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**Remaining student centred:**

**A critical discourse study of an adult literacy  
organisation's publicity in Aotearoa New  
Zealand from 1973 to 2009**

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degree of

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# Abstract

This thesis undertakes a historical critical discourse study of an adult literacy provider's publicity in Aotearoa New Zealand. It investigates how the organisation attempted to publicise a critical literacy mission and communicate with hard-to-reach learners within the structuring effects of wider marketised publicity discourses and a hegemonic functional account of literacy.

Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory and Habermas' critical theory of publicity, the research found that the case study organisation, Literacy Aotearoa, was increasingly impacted by the need to produce marketised publicity which centres on garnering positive attention from state funding agencies and business. Despite the paradox that in order to raise funds it had to publicise and in order to publicise it had to raise funds, Literacy Aotearoa managed to produce glossy, branded publicity in order to survive a tight fiscal environment. At the same time, it also articulated a student-centred critical literacy discourse in its publicity which was able to critique impediments to adult literacy provision. In addition, Literacy Aotearoa carefully engaged with low-key publicity methods that were better suited to learners' needs. This reconciliation of diverse literacy and publicity needs was achieved, in large part, due to the commitment, skills and resources of practitioners and learners in the organisation.

However, because of the organisation's need to identify with common-sense understandings of literacy learners as "lacking", stubborn deficit discourses remained in the organisation's publicity, which were at odds with a more empowering learner identity, although these discourses became less obvious in later years. In addition, the strain on the

organisation's resources in adhering to accountability requirements in a competitive funding environment impacted the organisation's full potential to connect with all learner audiences.

Building on previous recommendations for the sector, this thesis argues that in order to increase the sector's ability to reach a diverse range of adult literacy learners, agencies should support learners to publicise in their own social networks. It is also argued that this labour-intensive publicity work, which better meets the particular information and communication needs of adult literacy learners, should be recognised and supported in state policy and funding.

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# List of acronyms

3Rs	Reading, ‘riting and ‘rithmetic
ACE	Adult and Community Education (sector)
ABE	Adult Basic Education
ALLN	Adult Language, Literacy and Numeracy
ALLS	Adult Literacy and Language Survey
ARA	Adult Reading Assistance
ARAO	Adult Reading Assistance Officer
ARAC	Adult Reading Assistance Committee
ARAN	Adult Reading Assistance Newsletter
ARLA	Adult Reading and Learning Assistance (Federation)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
EFTS	Equivalent Full-time Students
ETSA	Education and Training Support Agency
FRST	Foundation for Research Science and Technology (New Zealand)
GM	Genetically-modified (food)
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ITO(s)	Industry Training Organisation(s)
LLN	Literacy, Language and Numeracy
LTSA	Land Transport Safety Authority
NCAE	National Council for Adult Education (New Zealand)
NPM	New Public Management
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NZCTU	New Zealand Council of Trade Unions

NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OTEP	Other Tertiary Education Provider
PTE	Private Training Establishment
QAS	Quality Assurance Standards
REAPs	Rural Education Activities Programmes
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission
TEAC	Tertiary Education Advisory Commission
TEOs	Tertiary Education Organisations
TES	Tertiary Education Strategy
TOs	Training Opportunities
TOPs	Training Opportunities Programme(s)
TUEA	Trade Union Education Authority
TV1	Television channel one
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States (of America)
WEA	Workers' Educational Authority
YT	Youth Training

