

**Educating Generation J (for justice): Reading the Tasmanian English-Literacy Syllabus in Neoliberal and Neoconservative Times.**

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## Certification

*I certify that the substance of this dissertation has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.*

*I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.*



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## Acknowledgements

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*"In the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate"*

No academic or professional achievement is ever an individual effort. Behind every successful venture is a supportive network and resources that make possible the personal effort to reach out for greater understanding and accomplishment. In the writing of this thesis, the importance of this support, in both home and university contexts cannot be underestimated.

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## **Summary of the Thesis**

The primary aim of this thesis has been to interrogate the underlying perspectives, assumptions and social justice paradigms of the Tasmanian English-Literacy Syllabus (TES), introduced into Tasmanian schools in July, 2007. In an era characterised by neoliberalism and neoconservatism, which has implications for race and identity, the discourses informing the TES are explored in relation to achieving equity for groups known to be disadvantaged in Tasmanian society, particularly students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). My own experience in learning English as a foreign language, and my parent's struggles to navigate the dominant society with inadequate English skills, have motivated my desire to develop effective literacy pedagogies and engage in the critique of the TES.

While national rhetoric continues to proclaim a literacy 'crisis', the literature review revealed that the crisis is not the one which receives most of the media attention – 'basic skills'. Rather it is a crisis of monolingualism that threatens to disenfranchise not only NESB students but also eventually, even English monolinguals. This monolingual centre marginalises or silences other discourses in an effort to protect the privileges of the dominant group, which requires both a hierarchical social structure and Standard English as the only authorised version. The conclusion arrived at, is that for multicultural, multilingual, rapidly changing 'new times', schools need to reconceptualise both English and literacy, recognising English as multiple dialects, and extending the boundaries of literacy to include other modes, languages and identities.

Given the media portrayals of declining literacy standards and the academic and economic success of Asians in both Australia and overseas, social theory related to power and fear was used to explore responses in the TES to these moral panics. Fear of the ‘other’ has characterised Australian history since first White settlement, and has driven policies to contain or exclude those deemed less civilised. But while the White Australia fear of being ‘swamped by Asians’ was an ethnocentric response to their perceived inferiority, the superior academic performance of Asians now appears even more threatening. Drawing on Foucault’s theories of biopower and disciplinary technologies enabled an investigation of strategies used to construct particular literacy related subjectivities in response to the threat of being outperformed.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was chosen as the methodology for analysing the TES. The use of CDA facilitated identifying two dominant discourses, with regard to literacy. The discourse of Standard English operating as a biopower technology was seen to ensure a stratified population that maintains the hierarchy necessary to protect the privileges of the dominant cultural group, while the discourse of the Effective Teacher as a pastoral power technology constructs compliant, disciplined subjects trained in Aristotelian rhetorical strategies to defend the ‘truth’ of Standard English as essential to success in life and for achieving one’s ‘potential’. But if Standard English is the only authorised version of English, then those who are native speakers may maintain an advantage over those who, such as ‘some’ Asians, must learn this English as a foreign language. This, it is argued, holds implications for the achievement of social justice.

The models of social justice underpinning the TES were found to be those that fostered assimilation and rewarded acculturation to the dominant discourses. Notably absent in the

TES is the Recognitive social justice, which responds to differences in positive ways and promotes self-determination. Despite this social justice related limitation, an intertextual and contrapuntal reading of the TES, reveals possibilities in the TES for prioritising pedagogies that are inclusive of difference. Informed by Jehovah's Witnesses' discourses, the contrapuntal reading identifies strategies for the reading of the TES in ways that might facilitate implementing socially just literacy practices.

Socially just and effective practices are argued to be those informed by the recognitive model of social justice. That is, those grounded in the 4Rs – Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility, which incorporate information access equalising strategies through provision of multilingual and multimodal resources; intergenerational literacy programs and conceptualising all learners as teachers and all teachers as learners.

## Contents

|   |      |
|---|------|
| <b>Certification</b> .....              | ii   |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b> .....           | iii  |
| <b>Summary</b> .....                    | iv   |
| <b>List of Figures</b> .....            | xi   |
| <b>List of Tables</b> .....             | xii  |
| <b>List of Appendices</b> .....         | xiii |
| <b>Acronyms and Abbreviations</b> ..... | xiv  |
| <b>Definitions of terms</b> .....       | xv   |

### **Chapter One: Overview of the Thesis**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Purpose of study .....                        | 1  |
| Research Questions .....                      | 10 |
| Positioning the Researcher .....              | 11 |
| Methodology .....                             | 12 |
| The Tasmanian English-Literacy Syllabus ..... | 13 |
| Social Justice .....                          | 15 |
| Whiteness and Social Justice.....             | 18 |
| Generation XYZ and J.....                     | 20 |
| Thesis and Structure of Argument .....        | 23 |

### **Chapter Two: Contextualising the Study**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Introduction to the Literature Review ..... | 26 |
|---|----|

|  |    |
|--|----|
| The Monolingual Mindset in Australian History .....          | 28 |
| English Literacy and Social Justice .....                    | 32 |
| English Literacy and Racism.....                             | 33 |
| The English-Sacred Imagined Community .....                  | 37 |
| Models of English Literacy .....                             | 41 |
| An Aristotelian Model of Literacy: Jehovah’s Witnesses ..... | 44 |
| Australian Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Ethnic Congregations .....   | 46 |
| The Tasmanian Context .....                                  | 49 |
| Conclusion .....   | 51 |

### **Chapter Three: Conceptualising the Study**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Introduction .....   | 54 |
| The Primacy of Discourse .....                                       | 55 |
| Power .....  | 57 |
| Policies .....   | 58 |
| Neoliberal and Neoconservative Influences on Current Education ..... | 64 |
| Risk and Fear.....   | 68 |
| Neoconservative Responses to Risk and Fear .....                     | 70 |
| Discourses of Paranoid Nationalism .....                             | 74 |
| Conclusion.....  | 75 |

### **Chapter Four: Research Methods**

|                         |    |
|-------------------------|----|
| Introduction .....      | 77 |
| Poststructuralism ..... | 79 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Contrapuntal Readings .....                         | 80 |
| Critical Discourse Analysis .....                   | 82 |
| The Techniques of Critical Discourse Analysis ..... | 85 |
| Data Collection Strategy.....                       | 87 |
| Validity and Reliability .....                      | 88 |
| Research Ethics.....                                | 89 |
| Conclusion.....                                     | 89 |

## **Chapter Five: Deconstructing the Tasmanian English Syllabus**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Introduction .....   | 91  |
| The Monolingual Construction of English in the Tasmanian English-Literacy Syllabus ..... | 92  |
| Problematising the Representation of English in the TES .....                            | 97  |
| Regimes of Truth and Biopower .....  | 103 |
| Construction of Compliant Subjectivities in the Tasmanian English Syllabus.....          | 107 |
| The (Not so) Good Shepherd.....  | 113 |
| Conclusion.....  | 116 |

## **Chapter Six: Social Justice Implications of the Tasmanian English Syllabus**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Introduction.....   | 117 |
| The Context of Competition, Fear and English.....                           | 121 |
| Social Justice and English as a Biopower Technology .....                   | 125 |
| Social Justice and the Effective Teacher as a Pastoral Power Discourse..... | 135 |
| A Parable from Tasmania's History .....                                     | 139 |
| Conclusion.....   | 140 |

## **Chapter Seven: Reading the Tasmanian English Syllabus for Socially Just Outcomes**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Introduction .....  | 143 |
| Contrapuntal Reading .....  | 144 |
| Recognitive Social Justice .....  | 146 |
| A Contrapuntal Reading of the TES informed by Jehovah’s Witnesses’ Perspectives ..... | 148 |
| <i>Human Potential</i> .....  | 149 |
| <i>Political Regimes and Discrimination</i> .....                                     | 151 |
| <i>Information Equalising</i> .....   | 151 |
| <i>A Common Language</i> .....  | 152 |
| <i>Intergenerational Programs</i> .....   | 154 |
| <i>Everyone a Teacher</i> .....   | 159 |
| <i>The 4 Rs</i> .....   | 160 |
| Conclusion .....  | 164 |

## **Chapter Eight: Findings and Conclusions: Implications for Future Research**

|                                  |            |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Two Dominant Discourses .....    | 166        |
| Contrapuntal Possibilities ..... | 169        |
| Conclusion .....                 | 172        |
| <b>References</b> .....          | <b>174</b> |

## List of Figures

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: McArthur's Circle of World English ..... | 40 |
|--|----|

## **List of Tables**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Table 1: Australia’s Generations – The Definitive Classification.....           | 20  |
| Table 2: Ethnic Congregations of Australian Jehovah’s Witnesses.....            | 48  |
| Table 3: Stages for Assessment Ratings.....                                     | 93  |
| Table 4: Models of English in the World .....                                   | 122 |
| Table 5: Evaluation of Family Literacy Programs and Suggested Alternatives..... | 156 |

## List of Appendices

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| Appendix 1: <i>The Tasmanian Curriculum English-Literacy K-10 syllabus and support Materials</i> ..... | CD Attachment |
|--|---------------|

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>ACER</b>   | Australian Council of Educational Research                       |
| <b>BCE</b>    | Before the Common Era  |
| <b>CDA</b>    | Critical Discourse Analysis                                      |
| <b>CPDA</b>   | Critical Policy Discourse Analysis                               |
| <b>DCAC</b>   | Demographic Change Advisory Council                              |
| <b>DIMIA</b>  | Department of Immigration & Multicultural & Indigenous Affairs   |
| <b>DoE</b>    | Department of Education  |
| <b>FDA</b>    | Foucauldian Discourse Analysis                                   |
| <b>GDP</b>    | Gross Domestic Product   |
| <b>IMF</b>    | International Monetary Fund                                      |
| <b>JW</b>     | Jehovah's Witness  |
| <b>JWs</b>    | Jehovah's Witnesses  |
| <b>LOTE</b>   | Languages other than English                                     |
| <b>NALP</b>   | National Accelerated Literacy Program                            |
| <b>NATO</b>   | North Atlantic Treaty Organization                               |
| <b>NESB</b>   | Non-English Speaking Background                                  |
| <b>OECD</b>   | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development           |
| <b>PISA</b>   | Program for International Student Assessment                     |
| <b>TES</b>    | Tasmanian English-Literacy Syllabus                              |
| <b>UNESCO</b> | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| <b>UTAS</b>   | University of Tasmania   |

## Definition of Terms

### **Acculturation**

Acculturation is a process in which members of one cultural group adopt the beliefs and behaviours of another group.

### **Aristotle**

Aristotle (384-322 BCE) was a Greek philosopher regarded as a founding figure of Western Philosophy and ‘Grandfather’ of Science and Enlightenment rationality.

### **Assimilation**

As used in this thesis, assimilation refers primarily to imposed cultural conformity and penalties for non-conformity to the dominant culture’s values and mores.

### **Biliteracy**

Reading and writing in two languages.

### **Biopower**

Biopower is a population regulation strategy which operates through a ‘truth discourse/regime of truth’ to authorise, regulate, and police social life and behaviour.

### **Community Languages**

Community languages are the home languages or ‘first’ languages of a particular community.

### **Contrapuntal Reading**

Contrapuntal Reading is a literary analysis method, allowing various perspectives to inform each other and expose silences and power.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis is a data analysis methodology that seeks to deconstruct ideologies that marginalise or privilege certain groups in society, in order to argue for more socially just outcomes.

### **Critical Policy Discourse Analysis**

Critical Policy Discourse Analysis is Critical Discourse Analysis performed on policy documents. There are two main approaches to policy deconstruction: viewing policy as text or policy as discourse. In this thesis, policy is addressed as discourse.

### **Discourse**

As used in this research project, a discourse is aligned with social practices and language performances that construct, legitimate, and reproduce particular identities.

### **English/es**

As well as a family of dialects, English, rather than a set of neutral skills is a discursive field. For various people English is: ‘talking Christian’; ‘talking

neoliberalism'; 'talking colonisation'; 'talking neoconservatism'; 'talking democracy'; 'talking Australian'; 'talking White'; 'talking Black' etc.

### **Ethnic**

An ethnic group is a human population in which members recognise their distinction from other groups by various criteria which may include presumed or common ancestry and cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics. Ethnicity can incorporate race, but is broader in its categories, and not limited to racial conceptions of difference.

### **Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

A Critical Discourse Analysis based on establishing 'Regimes of Truth' and contextualising and linking discursive productions to power relations.

### **Generation J**

Generation J is a play on the concept of classifying various generations by alphabetical categories – Generation XYZ. However, it is also an attempt to contrast a White, Anglo, Christian organisation which aspires to (U.S.) national dominance, namely Generation Joshua, with an imagined population committed to recognitive social justice, Generation Justice.

### **Jehovah's Witnesses**

A millenarian group with roots in the (U.S.) Second Great Awakening (19<sup>th</sup> Century) who espouse political neutrality, and anticipate a coming catastrophe (Armageddon – the 'Great Day of God') that will usher in a new system on earth for the multiethnic, peace-loving, loyal-to-Jehovah God, survivors. Jehovah's Witnesses are best known for their house to house preaching. They practice an 'equalising' principle to provide literature and buildings for their people in less affluent countries and circumstances. The prolific publishing efforts of the JWs and their literacy based teaching program, fosters literacy among groups known to be disadvantaged in this area.

### **Liberal-Democratic Distributive Social Justice**

Liberal-Democratic social justice is a top-down form of distributive justice concerned with compensating to a base level, those deemed to be disadvantaged in the area of common basic needs.

### **Liberal-Humanism**

The Liberal humanist tradition presupposes a real world that is able to be understood by rational minds, and which can be articulated in the language of autonomous, rational, free human selves. This thesis argues that the freedom and autonomy posited by Liberal Humanism is very selective and that exclusion is actually a necessary component in liberalism to allow the privileged to maintain their 'free and equal' status.

### **Monocentric discourse**

A social and cultural system that privileges certain groups by subordinating or silencing alternative voices and knowledges, resulting in only particular identities being valued, acknowledged and rewarded.

**Monolingualism**

This can refer to only knowing, using or privileging one particular language. As used in this thesis, it generally refers to a linguistic limitation which results when other languages are devalued, discouraging learning or using these subordinated languages.

**Multilingualism**

Multilingualism values linguistic diversity and encourages the learning of, and use of community languages in the public sphere.

**Neoconservatism**

A political perspective that may draw on a wide range of ideologies but shares a common desire for a strong state, patriarchal ‘family values’, patriotism, military reinforcements, and a moral code for restructuring the nation’s culture.

**Neoliberalism**

Neoliberalism is an organising principle/discourse that constructs everything in market terms. Competition, efficiency, productivity and profitability are the defining criteria for management in social and business areas. The focus on winners and losers subordinates concerns for equity and social justice.

**Pastoral Power**

Pastoral power, as conceptualised by Foucault (1982) is a legacy and appropriation of Protestant Christianity and colonialism, and has two main agendas: to guard the purity and privilege of organisational ‘truth’ and to ensure that its people are constructed as compliant and loyal subjects.

**Poststructuralism**

Poststructuralism is a disruption of the ‘common sense’ understanding of reality and truth. It recognises all knowledge and identities as partial, and regards ‘truth’, which is produced through discourses, as multiple. Poststructuralism acknowledges that every perspective silences some voices and marginalises some interests, with all truth claims implicated in the distribution of power.

**Race**

Racial classifications have varied over time, space and populations, but have usually included phenotypical characteristics such as skin colour, cranial and facial features and hair colour. Since these characteristics are considered genetic to a large extent, by essentialising and meshing them with characteristics dependent on specific cultural learning, erroneous and dangerous conclusions related to intelligence and ability can lead to tragic outcomes, especially in education.

**Recognitive Social Justice**

Recognitive Social Justice is the most democratic social justice model, founded on respect for different social groups, and offering opportunities for their participation and self-development.

**Retributive Social Justice**

Retributive justice, also known as ‘meritocracy’ views achievement as a purely individual outcome based on choice and effort in a ‘free market’ and fails to

address either the social structures and support networks that privilege some groups, or the conditions and structures that create and reproduce inequalities.

### **Social -Democratic Social Justice**

While based on a distribution of material resources, the Social-democratic ‘difference model’ is characterised by ‘complex equality’ and argues for a distribution of different social goods for different groups, according to specific needs. Equity or ‘positive differentiation’ distinguishes social democratic distributive justice from the ‘equal and same’ liberal-democratic version.

### **Structuralism**

Structuralism shares with positivism a faith in science, scientific progress, and analytical rigor, with language rules and binary oppositions said to produce meaning and reality.

### **Tasmanian English Literacy Syllabus**

A K-10 English Literacy Syllabus, part of the new Tasmanian curriculum, officially launched in July 2007. The Tasmanian English Literacy Syllabus replaced the ‘Being Literate’ component of the superseded *Essential Learnings Framework* (2002-2006).

### **Theocratic Ministry School**

A Theocratic teaching program, offered in Jehovah’s Witness’ congregations all around the world in multilingual formats. Its purpose is to equip members to eloquently disseminate the JW message and through effective reasoning skills, convince listeners and readers that they have the ‘truth’. However, a secondary effect is excellent basic literacy skills.

### **Whiteness**

‘Whiteness’ is not merely white skin, but symbolic of Western civilisation and an attitude of entitlement for managing the national space and positioning others within it.