywhere in the world statements identify adult education as a key to the survival of humankind in the 21st century, attributing adult education with the magic to contribute positively to education for all . . . and yet, almost everywhere in the world, adult education is a widely neglected and feeble part of the official education scene. (UNESCO 1997: 3–4)

In the foreword to its *Global Report on Adult Education and Lifelong Learning*, UNESCO (2009: 8) refers to its own 'pioneering role in affirming the critical role of adult education in the development of society and promoting a comprehensive approach to learning throughout life'. This gives a flavour of the breadth of the vision of lifelong learning as originally laid out. However, while the internationalisation of the concept of lifelong education may have been spearheaded by UNESCO, its vision has been eclipsed by policy scripts of other, more economically focused ideological forces, agencies and governments. UNESCO itself acknowledges the primacy of vocational training, at the expense of other forms of education in the wealthier countries (including England and New Zealand). It notes the increasing marketisation and privatisation of adult education in these countries. It describes some of the features which now characterise adult education across a range of countries:

- The restriction of public provision to minimum purposes and the lowest levels
- The tendency for adult education beyond 'the minimum' to be given over to commercial providers or non-government agencies whose provision is reliant on market forces
- The instability of provision as a result of the unpredictability of funding
- A consequent weakening of governance structures for the provision of adult education
- The threat to equity as a result of the increasing dominance of the profit motive in adult education provision

In summary, it states:

> The fluctuation and instability of public funds for adult education further underscores the sensitivity and vulnerability of this sector. With an unstable legal and financial framework, adult education provision is extremely

> susceptible to even minor economic or political change. (UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organisation) Institute for Lifelong Learning 2009: 56)

Even from the perspective of UNESCO, which could hardly be described as an over-critical organisation, the prospects for a publicly provided adult education system which pays attention to issues of equality and social justice do not appear good.

Summary

This chapter has outlined some of the ideas and events in history which have influenced the development of adult education globally as a field characterised by diversity and contested philosophical and political views. It has described how the dominance of neoliberalism has overshadowed radical and liberal/humanist ideas, has swept away policy and funding support for adult education which is not geared to economic aims and has left provision for non-instrumental ends to be offered in the educational marketplace. It has discussed how the discourse of lifelong learning has been captured in support of neoliberal aims, re-casting education and training in the richer industrialised countries as an individual responsibility and as a precondition for economic inclusion. The next chapter looks in more detail at the influence of the global and the local on adult education in two such countries – England and New Zealand.