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Adult Literacy as Technique and Technology of Governmentality

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Education
in
Adult Education

at Massey University, Manawatu Campus, New Zealand

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2011

Abstract

This thesis examines the policy for adult literacy in New Zealand, in particular developments since the International Adult Literacy Survey of 1996. It was the findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) that led to the problematising of adult literacy in terms of the needs of New Zealand society and economy and the greater engagement of government, businesses and tertiary education providers.

Foucault's (1991a) notion of governmentality provides a lens through which to view adult literacy policy and to analyse a number of policy documents, in particular *More than Words*, the adult literacy strategy, *Te Kāwai Ora*, and the subsequent *Tertiary Education Strategies 2002-2007*, *2007-2012*, and *2010-2015*.

The thesis argues that, in the policy formulation, adult literacy is concerned with the techniques and technologies through which the literacy needs of the population are constructed and controlled. The concerns of policy are how to bring people to a state of literacy so that they can be usefully involved in society, as employable workers. The mainstream discourse of adult literacy defines it as a set of skills without reference to context or culture, that can be applied in a range of contexts. The policy approaches tend to marginalise or silence other discourses, for example literacies for Māori, literacies as social practices, critical literacies and literacies used in a range of settings.

The thesis traces adult literacy in New Zealand from pre-European contact and the subsequent developments as part of the colonisation processes. The 1970s to the present saw the development of community responses to adult literacy.

The thesis discusses the subsequent tertiary education reforms and the subsuming of adult literacy into the tertiary education sector with increased emphasis on audit and monitoring practices developed by the Tertiary Education Commission and NZQA with implications for the identities and self-government of learners and providers.

Finally, the thesis concludes with a discussion of ways for considering the development of a wider policy focus for adult literacy that addresses such issues as culture, context and the needs as identified by learners. This is followed by some recommendations and questions for future research.

Acknowledgements

Any production of ideas involves the involvement of many people either directly or indirectly. So with this thesis there have been many influences that have brought the writer to this place at this time.

Firstly I wish to acknowledge the support, patience, forbearance and time that Moreen and other members of my family have given so that I could complete this work.

I also want to acknowledge the work and contribution of the many workers and learners who have willingly shared their experiences with me during my time of employment with Literacy Aotearoa. Thanks go to my colleagues at the National Office of Literacy Aotearoa, in particular Te Tumuaki, Bronwyn Yates, who over time have provided challenges and insights that have been significant to the development of the ideas for this thesis.

I also wish to thank my supervisors Nick Zepke and Margaret Walshaw for their critique, encouragement and assistance with the development of the thesis.

Finally, thanks to Philippa Butler for her assistance with the final proof reading of the thesis.

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