



From 1977 to 2017 - How did we get here?

Pamela Osmond
NSW Adult Literacy & Numeracy Council Conference –2017

Sue's Story – developing her 'fuller sense of self'

When you find some success in learning, you can be more open and involved in the community. Suddenly I took note of what was going on. I had never voted before, up until five years ago, which is precisely the time that I started coming to school. Learning gave me the confidence to want to vote and be interested in doing it.

Previously, I used to avoid coming up the street to do my shopping. I'd always had this feeling that people might be looking through me and into me. I know with me, I am a different person now.

Bowen, T 2011, A fuller Sense of Self

The 'Adult Literacy Discourse'

Lee & Wickert, 2000

- student-centred and student-directed learning
- curriculum based on student needs
- concern with student as a whole person
- use student experience as a resource for teaching
- negotiate learning with student
- no external assessment
- learning which develops student independence
- reflection
- student is active participant

The Concept of Success

Where success was most clearly felt, students were receiving a **general basic education** and were not simply in classes for the three Rs.

Charnley & Jones 1979 p 184

The mark of the successful student was a **gain in confidence**, without which progress in the skills would not take place'

Jones & Charnley 1978, p. 110

Phases of development of the field

- **to mid '70s** - Ad hoc literacy provision
- **1974** - Kangan Report
- **Mid 1970s – mid 1980s** – *At the margins: emerging from the ground up*

Wickert et al 2007

Community of Practice

'And we were learning all the time. We were learning new stuff. Working in this common thing, and learning stuff together, feeling part of something that was a good thing to be doing.'

'I still have a wonderful sense of the energy and camaraderie that was around in, I guess, the 80s and very early 90s as adult literacy just burgeoned as a movement and you had a sense that you were building this fantastic, useful, powerful, (sorry, I'm getting a bit carried away)... It was fantastic.'

(interviewees)

Community of Practice – (now?)

'I can't honestly say I do now, not really, because of everything that has happened. We are much more in our silos than ever, and of course we shouldn't be'.

(interviewee)

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 - *Australia's literacy decade*
 - *Out of the billabong, into the mainstream*

From Late 1980s

- Industry restructuring
- Training reform agenda

Adult literacy seen as central to the training reform agenda whose purpose was seen as being to: “efficiently and effectively service economic growth”.

(John Dawkins, Minister for Education, 1987)

“Your time has come. The door of history has opened for you. Award restructuring can’t happen without you”.

(Laurie Carmichael, Secretary of the ACTU)

The 1990s

[The early 1990s] was an exciting time because it was expanding and growing all the time and then of course towards the mid 90s the government changed. It was quite depressing for a lot of people. Losing work as well, but the fact that these people who were wanting learning situations were just cut off. So that was the biggest change and I think it has continued of course.

(interviewee)

“[Provision], although greater, is:

- fragmented and insecure,
- the workforce has become increasingly casualised,
- professional networks have been damaged by competitive tendering processes,
- infrastructure support has dematerialised,
- working conditions have worsened,
- curriculum has been “colonised” by competency-based approaches
- and in the eyes of many, adult literacy has come to be “sublimated to a centralised, controlling, assessing, monitoring, information-demanding mechanism”.

The issue of compliance

That's another of the changes that's so worrying – that head teachers are now entirely absorbed in the bureaucracy and administration and have no educational work to do and they are so bogged down in all this silly compliance stuff. It is madness. It is mad. I just think the whole thing is Alice in Wonderland. Straight down the rabbit hole. It is mad. I really think it is frightening.

(interviewee)

The issue of compliance

All flexibility has gone. It feels like creativity in terms of being able to do what your students need [has gone]. We still try as teachers, we try terribly hard to do that and to bend the words in the units of competence to reflect what we know our students need, because they tell us. It would be nice to be able to just do it without having to turn yourself inside out and bend over backwards and twist everything to give the students what they say they want.

Because of course you still have to match those stupid outcomes and indicators and... The beauty of it is though, despite the curriculum and the training package and all that, people just keep doing what they were doing anyway. The cake's still the same, the icing just gets changed.

(interviewee)

From Late 1980s

- Commonwealth funded LLN programs for unemployed
- Workplace literacy programs
- Competency-based curriculum
- Involvement of and accountability to 3rd parties
- Emphasis on assessment and evaluation
- TAFE's charter – vocational courses only
- Move away from liberal education to the discourse of human capital

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- **Mid 1990s – 2007 (... and to the present)** - *Intensification, Integration, and Fragmentation—Living With Tensions and Contradictions*

Wickert et al 2007

General Themes

Humanist liberal education → economic driven, human capital

Education of whole person → skills training

Individual needs / negotiated curriculum → externally developed competency-based curricula

Volunteerism → professionalism → casualization

Democracy/ professional agency → government control & compliance

And today ... ?

And so the concomitant low is right now, watching all that building work that was done in terms of colleges, resources, work force, academic programs, everything; watching it being explicitly and totally dismantled as we speak. I really think that many of us are grieving. All the other highs and lows pale into insignificance.

I guess it probably sounds dramatic to say, but I actually want to make teaching an act of love rather than just a job.

And today ... ?

The de facto philosophy of education we do have is a strictly economic one. This is dangerous for without a civic and moral core it could easily lead to a snazzy twenty-first-century version of an old and shameful pattern in ... education: working class people get a functional education geared only toward the world of work. For all the hope and opportunity they represent, our initiatives lack the imagination and heartbeat that transform institutions and foster the wondrous, unrealized abilities of the full range of our citizenry.

Rose, M. 2012, *Back to School*

Some messages from our history...

- The need to reclaim that initial ‘body of firmly held beliefs’
 - student-centredness
 - education of the whole person
- The need to reclaim ‘education’
- The need to work in the ‘small spaces’.
- The need to re-create some communities of practice
- And what about Sue?
 - the need for DIVERSITY of provision types and funding sources

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