



ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION (ACE) NETWORKS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Developing effective practice

**Guidelines written for the Tertiary Education
Commission**

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Ma te huruhuru te manu ka rere

**Only when the proper preparations are
made can dreams come true**

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1. INTRODUCTION

In September 2006 the Adult and Community Education Teaching and Research Team at the University of Canterbury was contracted by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) to:

- Explore the professional development needs of the ACE sector, with particular reference to the role of the 37 regional ACE networks,
- Explore a range of approaches that ACE networks could take to professional development,
- Identify those approaches that would be most effective in achieving the vision and strategies set out in the *ACE Professional Development Strategy and Action Plan 2006-2010*.

The project team undertook this task in collaboration with Auckland Workers' Education Association (AWEA) and six regional ACE networks to identify ways in which professional development can enhance the ACE sector as a whole, local ACE networks and the work of individuals within the sector. Our report *Adult and Community Education (ACE) Networks and Professional Development* was presented to the TEC in June 2007.

Regional ACE networks provide an opportunity for practitioners to share information, knowledge and expertise and to work collaboratively on a local basis. They can also provide a forum for discussion, critical thinking and problem solving and enable practitioners to keep up to date with developments in the ACE sector. Regional ACE networks therefore, along with other formal and informal, local, national and international networks, have a role to play in professional development in the ACE sector.

One of the tasks we were asked to undertake for the TEC was to develop guidelines on network professional development which might be shared with ACE networks and the wider ACE sector. This booklet

focuses on that task. It makes suggestions about the role of regional ACE networks in planning and organising ACE professional development; it offers some examples of effective professional development practice which might be used or adapted by regional ACE networks; it also offers suggestions as to how regional networks might adopt a 'communities of practice' approach to ACE professional development.

The ACE sector and its regional networks encompass a wide range of provision, roles and geographical locations. Its professional development needs and activities are therefore diverse. Professional development needs may be met successfully in a range of ways. However, we suggest that effective practice in ACE professional development should:

- Enable ACE practitioners to improve and develop their work for the benefit of adult learners
- Support ACE practitioners personally and professionally in their work
- Start from an understanding of practitioners' existing knowledge and skills
- Recognise diversity
- Recognise and use the expertise within the sector
- Be relevant
- Be accessible
- Be inclusive
- Be well-planned

The aim of this booklet is not to be prescriptive, but to offer suggestions for enhancing ACE professional development through regional networks, based on what we have seen working well during the course of our research for the TEC.

2. WHAT IS ACE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

According to the TEC, in its strategy document for the sector, ACE professional development is:

An ongoing process of learning that supports and strengthens ACE delivery. (TEC 2005: 6)

In the course of our research with network members, it was clear that ACE professional development is more broadly defined – it includes personal development, improving and developing practice and learning - in order to benefit communities, families and individual learners. So, the definition we arrived at, in consultation with networks was:

ACE professional development is an ongoing process of personal development, education and learning which enables all ACE practitioners to improve their practice as adult educators and their service to communities, families and individual learners, thereby strengthening the wider ACE sector. ACE practitioners are learners as well as teachers and require support and resourcing for their efforts to create effective learning environments.

Many ACE practitioners are already highly professional in their work in communities, have a deep understanding of community needs and are highly skilled and experienced at meeting these needs. In the course of our research it was clear that ACE practitioners were also keen to further develop their knowledge, understanding and skills in encouraging and supporting adult and community learning.

3. ACE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

From our discussions with regional ACE network members, the following professional development needs were identified for those working in the ACE sector:

New practitioners

- Induction into the work role, the local networks and the sector as a whole
- Ongoing peer and management support and mentoring
- Access to basic templates and guides for new ACE practitioners

Coordinators

- Opportunities to see the 'bigger picture' of ACE both in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally
- Understanding of the role and functioning of ACE networks
- Training in conducting meetings and formal procedures
- Information and sharing of ideas through networking
- Templates and guides for 'getting started'/ applying for funds
- Strategic planning
- How to reach out to new learners
- Marketing

Tutors and teachers

- Principles and practice of adult teaching and learning
- Specialist subject teaching – ensuring knowledge is current
- Curriculum and lesson planning
- Quality assurance guidelines

Trustees

- Understanding of the value and purposes of ACE
- Understanding responsibilities in relation to ACE work

All practitioners

- Treaty awareness and implementation
- Working appropriately and effectively with diverse learners
- Compliance/quality assurance/legal requirements
- Making use of new and changing technologies
- New ideas and inspiration
- Time to reflect on practice
- Peer support and mentoring – formal and informal
- In-house training in larger organisations
- Online resources

These needs are not likely to be met solely by local ACE networks, but networks have a part to play, either directly or in offering support, advice and new ideas to network members so that they can plan and organise professional development for colleagues within their own organisations.

4. REGIONAL ACE NETWORKS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The diversity of ACE and the range of roles played by people working full-time, part-time or voluntarily within the sector mean that it is not possible or desirable for networks alone to take responsibility for ACE professional development. Networks do not represent all the providers in a given geographical area: small, new and emerging providers may not attend network events; representation at network meetings and events is likely to be from paid or voluntary coordinators/organisers, rather than Board of Trustee members or tutors/teachers. However networks do have an important role in ACE professional development. First, they can act as ‘communities of practice’¹ for ACE practitioners; section five explains in more detail what is meant by the term ‘community of practice’ as well as offering some examples and suggestions for developing ACE networks as communities of practice. Second, local ACE networks have a role in identifying and planning to meet network members’ professional development needs; section six describes this role and makes some suggestions about effective planning for professional development. Third, networks have a role in organising workshops on issues of common interest and concern – for example working in a Treaty-based way, reaching out to under-represented learner groups and analysing community needs. This role is discussed in section seven, again with some suggestions for practice.

¹ Communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 2001) are groups of people who share a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

5. ACE NETWORKS AS 'COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE'

Communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 2001) are groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. What holds communities of practice together is a common sense of purpose, joint enterprise, a need to know what other members know and a desire to learn from each other.

Communities of practice function to:

- Foster a sense of community
- Enable the exchange of information
- Act as a repository of 'tacit' knowledge (the things we learn as we go about our work together, the 'jargon' of our ACE activity)
- Foster shared identity

Features of a community of practice are:

- Shared practice and commitment
- Deliberate mutual learning
- Informed connections
- Shared activity

Many ACE practitioners are expert 'networkers'. They are likely, consciously or unconsciously, to operate within more than one community of practice. This is one of the great strengths of the sector. Some ACE networks have the potential to develop and others are already operating successfully as communities of practice - encouraging mutual learning, sharing information, ideas and activities and providing a focus for ACE new practitioners and organisations in their regions. The three examples below, which are only three of many possible other examples, demonstrate how networks in different stages of development and different geographical locations and environments can operate successfully as communities of practice.

ACE NETWORKS AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: EXAMPLE ONE: TE KUPENGA O MANUKAU

Network background

The ACE Network in Manukau was established in mid-2002 as one of the five pilots set up by TEC in response to Koia! Koia! In 2004/2005, Manukau was included in the first round of networks to be supported post-pilot by TEC and has been operating ever since. There had been no ACE network in the area prior to 2002 which made it difficult to get established; even identifying the local organisations and other groups providing ACE in Manukau has not yet been achieved. Ambiguity about the purpose of the Network and who could/should attend has exacerbated the situation. Furthermore, there are many potential conflicts of interest among ACE providers (e.g., in relation to provider funding), and many were attending, at least initially, only because it was a condition for funding. In spite of these difficulties, largely thanks to the efforts of a few key people, the Network is now fully operational. It has developed an identity separate from TEC which relates to the special character of the communities in Manukau and is based on a broad definition of ACE. The name and logo were designed to reflect the cultural diversity in Manukau, emphasising values of working collectively and moving forward, that is, success through collaboration.

Network structure

The Network meets monthly to share information, identify and address common issues, and manage the business of the Network. All meetings are open to everyone, including people from other networks. A facilitator is chosen from amongst those present. A secretary is paid to take minutes and manage all correspondence. Members are able to communicate with each other via an email list. A member organisation has hosted the meetings (paid for venue and food costs) and acted as treasurer in relation to the TEC-provided budget. A member organisation has to volunteer to handle the finances for any activities which involve receipt and disbursement of funds. Working groups are created occasionally to undertake specific tasks. Adult Learners' Week is a major project each year. It was decided to organise the Network in this way in order to keep the group working together, to achieve the group's objectives and to make it easy for people to participate on whatever terms suit them.

Benefits

- *Newcomers to the group can become active participants very quickly*
- *Meetings are frequent enough to be able to undertake several projects concurrently*
- *It is easy to stay involved even when a meeting is missed because the minutes are emailed*
- *Members learn more about each other through giving brief profiles at the meetings*

- *This in turn heightens commitment to the group and increases opportunities for mutual support*
- *Involving everyone in decision-making means increased likelihood of meeting member needs*
- *The name and logo help to keep the Network focused on its reason for being – to meet the needs of its communities in culturally appropriate ways.*

**ACE NETWORKS AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE:
EXAMPLE TWO: WEST COAST ACE NETWORK**

This network consists of two sub-groups – Buller (based in Westport) and Central Southern (based in Greymouth/Hokitika). Regional meetings are held twice a year; local meetings are held more regularly. Buller has “mixed membership” with a high number of volunteers; Central Southern has mainly school or polytechnic-based practitioners. For the purpose of this case study, we have focused on the Buller sub-network.

ACE volunteers and practitioners in the rural Buller sub-network can travel for over an hour to attend a local network meeting in Westport. For community volunteers whose involvement in ACE may only amount to several hours a week, attendance at a network meeting is a ‘big ask’. But these ACE volunteers have a strong sense of commitment to their communities and their network. According to a network spokesperson:

“The volunteers are not directly funded by the TEC but they still want to be part of the network. They’ve been involved since the beginning of the networks. They are an integral part of running Adult Learners’ Week. They have a strong sense of community. I don’t know how we would get on without them.”

The commitment by the volunteers is recognised and highly valued by other members. This was evident in the professional development funding application that the network submitted to the TEC in early 2007. The application outlined four professional development training events including a workshop on reducing stress and maintaining a healthy work/life balance for the ACE volunteers.

Discussion at local and regional network meetings over the previous year had identified the need for professional development training that would provide the basis for ongoing support and development for the volunteers. The aim was to establish a “stronger, safer environment for the community-based tutors and learners” as a forerunner to professional development training that would improve quality. Buller sub-group members also decided to adopt an “in-house professional development” programme. This involved members being encouraged to provide training for each other using their particular skills and experience. For example, the network administrator was to run workshops on doing annual plans.

This strong sense of community within the network, coupled with its commitment to mutual support and shared learning, is what makes it a good example of a ‘community of practice’. Despite the diversity in roles that exists amongst the members and the challenges of being so geographically dispersed, there is a common sense of purpose. As well as sharing a passion for ACE, the network members have

demonstrated a willingness to work together to achieve better outcomes, both for themselves as practitioners and for their learners. Network meetings are used to facilitate joint activity and discussion through which a store of understandings, resources and ways of working is promulgated. This is consistent with the 'community of practice' concept (Wenger 2001) promoted by the TEC as a means of strengthening the sector.

Based on the Buller West Coast example, some of the factors that enable a network to function as a 'community of practice' are:

- A strong sense of identity and purpose – in this case based on geographical isolation and distinctiveness*
- A reasonable number of practitioners in the sub groups/network – helps to ensure that all members are able to participate in network activities irrespective of differences in their roles*
- A strong sense of mutual dependence with network members having shared and often interdependent roles*
- A key person providing administrative support and ensuring good communication is maintained – up to 10 hours work a week (Buller)*
- A commitment to planning and strategising on behalf of everyone in the network – so there is a clear understanding of a shared direction*
- A determination to have shared leadership and develop 'an active participatory culture' which fosters a strong sense of purpose amongst members*

**ACE NETWORKS AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE:
EXAMPLE THREE: MID CANTERBURY**

During the course of the Professional Development project, the leadership in the Mid Canterbury Network underwent changes. A new interim Chair and Secretary were in post. In spite of the changes the network has continued to run smoothly and some lessons can be drawn from their experience which may be useful for other networks undergoing personnel changes:

Leadership and relationships:

- *Shared leadership - a Chair with knowledge and skills in chairing meetings, a secretary who was an experienced administrator and a long standing member with historical knowledge of the group - enabled the sharing of expertise and 'shared memories' to support the life of the group.*
- *The steering committee, which acted as the core of the group, maintained monthly meetings and regularly communicated with the membership. This enabled swift and effective action when the TEC's professional development funding invitation arrived late in the year to the network. The steering group summarised TEC requirements, identified possible opportunities, developed the first level of a proposal and sent it out for consultation. It also ensured that meetings were effective when the members gathered.*
- *The connections and complementary skills of the membership of the steering committee were important.*
- *The skills and knowledge obtained from members' own larger community organisations which were supportive of their engagement in the networks and had enabled them to gain leadership skills, were helpful in supporting the network.*
- *The importance of the steering committee developing clear role descriptions for people taking leadership positions in the network.*
- *The importance of role clarity for the secretary or administrator as a paid position so that the Chair and the steering committee could ask for work to be done without feeling that they were putting upon the good will of the incumbent.*
- *Training in committee skills, streamlining a committee for effectiveness, and a skilled facilitator who could model the running of meetings would have been helpful in the past and could still be useful for networks in the future*
- *A tacit but deliberate strategy to ensure that the group had ownership of the processes for the meeting which was communicated throughout the meetings to all of the membership.*

Value to the membership.

- *Meetings structured to allow space for all participants to talk*
- *Members contributing information about their variety of networks from their own groups into this ACE network meeting*
- *Participants being encouraged to expand their networks nationally by discussing experiences of other networks and encouraging participation in the National ACE conference.*

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| BUILDING ACE NETWORKS AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: SOME SUGGESTIONS |
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1. PURPOSE

- Develop clear aims and shared values
- Make meetings clear and purposeful
- Develop a network identity and/or logo
- Have a plan and purpose for each meeting – and show this in the agenda
- Work to build trust – address the tensions inherent in a competitive funding environment
- Share resources
- Pool knowledge and skills in analysing community needs
- Seek face-to-face contact with TEC and specialist advisors
- Be accountable to other network members

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| BUILDING ACE NETWORKS AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: SOME SUGGESTIONS |
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2. STRUCTURE

- Have regular meetings, a regular meeting time and realistic meeting length
- Have an agenda – so the network can move forward
- Record decisions of meetings and circulate to network members
- Define responsibilities and assign roles for the year ahead
- Share and rotate roles and workload among all network members
- Have a smaller planning team if the network is large
- Pay a coordinator – with a clear job description
- Recognise the difficulties which may come with changes in leadership – and plan for them

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| BUILDING ACE NETWORKS AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: SOME SUGGESTIONS |
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3. PEOPLE

- A paid coordinator role can help to ensure that planning takes place, that new members are contacted and welcomed and that members are kept informed

- Have introductions at the start of meetings

- Develop an information sheet/manual for new network members

- Develop a 'buddy' system for new members

- Find out who new people are and ensure they are welcomed

- Provide support to new members

- Reach out to isolated providers

- Ensure meetings are inclusive

- Minimise ACE and TEC 'jargon' in meetings and communications

- Be aware of who is missing from meetings; ask why and then try to address their needs

- Watch for over-dominant personalities; ask them to allow space for others

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| <p>BUILDING ACE NETWORKS AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE: SOME SUGGESTIONS</p> |
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4. SHARED ACTIVITIES

- Plan social activities
- Provide food at meetings
- Plan and organise shared professional development activities
- Share leadership - develop the many talents of networks
- Encourage involvement in, and reporting back from, other networks
- Work on shared campaigns and local initiatives (for example: marketing, Adult Learners' Week)
- Celebrate success together

6. PLANNING TO MEET NETWORK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Professional development is more than just courses and special 'learning events'. It is also about sharing ideas, reflecting together on what works, what does not work and what can be improved. ACE networks have the potential to assist their members' professional development through:

a) Developing skills around:

- group work and group facilitation
- management
- working in inclusive ways
- organising meetings
- presenting information
- financial management
- planning
- campaigning
- marketing and recruitment

b) Providing information and advice about:

- funding
- quality assurance
- TEC policy and expectations
- support and supervision
- course development
- resources for teaching and learning
- building links

c) Increasing knowledge about:

- learning and teaching
- organisation and management
- working in a Treaty-based way
- policy and strategy
- adult and community education theory and research
- international developments and links

Network professional development can come in many shapes and sizes and it is a good idea to make sure that professional development plans provide for a variety of activities and formats.

Not all professional development activity requires funding; but it always requires planning. This will enable the network members to know in advance which professional development activities can be simply built into regular network meetings and activities, and which require special training events, additional time, targeted publicity or paid facilitators.

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| PLANNING NETWORK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: SOME SUGGESTIONS |
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- Develop an annual network professional development plan which covers the skills, information, advice and knowledge needs of network members
- Set specific dates for professional development activities as early as possible and make sure they are not too close to each other
- Publicise the annual plan to all existing and potential network members
- Ensure that new and potential network members are given information about the network and professional development opportunities
- Take minutes of network meetings to ensure that decisions and suggestions about professional development needs and activities are recorded for future reference
- Delegate responsibility for consulting on and making funding applications for professional development activities to one or two network members
- Use the network processes to develop members' skills (for example in chairing meetings, taking minutes, writing funding applications, leading workshops)
- Where feasible, try to link up with other nearby networks to share professional development activities and resources
- Request larger ACE providers in the network to invite smaller local organisations to share relevant training
- Seek the face-to-face involvement of TEC staff who are responsible for advising on ACE
- Spend the TEC funds made available to the network for professional development

7. ORGANISING NETWORK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

Some of the key features of professional development workshops are that they:

- Are topic specific
- Have clearly stated outcomes
- Involve planned facilitation or leadership (either from within the group or externally bought in)
- Have a practical focus
- Encourage discussion, reflection and critical thinking
- Cover issues of common concern

The nature and type of workshops and their providers can vary considerably. Workshop activity mentioned as having been organised successfully by ACE networks include:

- Treaty workshops to provide practitioners with the opportunity to consider and discuss the place of the Treaty of Waitangi in their work as ACE practitioners and more widely
- Community needs analysis workshops – to assist in the process of producing a needs analysis document as called for by the TEC
- Professional development needs analysis workshops
- Workshops on issues of common interest, for example managing the media, public profile development
- Workshops aimed at sharing ideas on reaching out to new or under-represented groups of learners
- Professional practice workshops which promote discussion, critical reflection and the generation of new ideas and ways of working – for example ‘working with difficult people’
- Open-ended ‘facilitation workshops where participants could set their own agendas, but were externally facilitated to work through issues they raised

Although one of the frustrations expressed by networks was that funding for professional development from TEC was not always predictable, it seemed that those networks which felt they were successful in professional development had developed their workshop plans well in advance, and had recorded their needs. Thus, when

funding became available, it was easier for them to make applications for funding which met the needs of network members.

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| <p style="text-align: center;">ORGANISING NETWORK WORKSHOPS: SOME SUGGESTIONS</p> |
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- Consult regularly with network membership on a programme of suitable workshop topics
- Try to develop a varied programme of workshop activity – which will be useful for a wide range of practitioners and provider groups
- Publicise the programme in advance to all potential network members
- Gather ideas for possible workshops and names of possible workshop facilitators from websites, and from conference attendance
- Use the resources and expertise within the network to plan member-led workshops
- Where feasible, collaborate with other local networks in providing ACE professional development activities

8. SOME RESOURCES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

a) Guides and handbooks

CLASS (Community Learning Association through Schools) ACE Co-ordinators' Handbook: A guide for ACE Co-ordinators

b) Books, reports, papers and articles

Benseman, J. (2001) 'Measuring the Wider Benefits of Adult Education and Community Learning' in *Koia! Koia! Towards a Learning Society: The Report of the Adult Education and Community Learning Working Party* Wellington: TEC

Cranton, P. (1996) 'Professional Development as Transformative Learning' San Francisco: Jossey Bass

Jeffer, T. and Smith, M. (1999) *Informal Education* Ticknall: Education Now

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: legitimate peripheral participation* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Richardson, L. and Wolf, M. (2001) *Principles and Practice of Informal Education* Abingdon: Routledge Falmer

TEC (2001) *Koia! Koia! Towards a Learning Society: The Report of the Adult Education and Community Learning Working Party* Wellington: TEC

TEC (2005) *ACE Professional Development: Strategy and Action Plan* Wellington: TEC

TEC (2007) *Interim Report on the ACE Network Professional Development Funding March 2007* Wellington: TEC

Wenger, E. (2001) *Communities of practice: learning as a social system* first published in 'Systems Thinking' (1998) accessed on <http://www.co-i-l.com> (5th February 2007)

c) Organisations and websites

ACE Aotearoa (ACEA)
<http://www.acesector.org.nz>

Adult Learning Australia
<http://www.ala.asn.au>

Auckland Regional ACE Networks
<http://www.acenetworks.org.nz>

Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)
<http://www.tec.govt.nz>

Network Waitangi Otautahi:
admin.nwo@xtra.co.nz

National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (England and Wales)
<http://www.niace.org.uk>

Open Space Facilitation
<http://www.openspaceworld.org>

Treaty Resource Centre
coordinator@trc.org.nz

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- Marlborough
- Mid Canterbury
- West Coast

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