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**Competing Discourses: A genealogy of adolescent literacy discourses in
New Zealand secondary education, 1870-2008**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Education,
At Massey University,
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New Zealand.

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Candidate's statement

I certify that this report is the result of my own work except where otherwise acknowledged and has not been submitted, in part or in full, for any other papers or degrees for which credit qualifications have been granted.

Kenneth Gordon Kilpin

Abstract

The thesis is a Foucauldian genealogy of adolescent, or secondary school, literacy discourses within Aotearoa New Zealand. It links cycles of competitive tension between local discourses of adolescent literacy to larger conflicts between national and international socio-economic discourses. Using Foucault's view of discourse as epistemic formations that reflect the material contingencies of their time and place, I analyse why certain historical conditions generated particular taken-for-granted truths, knowledge and beliefs about literacy education and schooling for adolescent New Zealanders between the years 1870 and 2008. I apply Foucault's analytic tools of discipline and control, biopower and governmentality to explore the complex relationship within New Zealand between adolescent literacy and early discourses of colonial economic development and social control (1870-1935), mid-twentieth century Keynesian national economic reconstruction and socially progressive education reform (1930s-1970s), and recent neo-liberal market and globalisation reforms of education (1980s-2008). In particular I examine the effect of international neo-liberal economic rationalist discourses advocated by the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD) since the late 1960s, on contemporary conceptualisations of adolescent literacy and secondary schooling. I explain how the OECD's international Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests reflect the OECD's deeper discursive advocacy of managerial rationalist principles to frame an international policy consensus for national education policy making and reforms. Since 2000, PISA has emerged as a powerful global instrument of neo-liberal education policy standardisation that aims to comparatively measure the effectiveness of national secondary schooling systems and their teachers to generate literate adolescents as privatised human capital necessary to service the demands of the neo-liberal global economy. I conclude that New Zealand adolescent literacy education discourses have been continuously shaped by *a priori* positivist principles of post-Enlightenment scientific rationalism. These have variously emerged within subsequent discourses of classical, social and neo-liberal forms of economic rationalisation, policies of curriculum or syllabus reform, and historical conceptions of teacher identity. Notwithstanding their particular socio-cultural aspirations or intentions, all reflect the hegemonic dominance of the laws of market capitalism, and the need for schooling systems to satisfy its demands for trained, literate and credentialed human capital.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 A genealogy of competing discourses of adolescent literacy: Introduction and research design	1
Understanding the personal and professional.....	1
Colonial discourses of literacy, the maintenance of class, and social mobility	3
The rise of Keynesian redistributive discourses	4
Competing paradigms in the post-war years	5
Conflicting discourses, 1970-1990.....	6
Rhetorical discourses of anxiety, crisis, and solution.....	7
Epistemological implications	10
International context.....	10
Thesis structure.....	11
Conclusion.....	12
Chapter 2 A Foucauldian approach to the analysis of New Zealand adolescent literacy discourses, 1870-2008	13
Introduction	13
Values and position: A paradigm away.....	15
My methodological tools	16
Foucauldian approaches to discourse analysis	17
What is discourse?	18
Hegemony.....	20
Genealogy.....	21
Genealogy, and the epistemic principle.....	23
Foucault's power-knowledge relationship	23
Governmentality	24
Biopower and discipline	25
Interviews	27
Conclusion.....	29

Chapter 3 A discursive survey of adolescent literacy policy, practice and pedagogy, 1870-present.....	31
Introduction	31
Section 1: A genealogy of socio-economic discourses and adolescent literacy.....	32
Pre-industrial Anglo-European literacy	32
Literacy education in colonial New Zealand	33
<i>Primary schooling, and the 1877 Education Act</i>	33
<i>Post-primary schooling, and the 1903 Secondary Schools Act</i>	35
<i>Literacy and schooling, 1905-1935</i>	36
<i>Literacy, schooling, and social progressive reforms, 1935-1950</i>	39
Section 2: A genealogical history of adolescent literacy pedagogies.....	41
Nineteenth century rote learning, and accurate copying.....	41
Using skills and strategies to construct meaning	42
Secondary school literacy, and the maintenance of tradition	44
Adolescent literacy as social constructivism	46
Socio-cultural theory, and adolescent literacy	47
Adolescent literacy, and academic success at high school	47
Why is literacy as subject content discourse important in New Zealand?.....	49
Conclusion.....	49
Chapter 4 The impact of international and domestic economic discourses on adolescent literacy policy	52
Introduction	52
The neo-liberal reform of New Zealand society.....	53
The OECD, education, and the generation of human capital	54
Literacy crisis and neo-liberal policy-making	56
Literacy policy, numbers, and global measurement.....	58
The OECD conceptualisation of literacy as global competencies.....	60
International literacy measurement tools: The New Zealand context	62
PISA, global competencies, and human capital	63
The OECD and the New Zealand Curriculum	65
Conclusion.....	67

Chapter 5 Competing discourses of language and literacy: Child-centred social progressivism or neo-liberal economic instrumentalism.....	69
Introduction	69
Section 1: Language, literacy, and syllabus reform	70
Historical background.....	70
A national collaborative response to teacher discontent.....	71
Literacy as multi-modal learning through language	73
Professional development, and an alternative national discourse.....	75
Advocacy and protection	76
Consultation and professional development	78
Devolving responsibility, and developing professional identity	79
Critical responses to discursive change	79
Section 2: The NESC’s discursive legacy	81
Language Across the Curriculum	81
The decline of LAC discursive strength	82
Resilient literacy discourses within neo-liberal curriculum reform.....	84
Conclusion.....	87
Chapter 6 Neo-liberalism as a colonising discourse of adolescent literacy policy and practice.....	89
Introduction	89
Background ideological discourses	90
The role of the OECD.....	91
CERI, education mandates, and international literacy policy	91
Discourses of literacy, language, and assessment, 1999-2008.....	94
Multiple and competing discursive shifts.....	96
Reconceptualising LAC as disciplinary literacy.....	96
Credential reform, and disciplinary adolescent literacy	98
Adolescent literacy learning as academic achievement.....	100
NCEA as OECD accountability and performance frameworks.....	101
School improvement, raising teacher quality, and national assessment.....	101
Professional development: Global agendas, national policy, and regional practice.....	103
Conclusion.....	107

Chapter 7 A genealogical overview and evaluation	109
Introduction	109
The genealogical narrative	110
Adolescent literacy paradigms in New Zealand, 1870-1935.....	111
Watershed changes and discursive turns in New Zealand, 1935-1970	113
The Keynesian reconstruction of adolescent literacy, 1970-1990.....	115
International and domestic neo-liberal influences.....	119
Neo-liberalism and New Zealand adolescent literacy discourses, 1990-2008	122
Conclusion.....	127
References	131
Appendix 1: Massey University Human Ethics Committee notification	144
Appendix 2: Oral interviews project information sheet.....	145
Appendix 3: Written interview project information sheet.....	148
Appendix 4: Oral interviewees consent form	151
Appendix 5: Written interviewee consent form	152