CHAPTER 6

A 'Non-career': Occupational Identities and Career Trajectories

I feel like a Polar Bear sitting on an iceberg which is slowly melting. My environment is being slowly whittled away, and what's left of it is not enough to make a living. I'm virtually unemployed in a sense.

(Carla, England, part-time adult educator and volunteer, 30 years plus)

I think the first point I'd make is that it's definitely a non-career.

(Imogen, New Zealand, part-time adult educator and volunteer, 30 years plus)

Introduction

Fifty years ago, it was possible to define a 'career' as: 'A succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered, predictable sequence' (Wilensky 1960: 127, cited in; Sikes et al. 1985). While such a predictable progression has rarely characterised women's working lives, it now seems more generally unthinkable from the perspective of a globalised and marketised economic and political climate. Historically, too, a career in the public sector was associated with a balance between a service ethic and a degree of job security and public respect. But since the 1980s, government pressures to drive down public sector expenditure and to restructure public service provision have resulted in work intensification, loss of job security and increasing demoralisation among public sector workers (De Ruyter et al. 2008). And at the same time the 'flexible', 'portfolio' or

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'contingent' worker has become an established feature of the employment scene in much of Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand (Handy 1994; Feldman 2006). The deterioration in adult educators' job security needs to be seen against the background of attacks on workers' rights and trade union organisation from the early 1980s onwards (Kirk and Wall 2011). Both are manifestations of the same ideological thrust.

In this context, the careers of educators in the formal schooling and tertiary sectors have received a good deal of research attention over the years (Ball and Goodson 1985; Sikes et al. 1985; Day 1999; Avis 1999; Kirk and Wall 2011). This is not the case in adult education. The casualised nature of adult educators' work reflects not only its voluntarist roots but also the historical marginality of concerns about education beyond compulsory school age. Moreover, there has been a tradition whereby evening classes for working people have been taught by educators who had day jobs elsewhere. Therefore, arguably, remuneration levels were not a priority (Tobias 1996a; Osborne and Sankey 2009). But adult education has been the sole or main occupation of some in both England and New Zealand. And it is strange when one considers the policy preoccupation with the professionalisation and professional development of adult educators (discussed in Chapter 4) that so little attention has been paid to their working lives and conditions. Against the wider background of increasing job insecurity, this chapter explores what it means to have a career in adult education through the narratives of six adult educators in England and New Zealand who are at different stages in their work lives. Their stories exemplify some of the challenges to the notion of a career in adult education – the haphazard nature of entry into the field, the opportunities and difficulties of portfolio or contingent working (Handy 1994: Feldman 2006) and the uncertainty and disillusion faced by adult educators as they contemplate the future. Career identity refers here to the ways in which adult educators define and re-define themselves as practitioners, make meaning of their work and envisage their working futures (Ball and Goodson 1985; Epstein 1978; Sachs 2003; Lasky 2005; Ecclestone 2007; Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997; Kirk and Wall 2011).

As Fig. 6.1 suggests, an individual's career identity may include personal and social factors arising from past experiences (family, education and previous work background), the present context for practice (the political and economic climate, workplace norms and discourses) or envisaged futures (which may involve consideration of job opportunities, promotion, redundancy or retirement). Career identity is also influenced by an individual's values and beliefs about the nature and purposes of adult education.

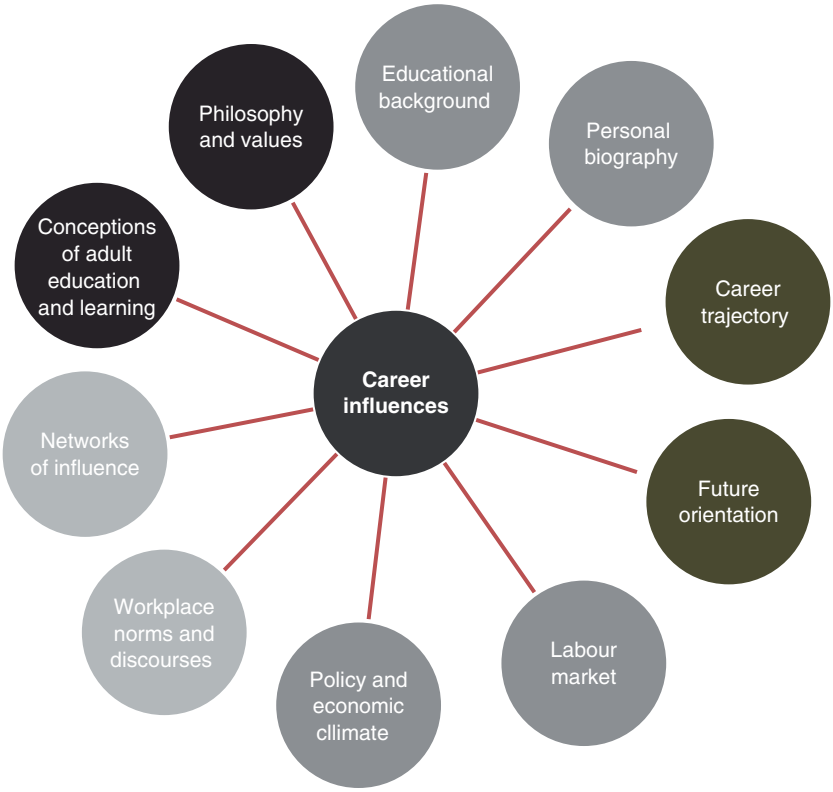

Fig. 6.1 Factors influencing career identity

Careers are therefore shaped by structural factors, by political and economic climates and by subjective values, dispositions and biographies (Ball and Goodson 1985; Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997; Kirk and Wall 2011). Like the term career, the concept of a career trajectory might once have implied a fairly straightforward progression from 'launch' to 'landing' (Huberman 1995). It is doubtful that this has ever been the case for teachers of adults, who are likely to come to teaching late in life and whose work might be hourly-paid or run alongside other commitments. The concept of career trajectory here is used descriptively to refer to past, present and contemplated future work roles, influenced both by external factors and those specific to the individual, including their aspirations and desires.

Six Portraits of a Career in Adult Education

This section describes the careers of adult educators through the narratives of six interviewees who were at different stages in their working lives, three from New Zealand and three from England. The portraits illustrate how, typically, adult educators enter the field, the qualification routes they take, the value they place on their work and their view of their career prospects. I begin with a brief pen picture of each adult educator.

Portrait One: Moira, England, Full-Time Community Adult Educator, 5 Years

Moira studied Art at university and wanted to be a professional artist. In the meantime she had combined a number of part-time jobs, including teaching 'A' level media studies and care work. Having gained a full-time job in a care home she temporarily abandoned teaching. She eventually returned to part-time adult teaching and at this point gained a teaching certificate. She then studied for a Master's degree in photography. Moira was offered work with a local education authority, teaching drama and digital photography. As cuts began to bite, she moved from this role to become a lead tutor with another authority. Although her job was relatively secure at the time of the interview, she was concerned about the future.

Portrait Two: Karen, New Zealand, Part-Time Adult Educator and Volunteer, 6 Years

Karen had trained and worked as a primary school teacher. However, when she and her family moved to a new town she gained employment as a school-based ACE coordinator. This part-time job was one aspect of her wider voluntary involvement in community education activities. Karen had recently been made redundant following government cutbacks to ACE provision in schools. She now teaches an art-based leisure class at her local college on an hourly-paid basis and continues to work as a volunteer in her community.

Portrait Three: Alex, England, Full-Time College-Based Adult Educator, 11 Years

Alex had been a mature student at a residential adult education college. He had gone on from college to study for a degree in

sociology and a postgraduate certificate in post-compulsory education (PGCE). Because he had been keen to combine travel and paid work he also studied for a qualification to teach English as a foreign language. He gained part-time work in a college, teaching sociology on an access to higher education course but he needed full-time work to support his family. Eventually he gained full-time employment as a resident tutor at the college where he had himself been a student. Over time, he took on more of a teaching role at the college and became a full-time, permanently employed social sciences teacher. However, in the light of changing policy in post-compulsory education he felt that his future prospects as a teacher of a non-vocational subject were far from secure.

Portrait Four: Debbie, New Zealand, Part-Time ESOL Tutor, 12 Years
Debbie worked as a literacy and language teacher with migrant learners in a community setting. Her specialist focus was 'pre-literate learners' who tended to be older women or people with disabilities. She began as a volunteer and slowly picked up more paid work over the years. Debbie had a degree in social sciences but when she began teaching she did not have a teaching qualification. She therefore studied part-time at her local polytechnic, gaining a certificate in adult teaching and a graduate diploma in teaching ESOL. Debbie was becoming frustrated by funding constraints and lack of professional recognition. At the time of the interview she was deciding whether to give up adult education work.

Portrait Five: Carla, England, Part-Time Adult Educator and Volunteer, 30 Years Plus
Carla's teaching areas included IT, history, philosophy, science and politics. She also taught on a further education teachers' certificate course. She had worked for a range of employers in the voluntary, local government and college sectors – frequently in more than one job at any one time. She had a Bachelor's degree and was qualified teacher of adults. She held local and national roles representing the interests of adult educators. The variety of hourly paid jobs on which she relied had progressively been reducing. She had gone from working five days to less than six hours a week. At the same time

she could not afford to retrain: she was in a 'qualifications trap' as a result of government regulations which had withdrawn fee subsidies from people already holding higher level or professional qualifications.

Portrait Six: Imogen, New Zealand, Part-Time Adult Educator and Volunteer, 30 Years Plus

Imogen's involvement in adult education dated back to her childhood in Italy where lifelong learning had been embedded in the everyday activities of work and community life. She had not planned to become a teacher, but she began teaching English on a voluntary, and then on a part-time paid basis and she trained to become a teacher of English as a foreign language. It was a means of supporting herself while she pursued her ambition to travel. Imogen taught English in Europe and Asia and eventually settled in New Zealand. She began teaching Italian privately to small groups. She also linked up with the Workers' Educational Association. Imogen's career was one of hourly-paid or casual contracts and voluntary work in a variety of adult education settings. For some years she managed the tension between a philosophical commitment to a non-institutional approach to adult education and earning a living. However, policy and funding changes increasingly restricted the opportunities for work. As cuts to ACE funding began to bite, opportunities to teach on a paid basis had almost entirely dried up and Imogen was reflecting on the course of what she described as her 'non career'.

Routes to a 'Non-career'

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) critique past theories of career choice (Krumboltz 1979; Super 1980; Kidd 1984) for their tendency to overemphasise the technical and rational nature of career decisions and to under-emphasise social and cultural opportunities and constraints. They identify individuals' decision-making as being determined by wider social, political, economic and cultural contexts in interaction with the individual and immediate concerns of people's lives. These may include personal preferences, unforeseen circumstances and desired futures. They may also include an element of chance. Each individual's horizon

for action will therefore be differently determined, while also being structured by wider social realities. However, some common themes are identifiable in the narratives of adult educators in this study which are illustrated in the six portraits presented in this chapter. The first is the haphazard nature of the choice of adult education as a career; the second is the attraction of adult education as a 'fall-back' career for those whose horizons for action involve an element of risk or uncertainty; the third is the association of adult education work with social and community purpose.

'Falling Into' Adult Education

Few of those interviewed appeared to have entered adult teaching through the kind of planned route generally associated with school teaching. Alex's: 'I fell into it!' was illustrative of remarks made by a number of others, and has been noted elsewhere (Osborne and Sankey 2009; Jephcote and Salisbury 2009). Alex, one of the few of those interviewed who was in a permanent, full-time post, became an adult educator almost by default after he had gained his Social Science degree:

> I couldn't afford to do a Master's degree, so a PGCE was the alternative … I wasn't fed up with education after I got my degree, but I didn't get a good enough degree to be paid to do a Masters. I had 2 young children and so I thought, I need to get some training under my belt, a profession … So I thought, I'm not bored with education, I can still get a grant to do a PGCE and my mum was on my back saying you'd better get something out of this degree.

However, he also linked his career choice with his own biography – returning to education later in life after a less than successful school experience, followed by spells of unemployment. Being an adult returner to education and a mature entrant to higher education gave him contacts in and experience of adult education which eased his entry to a career. Like a number of others, he was also attracted by the transferability of adult education qualifications to other contexts. The idea of training as a foreign language teacher suited Alex's aim to earn money while travelling.

Imogen too, who described her 30 years as a teacher of adults as a *non-career* had seen the potential value of training as a teacher of English as a

foreign language as a means to combine work and international travel which eventually brought her from Europe to New Zealand:

> I never wanted to be a teacher because my mother was a teacher. I was going to be a journalist or a public servant and I secretly always wanted to write but I felt that was a self-indulgent thing that rich people do when they've got spare time … But I started working with adult groups, ESOL groups in the UK. I worked as a volunteer and did a little bit of paid work for a community language centre. That was because I wanted to travel.

The casual nature of much adult education work (particularly in the field of language and literacy teaching) means that paid work opportunities may emerge as a result of, or in addition to, unremunerated voluntary work. This reflects the historical position of adult education whose activities have had a marginal status in public policy. The idea of a skilled teacher not being paid for providing educational opportunities would be unlikely to be well received in school-based education. It has been widely accepted in adult education.

A 'Fall-Back' Career

Combining paid work with overseas travel was one reason why an individual might see adult education as a positive career choice. Another was its flexibility for individuals whose ultimate career aspirations entailed a degree of risk and uncertainty. For example, it could be used to advantage by graduates who had personal aims which required a fall-back position. It had made practical sense to Moira, an artist, who had been looking for paid work which did not compromise her main career aim:

> I thought that teaching was a good way to combine being a practising artist and being able to earn money to live.

It was also a part-time option for professionally qualified women wishing to re-enter the labour market and combine work with care commitments, like Debbie, who had to give up full-time work as a librarian when one of her children became ill. In adult literacy and language education, it has been common for teaching roles to be performed on a voluntary or hourly-paid basis by women combining work with childcare responsibilities. In this sense, adult education is gendered work. Women's over-representation in part-time and hourly-paid roles appears to have

changed little since 1997 when Jane Thompson, writing of the situation in England noted:

> Women constitute the majority of volunteer tutors in literacy, adult basic education and English as a second language schemes. They are also more likely than men to be part time tutors in local authority provision. As such they have little influence, receive low rates of pay. And enjoy no recognisable career structure except as token women in an essentially male-dominated profession. (Thompson 1997: 45)

Little surprise then perhaps, that adult educators have enjoyed limited success in winning improved remuneration and employment conditions.

A Career with a Social Mission

For a sizable proportion of those interviewed, the idea of a career as an adult educator was explicitly values-driven. In New Zealand, in particular, paid work was often only one aspect of the community activity undertaken by adult educators. This seems to reflect the strongly networked nature of some communities in New Zealand, particularly in rural and semi-rural settings. Karen's profile illustrates this. She describes her activist motivations which coincided with her need for a job:

> I have always been interested and involved with people of all ages. We shifted to a new town … There was quite an extensive ACE programme, but I could see how it could be done better. When the job came up, I applied. My background also includes a stint as chair of another college community education committee as a trustee. So there has been an interest for a long time.

Similarly, Debbie linked her career choice with her personal experience and she took up unpaid adult education work, initially, out of a commitment to promote literacy and language learning:

> I have always been interested in reading and writing. Over my life I have met many local people who went through the school system and came out the other side unable to read and write well or almost not at all. My husband was severely dyslexic and unable to read until aged thirty … Our grandson is also severely dyslexic and sadly has had very little sensible help through the school system … I guess that was one motivation. My second motivation was my interest in the arrival of refugees from Somalia and Ethiopia in my home city about fifteen years ago. I wanted to meet them.

Carla's motivation was born from a commitment to education for democracy. She had chosen to work as an adult educator to sustain a career identity which was congruent with her beliefs:

> I am very passionate about education; it's welded into virtually everything I do. In many respects I'm like a lot of part-timers and contractual people working in the business, I did it because I wanted to do it; because I was enthusiastic about it. It changes people's lives.

The sense of social mission was a recurring theme. Not only was it common for these adult educators to work well beyond the terms of their paid contracts; participation in voluntary work in outside paid work was also commonplace. This suggests some continuity between adult educators' sense of their own teacher identities and their public, community and personal identities. However, this was not recognised in their social status, their conditions of work or in the way they are positioned by policy discourses of professionalisation.

The Double-Edged Sword of Non-standard Career Routes

It is difficult to imagine adult education being proposed as a career pathway for a young person planning their future. Because there is no clear way in, there has been a tendency for people to 'fall' in. Career decisions combined pragmatism and idealism. On the one hand, the philosophical underpinnings of adult education – radical or liberal/humanistic – have attracted people whose perspectives on education were as likely to be driven by public service ideals as by career aspirations. Adult education's connection with the idea of a reforming or ameliorating 'mission' has meant that those who choose to work within it have seen their work as intrinsically important, over and above financial reward. This has made their exploitation as workers relatively easy. The strength of social and emotional commitment to adult education, particularly among longstanding adult educators, whose entry to the field coincided with a more radical period in adult education's history, has challenged their educator identities as their status and working conditions have worsened. On the other hand, the flexibility of a career in adult education work has been useful for combining work with other commitments and aspirations. In this sense, the casual nature of adult education work may have been used to advantage. However, this tends

to reinforce its low status and helps to account for its relative lack of worker organisation. Both motivations tend to work against the prospects for job security and a level of remuneration which reflects the level of expertise required.

Qualification Pathways

If the reasons for entering a career in adult education are varied, qualification pathways are equally so. There has traditionally been no single qualification route to teaching in adult education and, in England in particular, they have been subject to a good deal of change, as discussed in Chapter 4. Attempts to impose a qualifications framework on workers in post-compulsory education in England were only partially successful – and least successful of all in the adult and community learning sector (BIS 2012b, c)

Most of the adult educators interviewed in the course of the research for this book had subject-specialist undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications; most also possessed teaching, social work, management or other professional credentials. Of the 62 adult educators interviewed almost all held a bachelor's degree or a teaching qualification. Most held both a degree and a professional qualification in teaching or a related professional area. A number held multiple qualifications – in their subject area and in teaching (Table 6.1).

Of the six adult educators whose narratives are recorded in this chapter, all were qualified to teach: Alex, Moira and Carla in England were qualified teachers of adults, and in New Zealand Imogen was qualified as a TEFL teacher, Karen was a trained primary school teacher and Debbie was qualified as a teacher of adults and in teaching English to speakers of other languages. The picture which emerges is one of multiple qualifications acquired through a desire to increase knowledge and improve practice, rather than through prescription. Moira explains:

> I began by doing a PTLLS [Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector] certificate just so I could teach adults in 2007. I realised I would rather go down the academic route thereafter and I completed my postgraduate certificate in post-compulsory Education in 2009. Not long after this I completed my QTLS [Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills]. I immediately followed this by doing a Master's Degree in Digital Photography at university. I am still studying for this and should be completed in 2012 and hope to continue on to a PhD.

Table 6.1 Qualifications held by adult educators interviewed

	Bachelor's degree	*Master's degree*	*Doctorate*	*School teaching qualification*	*Adult teaching qualification*	*ESOL/TEFL qualification*	*Other professional qualification*
New Zealand	25	5	2	10	9	6	6
England	28	7	4	3	20	8	2

As we saw in Chapter 4 in England and New Zealand professional development and training have been central to debates about funding of adult education. However, the evidence here suggests that adult educators were not lacking in education or training; indeed they sought it out, though their efforts to do were sometimes frustrated. In Carla's case, the UK government's denial of subsidy for studies at a level equivalent to or lower than that already achieved (the 'ELQ' – equivalent or lower qualification regulation) meant that she could not retrain when her teaching work began to dry up.

> I'm trying desperately to retrain, which I have found difficult to do. I'm caught in the qualification and funding trap. I already have a degree, so I can't retrain at the same level without paying enormously high fees which I can't afford. As somebody who has already got a degree I can't apply for a loan to get another degree … In effect, I'm locked out of progression, expanding my dimensions, because there isn't the opportunity there – the support for people with low incomes even though their qualification might be quite high level. I can't move in either direction.

The level of training and qualifications evident among this group of adult educators gives the lie to their characterisation, in both England and New Zealand, as workers in need of professional development. At the same time opportunities to study adult education theory and practice at higher levels have become fewer in both countries and the policy focus has been on lower level training and professional development.

Contingent Careers

The patterns of tenure for the adult educators interviewed for this book are indicated below (Table 6.2):

It was difficult to identify full-time adult educators in New Zealand, apart from those working in larger national organisations. At the time of the interviews cuts to school- and university-based adult education had reduced further the number of full-time and fractional contracts. In England, full-time adult educators were employed in local authority community education departments and in further education colleges, as well as in national organisations although, at the time these interviews were conducted, those in local authority employment were at risk from governments cuts in local government funding.

Table 6.2 Patterns of tenure for adult educators interviewed

	Full-time contract		*Part-time single contract*		*Multiple contracts*		*Volunteer*		*Retired*	
	Male	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
New Zealand	1	6	0	6	2	12	1	3	0	0
England	6	13	0	4	0	7	0	0	1	0

Around half those interviewed held part-time jobs. These were characteristically paid by the face-to-face teaching hour – often without preparation time included. Some combined paid part-time work with voluntary work, or paid contracts with self-employment. Some were formally 'retired' but taught a few hours a week. A sizable proportion of those interviewed held multiple, variable contracts – they were what Handy (1994) has described as portfolio workers and what others have called 'contingent' employees (Feldman 2006; Redpath et al. 2009). Contingent employment is a growing global trend; it has become increasingly common among higher-skilled workers (Redpath et al. 2009), though arguably it has long been a feature of adult education work. Its defining characteristics include less than full-time engagement with more than one employer, and contracts of limited or unpredictable duration.

Carla, in England, and Imogen, in New Zealand, were contingent workers of long standing. Their career patterns were strikingly similar. Both had worked in universities and colleges, for the WEA and community-based organisations on multiple casual contracts in their respective countries, as Carla explains:

> I've done stuff in Further Education and I have done quite a lot of stuff in higher education as well. But these areas do overlap on a regular basis. I'm a contractual tutor who does these things on a whenever it's possible basis ... I've worked for pretty well every organisation you can think of, including a lot you have probably never heard of.

Similarly, Imogen described her non-institutional orientation and her commitment to creating learning opportunities as much as to earning a living:

> The way I chose to work was making decisions based on what they call kaupapa.[1] By definition that's really the opposite of looking for a job in an institution and then working for the institution. I've had a terrific amount of involvement – working with, working for, working on projects, being involved in meetings with people who work in institutions. And I can see that the focus is often totally different; you're serving the institution and it's called adult education, or community education; those are they names that are given but the reality is that it is an institutional function, you have constraints and it's not to do with meeting learning needs, but it's to do with meeting the institution's needs.

As well as working on hourly-paid contracts and as a volunteer WEA committee member Imogen had brought small groups of people together who shared a common interest in language learning, running classes in private homes and charging the group just enough for her to make a small profit, or joining up with local organisations to set up classes on a shoestring.

The other aspect of adult educators' contingent careers was that their commitment often extended well beyond what they were paid for. Again, this had both positive and negative implications for a part-time, community-based worker like Debbie:

> I have never worked in an institutional educational setting which means I work harder and am paid less than my contemporaries, but also have had more freedom in how/what I teach, less emphasis on assessment (pass /fail) and a much more holistic approach to learners.

This was not only the case for part-time workers – indeed it will be familiar story for people working across all sectors of education. Moira described the hours of unpaid work she undertook at home and the impact of monitoring regimes on creative adult education:

> . . . there is a lot more paperwork in order to 'prove' that you do a lot of things. For instance to prove that you differentiate, that you are embedding key skills, that you have used sustainability, that you have set goal. All of these things now have to be shown and evidenced . . . I think that evidencing to an extent is needed but it does mean that all the creativity can be sucked right out of you in order to ensure that you have done other things! . . . I also think that teachers are leaving the teaching profession as they are expected to do a lot more for a lot less. I do a lot of work at home for my job, most of which is basically unpaid and so do many other teachers and this is why good teachers give up.

Karen's profile too, illustrates the casualised and temporary nature of adult education work in New Zealand. At the time she was interviewed, the cuts to school-based adult education in New Zealand had just began to make their impact felt and many schools were withdrawing altogether from their involvement in ACE.

> Having been suddenly widowed with two dependents, and then losing my ACE job, I have continued to work voluntarily in my local community. I sit on the Ministry of Social Development's community response forum . . . I am a trustee for the Arts Centre and I'm currently working

> on designing an Arts education programme there in conjunction with a small group of others … Very exciting! All this is voluntary and I'm also seeking paid employment.

While not all those interviewed were contingent employees, there was a strong tendency for this to be the case, particularly for women. Contingent employment has considerable advantages for the employer – it is easier to control costs and avoids the need to factor in holidays, staff development and training. For some workers too, it offers a degree of autonomy and challenge. However, as Redpath et al. (2009) have suggested, contingent employment brings with it psychological uncertainty as well as negative effects on future career prospects.

Contemplating the Future: Career Prospects in Adult Education

Looking at the data overall it is first worth noting that of the 62 people interviewed for this research just under one-third had already experienced redundancy or reduced working hours, had recently retired or were planning to leave publicly funded adult education altogether – a stark indication of the problems faced for adult educators considering their future careers. The attitudes to the future of those remaining in employment ranged from resigned pessimism to desperation. Although in permanent full-time employment, Alex was aware that dedicated college-based work with mature students was at risk:

> I think the problem is that the government are killing the whole Access movement off, with the idea that they are not going to fund over 25s. As far as I can see, education, you either pay for it yourself or forget it. Most people coming from poorer backgrounds are not going to have the money … If the changes come in, then our access course has got another year and it's finished.

In the meantime he was prepared to hold on and adjust to changing policy circumstances. Debbie too, had concluded that uncertainly and insecurity were the price to be paid for working 'on the margins' of education. However, she was reaching the limits of her own ability to endure:

> …I have come to accept that this work will never be properly funded and those of us who work on the outer edge of the profession will not be respected in what we do as we are seen as not fully professional. Also as

> our students are marginal people, our role is seen as of marginal importance. However that all doesn't really worry me that much as I have always felt comfortable on the margins because that is where creativity and innovation flourish. . . . unfortunately after 12 years I'm tired and broke and I feel my time is nearly up in this job . . .

Of the six adult educators whose narratives are related in this chapter, Carla and Imogen whose careers were longest, whose commitment was the most strongly expressed in social terms and who had been most dependent on multiple contracts with multiple employers were both close to despair. Imogen described the collapse of her WEA classes with the loss of ACE funding in New Zealand. Likewise, Carla had lost her WEA teaching and much of her other work:

> Two years ago I would have been teaching five days a week for four and a half hours a day contact time; and three nights and occasional weekend day schools. Although it wasn't a huge income, it was enough to keep me going. Now it has shrunk to about six hours a week. It's a huge drop. Every so often I'll get letters from my employers saying we're facing redundancies, we don't know what's going to happen next. It has become a very scary thing to be involved in . . . For many of us in adult education, we had faith in it; faith in its redeeming quality in human society and its capacity to change people; we still do thoroughly believe in that. I know many tutors who signed up to that manifesto and predicated their lives upon it. The blow of the shrinkage is not necessarily just the lack of income. It's the shock to self-esteem and the identity that goes with it.

And, ironically, at the same time as she was losing most of her part-time hours of teaching work, when was also being required to pay to register as a member of her professional body – the Institute for Learning – as a condition of remaining an adult educator.

Summary: A Career in Adult Education?

> Flexible capitalism has blocked the straight roadway of career, diverting employees suddenly from one kind of work into another. The word 'job' in English of the fourteenth century meant a lump or piece of something which could be carted around. Flexibility today brings back this arcane sense of the job, as people do lumps of labour, pieces of work, over the course of a lifetime.(Sennett 1998: 9)

What does it mean to try to make a working life in adult education? If adult education was always on the margins of public education provision, what prospects are there for those who have carved out careers in this field? The six portraits above reveal striking similarities between the career experiences of English and New Zealand adult educators. They are portraits of committed, adventurous, experienced and educationally well-qualified people. While these adult educators may have fallen somewhat haphazardly into their careers, they had knowledge and skills and espoused values which, in other contexts, would be associated with professionalism: and a sense of vocation expressed through the notion of working for the public good. In both countries, however, the idea of a career – or even a job – in adult education is problematic. It will almost certainly be characterised by insecurity, poor working conditions and poor pay and it may well end in despondency. The strength of social and emotional commitment to adult education, particularly among longstanding adult educators, whose entry to the field coincided with a more radical period in adult education's history, has left them in despair as their working conditions have worsened and their prospects have become more insecure. The policy rhetoric of lifelong learning has done nothing to alter this situation. The low status of adult education as a field of work clearly reflects the continuing low status of non-formal, adult-focused education. It is linked too, to the relative weakness of their industrial organisation and the gendered nature of adult education work below the level of management.

Note

1. Principles and ideas informed by a Māori world view.