

Discourses of Pedagogy and Performativity: Teachers Engaging with Competency-Based Assessment -

Jill Sanguinetti
Victoria University
Melbourne, Australia
Jill.Sanguinetti@vu.edu.au

1. Introduction: action researching teachers' responses to change

This is an account of two action research projects undertaken in Melbourne from 1994 – 1998, and the findings of a subsequent discourse analysis of the texts generated in these projects in order to gain a richer understanding of how teachers negotiate the tensions between their own educational and value commitments and the requirements of new policy.

Both projects investigated the impacts of policy change on teachers' pedagogical practices and their responses to (what was then) a suite of unpopular policies associated with the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA).. A number of authors have written about the profound impact of those policies on teachers' professional work, and their identities, as Adult and Community Education (ACE) teachers (eg., Seddon.etc). The findings of the discourse analysis show how teachers both facilitate and resist down-coming curriculum innovations; reflect the dynamics of pedagogical change in that context; and illuminate the politics underpinning the teachers' responses.

Fullen (1982) reported that teachers tended to cling to traditional ways of working and passively resisted policy-led changes. In his work, however, the nature of down-coming policy changes is not problematised, and so the political dimension of teachers' resistance is not explored. In this project, the poststructuralist notion of discourse (eg, Foucault, Fairclough) and in particular Yeatman's focus on 'the politics of discourse' provided a more complex language for examining of the politics reflected within the new policies and the teachers' responses.

When I embarked on this project I had been a teacher of adult ESL and adult literacy for over ten years. I thus identified (and was regarded) as one of the group of teacher participants, sharing similar classroom experiences, educational values and a sense of outrage at the policy innovations ushered in by the National Training Reform Agenda in 1992. We felt that the implementation of many of those policies contradicted our own educational beliefs and the pedagogical traditions of the adult literacy field itself.

Competency-based assessment appeared to undermine our professional control and pedagogical responsibility to teach what and how we thought best for the students. Notions of learner-centred practice and organic curriculum development seemed to be turned upside down suddenly we were fixated on student assessment, rather than on pedagogy itself. Competitive tendering for funds destabilised pathways, the culture of collaboration between small providers and long-term planning. New levels of accountability and managerialism seemed to further discount and undermine teachers' professional control of their work.

The project was framed as participatory action research; co-researchers working together to document the teachers' (our) experience of the policy reforms and their (our) responses to them. The findings were formulated from the teachers' perspective (Harding 1993: 49) developing knowledge conceived within their worldview and around their agency as practitioners. In facilitating this project, I was thus multiply- positioned – as a teacher-participant who was a single voice in the group; as project manager and meeting facilitator; as academic resource person; and as subject of my own research. As academic resource person I was able to bring to the group a body of theory and earlier research that extended their/our interpretations and the framing of their/our experiences. Moving between these positions in the course of the research gave me considerable 'knowledge/power' (Foucault...) and I was conscious of the need to be reflexive and heedful of the tensions and potential pitfalls in such multiple positioning. I was guided in my management of these tensions by the high levels of energy and enthusiasm around the project which was both *ours* (in that it was a process of articulating and documenting our individual and collective viewpoints) as well as *mine* (in that I led and facilitated the project, analysed the data and had a personal investment in that it was for a postgraduate research thesis) (Sanguinetti 2000).

2. The Australian Language and Literacy Policy and National Training Reform Agenda

The Australian Language and Literacy Policy (ALLP, DEET 1991) provided new funding for adult literacy courses, curriculum development and innovative national projects. Whilst the ALLP was couched in terms of equity and a "well-educated, cultured, humane and purposeful society" the available funds were re-oriented towards programs for skilling job seekers and support for industry training. The purposes of adult literacy teaching were being recast from the ideals of liberal humanism towards a strategy for investing in human capital, enhancing the productivity of industry and the employability of workers.

In 1992 the Keating Labor Government introduced a radical new strategy for building the 'clever country' and improving Australia's economic competitiveness. The National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) was a national system of training involving new regulatory authorities and funding programs. It was linked to a suite of new industrial relations policies directed to removing rigidities in the labour market which were seen as restricting productivity growth. These policies included a sweeping re-structuring of industrial awards and multi-skilling of the workforce.

Two key elements of the NTRA were the introduction of award re-structuring and the requirement that all training would be competency-based. A competitive training market was to be established and private providers were encouraged to compete for funds with TAFE colleges and community-based providers. Increasingly, the work place, (rather than the college) was to be a site of industry training, including literacy training.

The ALLP and NTRA established accountability requirements linked to standardised assessment procedures and the documenting and reporting of outcomes. Such requirements, combined with the re-framing of literacy in terms of competencies, levels and performance criteria had the effect of constructing adult literacy training as a commodity that was purchased by the government from the competing marketplace of providers. There was a significant expansion of the work force although the new jobs in adult literacy and ESL were almost all in part-time and sessional short-term (one semester) contracts. The increased levels of competition led to downward pressure on wages, reductions in paid non-teaching time despite the increasing requirements for assessment and documentation and discouraged the release of teachers for professional development.

A big cultural change was taking place in the field of adult literacy. Discourses of literacy education as an individual right within liberal democratic society were being replaced by discourses about literacy instrumentalised to meet the needs of industry and the economy. Technical discourses of competency, levels of assessment, efficiency and accountability became the new commonsense, taking the place of earlier discourses of pedagogy and curriculum.

3. The Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA)

The Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA) was designed to accredit non-school training pathways up to tertiary entrance standard. It was adapted from an earlier adult literacy curriculum framework by the Adult Community and Further Education Board (ACFEB) in Victoria in order to conform to the requirements of the National Training Reform Agenda.

It consisted of four levels of attainment and four domains of literacy: *literacy for practical purposes, literacy for knowledge, literacy for self-expression, and literacy for public debate*. The CGEA involved a far more complex framework of four levels of competence, four streams (Reading and Writing, Oral Communication, Numerical and Mathematical Concepts, and General Curriculum Options). ‘Reading’ and ‘Writing’ were separately assessable and each divided into four domains – *practical purposes, knowledge, self-expression and public debate* as was Stream 2, Oral Communication. Numerical and Mathematical Concepts divided into five fields of mathematical competency, and the General Curriculum Option divided into seven fields, derived from the Mayer (1992) key competencies (*collecting, analysing and organising ideas and information; communicating ideas and information; planning and organising activities; working with others in teams; using mathematical ideas and techniques; solving problems; and using technology*). See Figure 1 for an outline of the structure of the CGEA.

STREAMS				
Level 4	Reading and Writing 4	Oral Communication 4	Numerical & Mathematical Concepts 4	General Curriculum Options 4
Level 3	Reading and Writing 3	Oral Communication 3	Numerical and Mathematical Concepts 3	General Curriculum Options 3
Level 2	Reading and Writing 2	Oral Communication 2	Numerical and Mathematical Concepts 2	General Curriculum Options 2
Level 1	Reading and Writing 1	Oral Communication 1	Numerical and Mathematical Concepts 1	General Curriculum Options 1
<input type="checkbox"/> Certificate of General Education for Adults (Foundation)		<input type="checkbox"/> Certificate of General Education for Adults (Reading and Writing)		

Figure 1. General framework of the CGEA

Each cell across the grid of levels, streams and domains (known as an ‘element’) had to be assessed separately according to its own set of performance criteria, range and conditions. Assessment tasks had to be devised for each element of competence, containing opportunities to ‘show competence’ in each of the performance criteria (of which there were usually about 7). A selection of assessment tasks had to be moderated according to a prescribed process, as had the written work (the tasks) performed by the students for assessment. See Figure 2 for the performance criteria for assessment of Element 2:1, ‘Writing for Self-Expression’.

Element 2.1: Writing for Self Expression

Write a paragraph which describes personal routines and familiar situations

Performance Criteria:

1. Combine 2 - 4 personally familiar events, ideas or experiences
2. Refer to some external factors, including other times and places
3. Use pronouns correctly
4. Use descriptive details about contexts and thoughts considered unfamiliar to the reader
5. Write a coherent paragraph linked by language devices of time
6. Spell with spasmodic accuracy
7. Use standard grammar spasmodically

Rangel/Conditions:

1. Familiar subject matter related to personal life and meaning
2. Use of dictionary of own choice

Examples of texts:

stories, poetry, autobiographies, diaries, journals, plays, myths and legends, creative writing, greeting cards, interviews (magazines, TV, radio), TV soapies, films ("real life" documentaries, biographies)

Examples of assessment tasks:

- Write a short job history as part of a job application letter
- Write about one highlight of your weekend

Figure 2. Performance criteria for 'Writing for self-expression'

Immediately the CGEA was published, there was a cry of protest from teachers, who pointed out that a shift had taken place from the notion of 'literacies' for social action to a functional notion of discrete sets of skills. Articles by teachers in the magazine *Fine Print* said that the CGEA was "fatally flawed", "pedagogically fragmented", and "reductionist" (McCormack 1994: 13). The behavioural competencies positioned teachers as trainers and as assessors of students' performances according to pre-defined criteria, rather than as skilled and responsible teachers in a complex educational field.

4. Action researching the impacts of competency-based frameworks

In 1994 I was engaged by the Adult Literacy Research Network to lead an action research project documenting the impact of the CGEA on teaching practice (Sanguinetti 1995). A group of eleven teachers were involved in a working group to plan the research

process and generate the data. The teachers kept journals in which they recorded the 'nitty-gritty' issues of teaching with and to the CGEA and assessing students levels of competence. A set of key questions were brain-stormed by the group to guide their writing. The teachers shared their journal-writing at various stages and each submitted a summary, based on the journal entries, for publication in the report. Another 12 teachers were interviewed. The combined data were analysed thematically and the findings fed back to the participants for confirmation or modification.

The teachers' responses to the CGEA were very diverse. Most acknowledged the role of the competency framework and accredited certificate in bringing adult literacy in from the margins to the mainstream of public funding. They acknowledged the need to fulfil accountability requirements that were a condition of funding. They acknowledged the usefulness of a credential providing recognition of students' achievements and facilitating access to training pathways. The competency framework was found to be a useful framework for planning a more balanced curriculum; it encouraged teachers to tighten their practice; to be more rigorous in their planning and assessment and to be more aware of the theoretical underpinnings of their work.

On the other hand, there was a strong critique: many commented that the competency-based approach put pressure on students to 'show competence'; that a 'contrived' approach was brought about by the rigid separation of streams, domains and levels; that the framework 'goes against learner independence'; that the performance criteria 'stultify the domains' and the curriculum becomes 'atomised' into elements and modules; that devising assessment tasks to cover all performance criteria at once was difficult; that the separation of oral communication from reading and writing is artificial; and that "the preoccupation with the legalities of assessment diverted attention from the real business of teaching". In addition, funding for moderation and professional development was inadequate to meet the requirements; competitive tendering undermined the collaborations and relationships necessary for successful implementation; teachers were experiencing considerable stress in their attempts to implement the certificate; planning, assessing, documenting and reporting entailed a greatly increased workload; teachers felt a loss of professional autonomy and felt that their work was becoming 'bureaucratized' (Sanguinetti 1995, pp. 9 – 45).

In all, the study documented the pressures on teachers and students of the new approach and substantiated some concerns about how 'good practice' in literacy pedagogy was being distorted by the framework. On the other hand, the teachers also identified a number of positives and the research captured a sense of energy amongst many practitioners who were rising to the intellectual and organisational challenge of implementation. Both the 'positive' and the 'negative' responses were reflected in the

report, which was unanimously approved by the participants as representing their 'collective' (if diverse) response to the CGEA at that time. The recommendations included a call to produce a revised version and to develop a form of assessment more in keeping with current understandings of 'good practice' in adult literacy.

A second project was undertaken from 1997 with a different set of teachers based at a single TAFE provider, ('Herrington College of TAFE'). This research consisted of a series of focus group and feedback meetings. These vignettes and critical incidents shared during this second project provided more detailed data with which to explore the responses to the CGEA and the new policy environment. This time, I fed back not only the transcripts and thematic analysis, but also a discourse analysis of their discussions and of the data from the previous research (Sanguinetti 1998).

5. Teachers' responses and 'the politics of discourse'

The introduction of the CGEA provided an excellent case study for an exploration of the ways teachers were engaging with new policies and new forms of line management with an increasing focus on accountability rather than providing educational support. Foucault's notion of discourse provides a tool for describing and understanding how teachers engage with (both resisting and complying with) policy-led innovations. We are born into, formed and subjectified by language and Foucault uses the notion of discourse as a way of speaking about the ways in which language, knowledge and cultural life reflect at some level relations of power. Patterns of social practice, institutional structures and structures of power are reflected in language. Discourse is produced and enacted in all forms of human activity as well as in the semantics of language (in speech or in text). Thus, we can mobilise opposing discourses to challenge or resist dominant discourses. As members of groups or communities, we contribute to the production of new or hybrid discourses as we engage socially, professionally and politically (Fairclough, Gee, Lemke, Weedon).

I adopted the term 'discursive engagement' to signify that in our professional teaching lives, our responses and judgements are more complex than simply 'complying with' or 'resisting' new policies. Local and national policies are also constituted in discourses that reflect complex social and political histories, and often an uneasy compromise between opposing influences and value positions. Our discursive engagement with new ideas and policies can be understood as shaped by our own social, political and psychological histories, but also as determined by our own agency. We can choose deliberately between possible discourses and hence between possible lines of action. However, our subjectivities (and therefore choices) are also constituted by

discourses that are multiple, fluid, subject to power and always in process (Davies, 1990, Flax 1990 Weedon 1987).

I wanted to articulate a clearer picture of the discursive field that constituted our pedagogical understandings at that time and therefore attempted to ‘map’ the discourses that were ‘present’ in the teachers’ written reflections and interviews. Following the publication of the CGEA evaluation report, I therefore re-analysed the interview transcripts and the teachers’ reflective essays in order to put together a picture of what was happening during that period, cast in terms of discursive engagement and the ‘politics of discourse’ (Yeatman 1990).

6. Mapping the changing discourses of pedagogical practice

I set out to delineate the changing discourses of practice; the complex dynamics of resistance and compliance; and *how* and *by what means* teachers were adapting and resisting in the context of competency-based assessment. I mapped ALBE teaching as a discursive field and in this context described the discursive practices of teachers as they attempted to integrate the new CGEA framework into their teaching; as they responded in discourse to the new competitive environment and institutional managerialism.

I read and re-read the texts from both the CGEA evaluation project and the Herrington teachers project in order to familiarise myself with the way the teachers were constructing their practices, pedagogical understandings and individual struggles with the CGEA. I iterated between the reports, interviews and transcriptions of discussions and the historical and theoretical material that I reviewed. I looked for traces, anywhere in the texts (in the themes, value statements, anecdotes, metaphors, arguments and lexical items), of the schools of thought and traditions I had described (Sanguinetti 1998) and listed these.

I developed a web chart in which the main traces are named as discourses and their interrelationships (interdiscursivities) that reflect a set of power relations and a world view. The rules I used for determining whether or not a construction could be termed a ‘discourse’ were that it must: recur across the texts (but not necessarily be in each text); be identifiably associated with a particular institutional sector, tradition, theory and set of practices, and reflect a set of power relations and a world view. (The identification of discursive traces within text is slippery at the best of times; the ‘discourses’ are blurred, permeable and shifting. The naming of discourses is of course a reflection of one’s own subjective positioning, one’s own political purposes and investments.)

After depicting the discursive elements on the web chart, I found they could be clustered into three main discourses (configurations or ‘orders of discourse’) for the

purposes of the analysis. These were, *progressivist*, *professional* and *performative* discourses. I then marked up each text in terms of the three main discourses. Finally, I used the web chart as a reference point for studying the interdiscursivities as these appeared in the detail of the texts (Sanguinetti 2000).

4. Three configurations of discourse

The discourse map showed the links and distances between the different discursive fields identified. Items on the web chart could be clustered into three main conglomerations or configurations) of discourses: the *progressivist*, *professional* and *performative* discourses.

Progressivist discourse

The progressivist discursive field contained references and traces of discourses that I had named as discourses of *philanthropy*, *welfare*, *volunteerism*, *personal development*, *access and equity*, *experiential learning*, *critical literacy*, *learner-centred practice*, *critical literacy* and *social justice*. These reflected various aspects of the historical development of adult literacy teaching on the margins of mainstream educational institutions. They reflected the historical development of, adult education as a tool for self-improvement and self-fulfilment as well as a means for improving society. Progressivist theorists (such as Dewey, 1916), Rogers 1969, Knowles 1990) regard teaching as being mediated through interpersonal relationships and providing conditions that would facilitate holistic, experiential learning by the whole individual. Education should aim to produce the ‘fully functioning person’ who would know both freedom and commitment. This was the kind of philosophy was common in community education throughout the 80s and early 90s.

Professional teacher discourse

The second discursive field identified in the texts was what I called ‘professional teacher’ discourse. This included discourses of *curriculum*, *assessment*, *genre*, *standards*, *accreditation*, *functional literacy* and ‘*cultural canon*’. This is the set of understandings, values and practices that have been shaped by the changing environments of mainstream institutional settings. Trained school teachers who became involved in adult literacy teaching during the 80s brought with them an awareness of the technical dimensions of teaching as a ‘craft’ (eg, Connell 1985) including curriculum, forms of instruction and methods of assessment and which involved the making of complex situational judgements. Trained teachers brought with them a sense of their own industrial rights and conditions and a sense of the teaching ‘profession’.

Performative discourse

Thirdly, I grouped together the discourses associated with NTRA policy, under the heading of 'performative' discourse. This included discourses of *competency, vocationalism, accountability*, as well as *discourses of assessment, standards, accreditation and functional literacy*.

The term 'performativity' derives from the work of J-F Lyotard (1984: 46)

... the goal is no longer truth, but performativity - that is, the best possible input/output equation. The State and/or company must abandon the idealist and humanist narratives of legitimation in order to justify the new goal: in the discourse of today's financial backers of research, the only credible goal is power. Scientists, technicians and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power.

I grouped under the heading of 'performativity' those themes within the new policy discourse which tended to reflect the commodification of adult literacy to economic ends and to make it more 'efficient' and institutionally accountable. Performativity is a discourse that has the effect of disciplining teachers to conform to new sets of practices of assessment and managerialism. It has the effect of constructing teachers' subjectivities in terms of compliance and technical competence rather than autonomous and critically questioning professionalism.

Performative discourse was apparent in the texts in several different ways. In some cases, teachers spoke or wrote about the new policies and requirements in ways that implied an underlying 'enemy discourse' that the teachers either gently criticised or bitterly railed against. They were opposed to many of the policies introduced into adult literacy by the NTRA: the privileging of vocational outcomes; the introduction of performance-based criteria through competency-based assessment; the introduction of marketisation and deregulation; and the undermining of teachers' professionalism through 'content-free' managerialism. In other cases, teachers were more accepting and more willing to adapt to some of the new requirements.

6. Discursive interpretation of pedagogical practices

I used the web chart as a way of conceptualising the dynamic interplay between these three main discourses, in order to describe the discourses that teachers were taking up or resisting and the dynamic interplay between discourses.

In many cases, teachers (those who were most overtly critical of the performative and competency-based requirements) seemed to be positioned within the progressivist and professional teacher discourses in opposition to the discourse of performativity. A hybridising progressivist/professional teacher discourse seemed in some ways to be

gaining strength through such resistance. However, whilst explicitly criticising the requirements of performativity, it was apparent that teachers were also absorbing that discourse into their language and into their pedagogical practices. In other words, the discourse of performativity was colonising the thinking and work of teachers despite their overt opposition to it.

The importation of new ways of seeing and doing was not necessarily negative. Those teachers who engaged with performativity most intensely and struggled both to resist and to comply (according to their own commitments to ‘good practice’ and their perceptions of what they could or could not get away with) were producing new, hybrid discourses of pedagogical ‘good’ practice. Elements of performativity, taken into the teachers’ understandings and repertoires, fed into the evolution of more complex and sophisticated pedagogies.

By contrast, those who denounced the demands of performativity most vehemently and positioned themselves most clearly in progressivist discourse, holding onto the ‘tried and true’ were sometimes very resistant to engaging with the new ideas. However, they too were developing their craft in dialogue with the requirements and practices of performativity.

Subverting the dominant discourse

A number of the teachers seemed to be taking up the language of competency whilst broadening the meanings narrowly ascribed within the text of the CGEA.

Luke’s (1995) article, *Getting Your Hands Dirty*, talks about how the dominant discourse might be colonised from within and invested with slightly different meanings. He and his colleagues set out to “form a contingent alliance with the economic rationalists” and to use this to “redefine competency to competence; to shift emphasis from psychological/technocratic models of skills in people’s heads”; and “to build a complex, multi-levelled and multifaceted model of competence...” (pp. 91 - 92).

Several of the teachers spoke of attempting to subvert the discourse by means of gradually redirecting the requirements of the CGEA (and the performative discourse that it reflected) to more educational ends. They were learning the language of competency and using it differently whilst modifying the requirements in line with their own meanings and pedagogical projects.

Some seemed to be subverting the discourse in practice, rather than in the way they spoke about their practice. This kind of subversion was part of a wider culture of institutional resistance which was deeply embedded in their teaching and professional identities. These teachers were asserting their professional agency as teachers by

transgressing the requirements wherever they thought this necessary and possible to get away with. They were consciously holding onto reference points that had guided their practice in the past, in effect stating the limits to which they are willing to go in implementing the new rules.

Many of the participants spoke or wrote about how they selectively applied the ‘rules’ in their struggles to reconcile these with their teaching identities and notions of ‘good practice’.

In this way, the teachers were carrying out countless small practical refusals and modifications while talking to each other about what they would and would not do. The cumulative force of these small refusals was feeding into an anti-disciplinary “popular culture” (De Certeau 1984: xiv) in the field of adult literacy at large, producing new, hybrid pedagogical discourses and de-legitimizing the official discourse.

7. From small-scale subversion to explicit political struggle?

My analysis of data collected in the course of both projects revealed a complex picture of discursive struggles of compliance, resistance and the production of new discourses and pedagogies of ‘good practice’. Some of the teachers were strongly critiquing the CGEA but were nevertheless implementing it while carrying out multiple small resistances. Other teachers were less critical and appeared to be taking the language and practices of performativity directly into their practice. In both cases, new versions of competency and new discourses of ‘good practice’ were being produced, so that the question of to what degree individual teachers were ‘resisting’ or ‘complying’ became less relevant.

Do the teachers’ re-inventions of competency-based assessment merely illustrate Fullen’s thesis about teachers’ resistance to change, or do they have a deeper significance as resistance ‘in discourse’ to the effects on adult education of globalising financial and political power? Is it possible to make political judgements about what people were doing or saying at the micro level of their practice? And to what extent do struggles over the politics of education feed into broader, system-wide change?

The teachers’ resistances analysed in this study were of the nature of ‘dispersed, tactical and makeshift creativity’ (de Certeau 1984) and were not taken to the level of organised, strategic resistance. On the other hand, the teachers were undermining the performative requirements of CGEA through numerous small refusals and creative adaptations. At the same time, they were colonising the performative discourse and gradually investing that discourse with educational meanings and intentions, hence reasserting some degree of professional control over the teaching. As the ‘field’ of adult

literacy and basic education (ALBE) in Victoria struggled over, and engaged with, the CGEA accreditation framework, a number of contradictory discursive effects seemed to emerge. On the one hand, the interviews and written texts seemed to indicate that processes of discursive inscription (whereby the teachers were taking up the new discourse as their own) were taking place. On the other hand, new discourses of pedagogical ‘good practice’ were evolving at the interface between ‘progressivist’, ‘professional’ and ‘performative’ discourses. In critiquing and denouncing the new policy requirements, the teachers were developing a discourse of resistance to the values and principles underlying those policies. These are the values and principles that Lytard () suggested are a reflection of financial power, the discourse of performativity

However, the teachers’ discursive resistances to down-coming policies running counter to their educational norms and principles were largely local and directed towards revising and improving the CGEA framework, rather than engaging with the broader underlying issues. In other words, they were engaging with the demands of educational reform in educationally productive ways (See Fullan, 1998).

7. Looking back over the last decade: the ‘politics of discourse’ in ACE pedagogy

So, what form do the evolving ‘politics of discourse’ inherent in struggles around the competency movement in literacy teaching take, a decade later?

Competency-based assessment is now institutionalised in all levels of non-school and non-tertiary education and training, especially in National Training Packages. (These are a package of competency standards for all areas of work within a particular industry. Qualifications for the industry, corresponding to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Training packages include assessment guidelines, professional development materials, and assessment materials. Literacy and numeracy competencies have been incorporated into industry competencies. The CGEA and its administrative requirements have become more ‘user-friendly’, after a series of revisions, but the framework of competency-based assessment remains. Many teachers have learned how to use it for their own purposes, often very creatively. Discourses and practices of progressivist adult education, including critical literacy, are still very much alive: paradoxically, by institutionalising literacy for ‘self-expression’ and literacy for ‘public debate’, the CGEA framework has helped to sustain and legitimate the progressivist elements of adult literacy teaching. According to more recent research (Sanguinetti et al, 2004), the pedagogical culture of the Adult and Community and Education (ACE) sector continues to focus on learning and empowerment of students according to their individual needs and development pathways. Teachers may express irritation at the constraints of the framework, but they appear to continually find ways of molding the requirements of

competency-based assessment to serve what *they* judge to be the best interests of the learners, rather than to fit the learners' needs into the performative requirements.

Ten years later, the small-scale struggles of the teachers to both implement competency-based assessment, and where necessary, to subvert it, are continuing. New, learner-centred, progressivist pedagogies that draw on elements of 'professional teacher' discourse and appear to subsume or tolerate the performative discourses and requirements appear to be emerging. One example is 'back-planning' classroom learning activities to the assessment framework. That is, whatever teachers teach (according to their perceptions of need or learners' interest) can be mapped back to the competency-based assessment tasks and elements. Teachers can retrospectively 'tick off' the list of elements and competencies retrospectively. In this way, their pedagogical strategies are made more complex and potentially more comprehensive as they map onto, and hence check their teaching against the CGEA framework with its levels, streams, elements, and performance criteria (Sanguinetti et al 2004). The potential for teachers to be overly individualistic and idiosyncratic, or perhaps narrow, in their choice of curriculum and methods of instruction is thus reduced and a common discourse of pedagogical excellence emerges across the field of practice. In ACE at least, the democratising, social justice and community-building dimension of teachers' work are still central in the commitments and practices of many teachers. Despite performative requirements and increased accountability arrangements, the teachers' commitments and passions are to serve the learners on many levels of their practice and pedagogy (Sanguinetti et al, 2004).

Increasingly, the effects of global economic power on public education (as in other fields of public service and community endeavour) are being named and analysed. We need to locate our educational work across a wider canvas beyond our institutional settings and add our powerful stories of practice to the public critique and to the emerging discourses of resistance. We also need to cultivate discourses that frame adult education as part of a global dynamic: contributing to the local, community solidarity and collective action that in the long term, will be needed to harness local and global energies to build a fair and sustainable world. If we can develop more conscious and active approaches to resisting the performative discourses that frame educational work, we are better able to resist those discourses in our language, our practice and our identities as teachers and educators.

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However, not all aspects of policy-led reform are amenable to productive interpretation or creative subversion. As this study has shown, we are may be inscribed by the discourse of performativity even as we resist and subvert its effects. In order to address the discursive and material effects of globalising capital within education and training, teachers will need to contextualise the local issues within the bigger strategic debates. This means linking the critique of performativity at schools and institutions with an analysis of the rising power of globalising capital and its relationships with educational and other public institutions.