

***Adult Basic Education in NSW 1970–2018:  
Official stories and stories from practice***

**Pamela Osmond**

**Master of Education (Research) Thesis**

**University of Technology Sydney**

**Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences**

**2018**

## CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Pamela Osmond declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Education, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Signature:

Production Note:

Signature removed prior to publication.

Date: 1/8/18

## Acknowledgements

For a number of years in the 1980s and early 1990s, the field of adult basic education that had been created in Australia had earned a reputation as a global leader. This study was undertaken partly to document and honour that era of provision in NSW in particular, and to suggest some ways in which present practitioners might attempt to regain something of that earlier reputation.

No thesis is the product of one person alone and this one in particular is a distillation of the ideas of many people over many years. I acknowledge therefore the influence of my colleagues in the vibrant adult basic education community of practice that we shared. The sharing of professional practice knowledge that was integral to that community of practice has helped to shape my views, so that the ideas herein represent, in a very real sense, a co-production. I acknowledge particularly the many professional conversations with friends and colleagues during the writing of this thesis that have informed and helped further distil my thinking as the writing progressed.

In particular, I thank the interview participants, not only for the time that they freely gave in otherwise busy lives, but for the insightful reflections on their 'stories from practice'; reflections that have given life to the narrative of the thesis. I regret that I could not have used more of these verbatim comments to do justice to their thoughtful contributions. They are indeed co-constructors of the narrative.

I am indebted to the staff of UTS for helping to shape the development of the thesis: to Dr Ross Forman for his meticulous reading of and invaluable feedback on early drafts, to Drs Nick Hopwood and Ros Appleby for guidance in the design of the study, and to Drs Marie Quinn and Ros Appleby for feedback on the later draft. My thanks also to Dr Stephen Black for his invaluable feedback.

My particular thanks are due to Dr Keiko Yasukawa, my principal supervisor for her encouragement and continued interest in the project, for her generosity with her time and for sharing with me her vast knowledge of the field. I am grateful for her guidance and for her insightful feedback on my many drafts of the thesis. I was indeed fortunate in having her support and I will miss our discussions.

Thanks are due to my family also, for their sustained support, enthusiasm and encouragement in this supposedly un-grandmotherly venture; support that included many helpful scholarly conversations over cups of tea.

## ***Table of Contents***

<b>Certificate of Original Authorship .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Acronyms and Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>xi</b>
 <b>SECTION 1 – BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY .....</b>	 <b>1</b>
<b><i>Chapter 1 - Introducing the Study .....</i></b>	<b><i>2</i></b>
<b>Background .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Rationale .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Framing the research question .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Terminology .....</b>	<b>7</b>
What is literacy? .....	7
A historically situated term .....	9
<b>The ‘field’ .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Who are the students? .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Is there still a need? .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Boundaries of the study .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>My professional identity .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Overall structure of the thesis .....</b>	<b>17</b>
 <b><i>Chapter 2 - The Theoretical Framework – A Literature Review .....</i></b>	 <b><i>20</i></b>
<b>Actor Network Theory .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Discourse theory .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>The policy discourse .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Discourses surrounding ‘literacy’ .....</b>	<b>25</b>
What is literacy? .....	25
The cognitive or autonomous view .....	26
The ideological view .....	26
Functional literacy .....	27
The social practice view .....	29
<b>The value of literacy .....</b>	<b>32</b>

The Three Capitals .....	32
<b>Professional Practice Knowledge .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Chapter 3 - Methodology .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Rationale for choice of methodology .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>The emic researcher and the interviewer effect .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Data Collection .....</b>	<b>46</b>
a) Documentary and artefact analysis.....	46
b) Semi structured interviews with selected practitioners. ....	47
Selection of interviewees .....	47
The interviews .....	49
<b>Data analysis.....</b>	<b>50</b>
Transcription.....	51
Coding procedures.....	51
Constructivist approach – emerging codes .....	53
<b>Quality Criteria .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>57</b>
 <b>SECTION 2 - OFFICIAL STORIES AND STORIES FROM PRACTICE.....</b>	 <b>58</b>
<b>Chapter 4 - The Early Years: Before 1975.....</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Socio-political background.....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>The international scene.....</b>	<b>60</b>
UNESCO.....	60
<i>Social justice</i> .....	62
<i>Human capital</i> .....	63
Emergence of adult literacy provision in UK .....	64
<b>The Australian socio- economic context.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Australian developments – ‘a jigsaw from which many of the pieces are missing’ .....</b>	<b>66</b>
Australian Army WII program .....	67
‘No illiteracy in Australia’ .....	68
Election of the Whitlam Government.....	68
The emergence of the Vocational Education and Training sector .....	69
<i>The Kangan Report</i> .....	69
<i>The Richardson Report</i> .....	71
<i>Further calls to action</i> .....	72

<i>The beginnings of a public profile .....</i>	72
<i>Paulo Freire .....</i>	74
<b>Early development of the field in NSW .....</b>	74
Operation Literacy .....	74
<b>Discussion and Conclusion .....</b>	76
Student-centred learning.....	76
The human capital view .....	77
The social context view.....	77
The discourse of deficit and the autonomous view .....	78
Functional literacy.....	78
 <b>Chapter 5 - From the late 1970s to late 1980s .....</b>	79
<b>Introduction .....</b>	79
<b>The International Scene .....</b>	79
Adult literacy provision in the UK .....	80
<b>Australian National developments .....</b>	81
The emergence of advocacy groups.....	81
Commonwealth Government involvement.....	83
State responses.....	84
<b>Development of the field in NSW .....</b>	85
Collaboration between statutory bodies.....	85
Board of Adult Education.....	85
Adult Migrant English Service.....	86
TAFE NSW .....	86
<b>The TAFE NSW Adult Basic Education Program .....</b>	86
The Volunteer tutor program .....	89
Class-based tuition .....	91
The emergence of tensions .....	92
Numeracy.....	95
An accredited curriculum .....	96
<b>Adult Literacy Information Office .....</b>	98
<b>The Community of Practice.....</b>	100
Formal tertiary studies .....	102
Collaboration .....	103
Professional Development .....	104

Journals, newsletters and books .....	105
Searching for Saliences .....	106
<b>Agency .....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Underpinning principles.....</b>	<b>108</b>
Student-centred.....	109
Self-direction .....	110
Personal Growth .....	111
Participation.....	112
Emancipation .....	113
Social Capital.....	115
<b>Pedagogy .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Discussion and Conclusion .....</b>	<b>121</b>
 <b><i>Chapter 6 - From the late 1980s to 2000 .....</i></b>	 <b><i>123</i></b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>The socio-political background .....</b>	<b>124</b>
The international scene .....	124
The Human Capital Ideology and the OECD .....	125
<b>Australian National Developments .....</b>	<b>128</b>
Microeconomic reform and LLN .....	128
The changed nature of government.....	130
VET in Australia .....	131
<i>Influence of industry .....</i>	<i>132</i>
<i>The National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA).....</i>	<i>133</i>
<b>Adult Basic Education in Australia .....</b>	<b>135</b>
Australia's 'Literacy Decade' .....	137
<i>National Policy on Languages.....</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>International Literacy Year (ILY) .....</i>	<i>140</i>
<i>Australian Language and Literacy Policy .....</i>	<i>142</i>
Jobseekers.....	143
<i>Practitioner response to the advent of Jobseeker programs.....</i>	<i>144</i>
Workplace .....	144
<i>Practitioner response to the advent of workplace literacy and numeracy.....</i>	<i>145</i>
Assessment frameworks.....	147
<i>Practitioner response to assessment frameworks and reporting systems .....</i>	<i>152</i>

NSW Curricula in CBT .....	153
Numeracy.....	156
Integration .....	158
Literacy/numeracy and VET training .....	159
Pedagogy.....	160
<i>Systemic Functional Linguistics</i> .....	161
<i>Critical Literacy</i> .....	162
The Community of Practice .....	165
Adult Literacy Information Office (ALIO) .....	167
<b>Discussion and Conclusion</b> .....	168
 <b>Chapter 7 - The New Millennium</b> .....	170
<b>Introduction</b> .....	171
<b>International Developments and the OECD</b> .....	174
<b>Adult Basic Education in Australia</b> .....	177
The ANTA Era .....	177
Jobseeker programs.....	180
Outsourced foundation skills products .....	183
<i>National Foundation Skills Strategy</i> .....	185
<i>The Foundation Skills Professional Standards Framework (FSPSF)</i> .....	187
<b>NSW's response to national developments</b> .....	187
Smart and Skilled .....	188
Alternative provision .....	190
Community of Practice .....	192
The professional discourse .....	197
<i>Human capital / social justice</i> .....	197
<i>Social capital</i> .....	201
<b>Discussion and conclusion</b> .....	203
 <b>SECTION 3 - CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS</b> .....	204
 <b>Chapter 8 - Conclusions</b> .....	205
<b>Introduction</b> .....	206
<b>Revisiting the research questions</b> .....	207
The influence of changing socio-political contexts on public policies.....	207



<i>Influence of non-human entities</i> .....	207
<i>Transnational influences</i> .....	208
<i>Influences on key policy ‘moments’</i> .....	208
<i>The new assemblage of actors</i> .....	209
<i>A new category of actors</i> .....	210
The relationship between the professional, and the public and policy discourses .....	211
<i>The emergence of tensions</i> .....	211
To what extent have teachers’ reports of their pedagogy reflected the rhetoric of the professional discourse and the dictates of public and institutional policies? .....	216
<i>The rhetoric of the professional discourse</i> .....	216
<i>Public and institutional policies</i> .....	217
<b>Implications of the study</b> .....	218
The role for practitioners .....	218
The importance of communities of practice .....	219
<i>‘What am I fighting for?’</i> .....	220
<i>Re-invigoration of a research base</i> .....	220
<i>Re-imagine what the field might look like</i> .....	221
<i>Develop associations with other social justice and progressive movements</i> .....	221
<b>Contribution to scholarship</b> .....	222
<b>Limitations of the study and a suggestion for further scholarship</b> .....	223
<b>Concluding remarks</b> .....	224
<b>Appendices</b> .....	224
<b>References</b> .....	227

## ***Abstract***

This thesis traces the development of adult literacy provision in NSW over its 40 year history, with particular focus on the discursive tensions between policy and practice. A major and overriding theme has been the move away from a philosophy of humanist education and a socio-cultural view of literacy, towards an economically driven, human capital view of literacy.

The study analyses the changing socio-economic background to the development of the field of adult literacy (later called adult basic education) and the ways in which resulting public and policy discourses have impacted the field. In the foundation years, the public discourse of liberal humanism was reflected in the professional discourse. From the early 1990s however, a tension began to emerge as the public and policy discourse moved increasingly towards an instrumentalist, human capital view.

The study illuminates the increasing discursive tensions between policy and practice and between the public and professional discourses that have sought to shape the field. Discourse theory, with its focus on power relations, as developed for example by Foucault (1972), and elaborated by Gee (2015) and Fairclough (2015), informs the analysis of the ways in which these discursive struggles have defined and redefined the field over the period discussed.

Building on this understanding of discourse, the main conceptual resource employed is that of Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Callon 1986; Latour 2005). It is chosen as a useful lens through which to view the multiplicity of 'actors' both human and non-human, that have interacted in a non-linear and fluid fashion to influence the direction of the field. The study uses a number of the concepts described by ANT theorists to illuminate the ways in which some assemblages of actors came to exert power and advance a dominant discourse of literacy, whilst the influence of others declined.

A number of past and present practitioners were interviewed in order to capture the teachers' voices or 'stories from practice', thus informing and giving life to our understanding of the development of the field. Analysis of documentary and archival evidence provides a further perspective on the 'official stories'.

The primary rationale for the study was a wish to commit the narrative to the public memory in order assist present and future practitioners to contextualise their practice. The study concludes with a consideration of some possible implications that it offers to practitioners and activists in their challenge to the present discourse surrounding the field.

## ***Acronyms and Abbreviations***

AAAE	Australian Association for Adult Education
ABE	Adult Basic Education
ACAL	Australian Council for Adult Literacy
ACE	Adult Community Education
ACOTAFE	Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
ACSF	Australian Core Skills Framework
ALAC	Adult Literacy Action Campaign
ALAN	Adult Literacy and Numeracy Competency Scales
ALIO	Adult Literacy Information Office
ALLP	Australian Language & Literacy Policy
ALLS	International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey
ALT	Adult Literacy Teaching
AMES	Adult Migrant Education Service
ANT	Adult Numeracy Teaching
ANT	Actor Network Theory
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
BAE	Board of Adult Education
CABE	Certificate in Adult Basic Education
CAFE	Certificate in Adult Foundation Education
CBT	Competency Based Training
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
CSO	Community Service Obligation
CSWE	Certificate in Spoken and Written English
DEET	Department of Employment, Education & Training
DEETYA	Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DET	Department of Education and Training
EAL/D	English as an Additional Language or Dialect
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FSAT	Foundation Skills Assessment Tool
FSK	Foundation Skills Training Package

FSPSF	Foundation Skills Professional Standards Framework
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
IBSA	Innovation and Business Skills Australia
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ILY	International Literacy Year
ISC	Industry Skills Council
ITAB	Industry Training Advisory Board
LANT	Literacy and Numeracy Training Program
LLN	Language, Literacy & Numeracy
LN	Literacy & Numeracy
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NFSS	National Foundation Skills Strategy
NLS	New Literacy Studies
NPL	National Policy on Languages
NRS	National Reporting System
NSWALC	NSW Adult Literacy Council
NSWALNC	NSW Adult Literacy & Numeracy Council
NTRA	National Training Reform Agenda
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
RAWFA	Reading and Writing for Adults
RTO	Registered Training Authority
SCOTese	Standing Council on Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment
SEE	Skills for Education & Employment Program
SIP	Special Intervention Program
TAE	Training and Education Training Package
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UTS	University of Technology Sydney
VALBEC	Victorian Adult Literacy & Basic Education Council
VET	Vocational Education & Training
WELL	Workplace English Language and Literacy