WHAT CHARACTERISTICS ACCOUNT FOR WHO PARTICIPATES IN ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AT VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY?
A CASE STUDY OF POLICY AND PRACTICE
by
Jean Lynn Marie Maltesen

B.A., Lakehead University, 1990
B.Ed., Lakehead University, 1990
M.Ed., University of Calgary, 2007

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(Educational Leadership and Policy)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)
September 2019
© Jean Lynn Marie Maltesen, 2019
The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the dissertation entitled:

What Characteristics Account for Who Participates in Adult Basic Education at Vancouver Island University? A Case of Policy and Practice

submitted by Jean Lynn Marie Maltesen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Education
in Educational Leadership and Policy

Examining Committee:

Kjell Rubenson, Educational Studies
Co-supervisor
Pierre Walter, Educational Studies
Co-supervisor
Tom Sork, Educational Studies
Supervisory Committee Member
Daniel Pratt, Educational Studies
University Examiner
Anthony Clarke, Curriculum and Pedagogy
University Examiner
Abstract

This study is an in-depth examination of what accounted for participation in Adult Basic Education (ABE) at Vancouver Island University (VIU) from 1995 to 2015. I use a qualitative case study and discourse analysis to investigate participation in relation to how policies, perceptions, and contexts influence understandings of participation in ABE at VIU. I consider what other scholars have said about participation in ABE, particularly in regard to barriers to participation and student motivation. In particular, I draw on ideas presented in studies done by Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) and Boeren (2011) on how participation in adult education is impacted by power and governmentality located in welfare regimes and their associated policy structures. I take this idea a bit further by studying one institution in depth to learn that power and governmentality are present at macro, meso and micro levels. I then focus on how governance structures shape understanding and control who participates at the local level. In this way, I fill a gap in current literature on participation in adult education by explaining how various actors make meaning of policy in their local context and how these same meanings contribute to finding alternative solutions to longstanding participation problems.
Lay Summary

The goal of this study is to investigate how policy creates the conditions for who participates in Adult Basic Education (ABE) at Vancouver Island University in British Columbia, Canada. Current scholarship on ABE has a gap in adult education participation studies. Recent cross-national studies use quantitative analysis to show that social and education policies in various countries create the structures and conditions for national participation, but nuances at the local level are missing. In this study, a local provider of ABE is studied in depth to uncover how policy makers understand who participates in ABE based on educational policy and the characteristics of their local context. Using discourse analysis, I reveal how power, policy and context integrate in ways that bind thought and constrain action for policymakers, while often being hidden to participants. This process mirrors what occurs in broader structural contexts where participation patterns for under-educated people are constrained, and where systems and structures reproduce inequity.
Preface

The research in this thesis was inspired and informed by my 25-year career in Adult Basic Education (ABE) at Vancouver Island University (VIU). At VIU, I witnessed changes in ABE policy and the participation patterns of adult learner participants in ABE as both instructor and administrator over many years.

The research questions, methodology and the design of this study were approved as a minimal risk research study by both the University of British Columbia Behavioral Research Ethics Board (Certificate H14-00723) and the VIU Research Ethics Board (Certificate 2014-012-UBCS-RUBENSON).

The research presented in this dissertation is all original, and it is an unpublished product of my independent work on the topic of participation in adult basic education.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... iii
Lay Summary .................................................................................................................................... iv
Preface ................................................................................................................................................ v
Table of Contents ................................................................................................................................ vi
List of Tables ....................................................................................................................................... x
List of Figures ..................................................................................................................................... xi
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................. xii
Dedication ............................................................................................................................................ xiii

## Chapter 1: Study Overview ............................................................................................................. 1

1.1 Purpose of the Study ...................................................................................................................... 1
1.2 Situating the Problem .................................................................................................................... 2
1.3 Description of the Problem ............................................................................................................ 4
1.4 A Brief History of the Context of Adult Education in Canada and BC ........................................... 6
1.5 Brief History of Vancouver Island University and ABE Programming ......................................... 9
   1.5.1 Vancouver Island University .................................................................................................. 9
   1.5.2 Adult Basic Education Programming at VIU ......................................................................... 12
1.6 Research Questions ...................................................................................................................... 13
1.7 Significance of the Study .............................................................................................................. 14
1.8 Positionality .................................................................................................................................. 15
1.9 Assumptions .................................................................................................................................. 17
1.10 Methodological and Theoretical Approaches .............................................................................. 19
1.11 Organization of the Thesis ........................................................................................................... 20

## Chapter 2: Literature Review ......................................................................................................... 21

2.1 General Patterns Regarding Who Participates in Adult Education ............................................ 21
2.2 General Research Traditions related to Adult Education ............................................................... 25
2.3 Non-Participation: Motivation as a Profound Barrier .................................................................. 36
2.4 Non-Participation: Policy and Power ........................................................................................... 40
   2.4.1 Policy and Participation ......................................................................................................... 40
   2.4.2 Policy Analysis and Sociological Work ................................................................................ 42
   2.4.3 Foucault, Power, Policy and Participation ........................................................................... 44
Chapter 3: Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Strengths of Case Study</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Criticisms of Case Study</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Purpose and Type of Case Study</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Credibility</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Crystallization</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Transferability</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 Dependability</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Confirmanbility</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Ethical Challenges, Researcher Bias and Assumptions</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10 Design Process</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10.1 Unit of Analysis</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10.2 Identifying Research Questions</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11 Data Sources</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11.1 Context and Policy Documents</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11.2 VIU Related Documents and Archival Material</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11.3 ABE Policy Stakeholder Interviews</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.12 Data Analysis</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.13 Limitations</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.14 Summary</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 4: Policy Analysis: Understanding the ABE Context at VIU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Setting the Contextual Stage</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Establishing the Context: Federal Policy</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1 Jean Chretien and the Liberals (1993 to 2006)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2 Stephen Harper and the Progressive Conservatives (2006-2014)</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Establishing the Context: A Provincial Government Policy Lens</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Mike Harcourt, Glen Clark and the New Democrat Party (1991 – 2001)</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2 Gordon Campbell and the Liberal Party (2001 to 2015)</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Establishing the Context: VIU Policy</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Summary</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 5: Case Study of Vancouver Island University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Political Discourse and the Altered Purpose of ABE ......................................................... 141

6.2 Governance Policy and its Impact on Participation in ABE ............................................. 144
  6.2.1 Context and the Need for Change .................................................................................. 144
  6.2.2 Stakeholder Perceptions, Positionality and the University Act ...................................... 145

6.3 Power and Policy: Stakeholder Acclimatization and Neoliberal Alignment ....................... 153
  6.3.1 Government Representatives ....................................................................................... 153
  6.3.2 Administrators ............................................................................................................. 155
  6.3.3 ABE Instructors .......................................................................................................... 156
  6.3.4 Indigenous Education Counsellors and Not-For-Profit Representatives .................. 158

6.4 Funding Policy ..................................................................................................................... 159
  6.4.1 Institutional Funding ..................................................................................................... 160
  6.4.2 Internal ABE Funding ................................................................................................. 162
  6.4.3 Student Funding .......................................................................................................... 163

6.5 Failing Social Net ............................................................................................................... 165

6.6 Stigma, Power, Policy and Neoliberal Ideology ................................................................. 168
  6.6.1 Naming VIU as a University ....................................................................................... 168
6.6.2 Conceptualizing Stigma........................................................................................................169
6.6.3 Persistence of Stigma in ABE ..............................................................................................171
6.6.4 Stigma Embedded in Institutional Hierarchies.................................................................174
6.7 Summary ..................................................................................................................................177

Chapter 7: Implications, Recommendations and Conclusions..................................................178

7.1 Implications of Findings ..........................................................................................................178
7.2 Recommendations for Further Research ................................................................................182
7.3 Recommendations for Policy and Practice ............................................................................184
  7.3.1 Purpose and Power .............................................................................................................184
  7.3.2 Governance Policy and Power ............................................................................................185
  7.3.3 Stigma and Power ..............................................................................................................187
  7.3.4 Funding Policy and Power ................................................................................................189
  7.3.5 Social Policy and Power ....................................................................................................190
7.4 Conclusion ...............................................................................................................................191

Bibliography ...................................................................................................................................194
Appendix A – Recruiting Email for Instructors ..........................................................................232
Appendix B – Recruiting Email for Administrators ......................................................................233
Appendix C – Recruiting Email for Ministry Representatives .....................................................234
Appendix D – Recruiting Email for Local Agency Participants ....................................................235
Appendix E – Recruiting Email for Education Coordinators ......................................................236
Appendix F – Participant Questionnaire ....................................................................................237
Appendix G – Participant Information Letter and Consent Form ................................................238
List of Tables

Table 2.1 National adult education participation trends grouped by country ................................. 29
Table 2.2 Socio-political positions in a country’s governance structure ........................................ 33
Table 4.1 Federal and provincial parties and their contexts from 1995 to 2015 ............................. 73
Table 5.1 Summary of perspectives on purposes of ABE by stakeholder group ......................... 104
Table 5.2 Summary of ABE student paid fees at VIU from 1995 to 2015 ................................. 128
List of Figures

Figure 1.1 BC Ministry of Education High School Graduation Rates ................................................... 5

Figure 2.1 Participation rates of 25 to 65 yr. olds in sponsored or general education (1998) .... 22

Figure 2.2 Participation rates of 25 to 65 yr olds in sponsored or general education (2012) ..... 23

Figure 2.3 Comprehensive lifelong learning participation model ......................................................... 31

Figure 5.1 Vancouver Island University ABE full-time equivalent reporting ................................. 125
Acknowledgements

First, I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Kjell Rubenson, my supervisor, for his patience, support, and invaluable expertise. Dr. Rubenson was incredibly helpful in supporting me with formulating my research questions, structuring an extensive literature review, tightening up my methodology and being there to answer all my questions. He led by example and ensured that I stayed on a solid path. He truly is a master when it comes to adult education.

I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Thomas Sork and Dr. Pierre Walter. They helped me with the editing process, and they provided positive encouragement, important information and some much needed humor along the way. They were both critical for helping me see there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my Vancouver Island University colleagues for their continuous support and reinforcement. Their positivity was infectious, and it helped me press on as I balanced a heavy workload with my studies, particularly when there appeared to be no end in sight. Included in this group is Vancouver Island University’s administration who provided the much needed time for me to think deeply and write clearly about a very complex topic. Without this time, it is questionable whether I would have completed this study.

Together, this group of people have been incredibly valuable on my learning journey, and I am grateful for all their contributions.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, a family who believed in me and encouraged me to pursue my dreams in education.

To my mother, Rolie, for her never ending encouragement and wise advice.

To my deceased father, Al, who left the natural world during my learning process but continually watched and guided me in his own special way.

To my children, Bailey and Chelsea, for their ongoing inspiration, kindness and unconditional love.

And to my husband, Marvin, for his genuine patience, tolerance, devotion and friendship.

This past eight years have shown me that I truly have a wonderful, supportive family; I could not have achieved this huge milestone without their generosity.
Chapter 1: Study Overview

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This study had five objectives. First, the purpose was to provide a critical examination of how policy contributes to and conditions the understanding of ABE participation at Vancouver Island University in British Columbia from 1995 to 2015. Examining participation through a policy lens complements other ABE scholarship to date. Second, interest in scholarly activity in adult education has shifted to a national and international focus with cross-country comparisons (Boeren, 2011, 2016, 2017; Desjardins, 2015, 17; Desjardins et al., 2016; Lee, 2018; Lee & Desjardins, 2019a, 2019b), but a local or ‘micro’ level focus appears to be absent. This study focuses on the local level. Third, people who have low literacy levels often end up on social assistance and may need ABE to get into the labour market. The study area of the Nanaimo region has a higher number of people on social assistance (1.77%) compared to the rest of BC (0.93%) and the rest of Canada (1.21%) (Regional Labour Market Outlook, 2010 – 2020, 2011). Because the unemployment rate in Nanaimo is higher than the provincial average, and job growth is slower in the Nanaimo region than it is in the rest of the province (Regional Labour Market Outlook 2010 – 2020, 2011), education is critical for people to compete for a limited number of jobs. Over the next ten years, most job openings will occur in health, clerical, sales, paralegal, and social worker fields, all of which require a high school diploma at minimum, and higher levels of education will more likely be required. Therefore, it is imperative to understand non-participation of adult learners in ABE in the Nanaimo region to provide recommendations for a way forward. Fourth, a lower percentage of students in Nanaimo complete a secondary education diploma than the rest of the province (BC Ministry of Education, 2018). While it is not known whether this information is correlated to the number of people on social assistance, it is very likely that these individuals are not making high wages if they are working. In fact, 50% of the people in the Nanaimo region make less than $35,000 per year, and 26% of the population of the Nanaimo region make less than $15,000 per year (City of Nanaimo Profile, 2010). With the cost of living increasing, these statistics are worrisome and point again to the need for studies of ABE participation in the Nanaimo region. Fifth, using one institution to understand how various
actors make meaning in their particular context, and how these meanings contribute to, deny, or resist existing problems of access to adult education provides insights for changes in educational and related policies affecting ABE learners and the provision of ABE at institutions like Vancouver Island University.

1.2 Situating the Problem

Adult education (AE) is a complex and multi-faceted concept. Although many Canadians participate regularly in informal learning, this form of learning is often not recognized or measured, leaving many workers overqualified yet underemployed (Draper & English, 2013). National measurements of AE include both formal and non-formal participation, where formal AE is recognized for adults being able to ‘know’ things, while non-formal or job-related education is recognized for adults who ‘do’ things (Boeren, 2016). Public discourse suggests ongoing formal and non-formal learning are tied to improved life and well-being; therefore, access to and participation in AE has been of interest to researchers, educators, governments and policy makers for decades and is the main focus of this study.

On a global level, changing labour market needs have led to economic restructuring that has impacted educational systems around the world (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997). Education policy now focuses on global competitiveness through human capital, and the emphasis is on growth and market efficiency first, and regulation of social welfare – including equity – second (Gibb & Walker, 2011; Lingard, Rawolle, & Taylor, 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). This is also true for Canada, where AE has been part of Canada’s investment portfolio for decades and has been used to leverage human capital (Spolander et al., 2014).

Today, many AE programs reside in formal educational institutions where neoliberalism has become influential in shaping adult education’s purpose and the policies that support this purpose. Major funders such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and supranational corporations have influenced standardization, efficiency, and measures of productivity in education systems (Wickens & Sandlin, 2007). This trend of ensuring economic return on AE allows governments to set boundaries and regulate how and for whom education is made available and what people will learn, and it forces individuals to make provisions for
investment in and maintenance of their own human capital (Parsons, 1995; Rubenson, 2009; Wickens & Sandlin, 2007). Lesley (2018) argues that access to and participation in education in today’s society are elitist, as the relationship between government and education has undergone substantial transformation whereby institutions are being manipulated by state intervention to serve the market (p. 1). This creates problems for access of marginalised adult learners to programs like ABE, which formerly gained recognition for their contributions to solving social and equity problems (Levin, 1992).

In the early 2000s, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) created a forum for governments to share experiences and seek solutions on common problems – above all, strategies to educate and upskill workforces for economic growth. According to the OECD, the government also has responsibility for ensuring that accessible opportunities for working age adults are a priority for countries wanting to participate in the global economy (Thematic Review on Adult Learning, 2002, p. 4). That is, educational institutions would need to provide training for labour market participation. These ideas influenced countries like Canada to promote lifelong learning initiatives through policy, but what was not made clear was the individual’s role in this new model. This was a huge oversight given that neoliberal ideology has since placed the onus on the individual to ‘act’.

Over the last thirty years, AE policy along these human capital, neoliberal lines has become a priority in British Columbia (BC), as elsewhere. Learning is now seen as ‘profitable’ (Rubenson & Salling Olesen, 2007) and is overwhelmingly linked to the world of work (Meyers & de Broucker, 2006, p. 23). BC relies on education to improve the quality of the labour force and directs post-secondary educational institutions (PSE) to serve primarily economic ends (Bowl, 2017). Economic productivity, then, is transforming education into a purchasable product, while state responsibility and investment are decreasing (Davies & Bansel, 2007). Understanding which factors influence participation in formal learning has therefore also become a priority for BC provincial governments, as they attempt to compete in a global market that continues to change with the advancement of technology.

Although ABE has been available for many years in both Canada and BC and has been prioritized in the last two decades, participation in ABE among students who never graduated
from high school, the intended target group of such programs, has not increased. I question how accessible ABE truly is for those adults wishing to access the labour market through education (or simply study for a high school diploma for a variety of other reasons), particularly at Vancouver Island University (VIU) where ABE was created to serve this purpose. Is it that the ABE program is not really accessible? Or are there particular policies that are creating access challenges?

With many stakeholders in the education game, and policy typically vague in its message, understanding adult learner participation in ABE becomes a complex issue. Post-secondary Education (PSE) institutions such as VIU must satisfy many needs, including pleasing accreditation bodies, employers, grant funders, federal and provincial agencies, and the public at large (Humphreys & Acker-Hocevar, 2012; Taylor et al., 1997), but educators are also stakeholders and have input into decisions. It is from this perspective that I consider participation in ABE – as I try to understand how local policy makers (Levin, 1994; Howlett & Ramesh, 2003) perceive the structures in which they work. With this in mind, I turn to my research problem.

1.3 Description of the Problem

Most research on participation in Adult Education has honed in on situational, institutional, or dispositional barriers to access. Of particular interest has been how socio-demographic and psycho-social factors have correlated with patterns in attendance, non-attendance, and dropout (Bagnall, 1989; Boeren, 2009; Cross, 1981). This research focus has placed the ‘problem’ of non-participation on the prospective student – as the barriers become the individual’s responsibility and his/her ability or inability to overcome them. However, scholars such as Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) have recognized that non-participation in AE programs is much more complex, as structural conditions have not been considered in analyses. Because attempts have been made to remove barriers, but non-participation of under-educated populations in ABE programs in particular continues to rise, other factors must be at play. This is of interest to me, as I am an ABE practitioner who has worked in the ABE field for twenty-five years, and I want to better understand how participation can be supported.

In my experience as an ABE instructor and administrator, I have seen a noticeable shift in the type of student accessing Vancouver Island University’s (VIU) formal ABE program. During my
earlier years as an ABE instructor, none of my students had graduated from high school. However, over time, increasing numbers of high school graduates seem to be accessing ABE courses, while fewer students who have not yet graduated from high school are present in the program. This trend is consistent with the Ministry of Advanced Education’s Developmental Outcomes Surveys (2005, 2009, 2012), which show students who have already graduated from high school are accessing ABE in greater numbers province-wide: 71% in 2005, 80% in 2009, and 79% in 2012. What is concerning is that while the provincial high school graduation average continues to improve, Nanaimo-Ladysmith School District’s (SD #68) graduation rates are not improving at the same rate (see Figure 1.1). These non-graduates are not accessing ABE, which causes me concern, as employment opportunities available for these people will continue to decline as society advances technologically and jobs demand increased levels of education.

Figure 1.1 BC Ministry of Education High School Graduation Rates

![Percentage Rate of High School Graduation in BC](source: Information to Support Student Learning: BC Secondary Completion Rates, 2018, Ministry of Education.)

Given that SD #68’s non-graduate rates have remained flat (between 27% and 30%) or have in some cases declined in the last twenty years, I am wondering why these non-graduates are absent from the ABE program at VIU. I suspect the purpose of ABE has changed, particularly since ABE was originally developed for non-graduates as a second chance program. I also wonder
how educational policies support ABE’s purpose in BC, when the OECD’s direction has been to support lifelong learning and stay competitive with globalization. The OECD made it clear that governments need to design policies to improve economic and social well-being; thus, understanding the purpose of ABE and how policies support this purpose will require me to unpack who ABE is for, who is enabled to participate, and who is not. This study, then, critically examines federal, provincial, and local policy discourses to identify how ABE is socially constructed at one institution (VIU), how this view is supported, and how this impacts who participates.

1.4 A Brief History of the Context of Adult Education in Canada and BC

To frame this study, I provide the context of adult education (AE) and offer an overview of ABE’s history in Canada and BC. I also include a brief introduction of government roles related to the provision of ABE to provide a contextual framework for my study.

Historically, AE was rooted in societal aspirations and nation building, particularly with the industrial revolution. With an influx of immigrants coming to Canada, the industrial revolution, and advancements in technology, opportunities were needed to help adults adapt to a changing society. To respond, Mechanics’ Institutes, the YMCA, Farmers’ Institutes, Women’s Institutes, Labour groups, Religious groups, home and school associations, unions, cooperatives, hospitals, churches, factories, libraries, and museums were used to respond to social improvements (Adult Education, 2012) and loosely organized informal learning occurred (Draper & English, 2013). Yet, these opportunities were not seen as an ‘adult education movement’ because there was no common cause (Selman & Selman, 2009). Opportunities focused on vocational, social, recreational, and self-development purposes (Selman & Dampier, 1998). Jarvis (1985) adds adult education’s main purpose was to maintain the social system, which included reproducing existing social relations, transmitting knowledge and reproducing culture, providing for leisure pursuit, advancing individuals within the collective, and developing people for liberation. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) saw AE as an individual function and a social function, which suggests the AE model was a humanistic model (Dev Regmi, 2015).

The Workers’ Educational Association (WEA) provided education opportunities to labour movement leaders in Canada when labour conditions were horrible. This set the stage for new
and innovative AE initiatives. For example, Frontier College brought learning to logging, mining, and railway camps, prisons, factories, farm kitchens, fisherman, and immigrants (Draper & English, 2013). Initiatives like the Antigonish Movement and Farm and Citizen’s Forums emerged to help people recover from the Depression’s devastation. As a result, Canada’s AE sector grew when people believed learning could make individuals and society better by addressing poverty, isolation, and exploitation.

The Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE), established in 1935, increased support for training and education. By the 1950s, political leaders began to believe AE could play an important role in the development of society. Thus, the Canadian Association for University Continuing Education (CAUCE), the Quetico Residential Conference and Training Centre, and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce created educational programs for adults, and the Labour College of Canada and the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education were established. These organizations helped professionalize the field of adult education (Draper & English, 2013), and by 1961, the Technical and Vocational Training Assistance Act, the Agricultural Rehabilitation and Development Act and the Public Schools Act began to shift the focus of AE to advanced individual programs instead of centering it on common social problems (Selman & Selman, 2009).

By 1967, it was recognized that many people in need of vocational training did not have the basic skills to enter these programs, so the federal government introduced the Adult Occupational Training Act and launched Basic Training for Skills Development (BTSD), which was intended to provide upgrading for Grades 10 to 12. By this time, the professional field of AE was gaining respect on an international scale, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized lifelong education as the process of learning from cradle to grave and advocated for supporting adults to obtain basic literacy.

With the professionalization of AE, political leaders noted its potential to contribute to economic, social, and cultural progress, but new Canadian and BC policy mainly took an interest in AE for its economic possibilities. In 1973, the Basic Job Readiness Training (BJRT) program was added to BC’s college sector to focus on life skills, job search techniques, and work experience. A report from the Committee on Continuing and Community Education in BC recommended Adult
Basic Education be a ‘high priority special program’ in the college sector, and the Adult Basic Education Association of BC (ABEABC) emerged in 1979 (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2016). The provision of Adult Basic Education Programs became a government responsibility by 1982. Here the BC government identified the colleges, institutes and public schools as having the responsibility for developing, administering, and delivering ABE, and the provincial Literacy Advisory Council was created to advise on a literacy strategy. By 1985, ABE courses were provincially articulated for PSE institutions with oversight assigned to a Steering Committee.

During the 1990s, a major shift took place in public education; learning and innovation became the primary methods for promoting economic well-being in a competitive global economy. The BC government had much of the responsibility for formal AE, so education became focused on the job market and the economy. This change represented a shift from a humanist approach to a human capital approach (Dev Regmi, 2015). Adult education and workplace skills became inextricably linked, and attention to AE as a field declined with the emphasis on individual action instead of collective action – a pervasive direction in Canadian society (Selman & Selman, 2009). The Faris Report recommended that Ministries of Education and Advanced Education and Labour Market Development work together to address enrolment challenges and make recommendations on fee structures, common credentials, records management, certificate granting, course articulation, program quality/evaluation, good practice guidelines, and cooperation on ABE. What resulted was a common Adult Graduation Diploma credential, an ABE Accountability Framework, and ABE Program Quality Guidelines. This caused most formal ABE programs to focus on credentialed programs where curriculum and learning objectives had little to do with social change, democracy, or emancipation.

Non-profit agencies still promoted literacy as a common societal good, but such programs within the field decreased; instead the structure, values and rewards found in formal educational institutions became the motivation for ABE programs. In post-secondary education, professionalized instructors and units shaped beliefs and values of ABE to include more humanist approaches to ABE. However, they had limited power to shape institutional ABE policy beyond human capital approaches. Selman and Selman (2009) note that,
it is possible to theorize about education for social equality and to teach the importance of social justice to aspiring adult educators, but the actual practice of adult education as a means to address the interests of people facing disadvantages, or aimed at the public good, is not well supported and is sometimes actively discouraged. (p. 26)

The primary goals of the original AE movement, then, were to make education accessible to adults who needed it and to improve the quality of citizenship by helping people develop skills and knowledge required to be active, engaged citizens. But professionalizing AE programs caused “the focus on equality and citizenship that characterized the adult education movement [to be] left behind” (Selman and Selman, 2009, p. 24).

Most of my teaching career has been spent serving a formal ABE program at one institution – VIU – and I have always believed the program’s purpose was to make education accessible to adults who needed it for any purpose and not just for access to jobs, although this is of course important. I now outline where my study takes place and how ABE evolved historically as part of VIU.

1.5 Brief History of Vancouver Island University and ABE Programming

To understand the context of my research, a brief VIU institutional history is required, and a brief history of how ABE evolved with it. Both of these histories are critical for understanding the nature of participation as my study participants and I perceive it.

1.5.1 Vancouver Island University

Some argue that VIU began as a vocational school in 1936, while others cite its beginning in 1969 when it was founded as Malaspina College. I begin with the 1936 date, as the evolution of the institution is representative of the evolution of AE. It was in 1936 that local garage owner and mechanic Jack Macready invited eight young men to his shed to train as automotive mechanics. Two years later, federal and provincial funding allowed the automotive workshop to move to the Thomas Hodgson School on the corner of Machleary and Wentworth streets in downtown Nanaimo, where it was officially named The Dominion-Provincial Youth Training Centre (VIU Communications and Public Relations, October 2010). The school relied on community support,
as locals donated wood for heating the school and motors/machines for instructors to use in the classrooms, and students cleared land in return. This reciprocal action created a community-based partnership critical for the operation of the school and community.

From 1940 to 1945, the Dominion-Provincial Youth Training Centre trained army tank and vehicle mechanics, and in 1945 the school moved to the corner of 4th and Wakesiah in ‘Camp Nanaimo’ (VIU Communications and Public Relations, October 2010). The school was renamed the BC Vocational Training School in 1959 and continued demand made it difficult to operate. In 1969 Malaspina College opened its doors in the old hospital building on Kennedy Street to respond to increased demand; however, just two years later it merged with the BC Vocational Training School under the name Malaspina College Vocational and Technical Institute, and it offered programs that were locally responsive and legislatively mandated by the province of BC. ABE was included in the programming mix, and the government provided 72% of the institution’s operating budget; tuition and other entrepreneurial activity accounted for the 28% difference (Levin, 2003a).

In 1973, Malaspina College assumed responsibility for Cowichan Valley’s Adult Education Program, and one year later AE courses were offered in Powell River and Parksville. Growth prompted construction of a campus on Fifth Street in Nanaimo, which opened in 1976. The institution dropped the ‘Technical Institute’ from its name in 1978 and officially became Malaspina College. Three campuses were added over the years (Cowichan in 1979, Powell River in 1983, and Parksville in 1990), and ABE was supported under the college structure.

BC went through a review that examined participation in and access to PSE in 1988, and Malaspina College became Malaspina University-College in 1989 which allowed for degree granting status in partnership with other universities. Provincial and federal governments provided additional resources for new programming and facilities, and special attention was given to university transfer programs to increase accessibility for women, Aboriginal, and disabled people. The need to develop literacy skills in adults was re-emphasized, so Malaspina’s open-access mission was maintained even though increased access to baccalaureate degrees was stressed (Dennison, 1992; Dennison & Schuetze, 2004; Levin, 1994, 2003b). Efforts on ‘access’ were the new university-college model, and an underlying priority was the role university-
colleges could play in provincial economic development (Levin, 2003). Consequently, productivity incentives and targeted funding influenced Malaspina’s actions to invest in certain types of programs and institutional structures. This environment created ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ because concentration on degree programs meant “the trades or vocational programs – lost their once prominent position and faltered both in acquiring resources and in demand”; faculty not part of baccalaureate growth pondered job survival (Levin, 2003a, p. 68).

By the 1990s, the economy was suffering, and PSE reductions were imminent. Programs were reduced or cut, no new buildings were approved, and base funding was reduced. ‘New’ funds were available, but accessing them involved a competitive process. In hindsight, PSE access was meant to be a positive social good, but paired with the reduction of financial investment, it left many questioning the government’s true intentions, particularly with the competing values that were created by the dual mission of university-colleges. Malaspina gained independent degree granting status in 1995, and the International High School was added one year later. These changes focused on increased access created several problems for Malaspina: the institution was already severely underfunded, yet it was expected to increase access with no additional government investment; collective agreements and labour costs created issues; there was inadequate funding for upper-level sections; Workers Compensation and Employment Insurance costs were increasing; and the 1998 tuition freeze was problematic (Dennison & Schuetze, 2004).

Twelve years later, Malaspina University-College moved to full university status, and its name changed to Vancouver Island University (VIU). The new designation gave the institution a new name, which was a significant change for the region, and it created international appeal. At the same time, the name change heightened existing fears for Trades and ABE instructors who already felt disenfranchised; some thought the end of their programs was near. However, the change in status brought in new legislation, including a detailed mandate regarding the program mix and the provision for ABE therein. The new legislation also brought a new institutional structure. The ‘special purpose, teaching university’ would operate on a bi-cameral system where Senate (which included faculty representation) would be responsible for making decisions on programming, faculty qualifications, library, affiliation agreements, and other decisions related to program quality, while the Board of Governors would now be responsible for operations and
financial matters. This shift in structure put more responsibility in the hands of faculty – without additional resources – which added further strain to the system and continues today.

1.5.2 Adult Basic Education Programming at VIU

The initial design of Malaspina’s AE program was ‘typical’ of what Mezirow, Darkenwald and Knox (1975) claim ABE should be: it received students through referrals from community service agencies, it had informal classroom structures, it had individualized student plans and studies, it offered financial support subsidies such as transportation and child care, it was offered both off-campus and on campus, and it helped ‘hard-core illiterates’ obtain required employability skills. Most students had low self-esteem, poor attitudes about school, less control over their lives, low educational/occupational aspirations, low levels of high school completion, and/or low income (Bloom, 2010; Rosenthal, 1998; Rumberger, 1987; Zachry, 2010). ABE was a ‘second chance’ program for learners who had skill deficiencies (Grummel, 2007; Mezirow et al., 1975). Malaspina’s ABE program was differentiated from traditional high school programs, but it was also unlike the original form of AE because it was institutionalized and taught by professional instructors. The program also included high school graduates who had stronger academic skills. These factors suggest the program would not work for some students (Bloom, 2010; Hayes & Darkenwald, 1988; Levin, 1992; Mezirow et al., 1975; Thomas, 1990b).

While ABE enrolments remained strong over time, the mix of students has shifted with declining numbers of adults who have not graduated. This shift is the result of earlier decisions regarding provincial and institutional policy and structural changes. Since VIU’s operations hinge on federal, provincial, and local policy, I pay careful attention to evaluate how VIU’s new identity, in combination with provincial and federal policies, has impacted under-educated populations. To understand how policy impacts participation in ABE at VIU, I unpack some of my own assumptions and understandings that underpin perceptions about access to a program and an institution where I have been heavily involved. By examining policy within the context of a changing institution, I trace how policy has been interpreted and implemented in ways that have influenced the current participation phenomenon. My study touches on macro, meso, and micro
levels of discourse that show how structural levels interact, how policy discourse is important for understanding participation, and how power is exerted in ways that impact who can participate.

1.6 Research Questions

The central research question guiding this study was: *What accounts for the change in characteristics of participants in VIU’s ABE program in Nanaimo from 1995 to 2015?* Policies and structures have been designed to encourage access to ABE, yet access is occurring for some groups only. To better understand this situation, I consider the problem within the context it occurs. To investigate my central research question, I have five sub-questions. They are as follows:

1) What do employees of VIU, the Ministry of Advanced Education, and local social service agencies think the purpose of ABE is?
2) From this perspective, how well do they think VIU serves this purpose?
3) What policies exist that support or challenge the purpose of ABE as they see it?
4) What are the barriers for fulfilling the purpose of ABE as they see it?
5) What recommendations can they provide that would ensure participation?

I now explain each of these five sub-questions in turn.

1) What do employees of VIU, the Ministry of Advanced Education, and local social service agencies think the purpose of ABE is?

This question draws attention to people’s assumptions about who should be participating. Starting from an examination of educational purpose within a policy analysis framework is an important way to revive and re-legitimize the role of critique in defining professional identity (Shaw & Crowther, 2014). If participants believe the purpose of ABE is to serve high school graduates, then the program is serving that purpose. Pulling out actor assumptions on the intention of the program will help to understand their views on subsequent policies that support that purpose.
2) **From this perspective, how well do they think VIU serves this purpose?**

This question helps assure that I do not make assumptions about participant responses in question 1. Participants must be explicit on how VIU is serving the ABE purpose to get them thinking about the broader field of AE, how ABE fits into that field, what their role is, and if there is room for critique. Additionally, this question lays the foundation for discussing policies.

3) **What policies exist that support or challenge the purpose of ABE as they see it?**

This question gets at the heart of my study in terms of actors being able to identify the policies that impact the purpose of ABE. The question is deliberately constructed to allow participants to discuss their perspectives, rather than forcing them to think about policy from my perspective. Including the word ‘purpose’ asks participants to carefully consider their own values and belief systems about AE as they consider policy.

4) **What are the barriers for fulfilling the purpose of ABE as they see it?**

This question was crafted to ask participants to think about barriers from a different perspective – not from the perspective of barriers for students, but from the perspective of barriers for the system and its ability to deliver ABE. This question pulls the responsibility away from the individual and puts it squarely back on the system.

5) **What recommendations can they provide that would ensure participation?**

This final question asks participants to consider their responses and explore ideas to change the situation, and it gives them a voice that has previously been silenced. Asking them to blue sky possibilities for change allows them to put forward ideas that may be at odds with their own positions and provides hope that things could be different.

1.7 **Significance of the Study**

Findings of this study will contribute to the scholarly debate on participation in ABE. I could find no case study approaches for investigating the issue of participation from a local policy perspective. Other studies have focused predominantly on barriers to participation for the learner, but only recently has there been consideration to how policies create broader structural
conditions that limit individuals’ abilities to participate. Von Hippel and Tippelt (2010) identify a gap here, as they point out that researchers should be investigating how policy and actors interact in a single changing context over time to understand how participation is affected; this study fills that gap by showing that policy and actors create the conditions for participation in ABE at VIU.

By grounding my study in one institution in BC, I hope to add to what has already been learned about participation, and the role policy, government, and actors play in AE. Future studies in similar fields may wish to use a similar approach to mine, as I examine and explain how conditions are influenced by policy discourse, other actors, and power, and how this ultimately affects participation. Extending the findings from this study to other areas of educational policy might also demonstrate how beliefs, values, power, and position of particular actors all play significant roles in how understandings are created or influenced in particular environments. Studying non-participation through a case study approach adds new knowledge to the fields of education and sociology, where case studies have not always been accepted as a sound methodology. Finally, this study explains non-participation for one particular institution within one region, but educators and policy makers in other institutions may also learn to re-examine their assumptions and consider the various factors necessary to support adults who wish to engage in ABE and other educational opportunities.

1.8 Positionality

Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue that studies “should be framed in terms of research purpose and research positionality” (p. 51) and that there should be “transparent articulation of [researchers’] positionality and the significance of this to data collection and analysis” (p. 48). Bourdieu (2003) agrees and adds that I and other researchers must reject ‘epistemological innocence’. To do so, I must articulate my position within this research, including my assumptions, values, and my theoretical and methodological frames. Understanding who is doing the analysis, for what purpose, and within what context helps to show transparency to others while helping me determine what kind of research approach is required.

As noted earlier, my background as an educator includes twenty-eight years of teaching and administration: three years in the K-12 system and twenty-five years in the PSE system. My
focus for most of these years has been on ABE, where I felt I made a difference for many people who were trying to improve their lives. Yet, times were different when I started teaching adults in 1993, as the ABE programs I was involved in offered more holistic and humanistic programs that supported the many needs of marginalised people as adult learners. Today, ABE focuses on provincially-articulated outcomes that are mostly academic. I never questioned why curriculum was standardized or why students had to meet particular outcomes – it simply was. Further, as an instructor I always assumed everyone wanted to go to school to better themselves; even though I came across some people who were scared to return to education. I never really understood this fear until I returned to school as an adult to complete a master’s degree. It was terrifying for me to return to a system filled with expectations, requirements and deadlines, and this experience was enlightening, as it provided a window into how others like ABE learners might feel about education.

During my master’s studies, I was exposed to Malcolm Knowles, andragogy, and conceptual frameworks related to barriers to participation. This made me reflect on access to ABE, how difficult it was for some learners to engage, and the complexity of the many factors of motivation and participation, and how they interact. I thought about barriers to participation and the reasons adult learners participate. At the time, I did not see much relevance to the real world in the ABE classroom, as many of the provincially-prescribed outcomes did not seem to be applicable to adults in terms of how they could use them on a daily basis. The more I read about AE, the more concerned I became about the way VIU’s ABE program was structured. It appeared that the institution had replicated the norm of what education was ‘supposed’ to look like with static schedules, formal grading structures and due dates, and a one size fits all approach to ABE.

I began this study as an administrator responsible for ABE, and I wanted to better understand why people who had not graduated from high school were not accessing ABE. After all, the program was originally designed for this group of people. I paused to consider why I was interested in this. At first, my query related to ensuring that jobs continued to exist for ABE instructors. My concern, then, was about feeding a system I was a product of – and it was not really about the learners who could not access the system. I assumed that adults entering a university for ABE were put off because many of them had left high school prior to graduation.
and had less than stellar experiences. Yet, the more I learned about technological advances that
could prevent high school drop-outs from getting jobs, the more I became concerned about this
population, particularly since education is the key to a competitive economy and “the foundation
of social justice and social cohesion” (Mulderrig, 2012, p. 709). Moreover, ensuring people have
a basic education allows them to participate in the social fabric of society. Add in the increases
in cost of living, and I worried people without a Grade 12 diploma would face huge obstacles to
participating in society.

1.9 Assumptions

In terms of my assumptions, I believe that reality is co-constructed and shaped by political,
economic, social, and cultural forces, so my past interactions with ABE at VIU formed a significant
part of my beliefs. Like Cross (1981), I believe education is good, so people should participate to
improve their life opportunities. Yet not everyone has this same worldview. With the elimination
of ABE tuition – one of the most significant barriers limiting participation – my assumption was
that prospective students, including high school drop outs, would increase substantially. This was
not the case. My previous classroom experience as an instructor led me to believe that people
were not coming to ABE because they were scared. Yet, this was not necessarily the case either,
as some adults were able to move past their fear. The only conclusion I could arrive at was there
were other barriers interfering with participation.

The more I thought about the situation, the more confused I became. The Adult Basic
Education Student Assistance Program was available to help with costs (books, transportation,
and childcare), yet high school drop outs were not attending in numbers consistent with the
school district’s drop-out rates. While enrolments increased in 2008, 2009, and 2010 when there
was a global recession and unemployment was high, increases did not include the population I
was concerned about.

Many people in the education system believe that prospective students want to come back
for more education – particularly when it is free. But when enrolments do not materialize, these
same people do not understand why. I think that educators and governments do not discuss
enough how learner motivation, program structures, and policies work or do not work for adult
learners and can limit participation in ABE. The assumption that all adults want more education
is common with educators and governments because they are educated themselves, so it is what they value; it is not obvious to them how a system which has benefited them might be limiting to others (Meyers, 1997; Mulderrig, 2012). Also, how policies can function to deny access to education is for many a relatively new idea.

Another assumption I made is that problems related to education were often the result of incompetent provincial government actors, as education was the responsibility of the province. I often blamed the provincial government for problems related to funding, structure, curriculum, access, unions, etc. However, these issues are more complex than I originally thought, and they are interconnected in a variety of areas that are not so obvious. For example, I did not realize that the federal government played such a large role in supporting ABE through funding and social policy. This study has opened my eyes to the importance of context for understanding situations.

A third assumption I made is that people do not necessarily realize their thinking is impacted by larger forces. I say this in my experience as an observer in meetings where certain information is used to convince people to think a certain way about a topic when other information is clearly absent. This is important in this study, as gaps exist between the expectations of ABE instructors and the expectations of the provincial government, VIU’s Faculty, and administrators regarding what success looks like to students and what ABE should be doing. These gaps in understandings have created tensions between what students or ABE instructors value in ABE and what is being impressed upon them. I expose values, tensions and understandings to help liberate people who participate in this study or read it from the very circumstances that limit them (Bonham, 2005).

A fourth assumption is that the participation issue is related to fading connections with other stakeholders in the community who work with prospective ABE students. This assumption is based on conversations I have had with more senior instructors in the department who told me what it used to be like with community organizations. Without these relationships, I assume that prospective students are not being referred to ABE, and discussions about participation in ABE are not occurring. This view is grounded in an internal understanding that is based on the history of the department. Given that people who implement policy are in powerful positions,
unpacking this understanding might be helpful to understand how to collaborate with community stakeholders to better support people who never graduated from high school.

Lastly, I believe that policies can be interpreted many ways because understanding language depends on a person’s experiences and knowledge in a situation. I also believe that policies can be changed for the same reasons. This is an important assumption for this study, as it will guide my methodological and theoretical approaches for investigation and understanding of what accounts for who participates in ABE.

1.10 Methodological and Theoretical Approaches

The focus of this study is participation in ABE at Vancouver Island University’s Nanaimo campus and how educational policies can affect barriers to adult learners' participation in the ABE program.

Because the topic I am interested in is clearly described and bounded (e.g. participation in ABE as it relates to policy at one institution), a case study approach is appropriate. Yin (2014) outlines several definitions of case study research. Among these, I engaged in an empirical inquiry that investigated a phenomenon within a real life context and where I used multiple sources of data in well-defined boundaries of space, time and processes (Tellis, 1997; Stake, 2000). In the methodology chapter, I outline the topic of study, the boundaries in which I studied it, and the types of data I collected. More dimensions of my case study research are explained in Chapter 3, including reasons for choosing this approach. Briefly, as Yin (2014) explains, qualitative case studies are useful when research is explanatory, and the researcher wishes to uncover nuances of a case that cannot be found through quantitative approaches. With this in mind, my study is somewhat extensive. My topic of study is complex enough to require extensive, in-depth research and findings must provide sufficient details to allow readers to compare them to other research contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

For this study, two major propositions were helpful. First, I believe policy is impacting ABE participation at VIU; I suspect policy either supports or negates participation. My second proposition relates to the change in VIU’s structure - a policy change - and how this has impacted participation. I suspect ABE participation has been impacted by the institution’s shift from being Malaspina College to becoming VIU, and the new ‘university’ focus bestowed on the institution.
I suspect the new university does not view ABE in the same way it did as a college, and this understanding permeates a network of policy actors, impacting who participates in ABE.

This ‘understanding’ is grounded in Foucault’s (1980) ideas of power and knowledge, and forms of governmentality or ‘self-governance’. While Foucault used self-governance to literally mean governance of the self, the body, or the person, I use this concept in a slightly different way as I apply it to the down-loading of governance from government to organizations to individuals simultaneously. It is through this lens that I investigate the issue of participation, as policy and power align through governance and impact how people think about participation.

1.11 Organization of the Thesis

This first chapter has outlined the purpose of the study, research problem, a brief history of ABE policy in BC, the history and policy context of VIU, significance of the study, research questions and rationale, my positionality, assumptions, and the methodological and theoretical approaches I use as a foundation to investigate my research problem. My study unfolds in the next six chapters, with the literature review (Chapter 2), methodology (Chapter 3), the framing of my study’s context (Chapter 4), an analysis of policy, context and participant perspectives (Chapter 5), a discussion of the findings (Chapter 6), and recommendations and concluding remarks (Chapter 7).
Chapter 2: Literature Review

To understand the phenomenon of high school graduates participating in ABE, it is important to review what other researchers have said about ABE participation in order to find where the gaps are. This review of literature reveals general patterns regarding who participates in adult education (AE) and what theoretical traditions scholars use for investigation. It then presents recent research on how participation is conditioned by broader structural conditions and policy. The chapter concludes with a discussion of non-participation, policy analysis and Foucault’s concepts of power to develop a conceptual framework for the research on policy and participation in ABE which I carry out in this study.

2.1 General Patterns Regarding Who Participates in Adult Education

Understanding general patterns on participation in AE lays the framework for understanding inequalities in who participates, important for understanding how certain groups of people appear to have different circumstances prohibiting them from participating. In the 1960s, governments realized they had an important role to play in addressing basic causes of educational disadvantage (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 127). This led to various scholars investigating aspects of who participates in AE, and by the 1970s participation in AE emerged as a public policy issue (Rubenson, 2016). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) made lifelong learning a key educational goal for all of its member countries in 1996, but instead of recommending a broad approach to AE and training programs, the OECD emphasized adult learning as an economic strategy. Its 2012 OECD Skills Strategy made the link between AE and employment more pronounced. As general participation patterns have emerged over the last two decades, this jobs focus appears to be impacting who participates in AE and for what purpose. Most notably, participation rates have increased overall, and employer sponsored adult learning has become a driver of participation in some countries. Canada’s participation rate in AE twenty years ago was 36%, with just over half the participants receiving employer support; recently, the overall participation rate in Canada has climbed to 58% with over 80% of the participants receiving employer support (Rubenson, 2016). Figures 2.1 and 2.2 illustrate the overall increase in participation rates in AE for many countries and an overall increase in
employer supported participation. The Nordic countries (with the exception of the Netherlands) have higher participation rates and higher levels of employer supported education, but other countries are showing similar trends. This increase makes sense when the most common reason stated for AE participation is to improve employment prospects (Desjardins, 2015; Gorard & Smith, 2007). Boeren (2011), Desjardins et al. (2006), Desjardins et al. (2016), Desjardins and Rubenson (2013), Lee (2018), Roosmaa and Saar (2017), and Rubenson et al. (2007) affirm that employment status is a major determinant of participation, and Norway leads the way with policies that support participation in AE. The question then becomes who are these people participating in AE, and what about those who are not participating?

Figure 2.1 Participation rates of 25 to 65 yr. olds in sponsored or general education (1998)

The type of employment is also important to participation because AE 'is strongly mediated by the labour market' (Pont, 2004, p. 32). Boeren (2011) reckons successful labour market groups have more opportunities to participate in AE (p. 40), as part of structural conditions. Rubenson et al. (2007) and Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) refer to this as the ‘long-arm’ of the job. Moreover, larger firms have more opportunities for workers' participation in education or training and low skilled jobs have fewer opportunities to engage in training. This long arm of the job is more noticeable in countries where public policy focuses on broader social structures and supportive labour market policies.

While labour market funding is available, Hui and Smith (2001) contend that it 'ends up with persons for whom little economic justification exists' (p. 67). Rubenson (2010) adds there is a lack of stimulating training opportunities for those with lower skills, and a lack of skills and lack of education leads to long term unemployment, which eventually destroys its victims, wiping out their defences and subversive dispositions through stigmatization as a lower class (Benseman, 1989). This idea is important for this study, as a lack of opportunity for low skilled adults is a policy issue. In fact, many students in VIU's ABE program are working, which can make the low skilled and unemployed learners feel devalued. For example, in 2014, 57% of BC's ABE students were employed in some capacity with a median wage of $13 per hour; 51% of these were working.
30 or more hours per week, a 10% increase since 2012 (Developmental Outcomes Survey, 2014, p. 26).

This increase in the working population accessing AE is a worldwide trend (Rubenson, 2016), as the focus on education for employment has had an impact on the way AE is conceptualized, the type of data that is collected in relation to participation, and the consequences that result because of this focus – including how it is structured and who participates. As will be explained in Chapters 4 and 5, inequalities are being compounded because policies are forcing under-skilled people to work and limiting the types of training opportunities they can access (Pont, 2004). Boeren (2011), Boyadjieve and Ilieva-Trichkova (2017), Desjardins et al. (2006), Kilpi-Jakonen et al. (2015), Larson and Milana (2006), Lee and Desjardins (2019a, 2019b), Levin (1992), Pont (2004), Rubenson et al. (2007), Smith (1998, 1999, 2010), and Statistics Canada (2001) suggest these participation patterns reflect key social dimensions such as differences between men and women, ethnic groups, class, and age groups. Kilpi-Jakonen et al. (2015), Lee (2018), Lee and Desjardins (2019a, 2019b), Saar et al. (2013), and Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) add these participation patterns mirror broader structural inequalities in society where policy is playing a role. In short, the who of AE participation reflects social and economic circumstances where non-literate, high school dropouts, long term unemployed, elderly, ethnic minorities, workers in small or medium enterprises, and blue collar workers participate the least because they are not supported. Desjardins et al. (2006) adds that initiatives to reach disadvantaged groups typically correspond to the demands of the advantaged. This issue is referred to as the ‘Matthew Principle’ in that those who already have, get more, which is often a complication when policies are not targeted (Boeren, 2009: 2016; Boyadjieve & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2017; Kilpi-Jakonen et al., 2015; Lee and Desjardins, 2019a:2019b; & Rubenson, 2016).

Related to this point and to this study, people with higher levels of education participate more in AE than those with lower levels. Von Hippel and Tippelt (2010) argue this is a powerful trend that is supported by Boeren (2011), Desjardins et al. (2006), Gorard and Smith (2007), McMullen (2004), Pont (2004), and Smith (1998, 2010) and has been noticed in ABE at VIU as well. Malicky and Norman (1994) reveal that only 5.6% of adults with less than nine years of schooling enrolled in any type of AE program compared to 25% of all adults (p. 144), and
Mcmullen (2004) pegs AE participation rates at 14% for adults with less than high school, 24% for high school graduates, and 42% for those with some post-secondary. Munro (May 2014) has similar findings related to job training and Canadian AE participation rates: adults with literacy skills below level 1 have a 15% participation rate, adults at level 1 have a 27% participation rate, adults at level 2 have a 39% participation rate, adults at level 3 participate at a rate of 55%, and adults at level 4/5 participate at a 65% rate. These statistics are at the heart of the issue of this study, as the people who should be participating in ABE (high school dropouts, long-term unemployed, or low literacy) are not present, even though VIU-Nanaimo area high school graduation rates have not improved.

2.2 General Research Traditions related to Adult Education

With 4 million Canadians (20%) facing substantial barriers to participation (Livingstone & Raykov, 2013, p. 11), scholars have been very interested in solving the AE participation puzzle. As a result, several investigative traditions on participation have emerged over time (Kondrup, 2015). These traditions began predominantly by approaching participation from an individual, psychological standpoint, and then moved towards a sociological approach that integrated other factors. The various traditions are connected to one another and worthy of mention to help frame the research approach used in this study.

One of the first traditions for examining participation in AE examined who participates and why by comparing statistics on participants to non-participants on a national level. This tradition explored interests for enrolling in AE and showed participation was used mostly for career advancement. While findings from these AE participation studies were predominantly descriptive (Kondrup, 2015), studies found in this tradition used provincial and national literacy results and laid the foundation for governments to become more interested in AE as driver of economic development. Documents like A Report on Adult Education and Training in Canada (2001), An Analysis of Adult Education in Libraries and Museums (1988), Adult Learning Trends in Canada: Basic Findings of the WALL 1998, 2004 and 2010 Surveys (2013), and Exploring the Icebergs of Adult Learning: Findings of the First Canadian Survey of Informal Learning (1999) are examples that use this approach to examine participation in AE.
A second tradition focused on how participant motivation could be conceptualized and measured. Rooted in theories on satisfying needs, research focused on motives and whether individuals perceived education as a means to address personal needs. Houle’s theory on motives published in 1961, and Boshier’s Congruence Model (1973), which differentiated between deficiency and growth motives, were used to study motivation. Studies by Beder and Valentine (1990), Boshier (1971, 1973), Boshier and Collins (1985), Darkenwald (1977), Gordon (1993), Hayes (1988), and Hayes, Gordon and Darkenwald (1990) also reflect this tradition.

Research to this point attempted to understand what influenced participation, and motivation was included as a factor (National Centre for Education Studies, 1998, p. 87). But the most noticeable outcome of these approaches was the adult groupings which emerged, including a label of being ‘disadvantaged’. Kondrup (2015) reasons these models have been criticized for focusing mostly on AE participants (rather than non-participants), for assuming motives could be generalized to include non-participants, for ignoring how human development and life cycles affect people’s orientation towards AE, and for reducing participation to an individual action while ignoring the role broader social contexts play in a person’s ability to participate.

The third tradition, picking up on some of the criticisms of previous traditions, focused on explaining participation by considering the interactions between people, their context, and forces that were acting upon decision-making (Kondrup, 2015). Cross’s (1981) Chain of Response (COR) model, cited for its focus on situational barriers (obstacles arising from one’s circumstances), institutional barriers (procedures that discourage or exclude participation), and dispositional barriers (negative self-perceptions or attitudes that discourage participation), proposed adults go through a series of decision-making steps that are based on a self-evaluation of one’s position in his/her environment. These categories were later expanded to include informational barriers (learner awareness) in 1982 by Darkenwald and Merriam, and dispositional barriers was changed to psychosocial barriers to reflect a ‘broader social context that shapes individuals perceptions, beliefs and values’ (Wikelund, 1992, p. 10). Other approaches in this tradition include Rubenson’s Expectancy-Valency model (1977), which associates decision-making based on values of possible results with expectations of actions; Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1980) Theory of Reasoned Action, which suggests participants make rational
decisions based on what information is available; Darkenwald and Merriam’s (1982) Psychosocial Interaction Model, which conceptualizes participatory behavior as a set of responses to stimuli; and Smith and Macaulay’s (1980) Interdisciplinary, Sequential-Specificity, Time-Allocation, Lifetime (ISSTAL) model, which attempts to understand how broader psychological, social, structural, situational, and cultural contexts affect participation. Quigley’s (1987) Resistance Theory also emerged as it was believed people ‘resist’ participation due to a mismatch between value systems. Fingeret (1983), Davis (1991), Pare (1994) and Quigley (1987, 1990, 1992, 1993) tied external influences to internal beliefs from a sociological perspective.

Studies that investigated participation based on interactions between people, contexts and forces acting upon decision-making include Beder (1990), Beder and Quigley (1990), Blunt and Yang (2002), Crawford and Godbey (1987), Davis (1991), Elias and Merriam (1980), Hayes (1988), Henry and Basile (1994), King (2002), Malicky and Norman (1994), Pare (1994), St. Clair (2006), and Valentine and Darkenwald (1990). Research carried out under this tradition was also criticized for not addressing how attitudes, motives and barriers interacted with broader social and cultural contexts (instead of just local contexts), and for presuming participation decisions were based on conscious reasoning and agency irrespective of the complexity of life experiences and cultural, social, and political frameworks that informed those perceptions (Boeren, 2010; Desjardins et al., 2006; Kondrup, 2015). Kondrup adds that a focus on individual reasoning and agency misses the importance of structural factors, a point of interest in this study.

The fourth tradition critiques previous approaches by attempting to understand what determines participation. This tradition examines participation rates and explains patterns and differences through the use of data and transnational surveys. It also includes features of Cross’ barriers (Kondrup, 2015) in that dispositional barriers are related to structural barriers (Davis, 1991; Desjardins, 2003; Fingeret, 1983; Flynn et al., 2011; Konrad, 1991; Larson & Milana, 2006; Meyers & de Brouker, 2006; Pont, 2004), but not to the same extent that Rubension and Desjardins (2009) linked the two. This tradition shows that environments (material, social and institutional) can be constructed to support (or deter) participation because they can change a person’s internal state of readiness to participate.
Under this approach, comparisons of cross-country studies and transnational patterns revealed how welfare regimes, the long arm of the family, and the long arm of the job affects participation rates in significant ways. Welfare regimes are market, state, or stakeholder dominated (Boeren, 2017) and influence participation in conjunction with family and cultural views and employer perspectives. Researching participation through this structural lens sheds light on why researching participation through individual motives alone is inadequate (Kondrup, 2015, p. 165). At the same time, criticisms of this approach identify challenges with comparative data collection because study collections or designs change over time, inconsistent definitions of AE exist, reference periods differ, and divergent trends emerge (Desjardins, 2015).

More recently, scholars such as Desjardins (2013, 2015, 2016), Desjardins et al. (2016), Desjardins and Rubenson (2013), Escudero (2018), Green et al. (2015), Hovdhaugen and Opheim (2018), Kilpi-Jakonen et al. (2015), Lee (2018), Lee and Desjardins (2019a, 2019b), Massing and Gauly (2017), Roosmaa and Saar (2017) and Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) have used comparative studies to identify patterns in AE participation from an international perspective. By analyzing clusters of countries that have comparable levels of modernization and similar economies, the authors show how participation rates reflect government welfare regimes and how structural conditions play an important role. This perspective is important for this study because findings indicate that a government’s national and labour market policies can enable or constrain participation in AE opportunities (something that I had not considered before). Many of the authors observe that time constraints, support (financial and non-financial), mismatches between education supply and demand, and structural barriers contribute to low participation rates, but progressive national policies can help individuals overcome these barriers. More on structural barriers will be discussed later in this chapter, but it is important to note that economic and social policies provide insight into participation concerns. To demonstrate trends, Table 2.1 lists participation rates for countries with similar economic development.
Table 2.1 National adult education participation trends grouped by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Clusters</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 1 – Nordic Countries</strong> (Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden)</td>
<td>~60% or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 2 – Anglo-Saxon origin Countries</strong> (Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, United States)</td>
<td>55% to 59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 3 – Some Northern and Eastern European Countries</strong> (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Czech Republic, Ireland, Estonia, Korea)</td>
<td>48% to 54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 4 – Asian and Southern European Countries</strong> (Japan and Spain)</td>
<td>38% to 47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 5 – Southern and European countries</strong> (France, Poland, Slovak Republic)</td>
<td>33% to 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group 6 – Southern European Country and Eastern Europe</strong> (Italy and Russian Federation)</td>
<td>Below 25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This fourth tradition finds that even though “age, family background, educational attainment, and work-related factors are linked to inequality in participation in all countries, the level of inequality varies substantially between countries” (Rubenson and Desjardins, 2009, p. 193). These inequity patterns mirror broader structural inequalities such as income, education, and skill attainment, and they acknowledge that economic and neoliberal underpinnings of current policies such as the push for competitive free markets and the requirement of individuals to look after themselves are problematic. What is important here is other traditions had not examined barriers and participation through a structural lens in relation to policy.

Boeren (2011) advances this idea by adding that differences in participation rates occur among various countries because there are complex matching processes that involve the individual adult, learning institutions, regulating governments or other players. Rubenson (2007) submits that AE policies are linked to well-developed skills agendas, and restricted views on inequalities impact the ability of particular countries to recruit vulnerable groups (p. 532). As an example, Desjardins (2015) provides context for Table 2.1 by explaining that Nordic countries have traditionally supported AE by embracing broad policy and economic goals, including non-employment related education and lifelong learning. Others have similar findings (Kilpi-Jakonene et al., 2015; Lee & Desjardins, 2019a, 2019b, Livingston & Raykov, 2013; Massing & Gauly, 2017; Roosmaa & Saar, 2017), but Green, Green and Pensiero (2014) add that inequalities are associated with characteristics of the education system. Boyadjieva and Ilieva-Trichkova (2017)
concur, as they examined inclusion and fairness in participation and found that AE reproduces education hierarchies in almost all countries. However, this reproduction differs with regard to the number of under-represented people with low education, and they suggest AE has the power to influence participation, particularly through non-formal opportunities that allow unemployed or marginalized adults to ‘catch up’.

To address inequity, Nordic countries target their efforts for lower level adults with flexible scheduling, free courses, work sponsored training, and earmarked funds. Educational participation includes learning for the labor market as well as learning for social and personal development, and Nordic countries use social policies to eliminate barriers related to childcare, work schedules, finances, and transportation issues. By integrating labour market policies, union training policies, state support for various types of education (including popular education), and equity for unemployed, the functionally impeded, low educated and immigrant populations participation rates increased. Countries like Canada, conversely, do not have these same targeted efforts; instead, they focus more on skills agendas that link employment to economic growth. In fact, Rubenson, Desjardins, and Yoon (2007) report that Canadians participate at lower rates than countries such as Norway and Switzerland, and they spend less time on their studies (an average of 291 average hours in Canada versus 413 hours in Norway).

It is possible that countries like Canada had lower participation rates because they formerly lacked consistent or reliable data and input from stakeholders who could frame change over time, but today the Composite Learning Index lists statistical indicators that reflect the many ways Canadians learn at school, at work, at home, or in the community. In addition, there have been a number of macro level studies that have examined determinants of lifelong learning. These include studies on characteristics of AE systems, union density, expenditure on research and development, unemployment rates, labour market flexibility, wage compression, and Gross Domestic Product (Boeren, 2016, p. 111). Even with these studies, Canada remains in the cluster of countries that has the lowest overall spending on education, while European countries are correlating global competitiveness indicators, consumer health and consumption to better understand relationships between learning, well-being, and a strong economy.
Also important to this tradition is the idea that not only is decision-making likely to economic and situational conditions, but these same conditions impact dispositional barriers in ways that restrict (or support) a person’s ability to participate. Boeren et al. (2010, 2016), Krammer et al. (2012), Rubenson (2007, 2011), and Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) use the term Bounded Agency Model (BAM) to investigate participation from a broader perspective whereby decisions are made not on individual readiness but on opportunities and constraints within broader structural systems and policy measures. BAM encourages scholars to see that learners have a degree of agency that is bound by their ability to interact with macro and micro structures and contexts and by features of the self that constrain choices. Structural conditions and contexts are mediated by interpretations and understandings by individuals and by structural inequities (Rubenson, 2007). Rubenson and other scholars surmise that low participation rates of particular groups are the result of absent or inappropriate policies, including funding policies, and accompanying discourses that are situated within a broader social agenda. These structures and policies impact people’s behavior and institutions in both positive and negative ways.

Boeren (2011) renamed BAM the Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model (CLLPM), and created a conceptual diagram (Figure 2.3) to help explain participation.

**Figure 2.3 Comprehensive lifelong learning participation model**

![Comprehensive lifelong learning participation model](source)

BAM and CLLPM contemplate how “structural conditions play a substantial role in forming the circumstances faced by individuals [and] limit the feasible alternatives to choose from”
(Rubenson & Desjardins, 2009, p. 196). The process becomes one of identifying which structural conditions and individual dispositions provide an individual the capability to overcome perceived barriers (Rubenson, 2010) so that policy measures can be targeted to condition values and perspectives related to opportunities. Studies that focus on structural conditions, policies and individual based barriers include Boeren (2007, 2011, 2016), Desjardins (2017), Evans (2007), Lee (2018), Rubenson (2007, 2009, 2010) and von Hippel and Tippelt (2010).

Recently, Desjardins (2017) has added to this scholarship by proposing that structural and policy frameworks underpin entire Adult Learning Systems (ALS) in ways that respond to political, economic, social and cultural forces. These Adult Learning Systems are embedded in societal structures and are a reflection of the ‘advancedness’ of a country’s governance structures and its socio-political position. Different stakeholders (i.e. market, state, civil society) perceive the ALS structure as valid or not depending on historical and on-going negotiated political settlements. Picking up on Boeren’s (2017) welfare state’s socio-political positions, market based programs advantage the economically privileged, state led programs coordinate supply and demand and balance interests, and stakeholder led programs are typically self-interested. Desjardins (2017) argues that when state-led regimes combine with a high degree of stakeholder involvement, participation shifts occur similar to what happened in Nordic countries. While it is individuals who make the decision to participate, they interpret the world and opportunities through bounded, prevailing structural conditions created by governments and institutions, and these same groups can use policy to provide support through broader welfare measures like redistribution of taxation, while social benefits can motivate individuals to participate.

As summarized in Table 2.2, Desjardins identifies four socio-political positions that reflect a country’s governance structure. These structures intersect with the existence and effectiveness of adult programs and with other education/training systems, labour market/employment systems, and social policy systems in ways that support participation (or not).
Table 2.2 Socio-political positions in a country’s governance structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modernist</th>
<th>Neo-Marxist</th>
<th>Neo-Liberal</th>
<th>Post-Structural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Development is incremental, inevitable and irreversible; continually moving forward</td>
<td>• Redistribution of power and resources for social inequity; those in power use top-down governance to create blind acceptance of injustice</td>
<td>• Promotes competition/creates conditions for evidence based policy</td>
<td>• Societal groups (women, working class, minorities) reject norms embedded in top-down system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conflict should be minimized; progress optimized</td>
<td>• Led to Poplar Education &amp; Adult Liberal Education, social movements, and development of folk high schools/study circles</td>
<td>• Limits government intervention: budget discipline, free trade, competitive, privatization, market deregulation, union busting</td>
<td>• Embraces diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Theory of human capital emerged for economic value of AE</td>
<td>• Countries embracing this logic have most advanced ALS and lowest levels of inequality</td>
<td>• AET necessary to maintain national competitiveness</td>
<td>• Pressures State to protect diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• AE seen as a corrective function for national development</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Inequality is individual responsibility</td>
<td>• In clear opposition with requiring people to look after themselves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Political Economy of Adult Learning Systems: Alternative Strategies, Policies and the Coordination of Constraints, Desjardins (2017), pp. 4-10. Adapted into Table format.

To support the claim about advanced ALS, Desjardins examined eight countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Netherlands, Germany, UK, US, and Korea) and found similarities and differences between governance (legal frameworks and stakeholder coordination), finance provisions, and structural provisions. However, because differences in AE exist, available learning opportunities are not the same, budgets and governance systems differ, and qualifications awarded vary. As an example, Denmark had the highest participation and qualification rates, in part due to flexibility around combining courses taken in various contexts. This demonstrates a more advanced ALS. It should also be mentioned that participation was dominated by job-related motivation (80-90%), but all countries shared a systematic pattern of traditionally disadvantaged
adults participating less than advantaged adults, with large variations by country. It is believed
the levels of inequality are a reflection of the extent of unequal power relations that moderate
the availability and purpose of AE and the observable impact on outcomes (Desjardins, 2017,
p. 128). This is a concept that will be examined further in this study, as scholars point out that
power relations are often neglected when contextual factors are considered.

The fifth tradition focuses on understanding participation and non-participation from
different target groups. It tries to explain why unskilled and low-skilled workers have restrictive
views of or access to AE and training. Arguments are grounded in views that research needs to
consider life-histories and biographies where habitual dispositions, cultures, learning activities,
and changing contexts constitute how people perceive adult education and training (Kondrup,
2015). Perspectives in this tradition focus on the meaning of adult education and adult education
and training (AET) in the wider context of people’s lives, the habitus and culture of working class
dispositioned for stability and reluctant to change, or the significance of culture in workplaces
and how psycho-social factors determine employees’ orientation towards education (Kondrup,
2015, p. 166). Researchers such as Buttell (2000), Gorard and Smith (2007), Levin (1992)
investigated people’s attitude towards participation using aspects of this tradition, but they did
not consider how perceptions were affected by workplace cultures, how labour was divided, how
jobs were organized, what content was in jobs, or what abilities were present to allow new
knowledge to be applied. Understanding how habitual dispositions are formed and maintained
through subjective and collective experiences and throughout historical changes in labour
markets and in workplaces can assist with understanding participation.

To highlight this point, Von Hippel and Tippelt (2010) suggest educational barriers build
upon one another from the micro level (factors of socio-demographic attitude) to the meso level
(structural conditions that are institutional in nature) to the macro level (political parameters),
and each level must be examined relative to the others as part of perspectives. Green, Green and
Pensiero (2014) and Saar et al. (2013) agree and suggest effects of stratification are encouraged
by particular characteristics of the education system. Together, these scholars reckon adult
educators and agents play a critical role in impacting participation, and few studies have been
done on participation from educators’ perspectives as they relate to policy and system issues. Here is where a gap in the literature exists, as Von Hippel and Tippelt claim instructor views on policy and participation have not been analyzed in light of BAM. Because instructors are able to mediate between social demands, needs of learners, pedagogical tasks, and organizational aims, instructor perspectives become critical. Further, people working in adult learning systems have power that moderates the structure and availability of AE and its purpose. The authors reason that analyzing this field of tension will be important for understanding divergent forces and interests at work because patterns of participation are also linked to instructor competencies and their workloads. Lipsky (1980) has a similar perspective; teacher abilities and school atmospheres are part of broader institutional barriers that need to be considered with respect to participation. From von Hippel and Tippelt’s (2010) view, policies and political parameters have direct impacts on participation patterns, and programs need to orientate themselves towards the life world of students. However, conceptual models on participation must include a meso level investigation in a differentiated way because most studies to date examined interactions between policy measures at the macro level only, making findings too broad in focus. Furthermore, the authors claim BAM studies do not fully show the interaction between structural levels, particularly at the meso/micro level where institutions (in the form of government employees, administrators, teachers, support staff, and community workers) play a role. Boeren (2010) attempted to do this, but her model did not focus on the meso level that von Hippel and Tippelt suggest is necessary.

The last tradition focuses on discourses in transnational and national policies and how they define participation. This tradition considers policy analysis to reveal how discourses concerning participation in AET change over time. This approach has the ability to address some of the gaps von Hippel and Tippelt (2010) identify because there is an opportunity to focus on the human experience and it helps researchers see the political nature of AET. It addresses critiques of previous traditions by focusing on how the distribution of power affects what counts as positions of knowledge, how they are applied and change over time, and how changing discourses affect who is included in AET and who is not. The way participation is constructed by others and the policies that affect those constructions and understandings is critical for understanding the nature of ALS and who it will serve (rather than who it is meant to serve). While Kondrup (2015)
argues that it is necessary to understand the meaning of AET through unskilled workers’ historical perspectives, it is just as valuable to understand the meaning of AET through perspectives of employees who work within the AET framework, as their life histories are also conditioned by their engagement with specific historical, social and material work life, and their access to power (either known or unknown) can assist with change.

Research traditions presented here demonstrate an evolution of ways to investigate participation in AE. Traditional research began with the individual and then evolved into a focus on external factors, particularly structural factors, as part of the participation phenomenon. All traditions are useful for exploring how individual characteristics interact with social, and environmental influences as well as policy and other structural conditions in ways that affect people’s ability to participate; however, the relative weight of each factor varies from model to model.

2.3 Non-Participation: Motivation as a Profound Barrier

From the participation trends and research traditions outlined in this chapter, structural conditions (built by welfare regimes and other institutions), policy and motivation should be considered when thinking about participation in AE because they appear to condition possibilities for participation, particularly for specific populations like the less educated/lower skilled and the socio-economically challenged.

A quick overview of Canadian statistics shows that 42% of Canadians did not engage in formal or non-formal education (Statistics Canada, 2017). While BC statistics are a bit better in that fewer people are refraining from participating in education (39%), there are also fewer people participating in formal education than other provinces (4% BC vs 5% of Canada) (Statistics Canada, 2017). These percentages represent an extremely small sample size at 0.12% for Canada and 0.09% for BC, but the most common cited participation barriers include being busy at work, too expensive, or inconvenient course times. Interestingly, motivation or lack of interest was not explicitly stated as a reason for not participating; perhaps this is because it was not listed as a choice on the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies survey. Using surveys that do not include questions about motivation or interest in AE may not provide an accurate account of how people feel about AE, which makes it harder to address ALS in general.
Nevertheless, Desjardins et al. (2006) believe that low participation rates of less educated people are related to a combination of bad educational experiences, a lack of readiness, and a perception that there is nothing to gain. Thomas (1990b) uncovered a similar finding, as did Fingeret (1983) and Davis (1991), in that non-literate people do not want others to know about their plight. Buttell (2000) and Rubenson (2010) add that people who have low levels of education simply ‘accept their fate’ because they cannot imagine anything different, while Paladanius (2002) surmises that people are ashamed about being unemployed and they have feelings of distrust and anger with a system that prevented them from participating. These adults typically live day to day and have difficulty focusing on the future, demonstrating the toll dispositional barriers take on people.

Studies done on dispositional barriers show that motivation to participate in AE is not necessarily internally driven, but thoughts and views are impacted by situations and contexts in which these perspectives are created. For example, St. Clair (2006) thinks participation is tied to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs in that once a person’s basic needs are taken care of, he or she will participate in AE (p. 373). From this standpoint, a consideration of social policy and its ability to support the provision of basic needs is worthy of consideration. Ahl (2006) contends that motivation is based on binary ideas (rewards and punishments, instincts and drives, stimuli and rewards, needs and wants) and humans have an intrinsic motivation that is based on these binaries. Ahl supposes discourse among policy makers, educators, and researchers makes motivation for and participation in education problematic because people who do not want to participate are categorized as unwilling learners, which stigmatizes or marginalizes them. Ahl (2006) states:

If motivation is a construct of those who see it wanting in others, it not only positions adult learners as deficient but it may also put the adult educator in an impossible hostage position, as an actor who is supposed to deal with the so constructed ‘unmotivated adults’ in order to fulfill governments’ expectations and projections of economic growth. Furthermore, any educational policy that assumes and takes for granted motivation as residing with the individual may be quite inefficient. Perhaps it is not the individual that is ‘wrong’, but rather the
educational policy is unsuitable. Money spent on trying to solve the unemployment problem by educating those who have no interest in this could possibly be better spent elsewhere. (p. 401)

Ahl uses the United Kingdom as an example that places the responsibility for the smooth functioning of society on the individual instead of on society’s structures. This places blame on those who are not successful rather than placing blame on the structures that have put those people in their situation. At the same time, structures and institutions are made invisible. This view is similar to Rubenson’s (2010), but Rubenson puts more emphasis on the idea that education policy must allow people to pursue a variety of interests.

Flynn et al. (2011) note that learners coming from communities or families where education is not privileged from birth 'risk isolating themselves from their support systems' (p. 46). This finding highlights the importance of how situational barriers and structural conditions interact with dispositional barriers. The authors contend that factors most affecting participation for marginalized populations are 'often related to circumstances beyond their control. Family values, socio-economic status, parental educational level, culture, race, and gender [are] all major determinants of academic interest and achievement' (p. 55). These factors are structural, as people are born into their plight. Hayes (1988) agrees that for some low literate individuals, education is disapproved within social circles. Fingeret (1983, 1984) frames this by saying the ‘low-educated’ are not considered deficient to self or others within their own community, so participation occurs only in socially acceptable activities or within the confines of their social groups. Quigley (1987, 1990, 1992) and Beder (1990) add that disadvantaged adults do not feel they ‘belong’ in the current education system; but they do ‘belong’ in their social networks.

Many people feel the emotional toll of being low educated, and they have a sense of personal shame or low worth for they feel ‘less than’ or ‘different’ than others. “To the disadvantaged, education may be a luxury pursuit, an endeavour that may or may not lead to a means of supporting oneself and one’s family” (Flynn et al., 2011), and for others, participating in education “requires a great sacrifice and a profound leap of faith” (Meyers & de Broucker, 2006, p. vi). These examples of non-participation are related to structural factors that enable or block one’s ability to participate and 'are conceptualized in the context of privilege, not personal
deficit ... [because] the attitudes and values of illiterate adults are not necessarily internally driven or developed by choice' (Flynn et al., 2011, p. 55).

Recent studies done by Boeren (2011, 2016), Desjardins (2006, 2009, 2015), Lee (2018), Massing and Gauly (2017), and Rubenson (2007, 2009, 2016) share a new perspective on dispositional or motivational barriers by claiming that they are created or eliminated by structural conditions and policy. Since motivational barriers are powerful, are often shaped during compulsory education, and are difficult to overcome, scholars need to continue incorporating aspects of motivation into AE models of participation (Gorard & Smith, 2007; White, 2012), particularly since there are almost twice as many people who do not want to participate in formal education than those who do (Livingstone & Raykov, 2013). Negative attitudes about education are carried forward and impact further participation (Gorard & Smith, 2007; Hovdhaugen & Opheim, 2018), as a negative learner identity adds to individuals’ inability to engage in learning opportunities. Quigley (1990) explains non-participants do not feel like they belong in formal educational programs because “they see ABE as curriculum reflecting middle-class life styles” (p. 106) and they see not participating as “retaining, not losing, one’s self-worth in staying true to the beliefs and values of a chosen culture instead of conforming to the spurious values seen in the hegemony of schooling” (1990, p. 108).

Policies, a country’s socio-political position, power and the ‘advancedness’ of the AE system appear to be important pieces of the participation puzzle, as it is these factors that can condition prospective students to participate even if they have negative attitudes related to education. Policies create structures that cause limitations and prompt negative attitudes, but they can also broaden possibilities and influence attitude in positive ways. A country’s socio-political position (or welfare regime) impacts how it structures education, including what is intended to be accomplished and who is responsible for funding it. Given that people who are less educated have continued to participate in AE in fewer numbers for the last fifty years, examining AE participation in an educational system by using a structural and policy lens could reveal more about participation and motivation challenges where deep structures perpetuate themselves and prevent generating alternatives outside their own boundaries (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003).
Thinking about the way education is organized and conducted, in combination with policy, may be a better approach to understanding participation (Levin, 1992).

2.4 Non-Participation: Policy and Power

In the last decade, it has been acknowledged that policy plays an important role in affecting structural constraints for participation in AE in both positive and negative ways. What has been missing from recent studies is an examination of the role power plays within structures as it relates to policy. Here a review on what has been said about policy and participation in essential.

2.4.1 Policy and Participation

Policy is something that Boeren (2011, 2016), Desjardins (2015), Desjardins, Milo and Lee (2016), Lee and Desjardins (2019b), Roosmaa and Saar (2017), and Rubenson (2006a, 2006b) considered as a key factor in the AE participation problem. Rubenson’s (2007) Bounded Agency Model (BAM), which was rebranded to the Comprehensive Lifelong Learning Participation Model (CLLPM) by Boeren in 2011, is a transferable concept (Crowe et al., 2011) because it deals with structures, contexts, and features of self that constrain choices. Desjardins’ (2017) recent ideas about government socio-political positions is worthy of consideration, as governments are the keepers of major policy initiatives.

Public policy, as it relates to participation in education, 'encourages, discourages, prohibits, or prescribes private actions' (Weimer & Vining, 1999, p. 58). But policy is a complex process that involves much more than words on a page; it involves many actors and many interests throughout various stages of the policy making process. Therefore, there are factors to contemplate if policy is to be examined as a contributing factor to participation in ABE.

First, policy is multidimensional. Actors do not influence policy equally, and conflict between perspectives and interests occurs at all levels of the process. Institutional arrangements are often well-suited for pursuing different policies simultaneously, with different perceptions of the problem and with contradictory goals (Dye, 1975; Birkland, 2005). Therefore, policies designed to produce certain goals may not occur because competing actors and other policies make achieving goals difficult (Alegre et al., 2011).
Second, policy-making is value laden (Taylor et al., 1997). Actors do not respond to external events in consistent ways (Evans, 1987); instead, they make choices as they adapt to organizational cultures. Government rhetoric, also value laden, is perceived in different ways at micro, meso, and macro levels due to political spheres, differing values, and defined boundaries (von Hippel & Tippelt, 2010; Dye, 1975).

Third, policy-making occurs in contexts where prior histories of events, particular ideological and political climates, social and economic issues, and actors exist. These factors shape policies, their evolution, and their outcomes (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 16). Gee (2011a) expresses these as contexts where pressures lead to a policy’s creation; however, most policy documents do not reveal fiscal crises, unequal distributions of power, or economic imperatives of segmented labour markets that are driving policy (Codd, 1988, p. 245). Thus, investigating economic developments can help researchers grasp how policy is shaped (Dye, 1975; Stubblefield, 1981).

Fourth, state level policy is shaped by complex interactions between the state, the economy, and civil society. Governments focus on economic development, so education policy now focuses on the development of human capital for economic purposes (Lingard, Rawolle, & Taylor, 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Wolf et al., 2010). Provisions for public education fluctuate to accommodate economic circumstances, and resources are dedicated to improving economic, political, cultural or global conditions (Evans, 1987; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

Fifth, policy making involves other fields in both positive and negative ways (Taylor et al., 1997). Since policies are meant to stimulate markets, establish rules, alter incentives, supply goods, or provide economic protection, markets provide a yardstick to measure the efficiency of government intervention. Exploring changes in the economy and political arenas help to highlight the frameworks under which policies are operating.

Sixth, policy making is never straight forward; it 'occurs in a highly complex social environment, with official policy agendas seldom intersecting with local interests' (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 17). Thus, policies are contested, resisted, ignored, or rearticulated to suit local needs.

Seventh, policy making has intended and unintended consequences. Implementation is unpredictable due to 'complex interrelationships of contextual factors, different and sometimes opposing interests, linguistic ambiguities and the variety of key players involved in the policy
Policy is therefore complex, and policy analysis is much more than examining textual documents in isolation (Codd, 1988). Ozga (2000) adds that analysis can be done to determine policy (research for policy) or it can be done to analyze policy’s effects (research of policy). Before engaging in policy analysis, Howlett and Ramesh (2003) recommend considering which approach is appropriate for the questions being asked. Esping-Anderson (1990; 1998) considers the political economies of the state important aspects, so one approach is to associate policy outcomes with a political regime. Rubenson and Desjardins (2009), Rubenson (2010) and Desjardins (2015) touch on this in their cross national studies on participation. While appropriate for national level studies, this approach is too broad because examining outcomes through a political regime lens reveals 'little about how the characteristics of the regime manifest themselves in individual policy decisions' at the local level (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003, p. 8).

Another approach for policy analysis is to search for causal variables; however, this approach may not show how structural characteristics affect sectoral contexts where policies develop or are implemented (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). Yet causal analysis may be appropriate if policy appears to be affecting structure. A third approach is to focus on policy context, which suggests many policies are impacting a problem. In this last approach, those involved with policy react to circumstances in terms of their interests and pre-set ideological dispositions (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003, p. 14). This approach begins with the idea that state, society, and/or institutions affect how a problem is defined, how solutions are considered, and how they are implemented. In considering these approaches, I am also reminded that policy analysis does sociological work.

2.4.2 Policy Analysis and Sociological Work

Sociology is interested in the workings of the social world and the relations between personal problems and public issues (Gale, 2001). Similarly, critical social research is interested in unpacking reality to suggest ways to alter it for improvement (Troyna, 1994). To do this, critical sociologists take a closer look at particular relationships between specific and the general spheres of social life, including economics, politics, ideology, and cultures (Chouliaraki & Fairclough,
The work of policy sociologists, then, is important to anyone interested in societal problems. With this in mind, the policy cycle is of interest to sociologists because it attempts to create order in the social world. Further, policies and other social construction processes are of interest because they can create realities that advantage some people over others or reproduce a problem through taken for granted norms. Thus, a critical lens is necessary to reveal how relations between the specific and the general are manifested in ways that may or may not address the problem intended to be solved.

Ozga (1987) recommends anchoring educational and policy studies in social science traditions where text and discourse analysis involve time and scrutiny as a method for uncovering power relations (Troyna, 1994; Taylor & Henry, 2000). How policy discourse and its relationship with context are used to legitimize action in ways that limit and sustain relations of domination is one way to view policy problems (Fairclough, 1992). This requires examining policy in context where policy and power relations are used to produce, maintain, and reproduce positions of power at the local level (Bloome & Talwalkar, 1997; Young & Harrison, 2004).

Focusing on policy and power at the local level involves consideration of “how discourse is shaped, and how discourse shapes everyday existence” (Olssen, 2003, p. 195). This is done through a simultaneous examination of policy, context, and perspectives where culture and history influence meaning of social problems. It also requires an understanding that discourse, as presented in text, policy, and verbal recollections, involve values and views about relationships between people and objects. These values/views are defined by positions from which people speak and are often resistant to self-scrutiny, marginalize other viewpoints central to other discourses, and relate to the distribution of social power (Rogers, 2004a). Thus, policy discourse not only reflects social context, but it constructs and is constructed by contexts and is of interest to sociologists (Rogers, 2004b; Young & Harrison, 2004). The way people make meaning in unconscious ways as part of the cultures in which they live and work is at the heart of policy and discourse analysis and is fundamental for understanding characteristics of participation in this study (Young & Harrison, 2004; Fairclough, 1989).
2.4.3 Foucault, Power, Policy and Participation

Michel Foucault (1980), one of the most prominent thinkers of post-structural theory, believed power and knowledge were at the root of understanding. He believed in the historical ‘conditions of possibility’ that allowed knowledge to emerge or be suppressed in ways that created present situations (Mohammad et al., 2015). From this perspective, knowledge is situational and open to historical or political revision (Foucault, 1972). Mohammad et al. (2015) capture this view nicely by claiming that “knowledge, objects, individuals, and relationships have multiple meanings that shift with various contexts or different historical locations” (p. 101).

Knowledge, in the form of power, regulates people’s social conduct through policies and practices; however, Foucault rejected that power was enforced from above. Instead, he believed power was relational, as actors exercise power from many places in systems, and they exercise resistance (Foucault, 1980). Instead of focusing on this idea though multiple people, Foucault used the self to explain how multiple subjectivities exist within self and emerge by shifting into different social locations where the interplay of multiple forms of power and knowledge change in those locations. In other words, individuals are not only shaped by external forces but also by forms of self-constitution that affects their ways of being.

Foucault (1980) examined historical cases to develop ideas about power, politics, and the individual (which he referred to as ‘the body’), and the critical importance of context. How power affects the ways people interpret and implement policy in particular contexts is a missing piece from Rubenson’s, Desjardin’s, and Boeren’s national policy studies. Actors involved in policy networks have perspectives that are connected to their location within the network, and power relations take place at various levels of the context where what can be discussed, who can be part of the discussion, and how practices are carried out are controlled. Because social construction happens constantly in an everyday sort of way, “systems of power, privilege and oppression replicate themselves through the daily and innocent actions of well-intentioned people who may not be aware of the social significance of their actions” (Hirchmann, 2003, p. 84).

Foucault (1972) used the terms historiography, archaeology, and genealogy to investigate power. All three carry importance for investigating participation as how the rules change over time, who is allowed to speak and in what capacity, and how knowledge legitimizes rules at the
ground level can assist with understanding participation. To locate the rules and formations of power, Ball (1994) proposes that researchers look to forms of governance. This is similar to Desjardins’ (2017) recent findings. Governance shows itself as laws, tradition or economic conditions, intentional discipline, enforcement of compliance or consent, institutionalization, and/or rationalization. Governance also exercises power and subjugates workers as consulting objects (Foucault, 1980); therefore, it is important to think about how governance uses power to structure problems and solutions in ways that actors do not question (Hajer & Wagenaa, 2003). Foucault (1980) refers to this as ‘positive unconsciousness of knowledge’ (p. 106).

While power has taken on a negative connotation thus far, it does not always need to be associated with a negative definition. According to Bloome and Talwalkar (1997), power can be viewed as positive because it can “transform inequitable and hurtful social relations into more positive ones” through the reconstruction of social life (p. 111). Thus, the authors recommend incorporating Noddings views of transforming the potential of power from power over to power with for mutual benefit during the analysis process. Allowing stakeholder voices to speak as equals creates a shared form of power when institutions use political ways to maintain or modify discourses and the knowledges and power they carry (Foucault, 1984, p. 123).

Also important is that hegemonic control, through forms of governance and other means, can internally bind thought processes and restrict ways of doing things, while providing mechanisms for alternatives at the same time. For instance, institutional rules and policies involve discursive practices that subjugate workers. These same structures provide avenues for workers to resist subjugation from one form of power by instituting another form. Yet, power often remains curiously invisible to people using it (Breeze, 2011; Foucault, 1980), so examining the mutual dependency that exists in hierarchical orders is a good place to start. Fairclough recommends isolating different levels where rules are formed to find the imbalance in power. Similarly, how the rules are implemented is also important, as relations of power (including relations of domination) are diffused across diverse networks where practices position agents in relation to others in ways that they can incorporate the agency of others into their own actions – even reducing the capacity of the other. These ideas are vital aspects of policy analyses.
To conclude, trends in participation, approaches to studying participation, and motivation and policy as critical participation factors have been well defined thus far. The past ‘blame the victim’ paradigm (Quigley, 1992; Stone, 1988) continues today in BC’s AE environment, where it puts the onus on individuals ‘to awaken [themselves] to the possibilities’ (Faris, 1992, p. 4). Without acknowledging that there is much more to participation than individuals ‘awakening’ themselves and getting over their plight, the general understanding of participation in AE will continue to remain the responsibility of the individual. This blame-the-individual mentality has become systemic, and under-educated adults do not understand that various forces have shaped their lives, causing them to 'ascribe their plight to self-blame' (Merriam, 2005, p. 151). Yet there is hope, as policy, as a critical dimension of participation, has crystalized within this literature review. Recent studies suggest approaching participation in AE through a policy analysis lens could be the missing link to finding a solution to a very old problem. Since studies have occurred at the national and international level, engaging in a micro level (local) analysis at one institution will provide a perspective that is currently missing from the literature. Chapter 3 will outline how I go about this investigation.

2.5 Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed literature about who participates in adult education, and what conceptual frames have been used to explain participation and non-participation by adult learners in AE, including their participation in adult basic education. I then presented a summary of research on the motivations of adult learners, barriers to participation, and how participation is conditioned by broader structural conditions and policy. The chapter concluded with a discussion of non-participation, policy analysis and sociological work, and Foucault's concepts of power. These concepts comprise the conceptual framework I use for my research about what characteristics account for who participates in the local context of adult basic education at Vancouver Island University. The next chapter details how I investigated this topic in methodological terms.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This study is a qualitative case study (Merriam, 2009). Mohammad et al. (2015) define case study as a “methodological approach to empirical inquiry that explores a relatively bounded phenomenon in depth and examines the contexts under which this phenomenon occurs, particularly when the margins between context and subject are blurred” (p. 99). Merriam (2009) adds that a case study is suited for situations where it is impossible to separate variables of a phenomenon from their context. These definitions align well with what I tried to accomplish in my investigation. A case study can reveal how social, economic, political, and historical circumstances shaped understanding about participation in ABE at one location, and how power, which is found in and controls language and practice, impacted people’s perceptions.

The literature review formerly pointed to barriers to participation, but more recent studies done by Boeren (2007, 2011, 2016), Desjardins (2015, 2017), Lee (2018), Massing and Gauly (2017), Rubenson (2007, 2010) and Rubenson and Desjardins (2009) reveal an emerging theory related to policy and structural conditions and their impact on dispositional barriers as they relate to participation. These scholars focus on participation patterns in large national populations and allude to the role the state can play. I could find no similar research at micro or meso levels, where local contexts are considered as part of policy implementation. Further, I could find no qualitative studies on this emerging theory, so I feel compelled to attempt to provide an in-depth perspective that is missing. Stephen Ball (1994) argues this approach would be an important addition to a field that has been dominated by commentary and critique rather than empirical research.

My qualitative case study provides research and interpretation at the local level, largely missing from ABE policy studies to date. Policy text, whether written or spoken, is best understood as a social act and a product of the socio-political and historical context in which it exists (Johnson, 2011, p. 70). As such, I use a qualitative case study to understand acts within their context. I also use a qualitative approach because “human beings themselves are the best data collection instrument” (Buttell, 2000, p. 5). This involves examining how individuals construct reality as they interact with their social world (Merriam, 2009, p. 22). Before I explain my methodology, I acknowledge the strengths and criticisms of the case study approach.
3.1 Strengths of Case Study

One of the primary strengths of case study is its ability to facilitate an in-depth analysis of a particular complex context through the collection of robust and detailed information about a specific phenomenon (a ‘case’). This in-depth analysis retains a holistic and real-world perspective, which I need for greater explanatory power. As a form of empirical inquiry, a qualitative case study is used to understand a complex social phenomenon that would be difficult to investigate through quantitative studies alone (Yin, 2014), as it provides information about intangible factors such as social norms and inequality, which may not be apparent using a quantitative approach. When used with quantitative data, qualitative research helps researchers better understand the complex reality of a situation.

Second, because I am in a situation where I have minimal control over events occurring in a broader context, case study can be particularly useful since it considers a variety of factors that cannot be explored with other methods (Yin, 2014). For example, I am interested in policy, a process that cuts through many areas where actors and decision makers have the ability to influence human behavior but not necessarily control all aspects of the situation. My study needs to be able to examine the details of these processes, as policy studies account for complex sets of interdependent sociocultural practices (Johnson, 2011, p. 269).

Third, case studies allow new research questions, hypotheses and emergent theories to be tested (Flyvbjerg, 2011). As already stated, my literature review revealed theory related to the impact policy can have on participation, but testing this theory at the local level through a qualitative approach can provide the contextual factors and viewpoints that are missing from other studies. Further, I can locate and analyze power within relations found in the contextual framework, an aspect absent in other studies.

Fourth, case studies allow data to be collected from multiple sources for a more complete picture (Neale et al., 2006). Multiple sources of evidence and prior development of theoretical propositions guide data collection and analysis and assist with understanding multiple variables (Yin, 2014, p. 17). In this study, qualitative methods explain the nature of relationships that are often hidden within quantitative data (Stjelja, 2013). To clarify, getting information on how people interpret policy, how they feel about policy, or how they implement policy through
quantitative methods would be difficult. There is a place for this approach in policy studies, but it does not provide sufficient in-depth understanding of the complexity of policy I am seeking.

### 3.2 Criticisms of Case Study

There are several criticisms of case studies. First, Yin (2014) claims some scholars believe case studies lack rigor. However this objection can be addressed by allowing audiences to understand how the researcher arrived at her claims. I explain my process later in this chapter and include how I addressed aspects of credibility, crystallization, transferability, and dependability throughout the process (Carcary, 2009).

A second criticism is that case studies cannot be generalizable. Yin (2014) refuted this claim by arguing that statistical generalizations are not the only way to generalize information. A well-constructed case study that uses analytic investigations to understand complex issues and explain phenomena can be extended to other studies. By using analytical investigations, case studies can further develop and test theories rather than populations. Further, Carcary (2009) and Merriam (2009) add that generalizability is not the goal of qualitative case studies; an analysis that produces deep and rich descriptions is extremely valuable for understanding and explaining in and of itself.

A third criticism is that case studies are biased in their findings towards researchers’ hypotheses (Yin, 2014). However, all research begins with a proposition, so any research approach can be manipulated in accordance with researcher bias. To explain, Simundić (2013) contends that bias can exist in experiments where data can be fabricated, eliminated, and tested using inappropriate statistical tests or ‘fished’ using multiple forms of secondary testing that were not part of the original plan. In my case study, I have tried to design, conduct, and report my findings in a transparent and honest way and named biases upfront. Defining all elements of my case, including the formulation of research questions, was also helpful in addressing this criticism (Corcoran et al., 2004).

Fourth, some critics argue that case studies tend to collect voluminous amounts of data, of which some is irrelevant to the case or of little value. Researchers often spend time and effort analyzing information only to find that it may not be relevant. However, as Crowe et al. (2011) suggest a focused data collection in line with the research questions can help avoid that pitfall.
Also, because case studies can be flexible in exploring different paths, analyzing information that might not appear relevant could be helpful.

### 3.3 Purpose and Type of Case Study

Case studies are done for various purposes (Bassey, 1999). Yin (2014) claims the three main purposes are to explore, describe or explain particular phenomenon. Exploratory studies identify research questions or procedures that will be used in subsequent research studies where no clear set of outcomes exist or when the focus is broad. Descriptive analyses describe phenomenon in real-world contexts. They are often story based and are very detailed. Explanatory cases explain how or why some condition came to be. Because I want to explain how participation in ABE came to be, I use an explanatory approach to examine causal relationships to further develop a theory, but specific hypotheses and theoretical concerns are generally not applied when analyzing data.

There is no specific formula to apply when doing case study research. Nevertheless, case studies are helpful when trying to assess human behavior because they allow for various forms of qualitative and quantitative analyses within a bounded system of multi-layered and complex human activities. Polkinghorne (2005) adds that qualitative methods are particularly valuable for investigating human experiences. I use qualitative methods for data collection to construct meaning rather than discover it. Thus, my analysis tells how something works rather than what works (Stjelja, 2013). Finally, case study is the best choice when researchers have little control over events or when variables are so embedded in the situation it is impossible to identify them ahead of time. A case study can get close to the subject due to access of subjective factors like participant thoughts and feelings. The quality of a case study is a function of its trustworthiness (Carcary, 2009; Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2014). In discussing this, Hite (2001) claims very few reports provide sufficient information about a case, so “conscientious researchers must make efforts to locate evidence for the reliability of research” (p. 52). I now provide a brief explanation of how trustworthiness has been established in this study through credibility, crystallization, transferability and dependability.
3.4 Credibility

Credibility is often seen as the most important criterion for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research because it refers to how well my researched findings can match reality and how confident I am in the truth of my study’s findings. Any data set needs an interpreter regardless of the research approach. As such, words, equations, and numbers are all symbolic representations of reality rather than reality itself. In this regard, credibility is actually assessing something other than reality (Merriam, 2009). To be credible, I pay close attention to and follow carefully the data collection and analysis process I laid out, including considering outliers, to ensure integrity as a researcher. This assists with establishing credibility. Additionally, I reflect on myself as a researcher to identify biases, assumptions, and dispositions so that readers can understand how I arrived at my interpretations. My own values and expectations influence my conclusions and recommendations, so staying true to rigorous methods and presenting these biases, assumptions and dispositions upfront can establish credibility as well. In short, my study reflects the understandings of my participants in conjunction with my own understandings. I have been honest about the process I followed and how I arrived at my conclusions.

I also establish credibility through member checks. Data, interpretations, and conclusions have been shared with participants to allow them to clarify what their intentions were, correct any errors, and provide additional information if necessary. This process confirms integrity in qualitative research. I also drew on external reviewers (a VIU peer and my research committee) to provide feedback as an additional way to ensure credibility.

3.5 Crystallization

Crystallization is using thick description, attending to the complexity of interpretation, using more than one form of inquiry, and engaging in reflexivity, I seek to uncover truth that is grounded in people’s experiences, and I cross reference these perspectives with other data sources (documents, policies, reports, etc.) to confirm my interpretation of participant understanding. By using protocols to ensure accuracy and by considering alternative explanations (Stake, 1995), I use qualitative techniques to demonstrate that particular truths can be uncovered in a case study (Feagin, et. al., 1991).
Some authors (Yin, 2014; Polkinghorne, 2001) argue research strategies that include crystallization do not guarantee rigor, so I use a consistent and deliberate procedural approach to analyze data where transferability, credibility and consistency establish trustworthiness.

### 3.6 Transferability

One question often asked of research studies is how findings are applicable to other contexts (similar situations, similar populations, or similar phenomenon). However, in qualitative studies, generalization to wider populations is not the objective (Carcauly, 2009). Nonetheless, I use a single location to study an emerging theory in depth and use thick description as a way to provide evidence that may be applicable to other contexts, circumstances or situations (Merriam, 2009).

In this study, I provide a rich, contextualized understanding of the human experience as it relates to policy, power and AE participation. Understandings found within a single AE location and the complex factors surrounding it mirror other scholars’ findings, but I add to the body of literature by recognizing and acknowledging the nuances of the local situation and how factors associated with the local context can add to a general theory. In fact, it is the purpose of qualitative research to gain a rich understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon to explain it rather than to actually look for transferability. Therefore, I provide a thorough explanation of the steps I took, and I provide sufficient evidence and description to support my findings so that others can agree with my judgements. I explicitly connect data to political, social, economic, and cultural contexts with interviews and other forms of discourse that would help readers construct the scene surrounding my study. By including various contexts, others can make transferability judgements on their own.

To achieve transferability, Merriam (2009) suggests the researcher should collect data and engage in data analysis using four strategies. First, living among participants for extended periods of time can provide continual data analysis that allows for comparing and refining constructs between identified categories and participant reality. Because I have worked within the ABE environment at VIU for twenty-five years, I have access to knowledges and experiences others would not and can draw on these experiences to help interpret others’ experiences. Second, because my interview data and other discourses include words and phrases as part of language, empirical categories emerged in a less abstract way than if using instruments to identify
categories. I discuss these categories later in this chapter. Third, because I engage with participants in their natural settings, real life experiences are reflected and captured through conversation and can be explored in a deeper way. Finally, reflection, introspection and self-monitoring allowed for questioning, re-evaluating, and confirming my understanding directly from the participants. I validate my interpretation of participant interpretation by soliciting feedback on my findings.

Finally, being transparent throughout the research process by describing steps taken, what data was collected, the reason for a chosen method, and being upfront about a my background and level of involvement results in findings that can be transferable (Crowe et al., 2011). As Merriam (2009) so eloquently states, my study shows “the general lies in the particular” (p. 225).

3.7 Dependability
Dependability is the extent to which my study can be repeated by other researchers with consistent findings. Stated another way, if another person wants to replicate my study, that person needs to have enough information to do so. Given that there are many interpretations of what is happening in the world, and there is no benchmark by which to establish 'reliability' in the traditional sense of research (Merriam, 2009 p. 220), one way to establish dependability is to have an outside person review and examine my research process and my data analysis to ensure my findings are consistent and the analysis can be repeated. I have engaged an external peer at VIU and I draw on my research committee to review and examine my work and provide feedback. I have incorporated their suggestions along the way.

Additionally, Carcary (2009) claims, “qualitative researchers recognize that reproducing social phenomenon is difficult because of the challenges involved in replicating the precise conditions under which evidence was collected” (p. 14). This means that even if the same participants are used in another study, it is unlikely that they would give the same responses because their understandings of things may have changed due to the conversations they have been exposed to during the research process. The idea is that if similar studies are conducted with care, findings should not be drastically different. From this perspective, dependability is different than reliability as it is concerned with demonstrating the researcher has not invented or misinterpreted data or has been careless with data and analysis (Carcary, 2009). I used a
research journal to reflect on and outline my thoughts and procedures along the way that led to my findings. I checked my interpretations with participants as a way to discuss their experience and cross-referenced these interpretations by using other documents and discourses to bring a balanced perspective.

3.8 Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree of neutrality the researcher has in the study’s findings. In other words, findings are based on participant responses rather than potential bias or personal motivations of the researcher. Given that a single objective reality does not exist and multiple realities need to be considered (external and internal or subjective realities unique to individuals), making research value-free and objective is impossible. Situations vary and it is up to me, as the researcher, to derive meaning as a function of the circumstances based on the people involved and the interrelationships of the broader context (Carcary, 2009, p. 12). With this in mind, Carcary argues the researcher’ mind, supplemented with the minds of others when ideas and their own responses have been exposed to them, is the best tool for analysis.

Here an audit trail can assist with achieving confirmability provided it is built into the qualitative research process. This is done by ensuring the reader is able to audit the events, influences, and actions of the researcher to assure quality of the study. This is done through reflexive methodological accounting of analytic decision making. An audit trail is when a second party becomes familiar with the qualitative study, its methodology, findings, and conclusions and can audit the research decisions and the process of the researcher upon completion of the study to confirm the findings. In this case, my supervisor in my doctoral studies was my auditor.

While I used a journal to track research activities, document data collection and analysis procedures, capture process notes, outline my thinking and reflections, denote additional questions I had, and identify areas of confusion, much of my audit trail is intellectual in that I reflected on the literature review, data, analysis, questions, ideas, and my thinking on a daily basis and throughout the various phases of this study. These reflections guided my next steps. In fact, this reflection often occurred during travel time during my work days and when I was engaged in domestic tasks that did not require much thinking. To ensure I achieved confirmability, I have provided an account for the research activities I engaged in and the
decisions I made within this chapter and throughout this document where I detail why I chose to take certain actions. Anyone reading this study should be able to identify that my findings are accurate, as I provided a portrayal of participant responses by not skewing interpretations of research to fit a particular narrative or agenda. I have also provided a rationale for my decisions, and my inferences are logical.

3.9 Ethical Challenges, Researcher Bias and Assumptions

Researchers who study in their own ‘backyard’ face considerable ethical challenges. My location in this study relates to an intrinsic interest in the case itself. I am simply curious about what is occurring with participation at my place of work. I also have an instrumental interest because I want to provide insight into the issue of participation and the role policy plays. Because I am a powerful decision-maker at VIU, collecting people’s understandings put me in a compromising position in terms of respondent expectations. Walshaw (2010) corroborates this point regarding trusting relationships. My research could lead to expectations that are contradictory or not possible, so my approach is one of an ‘ethics of care’. I have “a duty to attend to people on their own terms, consider their needs and recognize the interpersonal character of research” (Haverkamp, 2005, p. 154). I clearly and explicitly state protocols for interaction with participants to both UBC’s Behavioural Ethics Review Board and VIU’s Research Ethics Board. Both boards approved these protocols, and I followed them precisely. I assured participants their comments would not be used against them, nor could these comments be connected back to their speaker, and I supported anyone who wanted to withdraw from the study (which did not occur).

Because research is political, I had concerns about how changes in knowledge, relationships with self and others, and my own perspective would impact my participants. The release of my research findings could exacerbate existing political tensions (Ballamingie & Johnson, 2011, p. 724). The leadership or VIU may not like what this study has to say about policy processes, structural conditions, or actions taken by these groups. Additionally, conducting research close to home could put my existing, past, or future relationships at risk (i.e. student, colleague, institution, community) since my status at VIU can be connected to my research activities, even though this study is not part of my employment. This ‘other’ subjectivity is part of self, an identity that is never static, but this is irrelevant during times of scrutiny or renegotiation. While I cannot
control how my words and ideas will be repackaged by others (Giampapa, 2011), I must live with the consequences of my project (Drake, 2009) and not worry about outsider views of my findings.

As the primary research instrument for collecting and analyzing data, my goal is to be responsive and adaptive, so I relied on both verbal and non-verbal communication during data gathering and analysis, but previously conceived notions about participation and policy needed to be made strange so that I could concentrate on other perspectives. This included cross-checking my interpretations of views with the respondents themselves to ensure I captured their understandings correctly.

Finally, this study is important to me because it relates to my career. Each participant group was impacted by participation in some way, and I considered this as I reflected on their perspectives. Bias helped me think about whose interests were being served by the way VIU’s ABE system was organized, who really had access to ABE, who had the power to make changes, and what the outcomes were when education was structured the way it is. Reflecting on participant views helped me consider how power was negotiated, and what structures reinforced the distribution of power. Merriam (2009) claims my biases and assumptions pointed to the idea that “people unconsciously accept things the way they are, and in so doing, reinforce the status quo” (p. 35). This underpinned my thinking as I engaged in data analysis.

3.10 Design Process

I used a qualitative approach because I am interested in finding out what is happening with ABE participation at VIU as experienced and interpreted by the people within that policy network. Since policy discourse is interpreted and understood in context, it was necessary to investigate the situation through those who are experiencing the problem to better understand it.

3.10.1 Unit of Analysis

In order to pursue a case study, I first define the case by identifying a ‘unit of analysis’ and creating a boundary to study it (Crowe et al., 2011). Since I am concerned about the characteristics of who participates in ABE from a policy perspective, my unit of analysis is ABE participation at VIU. In terms of defining the boundary, Yin (2014) prompts me to clarify the nature and time period covered by my case, the relevant social group, and the organization or
geographical area. I drew a dotted line around VIU as a post-secondary institution where participation has changed. VIU is an attractive case because the institution has gone through significant structural changes over the past 30 years. This had implications for my proposition, as structural change can impact who programs are designed for, who they attract, and who they serve. By examining one BC institution that belongs to a larger group that have also experienced change, I hoped this study can add to what has already been learned about participation and the impact of policy. Drawing on people at the local level involves a bottom up approach that recognizes policy goals are often ambiguous, they conflict with other needs, and they can show that implementing actors can be difficult to control (Evans, 1987, p. 66).

VIU is also an appropriate case because fewer students in Nanaimo complete secondary education than the rest of the province (BC Ministry of Education, 2013). While it is not known at this time whether this information is correlated to the number of people on social assistance, it is very likely that these individuals are not making high wages if they are working, particularly since, as noted in Chapter 2, half of the people in Nanaimo’s region make less than $35,000 per year, and a quarter of the people in Nanaimo’s region make less than $15,000 per year (Nanaimo City Profile, 2010).

Lastly, I use VIU as a case because I have worked there for twenty-five years, mostly in ABE. I have a personal desire to see participation increase in the program, and I worry that policy decisions are not doing enough to help people enroll in ABE. I use 1995 to 2015, as this horizon reflects the years I worked at VIU’s Nanaimo campus. I continue to work there today, but I end the study at 2015 to make the study possible for data collection, analysis and report completion. Along with timeline, I also consider relevant social groups to be people using policies related to participation in ABE. This includes VIU representatives (staff, administrators, instructors), as well as external representatives who use policies related to adults returning to school. These organizations are government, not-for-profit, social service, and Indigenous education centers.

3.10.2 Identifying Research Questions

Crowe et al. (2011) suggest formulating research questions should be informed by existing literature and a prior appreciation of the theoretical issues and settings. I had a general idea that
I wanted to know more about participation in ABE and factors prohibiting participation, but the literature review helped narrow my topic in that a new idea had emerged that considered how policy, self, and context constrain participation choices. I had not considered policy before, and I wanted to know more to narrow my topic further. As I learned more about how policy impacted participation at the macro level, I realized that there were virtually no studies done at the local level. Furthermore, studies done on policy and participation were quantitative in nature.

Because I believe knowledge is co-constructed, I was interested in the nuances of policy in context and how people understood policy within their social environment. I decided to focus my study on trying to understand how policy affects who participates in ABE at the local level. A gap in the literature provided me with an opportunity to have a closer, in-depth look at participation through a policy lens while adding to the research that had already been done. Additionally, because other studies pointed to context as an important factor, I wanted to understand how a person’s context impacted how policy was understood, as other studies indicated that self-concept was related to one’s environment. Understanding ABE participation through a contextual lens could provide insight on what accounted for the change in ABE participation.

I brainstormed a variety of questions related to my topic, and critically scrutinized them as I considered which ones would help me understand who was participating in VIU’s ABE program. Conversations with my supervisor helped me arrive at my primary research question and six additional questions I would investigate to understand my primary question. To get at my main research question, I operated on two levels at the same time – I used specific questions posed to participants and I used a broader question to analyze discourse related to policy and participation. The specific questions allowed for conversation, as they were semi-structured and open-ended (Yin, 2014). They guided data collection and helped investigation of study propositions, and they assisted in identifying relevant contextual or policy information not previously considered. Without these questions, my study might have been too broad (Yin, 2014). My propositions limited my investigation to the study of policies, context, and perceptions.

I considered policies as powerful objects; they are actually systems of knowledge that control people’s thinking, perceptions, attitudes and behaviors (Foucault, 1980), so my questions had to give me permission to examine the language found within them. My questions expected
me to analyze how this form of communication was understood in the world, and this would come about through my first unit of analysis: participant views on policies. Questions related to perspectives on the policies could provide insight on what is really going on with participation.

My first two questions focused on the purpose of ABE and whether VIU was delivering on that purpose. I chose these questions because the literature review revealed that AE had many purposes, and the term ‘Adult Basic Education’ or ‘ABE’ is quite specific. Many studies referred to ‘adult education’, ‘life-long learning’ or ‘illiteracy’, and the noticeable language shift was something to consider related to who ABE attracts. Getting a grasp on ABE’s purpose and how well VIU delivered on that purpose helped me understand who students would or could be and whether ABE’s function had changed over time.

The next two questions focused on which policies supported or challenged ABE’s purpose. I expected understandings of ABE’s purpose to be consistent, but I did not want to bias participant answers; therefore, I kept the word ‘purpose’ in the questions to allow voices to speak to their understanding of ABE from a policy perspective. The next question focused on barriers to achieving the purpose as participants understood it. Once again, the word purpose was left in the question so participants could answer based on their understanding of ABE’s function at VIU and what barriers affected this function. This question was important for removing barriers from the individual and putting them back on the system. Finally, the last question asked for recommendations to ensure ABE’s purpose(s) at VIU would be met. This question provided participants an opportunity to have input into what would make things better for the program and for students from their perspective. Questions asked of participants were as follows:

1) Please describe what you think the purpose(s) of Adult Basic Education (ABE) is/are.
2) How well do you think VIU serves this/these purpose(s)?
3) What policies support the purpose of ABE? Explain. (government?/institutional?)
4) What policies challenge the purpose of ABE? Explain. (government?/institutional?)
5) What do you see are the greatest barriers for fulfilling the purpose(s) of ABE at VIU? Explain.
6) What recommendations would you offer VIU to ensure the purpose(s) of ABE are met?
3.11 Data Sources

To ensure the design of my study met high standards of trustworthiness, I considered credibility, crystallization, transferability and dependability. One important factor is to ensure data collection is robust with multiple sources of evidence (Crowe et al., 2011; Stjelja, 2013; Yin, 2014). I drew from three large source areas to achieve a robust collection of evidence: policy documents, federal, provincial and VIU documents; and interviews with VIU policy makers.

3.11.1 Context and Policy Documents

First, I explored contextual documents on the historical, political, and economic context of Canada, BC, and VIU to get an idea of what was going on during my time period. As Lingard et al. (2005) and Rizvi and Lingard (2010) allude to, policy is tied to economic and social development. I traced the historical context of the participation situation to establish how ABE was defined. This means I examined the historical antecedents that led to the ABE policy framework. I also wondered about competing interests and discourses, new alliances or divisions, and key players. I examined Throne Speeches to highlight issues driving government priorities and policy, and the Ministry of Advanced Education’s Service Plans to provide specific details about priorities, issues, and ideology. These documents included references to national and global issues impacting the province. I also referred to reports like Campus 2020 and The Faris Report, and popular press releases to help identify the larger context for education and the stretched nature of the policy umbrella.

I also examined ABE policies. I used four strategies. First, I had previous knowledge of policies as a long time employee in ABE. Second, names of policies emerged through conversations with participants during the interview process. The third way I learned about policies was through intertextuality. Document and archival records used to establish the historical context named other policies. Finally, Google and library searches for information on ABE or AE in BC also named policies. Locating policies depended on where they were kept. Federal policies were available on the internet, and provincial policies were available through the Ministry of Advanced Education website, through the legislature, or could be Googled. VIU’s policies were in an online policy archive and searchable by key words.
The policies I examined for this study included the College and Institute Act, the University Act, Employment Insurance Policy, Social Assistance policy, the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act, ABE Tuition Free policy, the Tuition Fee Freeze Act, the Adult Upgrading Grant policy, and the Adult Graduation Diploma policy. I considered these policies because they offer information for institutions offering ABE; they outline parameters for participation in education; they offer information about ABE funding (an important barrier identified in the literature review); they include criteria for program admission; and/or they were named by study participants.

3.11.2 VIU Related Documents and Archival Material

Documents and archival records were analyzed using discourse analysis. Since certain systems of thinking or speaking are seen as accepted ways of understanding the world, I use written texts as one credible form of speaking (Mohammad et al., 2015). Documents were accessible and contained information that would take me an enormous amount of time to gather. These documents were used to verify emerging propositions, advance new categories, offer historical understanding, and track change and development. Documents included BC’s ABE Articulation Guide, VIU’s BCGEU Local 702 Collective Agreement, the Community Adult Literacy Program guide, the Ministry of Advanced Education Service Plans, Throne Speeches, media releases on changes to ABE, enrolment reports, budget letters, white papers such as Campus 2020, the Warburton Report, journal articles such as Levin, and books like Bauslaugh’s *Search for a Better University Education: Experiment at Malaspina*.

Together these documents provide a historical account of the political, social and economic changes that occurred in Canada, BC, and at VIU, but there are paths of inquiry that can be pursued further through direct interviews. The documents are other people’s interpretations of data, so information may be incomplete or inaccurate, or it could be written for a different purpose. Additionally, the interview enables depth, nuance and complexity to be captured and can uncover new knowledge (Carcauly, 2009).

Media releases were also considered in the collection of documents and archives, as they provided information that was constructed or stifled in ways that informed the public’s judgment
(Manning, May 6, 2015; Rizvi & Lingard, 2000). While these documents did not articulate how or why ABE participation became what it is today, they contained pertinent information on context. Placing these documents alongside policy and interview data created a robust data set to assist with understanding the ABE participation phenomenon at VIU.

As I read these documents, I used intertextuality to identify other relevant documents and archival records to paint the picture of what was occurring in VIU’s context. Understanding the influence of other documents helped me see ‘how’ policies were constructed and for what purpose, as well as how policy problems were used to justify particular positions (Walker, 2010). All relevant factors were not available because ideologies underlying policies are typically absent and could only be interpreted through critical interrogation of practice and the consequences that emerged at the ground level (Jones & Collins, 2006, p. 38). Words and meanings involved decision-making about “communicative behavior on someone’s part” (p. 40), so I turned to a variety of stakeholders to get their interpretation of text and what they knew about the situation. I referred to what actors knew about the authors of texts, the circumstances surrounding the text, and their opinion on policies and other relevant facts (Jones & Collins, 2006, p. 40).

3.11.3 ABE Policy Stakeholder Interviews

To understand how policy works, Codd (1988) recommends examining the effects documents have through reader perception and how meaning is produced, rather than searching for a text’s intention because policy is a vehicle of communication between agents within a process. As mentioned, thinking about participation from the perspective of ABE instructors, administrators and staff within the context of one institution is an important piece of the puzzle since prior histories, events, political or ideological climates, social or economic situations, and actors shape current circumstances (Taylor et al., 1997). Day and Hadfield (2004), like Foucault (1980) and Fairclough (1992), propose that I examine the relationship between what is organizationally controlled (systemic) and what is individually controlled (personally empowered) to understand the tensions between core values and changes in the working environments.

To choose policy stakeholders to interview about ABE policy and participation, I thought about key players involved at the local level to tease out beliefs on what policies controlled and
what actors controlled, as local pressures can weaken strongly stated policy objectives (Taylor, 1997, p. 31). ABE instructors had insider perspectives that others did not. They had views on the complexities and complications of everyday practice, as they dealt with them first-hand within the context of the problematic (Dirkx, 2006; Thomson & Gunter, 2011). This experience can color views of the situation from particular standpoints of “living it and bringing it into being” (Smith, 2001, p. 67). Therefore, I decided to interview all regular ABE instructors at the Nanaimo campus to learn how instructors understood their contexts, their learners, and to give them voice (Dirkx, 2006). I also wanted to ensure I had a historical perspective, so I reached out to three instructors who had retired within the last year. I considered my location as a researcher in this group, and tried to cultivate an open and respectful research environment where participants would feel free to disclose their perspectives without judgement, particularly since one of my own subjectivities was a position of power as their dean. Acknowledging this and explaining that I was a research student rather than their supervisor helped to create a safe environment for their responses.

I also thought about others who were part of the ABE policy network. I came to the conclusion that VIU’s senior administrators would also be key, as they were responsible for funding at the local level, and front line staff in ABE also had an important perspective related to their engagement with students and faculty. There were a variety of external stakeholders who were also involved with policies that affected the program in terms of clients participating. I thought about representatives from the government and community, as their perspectives on ABE participation and policy might be different than insider views. Engaging in dialogue with government representatives and community members would broaden my view of policy, power, and participation while creating “criticality and openness to alternative interpretation” (Kahn et al., 2008, p. 170). These perspectives were introduced by and broadened by the literature review (Saban, 2000) and my own ideas about the situation. For government representatives, I thought about those who would be directly responsible for ABE policy. I decided on people who worked in the Ministry of Advanced Education (MAVED), and more specifically, those working in the AE arm of the ministry. Additionally, I thought about social policy arenas and decided that front line
workers implementing income assistance and employment insurance in the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology respectively would be appropriate.

Finally, I thought about community organizations where people who needed ABE could be found. I decided non-profit organizations, as they worked one-on-one with people needing support. I was most interested in front line workers, so I considered Nanaimo Youth Services, Literacy Central Nanaimo, and GT Hiring. I also thought about VIU’s relationship with some of the local Indigenous communities since Indigenous students graduate from high school in fewer numbers (Ministry of Education, 2018). I felt Education Counsellors would have experiences and understandings that needed to be considered.

Together, these responses represented a collective of views that were based on understood roles in society. These roles reflected different values and beliefs, in addition to interpretations of the situation and experiences that revealed how policy actors made sense of policy within their environment (Johnson, 2011). I did not consider potential student perspectives for two reasons. First, not only are prospective students difficult to locate, but I would need to find students who are, in fact, interested in returning to school. Also, several studies highlighted in the literature review already considered student voices and their views on participation, so adding more to this well researched area was not my interest. Second, because I am interested in policy and how it impacts participation, I had a closer look at how actors understood policy in their context because policies themselves are often vague. Power and control are important in this study, so I am more interested in views from actors who were in positions to influence the policy process, even though they are also controlled by it. These views provide perspectives on what policies say, how they get implemented, and what they do as a result. These actors provided a voice currently absent from other policy studies on participation.

In keeping with Fairclough’s (1992) ideas about a constituted grid of actors, I sought involvement from ABE instructors, staff and senior administrators from VIU in Nanaimo, government representatives in various ministries (Ministry of Advanced Education; Ministry of Jobs, Training & Technology; Ministry of Social Development), administrators and workers in non-profit organizations in Nanaimo, and Indigenous Education Counsellors at various Aboriginal education institutions in Nanaimo. Interviewing participants from various parts of a broader ABE
policy network linked to VIU developed a deep conception of the social context and ABE policy network and how it operated in VIU’s region (Apple, 1996).

In total, I emailed interview invitations to 27 people. Copies of the invitation emails can be found as Appendices A through F. For instructors, I included only ‘regular’ and recently retired ABE instructors due to logistics on the timing of the study. I found contact information for government employees by searching ministry websites. Finally, I located representatives from local not-for-profit organizations and Indigenous education centers in community directories. I emailed Not-For-Profit Executive Directors, as these positions were more stable with longer term people in the roles. For the Indigenous education centers, I chose education counsellors because they were fairly stable in their position and they worked on the front line with potential students. Together my group of participants were believed to be “thoughtful, informative, articulate, and experienced with the research topic and setting” (Gay & Airsian, 2003, p. 116).

In total, 20 participants (74%) agreed to participate. They were asked to sign a consent form, were informed their anonymity would be protected, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time with their information returned as part of the process to protect them from harm (Gay & Arisian, 2003). They were also told all interview notes and recordings would be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home, so raw data would be secure.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight ABE instructors (three with 20 or more years of experience at VIU, three with 10 to 20 years of experience at VIU, and two with 1 to 10 years of experience at VIU). Instructors with different levels of seniority were grouped to reflect perspectives of the changing context at VIU, as some had been through many institutional transitions. Others with less experience were called upon to see if their views differed. VIU administrator views (two administrators) were called upon to reflect views from a decision maker perspective and from a perspective of innate power in terms of overseeing those who work with students. One VIU staff person was also interviewed to get a front line worker perspective.

I also interviewed four Ministry of Advanced Education employees who had ABE in their portfolio; three had a history of working with ABE policy in the government (more than five years) and one interviewee was fairly new to the position. Lastly, I interviewed five people from various community agencies and bands within the Nanaimo catchment area – three not-for-profit
representatives and two Indigenous education counsellors. All had worked for their employer for a minimum of five years. I could not secure participants from the Ministry of Jobs, Training & Technology or the Ministry of Social Development, two important ministries that would have interesting views to add. This will be discussed further in the ‘limitations’ section.

All interviews were semi-structured interviews where a natural conversation allowed for deeper insight into the phenomenon. This interview method treated participants as equals, as they expressed personal feelings and created a more realistic picture than using highly structured interview methods (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 371). Interviews occurred at several locations from August 13, 2014, to November 30, 2016. One interview occurred over the phone and another over Skype due to location challenges. Each interview was allotted one hour, but this timeframe was not static. Interview times ranged from 22 min 36 sec to 63 min 48 sec. I audio-recorded the interviews with a small voice recorder that could upload the recording to a computer to provide a more accurate rendition of the interviews (Yin, 2014). I also made notes about body language to help verify shared meanings and understandings. During the interview, I starred areas in my notes that needed further clarification or to remind me to investigate further post-interview. I did not make notes on body language for Skype or phone interviews for obvious reasons. These interviews relied heavily on participant feedback.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. I used ‘Transcribe’, a computer software, to slow down diction to fully capture words, pauses, and tone changes. I highlighted voice hesitations, included dots to indicate pauses, and underlined stressed words to aide with interpretation. The interviews themselves were the subject of interpretation for understanding policy and its processes (Gale, 2001). As Gale explains,

knowledge of the former [process and product] is to be gained empirically and not on the basis of interference from the latter [motive and action] or by deduction from grand theory. Hence the importance of going beyond the pronouncements of ‘policy makers’ and actually talking to them, for meanings and ‘assumptive worlds’ are essential parts of the policy process and require to be understood if action itself is to be understood. Written documentary evidence often provides a supplement to such data production. (p. 23-24)
Transcripts were emailed back to participants for review, edits and approval. Participant review is necessary for validating information and to confirm or critique my understanding. This form of validation provided an opportunity for additional material to be added, for further investigation, or for accuracy. This approach allowed me to experience refraction – the reinterpretation of a problem relayed over distance, time, location and hierarchy.

3.12 Data Analysis

Once data was collected, making sense of all the disparate data sources and offering a coherent, genuine interpretation was no straightforward task (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2014). My theoretical propositions helped me prioritize data and focus my attention on certain information while ignoring other data (Yin, 2014). I focused on policy and context as integrated factors of participation, but I also considered ways power contributed to the phenomenon. I thought about plausible explanations for participation at VIU given that policy actors within organizations influence each other’s beliefs and values (Frank & Zhao, 2005).

Information collected for the three units of observation would demonstrate an inseparable configuration of power as constituted through discourse and practice (Mchoul & Grace, 1997). Gee (2011a; 2011b) claims relationships exist between texts, events, practices, and structures, and Fairclough (2004) states texts are a critical component of the ‘social’ as part of language. Thus, I used discursive events to understand how the interaction of text and the social are influenced and mediated by interpretation.

I read through the composite set of Canadian, BC and VIU policy documents over the last twenty years and highlighted areas where shifts in policy occurred. I thought about historical, political, economic and social contexts and how these could have contributed to the current situation at VIU. I also considered the workings of the federal and provincial governments and VIU to identify where power existed and how discourse constructed ABE in a particular way and not in other ways (Locke, 2004). Thinking about governing bodies and how they created the conditions to subjugate and control people was a key aspect of this study (Foucault, 1984), so I focused on governing discourse to reveal how individual experiences and voices were socially generated out of public experiences (Olssen, 2003, p. 195) and how members of the same social group constituted hierarchical order and mutual dependency (Meyer, 2001). I wrote up a...
preliminary historical narrative of ABE policy using these analytical categories (presented in Chapter 4). I used this history as an organizing structure to help frame and interpret interviews with ABE policy stakeholders.

In analyzing policy and contextual documents, I read through the documents to get a first impression, and as I read a second time, highlighted areas that were vague or where power was asserted. I paid attention to how language was being used. I followed a similar procedure to analyze interview transcripts. As Gee (2011a; 2011b) recommends, I thought about language according to its significance, the practices identified, identities that are built, relationships that are created, politics or distribution of goods that are identified, how things are connected, and the various signed systems.

For interviews, I organized and coded the data to allow key themes to emerge, while considering the literature review, the context, and the policies. I used an iterative approach to look for frequently used key words, phrases and instances of word pairings (Gee, 2011a; Mulderrig, 2012). I was concerned about relationships between ideas and complexities in understandings (Stake, 1995), so during second and subsequent readings of interviews, I thought about my propositions and highlighted words and phrases to help identify patterns for themes/categories to emerge.

As I read transcripts, I conceptualized data as answers to my questions within the context of broader systems. I sorted questions and responses by comparing them to my larger question and to other responses. I looked for repeated words, inconsistencies, allusions, connotations, and basic assumptions that underpinned particular ways of talking about ABE and participation, as language forms the object of which it speaks and it creates a limited lens for how concepts are defined (Gee, 2011a). I compared answers for the same question within Excel by displaying the data in columns. I color coded responses in questions to analyze similar and different perspectives and to find patterns. I then linked perspectives to concepts of how policy and context binds ways of thinking and being. I also concentrated on types of ABE descriptions and policy options, and I systematically connected these viewpoints to one another.

Responses reflected actor locations in the system, which aided with understanding about how knowledge was shaped in context. Participants expressed perspectives that involved
selected meanings, and views were legitimized with generally accepted facts that were based on what actors believed to be important. Utterances were received as logical descriptions of how things were (Foucault, 1972), so I looked at how words were used to create networks of meaning in a continuous cycle (Ball, 1994; Fairclough, 1992; Taylor et al., 1997).

As I worked through each group of data, I began to link the three sources of information. I used Microsoft Excel to create tables of information that could continually be sorted, coded and re-coded, and organized and reorganized, depending on emerging themes. Using Excel helped me stay organized as I saved different versions of constituted grids of emerging themes.

After my initial analysis of policy and archival documents, I began analyzing them on subsequent reads similar to how I had done the interviews. I considered what might have been influencing the policy context. Birkland (2005) breaks these influences into four categories: structural (federal, provincial and local governments); social (nature and composition of the population); economic (distribution of wealth, cost of labour, size of industry); and political (how people felt about government, policies, problems). I considered these categories as I located ideas alongside participant perspectives within Excel. I looked closely at policy language to interpret what the speaker sought to do (Gee, 2011b) and what was left out or assumed to be understood. I then compared what the policies ‘said’ with what participants ‘said about them’.

I traced events back to policies and to participant perspectives to see how they combined to reflect various contexts and understandings. As per Weimer and Vining’s (1999) suggestion, I used the historical and political contexts to help me understand how policies and perspectives depended on these environments. I coded these as part of a complex network of integrated stakeholders, policies, and power. Engagement with policy text, views about the text, and consideration of other documents and archival information allowed me to make sense of AE participation through interpretations where particular understandings were privileged. I also considered participant positions, their relationship in the situation, and the role policy played.

Finally, I considered how governance engaged power with and through policy. I examined policy and participant responses where governance practices involved language that shifted terrain and built upon it (Bruchell et al., 1991; Mchoul & Grace, 1997). Put another way, I thought about where ‘actors [we]re positioned by language’ (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003, p. 107) in order to
consider their social situatedness. Ultimately, I assessed the causal and ideological effects of policy by linking micro level analysis with meso and macro level analyses to show how power and policy relations work across networks and structures.

3.13 Limitations

There are a number of limitations to consider for this study. First, I had no representation from the social service area. Although I tried to get representation from workers in Income Assistance and Employment Insurance, no one responded. I also tried to get more representation from non-profits with no luck. These ‘missing voices’ could have provided valuable insight on the ways in which EI and IA are implemented on the front lines and how they impact people wanting access to education. Additionally, these prospective participants work directly with the policies I am interested in. Lipsky (1980) indicates that these workers play a powerful role in the policy-making process, but I could not force people to participate and was unable to get these views.

Second, as a researcher who came from the field I was studying, I listened carefully during the data collection process because I straddled the boundaries between two positions of researcher and insider. When I listened to participant answers, I carefully considered my instincts as an instructor and curbed my urge to provide my own views on policies and barriers that I believed could assist with achieving ABE’s purpose. My participants were sometimes unaware of policies that challenged or supported access to ABE, but I did not want to influence the data by providing my own thoughts on these matters. While I occasionally paused to allow participants and myself to use reflexivity and to think more deeply about certain topics, I felt that participants did not always go deep enough. This was enlightening for me to see how little some participants knew about policy, and it demonstrated a gap in policy knowledge. This showed how powerful general discourse could influence understanding, and it showed how accepting some respondents were to the information they were privy to. It also made me think that I may be missing relevant policies due to respondents’ limited knowledge.

While interviews can be liberating experiences when they isolate individuals from the judgement of others and provide a space to explore controversial perspectives, I was also concerned about whether actors provided information that was somewhat modified. Sometimes respondents appeared to struggle with their responses, which led me to believe they did not
want to share their true feelings about VIU, funding or other policies that have the ability to advantage certain groups. They may have been hesitant to share certain views because of my position within the system, as they appeared to look to me for approval. Some were grateful their anonymity would be protected, as they expressed frustration with some policies. This leaves me thinking that not all respondents were fully upfront in their responses, perhaps fearing their comments could be linked back to them. This demonstrates a different kind of ‘feared’ power. McCabe and Holmes (2009) suggests these individuals should use interviews as a vehicle for reflexive thought and action to examine their own stance against normative values (p. 1523). The exercise in this study was about critical thought – not repercussions to employment.

3.14 Summary

This chapter outlined the qualitative case study as a methodology used to inquire into what accounts for the current student population accessing ABE at VIU in Nanaimo. This chapter clearly explained why case study was an appropriate methodology, what strengths and challenges exist, what things I considered to achieve credibility, crystallization, transferability, dependability and confirmability, my bias and assumptions, what data I chose to collect and the process I followed to collect it, how I analyzed it, and the limitations for doing this study. In the next chapter (Chapter 4), I articulate political, historical, and economic contexts to set the stage for understanding the policy environment and for understanding the conditions policy actors were working in.
Chapter 4: Policy Analysis: Understanding the ABE Context at VIU

The purpose of this chapter is to present findings on how federal, provincial and institutional contexts and policy framed how participation in ABE would be understood supported or challenged at Vancouver Island University. To establish these policy contexts, I analyzed the political, ideological, economic, and social discourse and perspectives that drove policy development and relationships between policies from 1995 to 2015.

4.1 Setting the Contextual Stage

Historically, ABE was delivered in communities across Canada on a volunteer basis to help people gain skills for jobs, enhance self-esteem, increase civic responsibility, or assist with continuation of self-development (Mezirow et al., 1975). By 1976, British Columbia (BC) identified ABE as a high priority for developing skills for the labour market, and the government claimed responsibility for developing, administering, and delivering ABE programs in colleges and public schools in 1982. The ABE articulation process was launched one year later with the Ministry of Advanced Education & Labour Market Development as a key stakeholder, and participatory PSE institutions were given power to award high school diplomas or accept courses as transferable.

The newly articulated outcomes were valuable as pre-requisites for PSE entrance. Because outcomes were equivalent to secondary requirements, ABE also met Grade 12 employer requirements. With higher skill levels required in job markets, scholars such as Mezirow et al. (1975) saw programs like ABE becoming ‘creaming’ operations where the least literate and most alienated tended to be excluded (p. 54). In 1992, program delivery problems were identified, so a report by Ron Faris provided 27 recommendations to address the difficulties. The Ministry of Education and Advanced Labour Market Development responded with recommendations on: funding, common credentials, articulation, evaluation, quality, transferability, certificate granting, and overall cooperation between education ministries. My timeline begins here, where federal and provincial contexts interact in ways that support and negate participation in ABE.

Beginning with regimes, Roosmaa & Saar (2015) and Saar et al. (2013) summarize Liberal, Conservative and Social Democratic regimes in a general way. Liberal welfare regimes are focused on market economies with minimal state interference and fewer incentives for training,
Conservative welfare regimes are focused on firm and industry needs, and skilled workers who are linked to insurance schemes through employee labour market status, and Social Democratic welfare regimes are focused on universal benefits and social equality through specific and general skills. However, these regimes are much more nuanced depending on who is in power and what their overarching values and beliefs are. Table 4.1 breaks down some of these nuances by providing an overview of the various economic and social conditions that were dominant in discursive contexts from 1995 to 2015. This summary lays a framework for establishing the various policy contexts, as different welfare regimes reflect different focuses on training opportunities (Saar et al., 2013).

Table 4.1 Federal and provincial parties and their contexts from 1995 to 2015.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Party/ Ideology</th>
<th>Economic Conditions</th>
<th>Social Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chretien, Martin (Liberal)</td>
<td>• Reduce Transfer Payments &amp; change to block</td>
<td>• Labour Force Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993 – 2006</td>
<td>• Transfer program funding to prov.</td>
<td>• Formations of LMDAs and LMAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-liberalism with some</td>
<td>• Devolve basic training to prov.</td>
<td>• Shift to use markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberalism</td>
<td>• EI restructure (active policy)</td>
<td>• Employment increasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Welfare to work</td>
<td>• Reductions to EI create increases in welfare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Eliminate deficit</td>
<td>• Welfare to work problematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Building growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Add LMDAs/LMAs for non-EI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harcourt, Clark, Dosanjh (NDP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 – 2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keynesian moving to Neoliberalism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell, Clark (Liberal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 – 2015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neoliberalism moving to Neo-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conservatism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harper (Conservative)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 – 2015</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neo-conservatism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Conditions</th>
<th>Social Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supports private sector</td>
<td>Low unemployment due to resource boom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports PSE through loans</td>
<td>Enhances training (LMDA and LMA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 Worst Financial Crisis</td>
<td>Work first ideology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on shared responsibility</td>
<td>Active (not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Conditions</th>
<th>Social Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recover from recession</td>
<td>ABE highly supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grow service sector</td>
<td>Shifting Labour Market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy borrowing</td>
<td>Welfare reform to cut down fraud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invest in education</td>
<td>Welfare to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair Wage - make work appealing</td>
<td>Substantial increase in social ministries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Conditions</th>
<th>Social Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on controlling spending</td>
<td>Massive cuts to social services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on accountability</td>
<td>Welfare restructure (growth first)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong growth in service sector</td>
<td>Minimum wage restricts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child poverty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

73
3.3.1 Jean Chretien and the Liberals (1993 to 2006)

In 1993, the Progressive Conservative (PC) party had held power in Canada for nine years. The party’s ideology leaned toward business and industry development as it was believed that market forces played a critical role in driving the economy. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) had recommended positive adjustment policies that relied on market mechanisms to allocate labour and capital (Morgan & Volante, 2016), so Statistics Canada began...
using surveys like Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities (LSUDA) and the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) to measure the competitiveness of Canada. At the time, Canada was in a recession with over 80% of the unemployed receiving benefits in 1991. Experiments with Unemployment Insurance (UI) and Social Assistance (SA) were occurring as a way to train unemployed people to build skills and confidence for jobs. Increasing debt in the 1990s left few choices but to decrease spending and discredit the Keynesian economic approach (Di Matteo, 2017, p. 55; Morgan & Volante, 2016; Wood & Klassen, 2017).

Jean Chretien and his Liberal government were elected in 1993 with promises to support social programs. The inheritance of massive debt challenged the Liberals on health, education, welfare, and social program spending, so they focused on deficit reduction. At the time, policy makers and the general public had doubts about education, as the level did not always align with skills and abilities, which provided a window for a policy shift. The government, in partnership with OECD’s Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI), US Department of Education’s National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES), Princeton’s Educational Testing Service (ETS), and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) were using the IALS to assess literacy levels (Stats Canada, 2011). Survey results supported a restructure or creation of ministries and policy. Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) was one such ministry.

Under this new structure, reforms were made to UI, and the ministry devolved certain labour market programming to provincial governments to reduce federal spending. This policy shift radically re-orientated two federal-provincial relations: the Labour Force Development Strategy (LFDS), intended to address perceptions about ineffective government funded labour market and private training programs; and, the Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre (CLMPC), established to oversee the implementation of the National Training Board (NTB), a multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance structure for labour market planning and coordination. These two changes began the devolution of training responsibility to the provinces.

To reduce the deficit, the Liberals restructured Federal transfer programs such as Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) and Established Program Financing (EPF) by replacing them with the Canada Health and Service Transfer (CHST) (Wood & Klassen, 2017). This change affected UI policy by increasing qualification requirements, decreasing the maximum benefit time, and
decreasing benefit rates (from a high of 66.6% in 1971 to 57% in 1993); people who left employment without just cause also became ineligible (Porter, 2015, p. 31). These changes also impacted SA, as available funding was cut in half.

In October of 1994, HRDC released 'Improving Social Security in Canada', a discussion paper which claimed intentions were to create opportunities, invest in people, share mutual responsibility, prevent future problems, and ensure fairness and affordability. These changes, along with UI changes, resulted in a drop in the number of unemployed beneficiaries, and dominoed into the number of under-skilled people being trained. The Employment Insurance Act (EI) then replaced UI, signaling a policy shift from a ‘passive’ approach in the labour market to an ‘active’ one (Hicks, 2008). This shift had ramifications for qualification, education and training possibilities for people. Benefit entitlements changed from weeks worked to hours worked, the new ‘intensity rule’ reduced benefits for repeat users, and the ‘divisor rule’ meant two unfunded weeks before benefits would be paid (Banting & Medow, 2012, p. 6). Due to these and other changes, the proportion of EI recipients dropped from 83.4% in 1989 to 48.1% in 1996 (Porter, 2015, p. 31), and part-time and seasonal workers were particularly impacted.

Under the new EI Act, Chretien devolved occupational training to provincial governments, and transferred $1.5 billion to provinces for the delivery of EI training programs through Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs). The federal government retained rights to set EI policy, manage the EI fund, deliver benefits, determine eligibility, and develop and deliver active labour market measures for non-EI clients (youth, people with disabilities, Aboriginal people, older workers, immigrants). Formerly, CAP had required the Feds to cover 50% of social program costs in conjunction with the provinces, but the revised transfer agreements made the provinces responsible for upholding people’s rights to adequate income (regardless of province of origin). This policy shift put incredible pressure and social responsibility on the provinces.

The LMDAs involved two types of arrangements: co-management agreements where HRSDC and the province assumed joint responsibility for planning and design of Employment Benefits and Support Measures (EBSMs) or transfer agreements where the province assumed full responsibility for active employment program design and delivery. The EBSMs included funding
for targeted wage subsidies for people not usually considered employable, business start-up, work experience partnerships, employment skill development, and job access.

Federal payments for social programs collapsed into one block grant that “reduced overall federal expenditure; eroded inter-regional income transfers; increased provincial power over social programs; and undermined the legislative base of national standards” (Herd, et. al., 2007, p. 7). This shift in responsibility gave power to provinces to experiment with and adopt welfare-to-work programs and disqualify certain groups from assistance, a practice that later became a strategy for deficit reduction in BC. Over four billion in cuts encouraged short-term, low-cost strategies that pushed work first approaches regardless of provincial politics (Herd et al., 2007). Additionally, cutbacks in government spending on education and the liberalization of education policies encouraged the diversification of general education systems. In effect, it opened the door for private education systems to increase (Saar et al., 2013).

Discourse related to growing caseloads and increasing costs suggested social programs caused dependency, so the already adopted neoliberal ideology called for program redesign to correct the problem. The Feds shifted closer to Third Way politics with cost-sharing and ideology reflecting there were no rights without responsibilities. Focusing on education or work programs instead of welfare payments stressed the importance of involving individuals in labour market development. People had to fulfill compulsory obligations to receive social support, so social policies were no longer viewed as safety nets but were designed to reintegrate people into the market as soon as possible (Gazso, 2006). The transfer of responsibility to provincial governments gave them more autonomy and flexibility to develop/implement policies and legislation specific to their training needs. This reframed social policies to economic/labour market development given the need for human resource development. This shift was challenging, as neoliberal ideology promoted reduced state involvement by asserting strong causal links between education systems, human capital, and economic prosperity (Morgan & Volante, 2016, p. 779).

The EBSM accompanied EI changes in 1996 and built an administrative framework for LMDAs and service delivery for EI clients. Although employee contributions had been reduced, UI contributions exceeded paid unemployment benefits as early as 1993/94 – when Canada was in a recession! People continued to pay EI, but more people were ineligible for benefits and
unable to access interventions to help them become re-employed (Banting & Medow, 2012). Instead, they were forced to take jobs that had low wages, required limited education or skills, had lower job security, lacked pensions and benefits, had few opportunities for career advancement, and had little access to employer sponsored training. These issues were exacerbated by rapid technological change that improved prospects for highly skilled, educated workers. Further, the LMDAs provided training for EI eligible people only, while others who relied on SA or subsisted below the Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) had to access very basic, short term ‘employability’ training offered through Labour Market Agreements (LMAs) (Banting & Medow, 2012, p. 402). CHST and EI changes made the provinces responsible for education, social assistance, social services and employment development.

By January of 1997, Canada had one of the least generous systems among OECD countries (Banting & Medow, 2012, p. 6). The EI program had divided the country into 58 economic regions to create regional unemployment rates, which created inequities. The Feds claimed people expected the national government to look after the vulnerable and needy (Wallace & Wood, 1997, par. 3), but further transfer reductions of $684 million occurred. According to Di Matteo (2017), federal policy initiatives put the economy at the center and displaced social policy. Changes to federal EI policy shifted the unemployed onto welfare rolls, while reducing support for provincial social assistance at the same time. Banting and Medow (2012) argue this shift ‘was probably one of the pressures provoking provincial governments to tighten eligibility and reduce benefits in their social assistance programs during the 1990s and 2000s’ (p. 22).

A federal surplus of $5.9 million occurred in 1998/99, which was linked to low GDP growth, low unemployment, high inflation, high interest rates and controlled spending. The Liberals wanted to invest in adult and higher education in a more targeted way (Haskel, 2013), as they recognized immigrants, youth, older workers, persons with disabilities, SA recipients, and Aboriginal people were not well served by the funding restrictions and program limits of LMDAs. With fewer people qualifying for EI, additional funding was needed for training non-eligible EI clients. In response, provincial and territorial labour ministers used statistical data to show a correlation between employment and education in order to expand LMDA skills training to non-EI people. The ministers claimed investment would yield high social and economic returns.
By 2003, the Feds looked to provinces for funding proposals. The OECD had replaced IALS with the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (IALLS) to compare skill gains/losses over an adult’s life span to better understand how work, education, and other social factors influenced learning. It also attempted to monitor skill levels needed to maintain worker supply for global competitiveness. Survey responses put people into one of five categories, but unequal intervals put more people at the lower end (Smythe, 2015). Of 23,098 Canadians tested on prose and document literacy, numeracy, and problem solving, 48% performed below level three. This provided rationale for literacy advocates to lobby for investment in literacy education. Due to internal party politics and the sponsorship scandal, Chretien resigned in 2003. His rival, Paul Martin, took over for the Liberls.

Under Martin’s leadership, the HRSDC put forward ‘A Plans and Priorities Report’ in 2004 which claimed Canada had fallen behind in basic literacy and other essential employment skills. The Report recommended active employment measures to assist people with preparing for, obtaining, and maintaining work. A $28.4 million grant was put in place in voluntary sectors, professional organizations, PSE institutions, and provincial governments to support literacy. This began a ten year coming of age in Canada’s literacy field, which included an intensification of international measurement and accountability frameworks on what counted as literacy, its purposes, and who was worthy of investment (Smythe, 2015, p. 4). Although there was no coherent policy framework for literacy/basic skills in Canada, international discourses, which included the OECD, had significant influence on literacy policy. A non-confidence vote brought the Liberals down in 2005.

4.2.2 Stephen Harper and the Progressive Conservatives (2006-2014)

By the time Stephen Harper and his Conservative government took over in 2006, unemployment was at a historic national low of 6.3%, and it dropped to 6.0% in 2007 (Wood & Klassen, 2017). Provincial ministers asked the Feds to participate in a Canada wide education and training strategy as a way to articulate adequate Canada Social Transfer (CST) funding levels. The Conservatives emphasized human development policy for economic purposes rather than for social purposes. A Working Income Tax benefit was also implemented in the Budget and
Economic Statement Implementation Act in 2007 to assist with labour market programming for apprenticeships, integration of recent immigrants, literacy and basic skills, workplace skills development, and supports for people facing barriers to re-enter the workforce. Funding was negotiated through the Labour Market Partnership Agreement (LMPA), which was seen as a major breakthrough in terms of policy for low-income adult training. Although LMPAs never got off the ground, they paved the way for Labour Market Agreements (LMAs) that followed in 2007.

The 2007 Strategic Training and Transition Fund provided provinces with $500 million to train non-EI clients over two years. While provinces could prioritize who they served with this funding, low unemployment and additional funding in loans, scholarships, grants, research, and PSE tax credits made additional investment somewhat challenging. Yet, this was an indication that educational investment and training was important for Canada. When the 2008 recession hit, previous economic restructuring and the implementation of a neo-liberal agenda had already created significant transformations in social policy (Porter, 2015), and unemployment jumped to 8.3% in 2009. The Feds experienced the worst global recession in fifty years.

In response to the crisis, Harper created the Economic Action Plan and offered $1.6 billion in transition assistance to facilitate provincial economic development through enhanced training for long-term displaced workers, many who returned to education (Banting & Medow, 2012). Due to decades of cuts, investment in training needed to bridge the gap was huge (Banting & Medow, 2012). There was no way to offset the devastating impact of falling revenues without massive tax hikes or severe cuts to critical services, so the Conservatives targeted workforce policies to support economic growth. EI funding increased and recipients could make an additional $75 per week (up from the former $50 per week). LMA funding increased $250 million, as markets and currencies collapsed and Canada’s resource industry kept the country going.

As Canada entered a new decade, the Feds assumed a larger role in setting labour market policy. With a view to improve the economy with a knowledge and skill based workforce, Canada created neoliberal policies that exacerbated tensions between addressing social exclusion and developing a high skills society (Gibb & Walker, 2011, p. 388). Those already employed or near employment ready became the priority, and long term unemployed were no longer important. Employers were also expected to contribute to training as part of improving accountability.
BC and other provinces became interested in EI and its relationship with provincial social assistance programs, as the unemployed who exhausted EI benefits or did not meet eligibility requirements often became Income Assistance (IA) recipients. Hence, EI policy had a direct impact on provincial assistance obligations. Some provinces tried to game the system by finding sufficient employment to move IA recipients to EI. But low EI rates and stringent criteria made it difficult for people to participate in training programs like ABE. With 784,000 Canadians ineligible for EI in 2010, it was clear declining EI recipient numbers were a reflection of changing policy.

Gains in literacy had not been realized in 2011, so funding decreased. The Minister of Human Resources Service Development Canada signaled a shift to targeted investments (learners near Level 3) so greater returns could be realized after three to six months. Smythe (2015) claims literacy investment shifted to reflect the new fiscal context of austerity where “literacy investment was framed not as an issue of income equality, but as savings to government and taxpayers in costs to employment insurance, social assistance and other social programs” (p. 11). Meanwhile, the OECD’s Senior Analyst and Manager challenged the minimum Level of 3 for literacy as ‘manifestly false’, as people below this level participated just fine in the labour force. Many Canadian jobs required high school completion or less, depending on a particular combination and complexity of literacy and essential skills. These literacy and essential skills became a powerful way to organize adult literacy education, and since literacy skills and employment participation had been reduced to matters of personal choice rather than public policy provisions (Smythe, 2015, p. 16), funding for adult literacy declined steadily.

At this time, EI was a poorly designed transfer program because it did not target benefits efficiently towards those most in need. Harper’s new Employment and Social Development Canada ministry focused on work first, so LMAs for high demand jobs were offered, even though active labour market policies that focused on marginalized groups – including the low skilled – could be effective in raising employability (Escudero, 2018). This shift honed in on people who already had skills and there would be less funding for those at lower skill levels, as $500 million in LMA funding was replaced by the Canada Jobs Grant. The grant required a $5,000 investment from the Feds and the province on a per client basis. Funding went to employers, who were also expected to provide $5,000, to sponsor training, and no consultation with provinces occurred.
Justin Trudeau, who made over 200 promises including reforming employment insurance, won the election in 2015. The human capital framework remained strong due to unemployment issues, slow economic growth, income inequality, and stagnant wages. Changes to AE and social policy at this time remain unclear.

4.3 Establishing the Context: A Provincial Government Policy Lens

The Social Credit Party (Socreds) led by W. A. C. Bennett dominated BC from 1952 to 1973 and from 1978 to 1991 under Bill Bennett and Bill Vander Zalm respectively. During their reign, BC was heavily reliant on resource industries, which were susceptible to fluctuating world market prices. This made workers vulnerable, particularly when world market prices fell, interest rates increased, or the Canadian dollar was high. Unemployment was at 15% in the 80s, so EI requests and forms of income assistance increased. By the end of the 80s, a time when AE was subsidiary to resource industries, the Feds began off-loading social program expenses to BC.

As the province entered the 90s, the New Democratic Party (NDP) was elected. However, BC’s policy direction was closely tied to federal government decisions. Shortly after the NDP were elected begins the time period for this study. Each political party over the past 30 years has experienced economic, political and social change from the Feds, which resulted in policy changes affecting unemployed/low skilled people who were ripe for participation in ABE. Government policy has been managed by expediency, and at times cynicism, as it failed to retract or compromise to recognize economic forces and the effect of shrinking transfer payments.

4.3.1 Mike Harcourt, Glen Clark and the New Democrat Party (1991 – 2001)

The NDP, led by former Vancouver mayor Mike Harcourt, took over in 1991 after a decade of economic struggle. At the time, the Feds were reeling from a national recession, so its reduced spending plan included less funding for BC. The NDP’s ideology aligned with strong social policy, so Harcourt’s political strategy was to ensure prosperity for all while reducing the deficit. He began by increasing basic welfare payments by 5% as BC’s resource sector (forestry, mining, and fishing) was being replaced by the service and knowledge sector.

The total number of people claiming Social Assistance was nearing 10% of the population. Harcourt responded by firing the Minister of Social Services and replacing her with Joy MacPhail,
who reduced SA rates and made SA qualification more difficult – an interesting response given the prosperity for all promise. Known as the ‘BC Benefits’ reform package, this policy shift included budget cuts, new restrictions, and a reduction in basic rates. Harcourt brought representatives from education, labour, business, government, and communities together for the Premier’s Summit on Skills Development and Training to create stakeholder connections for economic and social program reform. By 1994 the Premier’s Forum on New Opportunities for the Working and Living promoted skills training to support employment while being tough on welfare. The Skills Now program boosted employability and people’s skill level through four key themes: link high school to work, open more doors for post-secondary education, retain workers close to home, and move welfare recipients to work. But BC’s labour market had significantly changed; single parents had doubled, unemployment had doubled, youth unemployment had almost doubled, family income had fallen, and growth in individual incomes was nonexistent. Similarly, dual income families had almost doubled, working women had doubled, the average retirement age had fallen, immigration had more than doubled, and social security spending had doubled to 14% of GDP (Hicks, 2008, p. 3-4). BC’s demographics suggested social programs needed to adapt.

Concerns related to the recession, growth in unemployment and IA caseloads, reductions in CAP spending, and an increase in poverty ensured the implementation of BC Benefits in 1994. Welfare to Work and Youth Works programs reduced IA benefits by 8 to 10% for ‘employable’ recipients with no dependents and surveillance monitoring was used to reduce fraud and warrant people ‘deserving’ of the benefit (Gazso, 2006). These changes exemplified neoliberal values related to the individual’s responsibility to be self-sufficient. The BC Benefits Act also tightened eligibility for applicants. For example, employable single mothers had to engage in employment when their youngest was 7 years old, five years younger than the previous Guaranteed Available Income for Need Act. BC’s social policies reflected Federal employment driven tactics.

To address the education gap, Harcourt held a Skills Summit meeting, and 8100 spaces were added to colleges and institutes and sixteen skills centers were opened across BC to increase access to local training opportunities. PSE institutions also received funding for new buildings, which increased debt accumulation when the Feds controlled spending through transfer
payment reductions. The province’s Skills Now initiative injected $78 million to train 50,000 IA recipients – one sixth of the welfare caseload at the time (Di Matteo, 2017). On the surface, this seemed good for welfare clients; however, for those wanting to attend training, benefit rate cuts and stricter eligibility requirements made it difficult (Gazso, 2006). In other words, social policy did not align with education policy.

Included in the Skills Now initiative were the Learning Highway and the Learning Access funds. Both funds increased educational opportunities by using existing facilities and innovative delivery methods to respond to increasing demand at reduced costs. But at least 95% of the institutional target growth had to be delivered or funding could be withheld the following year. These draconian views put pressure on PSE institutions to meet targets. Welfare exemption levels for people engaged in employment were increased, child care subsidies were expanded, and single parents could stay home with children until they were six years old. These social policy changes seemed supportive, but underlying them was a belief that welfare caused ‘dependency’.

The NDP believed in jobs and prosperity, and eliminating debt was a peripheral goal. Lip service was given to protecting education, and moving people from welfare to work was the priority. Skills Now invested $200 million over two years to provide training for social assistance recipients to reduce welfare cases, and BC Benefits centered on employability first. Skills Now provided $2.1 million to PSE institutions, and the Ministry of Social Services was reduced by $37 million to reflect reduced caseloads. Meanwhile, the ‘Guarantee for Youth’ initiative had a direct impact on PSE tuition and institutional operating grants, as the initiative imposed a collective obligation on the PSE system to make access a priority for all qualified students. PSE funding became a series of envelopes for program areas that institutions had to deliver on. Additional funding was also available through the Learning Partnership Envelope, the Learning Highway Envelope, and the Technology Innovation Envelopes as a way to fulfill the Guarantee for Youth obligation, but finding efficiencies in administration, overhead, and classroom productivity were expected. The College Envelope was established to offer services to BC Benefits clients on IA, and the Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Program (ABESAP) was made available for people whose income was below the poverty level. ABESAP assisted with tuition, fees, transportation, books, and unsubsidized child care. This seemed to be a step in the right direction, but people’s
unstable situation contributed to their inability to fully participate in education and society (Gazso, 2006, p. 61). Further, offering tuition grants in a predominant climate where the expectation was ‘work before welfare’ meant they were utterly ineffectual.

While the Liberals pressured the NDP to cut taxes, reduce government costs, and implement balanced budget laws, Harcourt invested in social programs to make it clear jobs were the priority, followed by education and training (Government of British Columbia, 1996). Even though $435 million in transfers were cut by the Feds, 7,000 PSE spaces were added, alongside a tuition freeze policy in BC. This put significant pressure on BC’s institutions as they clamored for their share of funding. A comprehensive review of all programs was ordered to find efficient ways to deliver services, which began the subtle reshaping of ABE to better ‘feed’ receiving PSE programs.

Glen Clark replaced Harcourt in 1996 and continued pursuing efficient and coherent policy development, as the 1995 Gove Report outlined problems with policy integration approaches between ministries. Public distrust in the NDP and declining confidence emerged, so a decision was made to restructure the government to cut costs. Close to 1500 positions were cut and three ministries were eliminated, which shifted BC to a performance management system and saved $210 million (Carty, 1996). The NDP refocused on education as the most direct investment a society could make for its future (Government of British Columbia, 1996) and continued the Guarantee for Youth program to ensure accessible and affordable education opportunities related to training and work experience were available. The Youth Works program provided 80,000 skills training and work experience ‘seats’, while BC Benefits continued to emphasize jobs or skills training for those on IA; the idea was to make work a better deal than welfare (British Columbia, 1996). Between $350 and $470 million was saved by moving clients to work and reducing IA caseloads.

When Canada balanced the budget, it wanted provincial collaboration on programs worthy of federal investment. Using Warburton’s (1992) findings, BC shifted to creating employment opportunities through ‘responsive and appropriate’ skill development. BC’s LMDAs outlined the importance of developing a skilled workforce through rapid re-employment of unemployed people. Warburton claimed some programs were more effective than others for people on
income assistance. He alleged subsidized on-the-job training, public on-the-job training projects, and job action programs were more effective at reducing dependency on welfare than ABE, which supported moving investment away from ABE to short term employment training.

That same year, the NDP added 2900 spaces to PSE, but with only 60% of the funding. With institutional tuition and ancillary fees restricted for student affordability, 40% had to come from internal reallocation, spending prioritization, and creative delivery. For ABE, funding was maintained with the expectation of increased access; yet Warburton’s report, the underfunding of new spaces, and an NDP paper outlining concerns about facilities, standards, delivery systems, scheduling, infrastructure and funding left institutions in a quandary. Demand for PSE was increasing, but reductions in federal transfer payments and changes to reporting requirements meant a new accountability framework for public reporting that focused on 'accountability to the public, rather than to other levels of government' (Wood & Klassen, 2017, p. 10). This ideological shift had economic and political implications for education.

The NDP responded with the Power in Jobs Plan, which added $1 billion in infrastructure investment and $17.5 million to offset the 2900 underfunded spaces. The funding also supported adjustments for tuition and ancillary fee freezes. Several targeted funds (Learning Highway, Technology Innovation, Learning Partnership, Alternative Delivery) were reallocated to the Provincial Learning Network, and what was left of these envelopes was rolled into ‘New Learning Opportunities’ to simplify administration and provide institutional flexibility. This laid the framework for block funding, a policy shift that would create challenges for ABE in the future. The priority of moving people off welfare also remained, so Youth Options BC created free access to PSE’s ABE and LearnNowBC (online), and ABE’s Adult Graduation Diploma (AGD) was formalized.

By the end of 1999, the provincial government had increased PSE funding by $24 million, but Clark resigned after some shady activities. Ujjal Dosanjh was elected to complete the term, holding that “education [was] one of the best investments the provincial government can make” (Government of British Columbia, 2000). He invested $85 million in 5,025 new spaces while the tuition freeze remained in effect. The College and Institute Act was amended to allow for granting of the BC AGD, which further emphasized a particular role for Adult Basic Education.
4.3.2 Gordon Campbell and the Liberal Party (2001 to 2015)

A change in BC government occurred in 2001 when Gordon Campbell – also a former Vancouver mayor – and the Liberal Party won the provincial election. The Liberals had a different view on spending and good governance, and their 'New Era' ideology was appealing to the public. Campbell made promises based on perceived NDP mismanagement. The Liberals immediately brought in the Balanced Budget Act and the Transparency and Accountability Act, which would help provide rationale for social policy changes that focused on less spending. Massive cutbacks to IA benefits were introduced as responsible and accountable management of public resources, and reductionalist ideology was used to request parents, families and communities to play a larger role in education. Government services were reduced and private institutions were called upon to meet demand with reduced spending. These changes mimicked ideology underpinning federal policy reform, and terminology like ‘self-sufficiency’, ‘accountability’, and ‘active participation’ demonstrated neo-liberal values.

The end of the PSE tuition freeze and further IA changes were important modifications that occurred under the Liberal government because of their effects. Tuition was viewed as **cost sharing** between government, institutions, students, and families. This view reduced the government’s responsibility by requiring people to pay. After considering “growth in caseloads, projected labour shortages, an aging population, and the need to eradicate long-term dependency among repeat welfare users” (Gazso, 2006, p. 55), the *BC Employment and Income Assistance Act* replaced *BC Benefits*. Strict eligibility requirements, reductions to benefits, and penalties for inaccurate reporting or non-compliance did not support people’s training desires (Reitsma-Street & Wallace, 2004), nor did the fact that all recipients had to be seeking work to qualify for or remain on welfare (unless they had children under three). Other changes included a three week waiting period, a reduction to shelter allowance, the elimination of earning exemptions, a two year independence test, mandatory participation in welfare-to-work programming, a cut off after two years, and a lifetime ban for welfare fraud (Herd et al., 2007).

While economic growth created jobs, time limits on employment or education plans, sanctions for not following through, and unaffordable childcare deterred people from seeking assistance in the first place. Punitive policy measures for parents with children were also
problematic, as there was less recognition for caregiving responsibilities. Parents had to seek employment when their children reached the age of 3, which created social exclusion when other parents had choice. Under these strict conditions, few welfare clients could access ABE or PSE.

However, ‘time clock’ cuts were vehemently opposed by academics, unions, professionals, and religious groups who lobbied for change. Between 14,000 to 27,000 people were going to be cut off, all without appeal, recourse, or alternatives (Reitsma-Street & Wallace, 2004). For people who registered in short-term courses, their two year clock stopped ticking, which incentivized some recipients to attend short-term training, including enrolling in an ABE course. Legislation to allow the private sector to grant degrees further demonstrated abdication of government responsibility for education, and the public PSE funding formula was overhauled and replaced with block funding. This created new challenges for ABE.

As a further way to balance costs, the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act (BTAA) was implemented and Service Plans were required by government as an accountability measure. Clearly there was a shift from “a culture of entitlement to a culture of employment and self-sufficiency” (Gazso, 2006, p. 47). These ideological shifts put greater responsibility on individuals, as policies were geared for economic efficiency with market concerns overriding social equity concerns (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Education policies were also framed with economic restructuring undertones of producers of human capital. This new approach meant growth first, and social welfare second.

According to BC’s 2003 Throne Speech, 55,000 fewer British Columbians were on income assistance than when the Liberals took office (Government of British Columbia, 2003). But where did they go? Campbell touted that 92% of these people left welfare for work, educational opportunities, or other sources of income, and that the majority (66%) had found paid work that was generally ‘two or three times more than when they were on welfare’ (Government of British Columbia, 2003). The National Council of Welfare claimed IA kept families below the poverty line, and BC’s child poverty rate had risen to 23.9%, more than 5% higher than the national average (Gazso, 2007). The Liberals planned to add 25,000 more spaces to PSE by 2010, so financial assistance was increased by $8.7 million, again putting the onus on the individual to pay for his/her own education through a loan. The new seats were in applied degrees, skills training,
employment preparation, and PSE entry, demonstrating access to PSE (and ABE) was a priority even though social policy did not support it.

Even though access to ABE was a priority, the Liberals decided that institutions could charge tuition for ABE students who had already graduated high school. By this time, fewer people were receiving welfare, but they were not making high wages either. Additionally, long term welfare recipients had been reclassified as people with persistent and multiple barriers (PPMB). This new ‘label’ allowed this group access to different training – the type that Warburton (1992) recommended: short-term employment focused, not ABE. With BC’s secondary graduation rates climbing, institutions were asked to lower entrance grades for high school grads (VIU Budget Letter, 2004, p. 1), but VIU already had entrance grades lower than other PSEs. Still, ABE remained a priority as an access program because “low literacy [was] directly tied to low income and unemployment” (Government of British Columbia, 2004). To better understand literacy at the time, a Premier’s Advisory Panel on Literacy was created to assess needs, make recommendations, and invest new funding in initiatives because the government wanted BC “to become recognized as the most literate location in North America by 2010” (Government of British Columbia, 2004).

Presenting a balanced budget and “sustainable improvements to social services” for the most vulnerable (Government of British Columbia, 2005) helped the Liberals get re-elected in 2005. Campbell invested $5 million in the Literacy Now initiative to make BC be the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. The initiative supported community-based literacy programs (CALP) that partnered PSEs with not-for-profit organizations as a way to move some of the responsibility for education back into communities. ABE tuition was eliminated for students who had never graduated from high school, but welfare recipients continued to have difficulty being supported to access ABE. The tuition-free policy created an opportunity to ‘target’ adult learners who were economically challenged, but the income assistance rules worked against this policy change.

The government wanted to make the PSE system better, so 602 stakeholders were consulted on a number of issues in 2006. Geoff Plant’s Campus 2020 Report summarized the findings and provided 52 recommendations for improvement. One important recommendation
was to “eliminate all tuition for Adult Basic Education in British Columbia effective the fiscal year 2007/8” (Plant, 2007, p. 85), and another important recommendation was for BC institutions to support students to ‘learn where they live’ by adding regional universities in those areas. These two recommendations would have profound impacts on ABE.

That same year, the Liberals capped tuition increases at 2% and allowed institutions to make “minor adjustments to targets ... either across regions or across institutions” in response to changing labour market needs (Ministry of Advanced Education, February 25, 2005, p. 5). Given that funding was in a block form, this permission afforded institutions the ability to reallocate funding within the block, creating a competitive environment for program areas. Metcalfe et al. (2007) identified flaws with the Campus 2020 Report, as it did not address how competing economic pressures would be dealt with, how institutions would respond to labour market and in-province migration/immigration pressures, how program expansion would work for all groups, how equitable access would occur, how Aboriginal students’ needs would be addressed, and what funding would exist. The last item was especially problematic, given that education’s share of the total government budget had remained stagnant for seven years at 7.1% to 8.5% of the budget while health’s share had increased almost 15 times. Budget revenue generated by institutions was now larger than the government’s share, creating a burden for students. With the devolution of LMDAs and LMAs to BC, targeting employment programs specifically for non-EI individuals who were ineligible for the full range of employment services was challenging since liberal schemes did not typically align with or initiate LMDAs or LMAs; in fact, declines in LMDAs and LMAs at the time reflected a global financial crises (Lee, 2018).

As BC entered 2008, the Liberals claimed education was the key to lifting people off the street (Government of British Columbia, 2008), but pressure on the PSE system to improve quality, access, choice, and accountability at all levels existed. Improving literacy for people of all ages was also a core goal. As a result of these pressures, tuition was removed for K-12 ABE to align with ABE tuition policy in PSE, giving more choice to students. Also, a significant change occurred when five university-colleges became full universities. In this mix was Malaspina, as it became Vancouver Island University. Education funding was up, completion rates were up,
there were training and upgrading opportunities for laid off workers. And then the recession hit in 2009.

The recession brought unprecedented investment in PSE to address increasing demand for higher levels of education. Changes were made to federal agreements with over 350 contracts transferred to BC’s Ministry for Social Development (MSD), and funding for LMDA, LMA, Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities (LMAPD), Targeted Initiatives for Older Workers (TIOW), Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS), Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership Program (ASEP), Youth Employment Strategy (YES), and Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities (OFPD) was available. These initiatives included employment assistance services, targeted wage assistance services, targeted wage subsidies, skills training, self-employment, labour market partnerships, and job creation partnerships. Additionally, MSD created the Employment and Labour Market Services Division to facilitate the integration of programs that would be assigned to the Ministry of Regional Economic Development and later to the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism, Skills and Training. For two and a half years, MSD reviewed all programming and tried to create efficiencies and consistency in administrative processes by switching to a centralized model with a diverse array of services tailored for individual clients.

The new model was launched on April 2, 2012 by WorkBC Employment Services. Investment in skills training and managed staff costs seemed like the most rational thing to do. Accessible and affordable ESL, ABE, Adult Literacy, and access to quality PSE were once again crucial for building a skilled and competitive workforce, so targeted funding to train and educate low skilled and unemployed people was front and centre once again. The Canadian/BC Labour Agreements brought $65.7 million in funding for Essential Skills training, and the government wanted BC to be a destination of choice for international students who would strengthen the economy.

On March 14, 2011, Gordon Campbell resigned. Christie Clark replaced him and changed PSE’s accountability framework by requiring PSE institutions to have a portion of their programs align with the BC’s Jobs Plan. This change went against the bi-cameral structure of universities, as the Senate decides programming. But when funding comes from government, institutions had no choice but to follow the rules and train students for economic development in Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) and various spin off industries. Redirecting public expenditure towards something that
offered high economic return and potential to improve income distribution, while expecting fiscal
discipline, caused problems for PSE (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), but it was clear the province’s policy
agenda was being driven by corporate giants like LNG (Rizvi & Lingard, 2000).

The plethora of programs available in BC prompted the government to direct the Ministry
of Social Development and the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training to create a more
integrated approach for improved access to employment services offered through LMDAs and
LMAs. A report entitled 'Environmental Scan of Employment Programs in BC', authored by John
Coward Consulting (May, 2013) on behalf of BC’s Centre for Employment Excellence, provided
information about the federal and provincial funded employment programs available to people
in BC. The purpose of the review was so practitioners would know about programs, available
supports, and eligibility requirements so they could better support their clients to participate
(p. 9). According to the report, various initiatives provided specific and rapid opportunities that
were paid for by the Feds and designed for targeted populations, including multi-barri ered
people. This compilation of services was part of the final devolution of the LMDAs and LMAs into
the Employment Program of BC and demonstrates the importance of having information on what
is available. If practitioners did not know, how would clients? PSE and ABE programs were not
listed here, making it difficult for people to know this was an option for them. The document
highlighted training for employment, and while some commitment to ABE existed, there was a
preoccupation with controlling spending and growing the economy. As a result of this
preoccupation, the Ministry of Advanced Education (MAVED) announced it would allow
institutions to reinstate ABE tuition as of January 1, 2015. The tuition rate was capped at $1,600
per semester for full time studies of 5 courses, and the Adult Upgrading Grant (AUG) replaced
ABESAP to provide financial support for those in need. This change in tuition policy and policy for
financial support created challenges for students because the grant was viewed as income to the
CRA but tuition could not be claimed as an expense. This announcement was devastating for the
ABE sector and for low-skilled prospects.

4.4 Establishing the Context: VIU Policy

The context surrounding VIU’s metamorphosis from a college to a university-college to a
university sets the stage for changing policies and discourse that impact participation in ABE.
During the 1990s and 2000s, VIU provided differentiated programs for hard to reach students, but by 2010, only the formal ABE program remained. Funding appears to be related to this shift, but so does the move to a full university as ABE appears to be attracting some students but not others. As a university-college, Malaspina had two broad areas – university and college. ABE was neither of these, as it is ‘pre’ university and ‘pre’ college. When Developmental programs became their own Faculty in 2010/11, the Faculty was given power to make decisions on programming. The newly minted ‘Faculty of Academic and Career Preparation’ (FACP), responsible for ABE and other preparatory and career programs, could set policy and govern itself within the Senate structure of VIU. This change impacted how ABE would function within the university, as well as perceptions on ABE at VIU. A new name brought a new environment to VIU which impacted the entire community. ABE’s place in the system was renewed, as was its purpose.  

I use 1936 as the date of VIU’s inception as this was representative of a true AE initiative; it responded to a community need for auto repair. The school went through several iterations of automotive mechanics (outlined in the introductory chapter of this study) until it became Malaspina College in 1969. As a college, its purpose was to be responsive to community needs, but it was also legislated to offer specific programs funded by the provincial government, including ABE. As a publically funded institution, Malaspina reported to the ministry responsible for higher education and fell under the College and Institute Act. This allowed instructors to have advisory participation in governance.  

Roughly 72% of Malaspina’s activity in the early days was funded by MAVED (Levin, 2003a), and ABE played a large role in the comprehensive mix of programs. The college structure supported ABE as a typical adult learning program where students were referred through community agencies, classes were informal, student plans were individualized, financial supports were available, instruction occurred both off and on campus, and the goal was to help ‘hard-core illiterates’ obtain skills to make them more employable (Mezirow et al., 1975). These students often had low self-esteem, poor attitudes about school, little control over their lives, and low educational and occupational aspirations (Bloom, 2010; Rosenthal; 1998; Rumberger, 1987; Zachry, 2010). It was a ‘second chance’ model that was differentiated from traditional high school programs (Grummel, 2007; Mezirow et al., 1975).
When BC examined participation in and access to PSE in 1988, it was recognized that additional investment was needed to develop literacy skills for baccalaureate degrees - yet not for vocational programs (Levin, 1994). The Provincial Access Committee recommended Malaspina College become Malaspina University-College in 1989, but Malaspina had to maintain traditional community college open-access education and training (e.g. ABE) while focusing on increasing access to degrees (Dennison, 1992; Dennison & Schuetze, 2004; Levin, 2003). This was a paradigm shift for the institution; ‘access’ to higher learning became the focus of the new university-college model, while the role university-colleges could play in economic development was a government priority (Field & Gounko, 2014; Levin, 2003b). Productivity incentives and targeted funding for specific programs influenced Malaspina’s actions in terms of the types of programs it invested in and the institutional structures that were put in place. This environment created ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, as degree programs were of utmost importance, and the once prominent vocational programs got lost in complex funding models and waning student demand. College and preparatory instructors who were not part of baccalaureate growth concentrated on job survival (Levin, 2003b, p. 68).

In 1993, outreach was part of ABE’s model. Programs such as Men’s Focus, Personal Achievement Through Skills (PATS), and the Volunteer Tutor program were funded with additional grant money and were available off campus. The designs of these programs were much different than what was available on the Nanaimo campus, as they attempted to reach adults with persistent and multiple barriers, and they focused on the whole student. Economic stimulation was needed, so the government provided Malaspina with more seats and infrastructure, but funding was allocated to university programs where demand was increasing. LMAs and other provincial grants targeted programs for welfare and EI recipients.

By 1994, growing internal inequity emerged at Malaspina due to an expanding focus on degree programs and a reduced focus on college programs. Collective agreements and labour costs created problems between the different teaching unions, and the dual mission of a university-college and its competing values created tensions. Inadequate funding for university sections and the tuition-freeze commitment put substantial pressures on Malaspina (Dennison
& Schuetze, 2004), while government funding outlined in budget letters and additional LMA, HRDC, and BC Benefits funding, was not ideal to meet demands.

The Outlooks Unlimited program, which “provide[d] flexible Adult Basic Education in math and English for students who cannot commit to regularly scheduled classes” (Nanaimo-Ladysmith Literacy Council, 2009, p. 26) replaced Men’s Focus and PATS. Instructors worked closely with service agencies and non-profits to assist clients with their needs. Outlooks was funded through HRDC, but when ABE became free in 1998, all students from all walks of life could access it. The removal of tuition immediately benefitted approximately 700 Nanaimo campus students.

Malaspina received funding for additional student Full Time Equivalents (FTE) in response to community training needs for EI and others wanting to return to the labour market. This was good news for ABE and Outlooks, as funding came through the Quick Response Training and Skills for Employment initiatives. Further, Expanded Capacity funding, BC Benefits, and Institutional Based Training grants were available for IA recipients seeking training or upgrading. The College Envelope that assisted welfare clients could not support everyone, but K-12 graduation rates were up. This created a unique problem for ABE – should non-graduates be the focus or should graduates? Malaspina’s ABE program decided to concentrate on both. The institution’s entrance requirements were already lower than traditional BC universities, so many high school graduates gained access to PSE, but those who did not have the prerequisites needed for entrance could access ABE courses. There was also continued outreach through Outlooks and the tutor program even though there was considerable economic pressure to reduce costs.

Concerns were raised by faculty and administrators over the way targets were set and/or funded, as university demands (both student and faculty) continued to grow. The government responded by switching to block funding, although the Budget Transparency and Accountability Act countered this approach by forcing Malaspina to be accountable for certain targets (Osborne, 2003). While Malaspina had more flexibility to meet local needs, internal competition for resources resulted as limited funding pitted programs against each other. For ABE, a targeted program, there was an additional expectation that students would funnel directly to PSE, adding more pressure. This view came from Malaspina’s 2002 budget letter, which stated Adult Basic Education was an “important avenue for disadvantaged students to access post-secondary
education. Institutions’ ability to meet the needs of these students will be a component of the accountability framework to be developed over the next year” (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2002, February 21, p. 2). Contrary to this claim, the province changed tuition policy in 2002 by allowing institutions to charge ABE students who had already graduated from high school. This was a way to deal with funding pressures. Malaspina decided to charge a ‘commitment and support’ fee of $50 per course for all students instead of differentiated tuition, which created challenges for learners who could not afford the $50.

Between block funding, competition, meeting targets, and the newly imposed fee, it was unclear how ABE students and instructors would be impacted, but concerns mounted. Nanaimo’s non-profit sector experienced something similar as competition for ‘service’ dollars created difficulties between organizations, and the devolution of services made it taxing for clients (Burnley et al., 2005). With the safety net disappearing, IA recipients were desperate to secure basic needs such as food, shelter, and employment, but educational requirements for jobs had increased while for-profit providers assisted with the New Era agenda.

Malaspina’s Developmental Education (ABE, Adult Special Education, and English as a Second Language) was given a new target of 735 FTE in 2005, but the $50 commitment and support fee was looked upon with disdain by institutional members who believed institutional funding was being ‘diverted’ from university programming to ABE. Accountability frameworks placed on grant funding for non-profit organizations also tightened, as similar descriptors used in international adult skills surveys appeared in manuals used for assessing community literacy students (Smythe, 2015). These descriptors were used to assess the progress of adults working with volunteer tutors even though this progress did not ‘count’ at PSE. MAVED recalibrated FTE targets once more in 2006, and Malaspina’s Developmental Education target jumped to 805 FTE. This was based on actual delivery, even though the program served predominantly higher Level 2 and lower Level 3 learners, a group that was ‘easier’ to move to the next level (Smythe, 2015).

In November of 2006, Malaspina overtly lobbied for a status change from a university-college to a full university by contributing to a white paper entitled Regional Universities in 2020. This change was to develop the workforce, attract international students, support Aboriginal students, widen participation for under-represented groups, address immigration and economic
development issues, offer flexible delivery, and contribute to regional economic development. *Campus 2020*, a government visionary document released in early 2007, set the stage for major changes to Malaspina (and 4 other institutions) and ABE. Recommendation #35 suggested repealing the statutory designation of ‘university-college’ and designating affected institutions as ‘regional universities’, and Recommendation #49 suggested all tuition for ABE be eliminated effective 2007/8 (Plant, 2007).

Shortly after *Campus 2020* was released, six UBC professors warned of glaring issues with the report. Concerns related to provincial/regional planning structures, paradoxes created by access and equity, and a lack of attention to AE, Aboriginal and vocational education, funding, and tensions between excellence and equity surfaced. Regardless of these concerns, Malaspina University-College, three other university-colleges, and one institute became full universities in September of 2008. The new designation gave Malaspina a new name, Vancouver Island University (VIU), and the confusion of ‘university-college’ designation was removed. Some at VIU hoped the new title would bring added prestige, while others believed the ‘new institution’ would focus solely on university programs rather than college (and ABE) programs. Since many trades and ABE instructors already felt disenfranchised under the former ‘university-college’ model, many believed the end of their programs was near. Block funding and the removal of specified funding originally designated to ABE did not help matters.

With the change to university came new legislation, including a detailed mandate regarding the purpose of VIU and types of programs it would offer. However, there was no new funding. The University Act defined VIU as a special purpose teaching university that served its geographic region. A critical sentence in the Act is VIU must “provide adult basic education”, among other programs in accordance with regulations under section 71(3)(c)(i) (University Act, 2013, Section 47.1). A new institutional structure outlined in the Act was required whereby VIU would operate on a bi-cameral model with a Senate and a Board. This shift in structure meant Faculties now had decision-making powers related to programming rather than advisory powers, and the loosely coupled provincial and local systems allowed the institution’s governance structure to diverge from national and provincial expectations (Saar et al., 2013).
Another important change was the formation of ABE’s Faculty. Initially, ABE was located in the newly created Faculty of Adult and Continuing Education (FACE). Most of the Faculty consisted of continuing education (CE) programs, which were responsive to regional needs. However, CE programs did not require the same level of rigor as other Senate approved programs; therefore, faculty and programs came and went as needed. This created challenges when establishing FACE’s bylaws, particularly with setting quorum. As the Faculty struggled to figure itself out, the Dean decided to move the Outlooks program to campus to reduce costs. This resulted in a spike in ABE FTE, as the program absorbed on-campus waitlisted ABE students rather than hard to reach clients. Seeing this change, Outlooks was cancelled in 2009 and the instructors were moved into regular ABE classrooms. The cancellation meant ABE would be offered only in a formal institutional structure at VIU, with the purpose of preparation for PSE – “a virtual prerequisite for admission to the middle class” (Bloom, 2010, p. 93). This model, according to Bloom (2010), served adults who already had stronger academic skills. This also meant the Volunteer Tutor program, a non-credit ‘volunteer’ program, was the only outreach program left with learning not valued in the formal structure.

A further change that affected ABE was the second restructure of its Faculty. After two years of trying to corral such a diverse group of faculty and programs, VIU went through a consultative process to develop an Academic Plan and it was decided that Continuing Education, the largest component of FACE, would be decentralized to other Faculties that picked up some of the 40 programs. The decentralization left ABE, Adult Special Education (ASE), Literacy, Aboriginal University Bridging, and the Tutor Program as the remaining programs in FACE. It was then obvious that the Faculty name no longer represented the group, so the Faculty renamed itself the Faculty of Academic and Career Preparation (FACP) in 2011, and a new dean was hired to oversee the new Faculty’s direction.

When the economy improved, ABE enrolment fell, as it did in other programs. Capital funding was eliminated in VIU’s budget that same year, so VIU had to do more with less. By 2012, the Liberals had invested in several programs through Work BC (Employment Programs, Job Options BC, Employment Skills Access, Skilled Trades Employment Program, and Targeted Skills Shortage Program) as the pendulum swung to target low income, IA/EI, and under-skilled people
to get them working. Programs offered assistance with job search, training, specialized services for job seekers including skills training, assessment, skills upgrading and training, and work experience. Programs were intended for immigrants, Aboriginals, Francophones, people with disabilities, youth, older workers, and multi-barrired adults – people who typically accessed ABE in the past.

In 2013/14, enrolments were down 24.8% from its peak year and ABE did not achieve its target (Office of Educational Planning, 2014); yet, this declining trend was occurring in other VIU programs as well, despite several LMA funded Essential Skills Access (ESA) training programs being offered at the Nanaimo campus. The LMA programs ranged from 3 weeks to 12 weeks in length, and included driver training, intro to culinary arts, building service worker, and security worker, all targeted adult training for Labour Market needs. Concerned with falling enrolments, FACP invited some non-profit representatives to the annual Faculty meeting to try to find out what was happening. The department also surveyed current ABE students to better understand issues around delivery and scheduling.

Just as FACP began to implement a new strategic plan in the fall of 2014, the Liberals changed the ABE funding policy by allowing institutions to charge ABE tuition. The maximum tuition for a full time ABE student increased from $0 to $1600 or $320 per course for 5 courses. The Liberals also clawed back $523,552 in VIU’s block funding, money that had been provided in 2008 to off-set the elimination of tuition (Ministry of Advanced Education, May 30, 2008). FACP lobbied senior administration to charge less than the maximum, but revenue was required to off-set funding losses and increasing costs.

On April 1, 2015, VIU implemented the maximum tuition of $320 per course. The Adult Upgrading Grant (AUG), ABESAP’s replacement, was available for tuition, fees, books, childcare, and transportation for adults who made less than $23,647 annually. The dean estimated roughly 75% of VIU’s ABE student cadre would require AUG, but only 30% drew on it. This surprising figure showed fewer people living in poverty were accessing ABE than originally suspected. VIU’s student union lobbied the provincial government to eliminate the fees, and failing that, the hope was a provincial election in 2017 would bring in a more ‘reasonable’ government.
4.5 Summary

In summary, federal and provincial policy discourse demonstrates a preoccupation with economic growth and finding efficiencies through reducing spending. Changes made to policies regarding EI, IA, Labour Market Agreements, transfer payments, tuition and institutional structures impacted the types of programs that would be made available to people and who could participate in them. A focus on work first, even if jobs were low paying, created a situation where EI and IA clients had to comply or face punitive measures, and at the local level, VIU was required to respond to a university mandate, while maintaining open access with ABE programming, with no extra money. The downloading of responsibility from the Feds to the province, and the province to the local institutions demonstrated the social policy environment was one of “disinterest, direct intervention, benign neglect, commitment to access and expansion, or obsession with a need to control budgets” (Jones, 1997, p. 49). Discourses influenced by the economy, ideology, politics, and people’s social situations ultimately impacted educational policies, which in turn impacted the type of program ABE would be at VIU and who would participate in it. In Chapter 5, I report on interview findings in regard to adult learner participation within VIU’s particular context, framed by findings on the larger policy discourses analyzed above.
Chapter 5: Case Study of Vancouver Island University

This chapter presents interview findings on the central research question guiding this study: *What accounts for the change in characteristics of participants in VIU’s ABE program in Nanaimo from 1995 to 2015?* The question was examined through a series of sub-questions to get study participants thinking about the question from their location in the system. I first present findings on the purpose of ABE through an examination of stakeholder perspectives. Next, I present findings on study participants’ perspectives of psychological and structural barriers to ABE. This includes the stigma that resulted with the shift to becoming a university (VIU), inflexible course scheduling and tightened admissions. Finally, I detail findings related to stakeholder perceptions of provincial policies limiting access to ABE at VIU. These include educational funding policies and income support policies.

5.1 Purpose of ABE

Understanding the purpose of ABE at VIU is a key step in understanding the who, the what, and the why of participation. I investigated stakeholder perspectives as they pertained to ABE’s purpose at VIU to better understand how political, social and economic policy shifts impact understandings of purpose by participants who must implement policy. These stakeholders were VIU ABE instructors, staff and administrators, government representatives, not-for profit representatives, and Indigenous education counsellors. I draw on these views to uncover perceptions of ABE’s purpose. These participants reflect constructivist principles of knowledge building, as they provide a perspective of lived experience through working in or with VIU’s ABE program. These participants are interpretivists, as they draw on their own interactions with people and discourse to inform their understandings of ABE’s purpose. Many purposes are provided:

- upgrading for access to post-secondary study
- employment
- high school graduation
- access to opportunity
- social/economic development
- build confidence
- provide socialization
- develop the whole person
Fundamentally, the many definitions reflect a multi-purpose role of AE: one with a narrow educational focus (high school diploma or further education); one with an economic focus of improving basic skills for workforce access or advancement; and one within a broader utopian perspective of self-improvement, democratic participation, and advancement of civil society (HRSDC, 2005). FG, a government representative who struggles with ABE’s purpose, comments that the province should:

just call it like it is. If it is to be employment training, then get behind it and do it. Maybe it results in two streams ... more traditional ... and I hate the word remediation ... a stream of transition programming and a stream of employment prep. Not all are created equal.

What occurs here aligns with Foucault’s (1991) views on how language is used by people in institutions and social/cultural contexts to convey meanings and purposes to and for those people. The location of the participant within the system, the number of years worked there, and the role the interviewee plays within the system results in perspectives that prioritize certain purposes as more important than others. People within PSE understand this influence (although they do not refer to Foucault). For example, one VIU administrator (SM) states that ABE varies upon the institution and the values within that institution ... ABE is ... a word and ... you want to fit it into a hole .... ABE is based on the environment within which it is being provided ... I think ABE varies based on the demands of the environment in which it’s being delivered.

Government representatives had similar perspectives. FG states, “ABE is seen within the context of post-secondary education system. And so ABE as a value and worth is measured by how well it transitions people to the post-secondary system and probably also to employment.” TS adds,

I tend to conceptualize ABE as the linkage that helps ... provide [learners] with the necessary foundational skills to help get them to where they want to go. I think ABE serves a critical linkage in terms of skills development ... to meet the prerequisites to move into other post-secondary programming, employment training, or other opportunities.
The use of the word 'probably' in FG’s statement suggests that transition to employment is not as clear of a purpose and, perhaps, is not seen as important or as valuable as transitioning ABE students into the PSE system. Transition to employment appears to be something that could 'also' happen, and is once again an after-thought. The second statement shows a commitment to education and PSE, as it is named first. Both government representatives and the VIU administrator see ABE as a 'linkage' that is 'based on the environment within which it is being provided'. Hence, the focus of ABE is part of a continuum in higher education.

To further investigate how perspectives are influenced by discourse within a particular environment, I break interviewees into groups based on their affiliation and the time spent there. Instructors who worked in ABE for more than twenty years favor access to opportunity and societal/economic investment as the main purpose. This group of interviewees was privy to provincial government discourse and belief systems throughout 1990s when the Skills Now initiative attempted to boost the skills level and employability of people in BC by “linking high school to the workplace; opening more doors, and the right doors, to college and university; retraining workers closer to home; and moving from welfare to the workforce. The overall thrust was to develop ‘real skills for the real world’” (Carty, 1996, p. 262). The multiple purpose of ABE, then, has had a lasting effect, as these ABE instructors cling to those values today. Funding was provided for articulation of career preparation to strengthen links between Malaspina and K-12, to ensure the concept of ‘employability skills’ was coordinated into all programs, to ensure ‘prior learning evaluation methods’ were developed, and to ensure community education services expanded. This discourse influenced long-time instructor views.

On the other hand, ABE instructor participants with fewer than twenty years prioritize ABE’s purpose as upgrading for transition to PSE. These instructors, unlike their senior colleagues, did not experience discourse related to ABE commitment or increased funding for new programming for marginalized learners in the 90s. Rather their views were influenced by discourse that framed ABE as a feeder for the PSE system and an area of lesser importance than university programs. These same instructors also experienced government discourse that was preoccupied with increased accountability frameworks imposed throughout the 2000s to control public sector spending (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2002) and accountabilities and reporting mechanisms.
that would achieve efficiencies. Junior instructors also experienced the deconstruction of their structural alignment with Continuing Education at VIU, an area that was eliminated even though it met a diverse range of community needs. Experiencing this change may have created fears about the commitment to ABE. Ensuring ABE’s purpose was tied to something bigger – like other VIU programs – became a central way of thinking. Even the articulation committee (which is made up of ABE instructors from various PSE institutions) ensured ABE’s purpose aligned with PSE. One ministry representative (FG) articulates that ABE is fixing K-12 incompetency by saying they have a philosophy now that you just push kids forward ... so no one's ever held back based on ability and it changed the dynamic of the graduating sort of cohort ... I think it might have even been legislated ... a lot of people now would have a Grade 12 credential but not the skills to actually enter a post-secondary program, so it forced this change on ABE... to help those that truly didn't complete and those who need to get a better mark ... instead of fixing the K-12's problem.

It's hard because the purpose of ABE is debated.

Words like 'I think' tells listeners that FG is not sure whether this is true or not, yet linking it to words like 'legislated' creates a powerful statement that the law is to pass kids without skills. ABE’s purpose morphed into upgrading, as students 'truly didn’t complete'. Table 5.1 summarizes various participant groups’ views in the order they were provided.

Table 5.1 Summary of perspectives on purposes of ABE by stakeholder group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Purpose of ABE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ABE Instructors (> 20 years) | 3            | 1. Access to Opportunity/ Education  
                          |                           | 2. Society/Economic Investment  
                          |                           | 3. Upgrading  
                          |                           | 4. Public Good  
                          |                           | 5. High School Graduation  
                          |                           | 6. Employment  |
| ABE Instructors (< 20 years) | 4            | 1. Upgrading  
                          |                           | 2. Improve Quality of Life  |
| ABE Advisors and Staff | 2            | 1. High School Graduation  
                          |                           | 2. Upgrading  
                          |                           | 3. Gain Confidence  |
| VIU Administrators (< 20 years) | 2            | 1. Upgrading  
                          |                           | 2. Employment  
                          |                           | 3. Responsive to the University  
                          |                           | 4. Improve Quality of Life  
                          |                           | 5. High School Graduation  |
Since the purpose of ABE can be a variety of things, why is it that participants focused mostly on upgrading for transition to post-secondary education (PSE)? It is because this purpose aligns with recurring discourses related to accountability metrics. Student Outcomes reports prepared by the Advanced Education Council of British Columbia state “Adult Basic Education/College Prep (ABE) programs help people upgrade their education and skills to advance along their chosen path … and is an important step to improved confidence, higher education and new careers” (1996). Using a forward slash to link ABE to College Prep in the descriptor on ABE’s purpose leads the reader to believe these two things (ABE and College Prep) are synonymous. If the authors had chosen to use a coordinating conjunction word such as ‘and’ or ‘or’, the two purposes would have been somewhat delineated to represent two distinct things.

Supporting this perspective is the title of ABE’s articulation guide: Adult Basic Education: A Guide to Upgrading in British Columbia’s Public Post-Secondary Institutions. The guide is a provincial level document used by PSE institutions, so structuring the title to say that the document is a ‘guide to upgrading’ names ABE as upgrading. Government representatives, institutional administrators, and ABE staff and instructors use this guide to inform their practice and achieve standards. But this also begs the question of whether people outside PSE have a clear understanding of ABE’s purpose. One government representative claims there is confusion because there is a “lack of a definition of ABE ... the province has never come out and said what

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Purpose of ABE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Government Representatives     | 4            | 1. Upgrading  
2. Employment  
3. Access to Opportunity/  
Education  
4. High School Graduation  
5. Society/Economic  
Development |
| Not For Profit                 | 3            | 1. Upgrading  
2. Employment  
3. High School Graduation  
4. Society/Economic  
Investment  
5. Gain Confidence  
6. Responsive to the  
University |
| Indigenous Education  
Counsellor                     | 2            | 1. Access to Opportunity/  
Education  
2. Upgrading  
3. Improve Quality of Life  
4. Gain Confidence  
5. Employment |

Source: Author. Based on an analysis and compilation of interview responses on ABE’s purpose at Vancouver Island University.
it is and what it is not ... which breeds this confusion” (FG). Yet, VIU’s ABE department managed to enact their power and create a core purpose (upgrading for PSE or obtain high school diploma). Taking a closer look at participants’ views on provincial and local policy discourse and policy processes could help unravel how political, economic and social tensions have framed what ABE is today and who can access it. One point is this narrow view of ABE does not align with all participants. Further, participants assumed students wanted to get their diploma or go on to further education. This assumption is part of the general discourse on the value of education that is not common to all ‘would be’ students.

When asked about policies that supported ABE’s purpose, not all participants were able to quickly identify them. Study participants could not necessarily name or describe a particular policy or its contents, yet they believed they could identify the impact of the policy or who was responsible for a policy. Participants did not see themselves as part of policy, but instead referred to policies as something that was done to them; words like 'us' and 'them' were referred to often to demonstrate how participants were recipients of policy discourse rather than a part of it. Also descriptions on what policies do shows actors’ perception is informed by interpretations of their experiences rather than an interpretation of the actual policy. At any rate, several themes emerged around important policies that support or challenge participation in ABE. The policy areas include governing legislation (the University Act and discourse surrounding changes related to becoming a university); funding policies (including institutional funding and accountability, specific program funding, and student funding); and social safety net policies (Social Assistance and Employment Insurance). Also identified were psychological and structural barriers; these will be discussed first.

5.2 Psychological and Structural Barriers

In this section I discuss the psychological and structural barriers that participants believe are affecting ABE participation. The first barrier is psychological and results from the institution’s shift to become a university. Interviewees framed the psychological barrier as stigma, as would be participants do not feel they fit in the new ‘university’ environment. The next two barriers (inflexible course scheduling and tightened admissions) are structural in nature and are created by the institution. These barriers relate to governing legislation and who participates in ABE.
5.2.1 Stigma from the Shift to a University

The structure of having university programming alongside ABE at Malaspina created opportunities and challenges for low level learners. But the change from a university-college to a university created a governance structure that altered decision making powers and provided a formal structure for ABE to evaluate its own purpose. However, the Faculty housing ABE has not really capitalized on this power because their beliefs and values have been tempered by broad social, political and cultural functions that have been normalized over time. The move to a university should have removed stigma for ABE programming through the empowerment of faculty, but it solidified the hierarchy instead. Past practices, values and systems have been reproduced without engaging in self-critique. Some discourse suggests the policy that changed Malaspina to a university created a pre-determined environment that is more problematic for attracting learners who never graduated from high school than the previous environment.

Not only did the change bring a new powerful governance structure, but it also created a very different environment. ABE instructors who were part of the institution for more than twenty years recognized this change immediately when questioned about policies that support or challenge ABE. The change in status meant that, “People can't come to the institution especially since it became a university … Even Malaspina College was hard … they can't do their times tables and they're going to come to a university? Forget it!” (MG). This same instructor states

The culture has shifted. ABE has [changed] because of the institution ... as soon as we start teaching more Grade 12 science and math, that's what it becomes ... I think it's changed because there are more teachers teaching higher levels, so of course that's what the culture's going to be. And there are people that don't believe in literacy or lower levels, so welcome to your ivory tower ... you're locked into the machine ... it's a university and the lower level becomes less valued, for sure, because what place does it have in a university? Why would you have Grade 10 in a university. (MG)

This view is corroborated by Bauslaugh’s (2015) book A Search for Better University Education: Experiment at Malaspina, where the author recalls
Malaspina ended up as an institution without the research cachet of an established university and without the attention to students and community that characterizes community colleges. We brought university culture to a college instead of enriching university degrees with the student-orientated approach of colleges. Many people had said it was inevitable. (p. 169)

Another twenty plus year ABE instructor adds “the idea of coming to a big university and then attending these really intense classes is often a non-starter for some students” (HA). To put it bluntly, the “lower level students feel disenfranchised' (MM) because a university is different than college; it is the name and the social value it represents. What these interviewees are getting at is the University Act did not overtly state that the environment must now become something different. But what happened in reality is the environment did become something different due to the social value society expects of ‘a university’.

For ABE students, many already have stigma problems, so interviewees believe other kinds of transition programs are needed. According to EU,

That's why we need Foundations for Success because of the nomenclature. I just don’t think ABE is appropriate anymore ... It's frustrating. It's just a myopic view of what this is about... it's this view that it is what it was ten years ago. Government doesn't seem to be willing to entertain new notions of this and what it could be and what it could do.

This administrator’s comments express normatively held values and beliefs need to be challenged. There is a belief that VIU cannot change current practice, when the governance structure says it can. Instructors also refer to stigma, but they don’t seem to know what to do about it. HG states, “Students are embarrassed about being in ABE... don’t want people to know that they are ABE students.” And DQ adds, 'There is huge stigma attached to ABE ... I have had students come to me and say “I wouldn't have done this if I had to go back to my high school”’. NG agrees “there's shame around our literacy levels and especially if you are an older adult.”

Because many ABE students have “had a horrific, sometimes, not only educational history but personal history ... they've got all kinds of things they feel ashamed about that they think if they come to a classroom someone is going to figure it out” (MQ). According to HA, “Freire
would talk about it in class terms. It's the wrong class ... It's one of the ways that an elite prevents people from entering.” These comments acknowledge a need to honestly critique who ABE is serving. HA refers to discourse ‘about’ universities as prestigious environments, so people who never graduated from high school cannot see themselves fitting in. Less senior ABE instructors communicated similar thoughts, as KR states, “I think psychologically ... that the perception of a college seems to be a little less intimidating than a university.” Others support these views.

We forget how scary it could be to come here for the first time ... There was a woman who ... walked in the door and she walked up to the front desk, and just looked at the secretary and burst into tears. And it had taken her five times before she could make it from the parking lot to the front door of this building ... that's how scared she was and that's how horrible her experience in school had been. So for a student who comes here for the first time, it is terrifying ... It is second nature to us but not to them. (MQ)

Students are embarrassed about being in ABE ... They don't have enough belief in themselves ... They're afraid to move ... And they're afraid of what other people are thinking of them .... It goes back to 'I don't want anyone to know that I'm just an ABE student... I don't want to be around all those smart, you know, psychology and other students. (HG)

One participant commented on how VIU’s space and the space in the ABE building had changed to become ‘institutional’. MG’s first impression when walking into the building was the feeling of “assailed by this starkness .... This white wall with a corner staring at me ... emotionally I already feels like there's an arrow shooting at me as I walk in that door and there's this sharp point ... I would feel like I can't do this.”

This same instructor recounted people coming in the door and leaving – not even talking to anybody—because “the building... it’s just ... it’s cold. It’s just another institution for somebody who was maybe not successful in school. Just even looking up there ... the grey ... the grey concrete. It’s not welcoming for students who are not university students” (MG). While no policy states that buildings and institutional spaces need to be large, ‘stark’, ‘grey’, or ‘not welcoming’, institutional buildings often take on that feel because they are built to minimize costs.
Because the Nanaimo campus serves so many students (domestic and international), it can be difficult to keep that friendly, small school feel that terrified learners need. In fact, “Framing the Future: VIU’s Master Campus Plan’ sets a vision for 'major investments and restructuring to bring VIU’s image and functionality in line with its new status as a full degree-granting university' (January 2009, p. 29). The collection of small buildings was fitting during the time as a college and university-college, but VIU now “needs buildings that permit and encourage a great academic, social, spiritual and healthy life ... [to] transform a college into a university” (p 29). This is precisely an example of reproducing values as buildings must fit a predetermined ideology of university infrastructure (not college). The plan indicates the number of buildings will decrease by 6% but the average area per building will increase by 83%, which means buildings will be even larger to accommodate more students. But MG points out that these kinds of buildings can make students feel like “once [they] walk in there then the trap's going to close on [them] and [they’re] going to fail.” This same participant recounts a trip to the downtown library with literacy students:

so we went down and had a field trip ... and the first things the students said were I can't walk in.... it's like a V kind of thing ... there were two walls at right angles .... they said I'm closed in and I have no escape to get through here ... once they start walking down the halls there's no way out. (MG)

External participants also shared similar perspectives that university environments are different to college environments. The institution simply becomes a different place:

Sometimes being a larger institution becomes difficult for ABE students who don't have the skills to read the map, find numbers ... It's intimidating. That's a university! I can't go there ... it is difficult to access. There's a real fear of coming up the hill for a lot of students. They're really quite frightened. They get lost and frustrated and they go away. The institution just does not welcome people ... oh my god! It’s so hard to register! (KZ)

I don't know that there's a real inclusiveness on this campus. I think that there are attempts to be more inclusive of ABE students, but I don't see a lot of places on campus ... because now there's masters programs. I don’t see many places where those students can intersect in a healthy way. (KZ)
They closed Outlooks. Downtown drew different kinds of students. They were able to access those sort of non-traditional students that we are not seeing … literacy classes were in the military huts and that was different too because that was a whole different non-institutionalized kind of feeling. They had their own space – it was sort of family orientated. And then VIU said let's put it all together - lump it all together … it’s too intimidating … The move from college to university changes the focus … it has to. It's all about degree granting and certificates … to try to lump literacy student in the same category … doesn't work … The move from a college to a university does mean that that eliminates some students. (KV)

This last comment indicates ABE students have difficulty coming to campus. The off campus location of downtown Nanaimo for Outlooks Unlimited was designed to attract hard to reach ABE students, as other support services existed. It “drew different kinds of students … those sort of non-traditional students that we are not seeing” today (KV). Outlooks’ inception was tied to the Skills Now initiative, as the program’s intent was to upskill students with persistent and multiple barriers (PPMB). A Malaspina report sent to HRDC in December of 1999 reports much promotion was done at EI Offices, Job Clubs, Skills Development Centres, and Nanaimo Youth Services which resulted in 61 enrolments, of which 10 were EI, 40 were youth, 25 were income assistance, 4 were First Nations, and 3 had disabilities. Although Malaspina was able to keep Outlooks open well past the elimination of the Skills Now initiative, it was eventually absorbed into the regular ABE program in 2008 due to institutional funding challenges. The facility rental alone was almost a quarter of the cost of the program. The decision to close the program, however, was the department’s – not the institution’s. Outlooks demonstrated that having a place in community for students to go to truly made the program accessible. Today, “[Students] don’t see themselves initially as being smart enough to be there … not having a right to be at ‘the university” (NG). KZ adds that

the community is always mentioned in VIU’s plans, papers and mission statements, but when you get down to the nitty gritty … instructors aren’t talking to schools. They aren’t talking to employment agencies. There is no capacity for
that. And it’s a real pity because it helps us. It creates our definition of community, but there's no connection. (KZ)

Even some of VIU’s administrators and staff acknowledge the different environment that resulted when Malaspina changed to VIU:

I think there's a group of people that .... don't come to university here because of intimidation. They are intimidated by the university ... if they have had a bad experience at school, coming to a university is going to be an enormous step for them - a bigger step than when we were Malaspina. (HV)

EU agrees that “We need to de-politicize [the perspective] to actually create a place of support and welcoming so that we can help those that need to be helped.”

None of the government participants shared this view about a changing environment. Conversely, one government representative believes offering ABE in a university environment is a positive change as it creates “a certain social prestige” for both ABE instructors and students (TQ). Another participant corroborated this view by saying, “some people want to say they are going to university instead of ABE ... once they are here they're fine... It's getting them here” (KR). This comment, while supportive of ABE being offered at a university, also points to an underlying issue – ‘getting them here’. The word ‘prestige’ denotes positivity for students and instructors alike, but it also has a negative connotation for people who do not see themselves fitting into a mold associated with ‘prestige’. Social norms associated with university environments ooze status. It is an unintended consequence of a policy where common ideology trumps what something is or is not. Bauslaugh (2015) predicted this would occur, contending at stake was the issue of what sort of institution Malaspina would become. Would it become a mini-clone of universities, in a perpetual struggle for funding to boost its research capabilities, always being viewed as third rate in comparison to the Province’s large universities? Or ... would it become an institution unlike universities, focusing on excellence in undergraduate education, having not just committed teachers but, critically, a curriculum that allowed such excellence to happen? The opening of the curriculum to standard discipline-based degrees sent
Malaspina in an inescapable direction. It colonized our upper level (third and fourth year) programming. (p. 169)

5.2.2 Inflexible Course Scheduling

In addition to a new governance structure and university environment, participants pointed to schedules being problematic for ABE students. HV, MG, DQ, MK, HA, KR, and KV all indicated that ABE’s schedules were barriers for students, and the general commentary indicated policy dictated schedules. ABE instructors state “curriculum isn’t a barrier, but it is a bar that students must meet. They are necessary bars. It’s the way courses are delivered that is a barrier. Eight hours a week for 13 weeks” (DQ), and “when they’re juggling work and home, the way our schedule is laid out does not work for them. And they can’t afford not to work” (MQ). MK recalls

I had to support a student to work independently because anytime anything happened, he wouldn’t come to class. I told him I can’t do anything about the labs. [He] need[ed] to be able to come in approximately every other Wednesday for labs ... But it's not easy ... If they’re here, then they aren't working. Rent and food still need to be paid for.

Government participants agree with these perspectives. TQ supposes that because ABE students are “balancing families and work, education ... institutions must be more flexible to accommodate this.” These responses align with ideas reflected in the literature review on institutional barriers. Courses must be accessible for adults if they are to enroll in them. And while interviewees assumed policy drives course scheduling, no institutional or departmental policies could be found. The only policies relevant to scheduling are ‘weekly norms’ defined in the BCGEU 702 Collective Agreement as instructor workload, and articulated course hours, which the department establishes through VIU’s Curriculum Committee, Senate and the provincial articulation committee. None of these documents or committees dictate course schedules.

Classes, then, are scheduled a certain way because “there is the tradition of what school looks like. And [ABE is] pretty driven by that tradition ... and it's really because it's so pervasive” (HA). This comment exemplifies how structure is regularly reproduced – it's what educators
know. And the courses must align with other educators’ courses. Even with this reproduced barrier, discourse supports a blame-the-victim ideology: it is students who cannot come to class at certain times rather than it is the institution that scheduled the course in a way people cannot access it. Students “want flexibility but courses here are offered during the day ... [students] have to give up their entire work life to go to school” (HV). This demonstrates the belief is students need to accommodate VIU rather than the other way around. While some evening courses exist, the schedule for these classes is not optimal either. KV points out that evenings are “three hours twice per week and I just think .... Oh my God, three hours is a lot. I don't really know if [students are] expected to be there for the full three hours, but that’s a lot.” Instead of re-examining the course hours and schedules, ABE courses remain at 8 hours per week, consistent with the last twenty years.

Linked to delivery models and course hours is student availability. Available learner time was listed as problematic by several participants, but again this was not linked to any particular policy. For example, one instructor stated that the students realize “it's going to take [them] two years to upgrade until [they] get what [they] want ... and [they] can't wait that long” (MQ). This was also acknowledged by CC, a government representative, and QQ (also a government representative) noted that adult students must take time out of their personal life to pursue studies or come to an institution to get help. An ABE instructor recalled having

a student come to [her] office in a panic because the front desk was closed at 400. She couldn't come back during the day because her hours changed ... and Registration was closed too. So here's this poor student who couldn't technically enrol in the class ... or drop the class she had and enrol in the next class ... because it was 415 and everything was closed. [VIU’s] hours are absolutely bonkers. (MK)

5.2.3 Admission Requirements

Under the new university structure, the Faculty and Senate require and approve admission policies. These policies are both supportive and challenging as identified by study participants. VIU is an open access institution, but the term ‘open access’ can be misleading. An open access university means VIU has lower entrance requirements than traditional universities, but there
are still entrance requirements. To be admitted into VIU’s degree programs, students need English 12 with a 'C' grade (or better). This ‘lower’ requirement provides access for students who are not as academically prepared as those attending universities like UBC or UVIC. For students to gain entrance to VIU, they must prove they have Grade 12 with a 'C', even if they are mature students, by providing adequate documentation as proof. Without proof, they must complete English 12 (or equivalent) prior to being accepted into a university program.

People without English 12 (or no proof of it) need to upgrade. Yet, registering into ABE’s English 12 is not easy because ABE also has admission requirements. These requirements are 17 years of age and out of school for one year, or high school graduation, or enrolled in a VIU PSE program. What is missing from this list is students must provide transcripts or go through an assessment process. If transcripts are more than five years old, students must do an assessment to be placed into an appropriate level. Many students see this process as a barrier, and so do some ABE instructors. One instructor claims,

The prerequisites of a C+ within the last 5 years is a huge barrier. It doesn’t seem like a barrier ... students who come in with low, old prerequisites are not successful but they won’t even consider it. They don't want to go backwards ... it’s like a catch 22. You put them into a class they're not ready for, they're unhappy because they're not successful. Try to put them back a level and they see themselves as going backwards. (DQ)

QQ, a government representative, refers to this as “snakes and ladders. They’ll knock on the door and they’ll find out that they have to go back to square one.”

In addition to the five-year rule, several ABE instructors contend the entire assessment process is challenging. One instructor recalls

[Learners] sitting in a room and they're writing this test, and every single memory they've had from high school of all that's bad comes into play .... That can be a challenge. But I don't know what else to do. We have to assess their learning at some time. (MK)
Two other ABE instructors comment that “It's terrifying... an epidemic of anxiety... they've got test anxiety ... they're anxious ... like they're shaking in their boots about things ... about coming to school, about life, about coping, about everything” (MQ) and that

It's all the forms [students] have to fill out ... we are more forgiving here [with the forms] ... people doing the assessments are a little bit more aware that it's for someone not comfortable being at school. They try to make [students] feel more at home... more comfortable and not targeted or under the gun ... but the students think, ‘Oh God I have to fill out this form! I don't know when I quit school or how far I went in school so I’ll just lie about it!’ The questions are hard to answer! (MG)

These responses suggest people in VIU’s system know the process is unwieldly for students, yet the practice continues. Even the term ‘assessment’ conveys some sort of judgement, as the process exerts social authority about students’ levels, and the interests of the institution are privileged over the interests of prospective students. Not-for-profit interviewees made similar comments about how difficult ABE’s admission processes are for students. NG commented, “People have to be assessed even though they might be at higher levels of course work ... It causes people to walk out and be angry”. This process, created by instructors, deploys a system of representation – of order – to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible a way of judging abilities (Blunt, 2004). In essence, the process categorizes students or labels them based on a particular educational level because that is what instructors know in their own system.

There are other means of acquiring the Grade 12 English prerequisite, as the term ‘equivalency’ exemplifies other options. To bypass ABE, adults can enrol in the local school district’s adult programming, and students can do Prior Learning Assessment (PLA), Language Proficiency Index (LPI), or Accuplacer. While options provide choice for students, general ABE discourse frames these alternatives as ‘competition’, as free markets are desirable in neoliberal ideology. The local school district offers English 12 in both face to face and online formats. For the adult population, ‘Learn at Home’ is particularly attractive due to its flexibility. The completion rate for this model is less than stellar, but it works as an alternative. VIU’s PLA
process allows students to write a test (similar to a final exam) to gain credit for an ABE course. There is a $100 fee, but students save time. The LPI, another equivalency option, is offered through the University of British Columbia for a $109 fee, and students can write the test at VIU. Finally, the Accuplacer test, which VIU added in 2012, is another option to prove equivalency. The fee is $55, and rewrites are $40. The highest grade a student can achieve on any of these tests is a B. These lower maximum scores demonstrate that equivalency tests are not valued in the same way as course grades. In other words, the power to award high grades rests with instructors. These equivalency options, according to ABE instructors, have contributed to a decline in ABE participation because they have created competition for ABE. A government representative agrees there is “competition with others. There are electronic, private and K-12 options. Learners have more choice, which could impact the sustainability of the program” (TQ).

Another government representative thinks “K-12 and post-secondary need to get on the same page. Maybe we don’t need to be in the same game here. Decide who is going to do what!” (FG). VIU instructors, staff and administrators agree competition is a problem. But competition for who? Only one instructor, MQ, believed VIU contributed to its own ABE access problems, claiming that VIU “has very low standards for English. Accuplacer and the LPI can be taken as an equivalent to English 12 ... students will choose the Accuplacer or the LPI rather than coming to ABE. So institutionally, that challenges our purpose.” Alternative equivalencies offer choice, but the choice is not ABE, and thus is not acceptable. No other administrator or external participant referred to PLA, LPI, or Accuplacer as competition. Perhaps because VIU receives fees for these options, these are not seen as competitive to ABE.

Another ABE instructor considers VIU and other institutions as their own worst enemy. The instructor seemed to think that the PSE system is one big problem. This thinking aligns with resistance theory, referred to by Beder, Fingeret and Quigley in the literature review, as the instructor contemplates:

It's funny because the university is set up in small chunks with certain time constraints. It's just not really conducive to real learning. There is a push to get content covered and pass exams, so it's an easy way of judging people. It's real people who have had challenges in life, and they come and go ... The way things
are set up puts up bars for people ... from thinking outside the box. The way things keep moving doesn't allow for flexibility, so students face more failure. It's impossible for us to figure out a strategy where individuals can succeed in this ...

It's just flawed itself, right? This is for VIU, not for students. (MM)

What this instructor is referring to is education systems like VIU create policies around articulation, scheduling, and admissions that seem irrelevant to many adults. ABE creates boxes that people do not fit into, nor do they want to fit. People become a 'number' and “can’t register without [it]” (KZ), which is indicative of a system that does not work for all people. ML, who brings an Indigenous perspective, states “It’s colonialism; the approach that we have to have education ... [ABE students] see things differently.” These differences make external partners “feel like [they are] swimming against rather than in support with” all these structural issues. A similar metaphor is used by a government representative: “it’s like they are salmon swimming up the worst stream” (FG). And QQ uses an interesting metaphor by recalling “trying to fight not for a place in the sun at an institution, but at least to get out of the continual shade.” In short, ABE has managed to fit itself into this large box, albeit in the shaded back corner as it swims to stay afloat. Scheduling and admissions processes align ABE to institutionalized processes, and insiders did not overtly recognize these practices as problematic until they were asked to think about them.

5.3 Provincial Policies Limiting Access to ABE

International and national studies done by Rubenson (2009) and Boeren (2011) demonstrate that political regimes have the ability to affect change in participation through policy. In this section, I investigate how policy at the provincial and local levels was influenced by political regimes and by local level beliefs, interests, and situations. I refer first to educational discourse and funding policies and how these impact participation in ABE. Then I explain social safety net policies – Employment Insurance and Income Assistance – and how these policies impact participation.

5.3.1 Educational Funding Policies

Under educational funding policies, I refer first to government and VIU discourse related to the overall investment in institutional base funding, and how this impacts perspectives at VIU and
the need to reallocate funding at ABE’s expense. I proceed to explain how this limited funding impacted the ABE department and student access. I then outline ABE tuition and fees, established by VIU, and the impact this had on participation for potential adults. Finally, I present the Adult Upgrading Grant, and whether this available funding is useful for participation or not.

5.3.2 Decline in Institutional Base Funding

Funding has always been an issue for the institution, as VIU imagines it can always do more. Although the federal government reduced funding during the 90s, the provincial government provided funding for various types of AE opportunities. When the Liberals took over in 2002, the funding situation shifted.

By 2002/3, VIU was struggling with flat operating grants, increased growth in student FTE, and inflationary costs. By ‘unfreezing’ tuition and deregulating tuition fees altogether, costs were redistributed to various partners: students, institutions, governments, and the private sector (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2002, p. 4). This shift allowed institutions to increase tuition. During this time, the Ministry “directed Malaspina to increase its overall production of FTEs with no increase in the grant” (Malaspina Executive, January 15, 2003). Neoliberal ideology of the day created a window of opportunity for Malaspina to increase tuition, and the policy change helped Malaspina “avoid massive program cuts and staff lay-offs as a result of major budget shortfalls and ... offset increased expenditures for costs over which the institution has little control” (Malaspina News, March 27, 2003). Students were advised tuition rates would increase further by up to 20% in each of the next two years (Malaspina Executive, 2002/3), and on-campus employment opportunities and bursary funding would be available for students.

The net effect of tuition changes and other institutional fees resulted in a total increase of 78% for domestic students (Malaspina Executive, 2002/3). Neoliberalism demonstrates access to education was altered, as higher tuition meant some students could no longer afford an education (Malaspina Executive, 2003/04). An ABE instructor understands this view by stating that education has shifted “towards serving people that already have access” while societies “become more individualist” (MM). The ABE instructor surmises that
personal success can now exist while huge portions of society are in crisis. There seems to be less motivation to support everyone and more motivation to support ourselves – that’s what the university is doing. It is being pushed to be profitable, more business orientated as funding gets cut, so the university now has to look at the students it’s serving and say how will those students serve the university. Lower level students take longer to become fee payers, if they will become fee payers at all, so there's no way for the university to justify doing that in this environment. (MM)

Another ABE instructor claims, “if people want to climb out of the pit of lower levels of literacy, they are going to have to pay for it” because when “somebody is highly motivated, it doesn't matter what it costs - they'll find a way.” (HA)

While ABE experienced no tuition change in 2002, the ABE categories were reduced from seven to five and employment preparation for ABE and ASE was eliminated. This signalled a shift from PSE training students for the workplace. At the same time, student FTE in ABE Fundamental and ABE Developmental had increased by 62% and 11% respectively. This rejigging of categories and FTEs in government letters shows a shift in focus. This shift is further refined in the budget letter addressed to Richard Johnston, Malaspina University-College President, on March 11, 2002, which outlines a transition to a new accountability system for PSE institutions. Of specific note is the change from a detailed breakdown of FTEs and budgets to more general budgets with an overall target and a handful of specific program targets.

The following year, Malapsina proposed to implement a credit structure to courses at the 040 and 060 levels (Grades 11 and 12), and graduated ABE students would be charged the standard tuition of $102 per credit (or $306 per course) – even though provincial policy maintained that ABE was to be free and ‘credit’ would be meaningless (Malaspina Executive, 2003/4). ABE instructors resisted the change, claiming it would create divisive classrooms and morale issues. As a compromise, ABE’s Instructional Director came up with a plan to charge all ABE students a $50 course fee regardless of their level, as a “commitment and support fee” (rather than a tuition fee)
Stagnant or declining government funding left the institution with no choice but to increase tuition for PSE students. Malaspina’s external discourse channels shaped the tuition issue as cost savings through access to high quality education close to home (instead of a focus on higher tuition rates). While instructors and the general public often blamed the government for tuition charges at the institutional level, the ultimate tuition decision was left to the institution’s BoG who had the fiduciary authority; yet with fewer government dollars the choice was already made.

The province infused an additional $700,000 (of $14 million) into mostly volunteer programs, demonstrating a shift towards moving education to private providers as an effort to reduce costs (Ministry of Advanced Education, September 1, 2005, p. 20). This move sent the government back to the seventies in its thinking about using volunteers to increase inter-agency co-operation by acknowledging that the costs were too great to support illiterate people (Thomas, 1976). Further government initiatives followed. First, there was the promise of 25,000 seats to PSE in 2004, an initiative that would take time to achieve. There was also a renewed focus on literacy as part of the Liberal’s 2005 re-election campaign. Third, a tuition cap policy (2% annually) was implemented in 2005. Finally, the government imposed a collective agreement on the K-12 teachers that made it illegal to strike. These initiatives received support from the general public, albeit with mixed feelings, and created concern in PSE. The Liberals were re-elected on May 17, 2005, and their hard-handed approach put fear into the education sector in general; Malaspina (and others) simply had to do more with less. By naming ABE as a program the Ministry was committed to in the 2006-9 Service Plan, at least on paper, it forced institutions like Malaspina to keep offering ABE with no new funding.

By 2006/7, Malaspina’s average funding per FTE dropped from $6,716 to $6,224 – an average of 7%. ABE FTE was recalibrated to reflect a new counting method which increased the target from 735 to 805 with no additional funding. Setting a baseline target which institutions must deliver on was one mechanism to address access, but with no reference to what ABE was, what spaces looked like, or how they would be filled.

Local Malaspina discourse demonstrated a relaxing of investment in ‘college’ type programs - including ABE. Even though the report admits there was a softening in enrolment in first and second year undergraduate programs and targets had not been met (language regurgitated from
the Ministry’s Service Plan), upgrading (ABE), career/technical programs, and trades (all college programs) had seen increases in student enrolments and demand but were limited to expansion due to a lack of investment. Malaspina expanded degree offerings in social work, computer science, environmental chemistry, marine science, hospitality management, physical education, economics, philosophy, psychology, media studies, language, graphic design, interior design, visual arts, and film (p. 6). This institutional plan and chosen investment laid the foundation for Malaspina to later argue its case for university designation. Malaspina wanted a greater range of programs to meet regional demand, improve student access, recruit well-qualified faculty and staff, attract more international students, attract private donors, create spin-off economic benefits and contribute to the economic, social, and cultural development of the region, so it made ‘university designation’ one of its top priorities (Ministry of Advanced Education, February 8, 2006, p. 8).

In a forum Looking Forward: Workforce of the Future, the Ministry brought together business and labour market leaders to develop priorities for labour market initiatives and training. The Forum and the additional funding were a response to the global recession and the move to change university-colleges to full universities. Unemployment had jumped from 4.6% to 7.7% in BC, and increasing access to PSE through free ABE could prepare the unemployed for the next economic boom. Therefore, tuition policy changed and tuition was once again removed for ABE. This time, the government provided some compensation. Malaspina, which was now VIU, was given a lift of $523,552 to off-set the ABE tuition free policy. This worked out to roughly $103 per course registration, a figure that was well below the value of tuition had it stayed in place since 1997 and increased at 2% inflation every year.

This policy remained in place for six years with no increases. But ABE compensation funding was rolled into the block grant, making it hidden from those not familiar with the situation. By 2014, various administrators at BC’s PSE institutions were lobbying the provincial government to increase the embedded compensation by, at minimum, the cost of inflation. Understanding that literacy was important for economic development, the government touted it was committed to improving literacy through free tuition and investment in the community adult literacy program
(CALP) through the Adult Opportunities Action Plan, a strategy meant to reduce barriers, increase access and improve literacy success for key populations.

By this time, the Annual Service Plan suggested the government invest over $106 million to support 43,000 adult learners in basic literacy, high school completion, upgrading, and tuition free ABE. Additionally, although funding for VIU and others had been in decline, $56.4 million was invested through the Strategic Training and Transition Fund (STTF) to assist people with job and skills training, and an additional $20.1 million was invested in the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers Program (TIOW). Who received the funding or did the training is unclear, but these initiatives were focused on employment for work – which is very different than ABE. Funding decreased over the next three years, as did FTE. During this period, a few things occurred. First, a change occurred at the federal level. Harper and his Conservative government decided to cancel the transfer agreements for ESL and clawed back $17 million in federal money. This money then went directly to not-for-profit and community-based language-education providers (private sector) instead of PSE, supporting neoliberal views for bringing in private sector competition. VIU lost $218,000, while some institutions lost millions. Minister Virk reminded institutions they had block funding, suggesting they could ‘find’ funding within existing budgets.

To respond to this problem, the Ministry of Advanced Education’s (MAVED) 2013/14 Service Plan Report included a requirement that PSE BoGs “undertake an institutional-wide core review of their programming to ensure student seats are being filled” (June 30, 2014, p. 17). It was almost as if the Minister was going to force institutions to cut under-filled programs in response to funding issues. Of course this would be overstepping his power, as the new universities had Senates and Boards that made those decisions. On December 9, 2014, BC eliminated the tuition-free policy to allow institutions to charge tuition for ESL starting January 2, 2015. Continuing the neoliberal philosophy, costs were passed to students, and ABE was thrown into the mix. ABE tuition-free policy was repealed along with a claw back of $523,552 for tuition compensation.

These government decisions on provincial policy had ramifications for VIU and for would be ABE students. VIU immediately implemented a new tuition policy for ABE and ESL. These changes needed to go through VIU’s Board, as per VIU’s bylaws, so the change became effective April 1, 2015. Government communications to institutions indicated tuition could be collected to
a maximum of $1600 per full time semester or $320 per ABE or ESL course. VIU’s administration decided to charge the full $1600 for ESL since it was a full time program and the full $320 per course for ABE. By this time, there had been four changes to ABE tuition policy since 1995, which made it very confusing. Tuition moved from $97 per course in 1995 to tuition-free in 1998 to $50/course in 2003 to tuition-free in 2008 to $320 per course in 2015. With so many changes, confusion around ABE costs would exist for the general public, and media excitement drew attention to the new fees and the impact on access.

5.3.3 Funding Impacts on the ABE Program

While PSE enrolments exploded during the 90s and 2000s, ABE enrolments had been on a steady decline since 1996 (see Figure 5.1). The two most prominent years for decreases in enrolments are 2002/3 when FTE dropped 11% and in 2003/4 when there was a further decrease of 17.3%. To explain this decrease, it is important to consider changes made to Malaspina’s structure and changes made to tuition policy.

While there was no change to ABE tuition in 2002/3, media releases highlighting increases to Malaspina’s tuition were circulated in the region. This information may have been misunderstood by prospective ABE students, as releases focused on the tuition increase and not that ABE was still free. Misinformation could have caused interested ABE students to change their mind about enrolling. Also possible is Malaspina students who were taking both ABE and other PSE courses simultaneously may have found it unaffordable with the university/college tuition increases, thus impacting their ability to remain at PSE. Some university/college programs (BSN, BChild & Youth Care, Community Support Worker, Academic Arts & Sciences) that ABE typically prepared students for experienced a drop in FTE in 2002/3, suggesting drops in ABE could be linked to PSE declines. Finally, students who knew ABE continued to be free or had a nominal $50 fee may have chosen to opt out knowing that further education would not be an option due to the increased costs. Thus, the decision to not invest in education at all.
When government priorities changed from educating the most vulnerable to focusing on cost-effective systems and specific PSE training, a critical shift in ABE’s purpose at Malaspina occurred. ABE aligned itself with transitioning students into other programs to stay alive within a framework that sometimes challenged ABE’s worth or value. From 2007 to 2009, there was a steady climb in ABE FTE, aligning with the provincial focus on literacy improvements. The government discourse on Malaspina becoming VIU, the elimination of ABE tuition with an injection of over $500,000 to VIU, and the 2008/9 global recession all contributed to the ABE FTE increase. Also contributing was a special program for parents with children under the age of 3 offered downtown near the former Outlooks’ location with funding from MAVED & Labour Market Development, Housing & Social Development, and the City of Nanaimo. The program included onsite childcare, life skills, and counselling. All students passed their ABE courses, and 50% of the students went on to complete additional levels of PSE studies. When the economy picked up in 2010, VIU experienced a decline in ABE FTE. While there was no tuition for ABE courses, low-paying jobs became available and people on EI or IA were expected to work. Also, the idea of ABE serving the institution’s needs was further amplified after 2007 because it became free. The free-tuition policy movement favored access for students, but for ALL students, and it caused trouble for VIU due to underfunding. To remain in VIU’s environment, ABE fed PSE.
Funding was a huge issue for VIU as internal resources had to be diverted to underfunded degree programs. One government representative states

ABE got diluted and watered down and it was just a totally different beast ... the Ministry made no objection to transferring some of the FTE counting from ABE classes to this more generic and broad based courses – below the ministry's horizon [they] didn't see what was happening and didn't care. Some colleges, in their pursuit of being a university-colleges and then universities, downgraded is probably too mild a term for what they did for ABE. (QQ)

Administrators thought the move to a university would bring increased funding tied to university programming, but as a ‘teaching institution’ VIU’s funding model did not change. Another administrator (SM) claims that government policies order institutions to not charge for ABE, but they did not pay for it either, even though “there is clear recognition” and direction that “Gordon Campbell and the golden rules were about the most highly educated population in the country.” SM adds that the lack of funding affected VIU’s ability to meet demand and the 'ability to grow.'

Funding that was given to off-set the tuition free policy in 2008 was rolled into the block funding moving forward and did not see any increases for the next seven years. Frozen ABE tuition compensation caused concern for PSE institutions. One government representative (FG) notes that 'administrators are saying, “we need to move these people into fee paying programs as quickly as possible. That’s the purpose is to get them paying tuition.” As a result of this view, a change in the configuration of ABE courses offered at VIU occurred. Fewer literacy level courses were offered, as these were seen as expensive with a class maximum of 16 (instead of ABE’s normal 26). These students were also more difficult to attract, keep, and move forward. The government recognized this, as one representative said the tuition free policy “limits an institution's ability to keep it sustainable and have smaller class sizes” and it limits the number of courses that can be offered (CC). CC also states that “funding isn't necessarily targeted so depending on how invested the institution chooses to be in ABE, funding is set accordingly.” Other government representatives believe:

It's tricky ... [tuition-free policy] supports students coming back, but it is a barrier for institutions because it threatens the sustainability of the program area, which
creates a rub within the institution about the purpose of the program, the commitment of the students, and the fact that they just can't be revenue generating. (FG)

External interview respondents express similar concerns. KZ claims

There's not enough funding for supportive programs that socially connects and integrates ABE students with other people. There's funding here and there, but I don't know ... There have been deep cuts to ABE over the years. A big one for me was not replacing the student success advisor for literacy. The individualized attention that that position allowed just isn't possible with the current structure.

ABE instructors also had concerns about funding, but they did not appear to fully understand it. One instructor (MQ) includes a question in her remark, as if trying to get confirmation on her understanding. She surmises that

There is no tuition, so I suppose that there is the government supporting ABE, right? Wait - the government doesn't fund ABE .... Do they? I don't know ... I feel out of my depth here. But VIU is not charging tuition, so the university doesn’t get any money from our students because they don't pay tuition, so I guess our institution sees the value in ABE because we get people up the hill. We educate them to a certain place and then they can move on to certificates, diplomas, trades, degrees.

So funding problems at the local levels do impact the program type and level of delivery. Inappropriate funding means VIU tries to invest where it will get the most bang for its buck. Even though there was a renewed focus on skills training in 2014 when the newly elected Premier Christy Clark planned to re-engineer BC’s education and training system to align with labour market needs through the *BC Skills for Jobs Blueprint*, VIU’s response was its trades were already ‘right sized’. And the move to block funding meant VIU did not have dedicated dollars for anything – particularly ABE activity – so it continued to invest in its own priority areas – university program investment, as Bauslaugh (2015) indicated it would. Although there was a developmental target of 805 FTE, funding did not necessarily accompany this target, so there have been no consequences to VIU when it has under-delivered. This further supports the
institution’s autonomy to focus on programming that it feels is relevant. HA, an ABE instructor at VIU argues,

> Under this extremely conservative regime, we are being asked that question [about funding] again. And we’re getting a very different answer. The government hasn’t said we are going to shut ABE down at colleges and school districts, but what they are saying is ... it’s too expensive so we are going to start charging high levels of fees for it.

This ideology affected the ABE program itself, which ultimately affected who could enrol in the program. Additionally, there were other funding problems that pertained to students.

### 5.3.4 Funding for ABE Students

Most respondents interviewed for this study remarked that student funding is a significant factor in supporting or challenging participation in ABE. Tuition policy has fluctuated over the years, but other funding policies created issues for ABE students. First, VIU has an application fee that must be paid before students can register for courses. Similar to tuition, this fee is subject to the 2% annual increase. By 2015, the application fee had crept up to $37.78 annually. Another required fee is the student society fee. The rate is a flat fee regardless of the program or commitment (part-time vs full-time) and is calculated on the number of months a course or program is in session. For example, a student taking one ABE course would need to pay the student society fee for a four month period because a course runs for 13 weeks. If the same student was also taking another program that was 24 weeks long, the rate would increase to 6 or 7 months (depending on program start and end date). The student society fee typically increases with tuition. ABE students also have to pay a student activity fee. This fee was originally set at 4% of tuition but fluctuated as ABE tuition policy changed. When ABE tuition was implemented in 2015, this activity fee went back to 4%, the same as other VIU programs. The increase to $38.40 was a 997% increase for a full time ABE student. In addition to these fees, students must also pay for books, parking, and supplies. To put things into perspective, total ABE fees increased 657.5% from 1995 to 2015. Table 5.2 summarizes the student fees.

| Table 5.2 Summary of ABE student paid fees at VIU from 1995 to 2015. |
These costs, when put together with other household expenses, child care, and other family costs add up very quickly, making it unaffordable for some adults, especially lower income earners. While course tuition was kept relatively low until 2015, Table 5.2 shows that other costs were increasing. The neoliberal view that people can and should help themselves is not possible for all people – especially when a person’s income does not support it. Yet political and economic discourse published through media releases, institutional information, and government websites, makes it seem like ABE is fully accessible with free tuition. Complicating matters is inconvenient schedules that interfere with work or other commitments. Therefore, the fact that ABE courses are tuition free does not really mean that they are free. Interviewees commented on the funding problem, as KR states “ABE courses do not qualify for loans, so students can't get student loans for upgrading ... [they] would just need a student loan to live off of so they're working part time and then trying to go to school” (KR). DQ agrees funding is challenging, as

There could be a lot more in place in terms of financially supporting students. I just had conversations this morning with the students who are not doing well and a lot of them are saying 'I am working 40 hours per week and I am trying to do two classes ... and both are requiring me to do 8 hours of classes a week and probably another 15 hours a week of homework’ ... they still have to eat, they still have to put gas in their car or buy a bus pass, they have to pay their rent or their mortgage, and it’s not enough support. (DQ)

The government is very aware of funding issues, or it would not have made ABE free. At the same time, it is also aware the institutions have other fees that students must pay along with other costs. To try to mediate these costs, the government created the Adult Upgrading Grant.
5.3.5 Adult Upgrading Grant (AUG) for ABE Students

The Adult Upgrading Grant (AUG) is a funding policy that provides financial support to students enrolled in AE programs in PSE. This grant “is intended to support learners most in need with financial assistance for fees, books, unsubsidized childcare, and transportation” (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2018, p. 2). Formerly known as the Adult Basic Education Student Assistance Plan (ABESAP), the program changed to AUG in 2015 to align with the implementation of ABE tuition. Similar to other BC Student Aid programs, AUG has eligibility requirements. AUG’s eligibility rules require students to sign and submit an application for funding and provide documentation (proof of residency and income statement) to VIU’s Financial Aid Office. To be accepted as a resident, the policy manual states applicants must have

- a. Lived in BC since birth;
- b. Lived in BC for 12 continuous months prior to the start of their program; or
- c. Arrived in Canada as permanent resident, landed immigrant or protected person and has not lived in any other province for 12 continuous months (p. 6)

These residency requirements mean adults who move to BC from other provinces cannot access AUG funding until they have lived in BC for one full year. This very narrow thinking is problematic, as Canadians often move to other provinces to improve their situation (work, education, living conditions, etc.).

Once students qualify for AUG, funding can be used to pay for all education-related fees: application fee, tuition, book and supply costs, transportation, and child care not already subsidized. At VIU, AUG funding is transferred directly to charges on students’ accounts. Students receive bookstore vouchers for books/supplies and bus passes for the semester, which makes them look different than other students. For child care, students must provide documentation that shows child care has not been paid by other funding. These funding mechanisms ensure there is no transfer of cash to students, a process that is entirely different than the process applied to student loans where funding is given to students to manage. While several study participants (MK, KR, MQ, CC, and QQ) think AUG is a good thing for low income students, some understood that transportation, child care, and living expenses were areas that students needed help with (DQ). One government representative stated AUG was not used as much when there
was no tuition, as students seemed to be able to afford other fees and books and there was “too much paper work so they just made it work” (TQ). But when tuition came into play in 2015, “there [was] a direct relationship with the volume of [AUG] applications” (TQ). FG states AUG is “probably one of the only things keeping some institutions in the game.”

However, AUG counts as income for people who receive it because it has monetary value. ABE students cannot claim educational expenses through the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) because they are high school level, so the AUG income rule is doubly problematic – students must claim AUG as income even though they cannot claim expenses related to it. Also concerning is applicants must “ensure that receiving the AUG does not impact their income assistance eligibility” (Ministry of Advanced Education Adult Upgrading Grant, 2018, p. 10). This makes absolutely no sense given that ABE students do not actually receive cash in any form; in fact, the grant could put some students into higher income brackets, which would definitely cause them concern for enrolling in the first place. Also problematic with the AUG policy is Section 6: Academic Progression and Re-application. Originally, students could withdraw or fail courses twice and then they would no longer qualify for future grant funding. MG, a twenty plus year ABE instructor, remembers that student funding policies also limit the time individuals can access education, ultimately affecting their ability to achieve their goals. MG states,

policies say you get this much funding. So you are allowed 18 months funding. So somebody comes here and does an assessment and finds out, ‘Oh God! I start at literacy level and only have 18 months? I'm not going to get my high school diploma in time to use all my funding.

One Indigenous Education Counsellor confirms timelines are problematic, but from a different perspective. Students “lives would be easier if they understood deadlines ... they find out that they missed the deadline for funding or have gone past it ... deadlines are ridiculous” (KR).

To ask a student who is living at or below the poverty level to fund all fees related to ABE makes an assumption that he/she has the funds to do this. While ABE courses were free at the time, other fees made them inaccessible. This policy language changed in 2015 to say students could repeat a course once if they fail or withdraw, but they would need to get permission from
the dean or department head for additional repeats. While this rule provides additional opportunity for funded unsuccessful ABE students, it also aligns with neoliberal ideology underlying the BTAA by putting the onus on VIU to make sure students are not wasting public dollars. Adding the line “this policy should be consistent with public post-secondary institutions progression policies with respect to Adult Education courses” (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2018, p. 18) further emphasizes responsibility has been placed on BC’s PSEs to be mindful of spending. Providing a second chance to people is fine, but only one chance, and VIU’s Financial Aid Office holds the power to make the final decision on whether to fund or not.

Besides issues related to AUG eligibility, study participants drew attention to other areas where the AUG policy was problematic. MG, MM, MK, SM, NG, ML, HG, CC, QQ all mentioned costs that are well outside the institution’s responsibility - household bills, food, rent, fuel, child care, phone bills, and other costs – not covered by AUG. NG points out that “Social assistance hasn't been raised since something like 2008. How do people live on that? They don't have enough food to eat at home ... how can you learn when you're hungry” (NG). Amount of income in relation to costs also affects students’ ability to attend. Student loans and grants cover these expenses for PSE students but not for this group. MK observed that there is pressure for students to pass to get future funding, and CC and KV acknowledged that the income threshold was too low for AUG eligibility. This means many students who are just above the poverty line do not qualify for AUG, but they cannot afford to enroll in ABE because of their financial situation. Participant comments align with themes on funding and access for marginalized learners found in the literature review, and a more holistic approach must be taken since students who have never graduated from high school need to be well supported financially.

5.4 Income Support Policies

This last section presents views on social safety net policies and how they impact people’s ability to participate in ABE at VIU. The two policies referred to in this section are Income Assistance (IA) and Employment Insurance (EI), as it is often these two policies that people who never graduated from high school are drawing upon. As a reminder, provincial funding during the 90s was aimed at increasing student retention, completing basic education, and increasing PSE seats. Although federal funding was reduced, reforms were made to welfare and unemployment insurance
policies to skill people up and move them to work. Much of this funding came through the Institution Based Training (IBT) and Expanded Capacity (EC) funds that supported EI and IA. When the liberals took over in 2001, IBT was eliminated, making it difficult for IA recipients to participate in ABE and PSE programs. At the time of the change, students registered in IBT or EC funded programs were forced to withdraw or lose their benefits. EC funding continued to be given to institutions, but as part of block funding. This impacted ABE at the institutional level because supporting people with multiple and persistent barriers was no longer a priority; instead, block funding allowed institutions to dictate their priorities.

5.4.1 Income Assistance

In terms of understanding how income assistance policy affected potential ABE students who never graduated from high school, it is important to recall the historical context of discourse related to social policy. During the 1990s, a pulling away from social safety net ideology began when the NDP reformed welfare. Underlying the reform was a desire to cut spending, and a focus on a lack of trust in clients – a shift in traditional NDP values. The NDP estimated that changes related to fraud abuse, double dipping between EI and welfare, collection of security deposits, cheque pick-up, job search paperwork, voucher payments, employment eligibility, welfare eligibility requirements, residency requirements, system complexity, claw backs, earning exemptions and welfare to work strategies saved taxpayers over $500 million. But what was the cost over the long run?

By 2009, MAVED’s 2009/10 – 2011/12 Service Plan recognized there was a problem with low skilled and unemployed individuals, and Objective 2.3 recommends strategically targeting training for these people for improved labour market access. Federal LMA funding targeted people who were unemployed but not eligible for EI benefits or people who are employed but low skilled – this would include people who never graduated from high school. LMA funding was also earmarked for business, industry and service providers to ensure tools, curriculum, and support assisted with integrating Essential Skills into workplace training. The Government of Canada identified nine key Essential Skills for the workplace, and each skill had different levels that employers expected workers to demonstrate. The Essential Skills include numeracy, oral
communication, working with others, continuous learning, reading text, writing, thinking, document use, and digital skills. While all nine of these skills areas are embedded in ABE’s articulated outcomes, Essential Skills are framed differently by Skills Canada. Programs that receive LMA funding must identify the Essential Skills students will learn. By creating a new stream of training outcomes separate from BC’s articulated ABE system, the government created an opportunity for the private sector to get in on the training game. LMA dollars are ‘won’ though a proposal process, so PSE’s must compete with others if they want to offer programs. Because LMA projects are locally based, VIU competes against other local stakeholders.

For VIU, training contracts originally ran through the Community Education (CE) arm of the institution, which was originally part of the Faculty ABE belonged to. In this regard, there were synergies and internal partnerships that included ABE instructors. However, when the CE department was decentralized in 2010, these employment focused programs (and the proposal process to get funding) fell to various Faculties who would or would not continue with the process. CE’s decentralization resulted in LMA programs being whittled down to one or two per year at VIU, as Faculties do not have the time or resources to put into program proposals. Additionally, programs VIU engage in range from 3 to 12 weeks in length, are very job specific (i.e. driver training, intro to culinary arts, building service worker, security worker, etc.) and are not like ‘university’ programming. They are precisely aligned with 3 to 6 month training at the near level 3 of literacy that the federal government advocates for. One ABE instructor commented that these training programs are short-sighted because the government wants people to go back to work....they want them to move quickly through the trades or short term programs. They're trying to sidestep other things because they don't want them to be in school for two years. They want them to ...get out there and start working ... They don't want them to get a better education. (MQ)

Another instructor supposes “students can't go to school full time if they're on social assistance. [Government] wants them off assistance, but [they] don't want them to go to school, so they're trapped” (ML).

Study respondents were quick to recognize the punitive approach to social assistance from their discursive interactions in the classroom, from media releases and statistical reports they
had read, and from casual conversations they had in various realms of their lives. Aside from agreement about the incredibly low financial support, discursive interactions resulted in a general consensus that people on IA were not allowed to come to school because they needed to be looking for work. This thinking aligns with IA policy that states an applicant is “not eligible for income assistance ... if [he/she] is enrolled as a full-time student (a) in a funded program of studies, or (b) in an unfunded program of studies without the prior approval of the minister.”

One issue that study participants also drew attention to is the power that workers have over people within their various contexts. KZ, a not-for-profit representative, states people on IA used to be supported by well-trained people helping to get them moving on, supporting them to go back to school, but I think that’s changed a lot ... the hope behind working with people is not there anymore. So I don’t know if the policy has changed or if there’s just not the people or the will to help because I think education was promoted a lot more for income assistance.

And an ABE instructor stated

hearing that social workers are saying get to work. ‘Get yourself an $8 an hour job!’ The government is making it very difficult for people to come to ABE. My impression is that in the past the government had policies that encouraged people to further their education and supported it, even paid people to go back to school. Whereas this government ... some of the folks I see say that they have to work and if they go to school, they’re going to lose the money they are getting ... but I’m not knowledgeable enough to say what those policies are ... Haven’t got a clue what the government thinks ABE is for. (MQ)

NG, another not-for-profit representative related a similar experience on people making decisions for others.

The social worker said to her, ‘You are not allowed to go to school on my money!’ And it’s like, excuse me? It’s not YOUR money! It’s everybody’s money and I actually want to support this person to go to school. [Social Workers] cut people off Income Assistance when they are upgrading for all kinds of reasons ... I remember I was helping a student when she said, ‘Oh please ... I hope we don’t
get that woman because she is going to refuse me and she is going to be so nasty to me’ and thank god we didn’t … And so, what happens is it is the social worker who then decides this. (NG)

So while some support for returning to education exists in IA policy, it is minimal at best, and it only supports part time studies though an individual approval process. If the proposed training aligns with employment, chances of getting approval are better, and there are additional supports (six months of $100/month for transportation; tuition/book costs; up to $200 for safety clothing; and up to $100/month for volunteer placements). These supports point to an infatuation with training for employment, while ABE’s PSE focus is left out of the mix. The people who have been on IA for at least 12 of the preceding 15 months and score at least 15 on the employability screen are a special group, as they are labeled persistent and multi-barriered (PPMB) and have access to specific employment training options. However, these training opportunities fall under Labour Market Assistance (LMA) funds, not IA. As mentioned, these programs are short, narrow in focus, and typically align with low paying jobs. This group of people, interestingly enough, also qualify for self-employment programs, which is very strange given the label placed on them. This focus demonstrates that because these people are often not employable, the ministry wants them to take training that will allow them to work for themselves – be their own boss – a very strange plan given their circumstances. While IA policy is not very supportive of adults returning to education, particularly ABE, EI has more opportunities, but has challenges also.

5.4.2 Employment Insurance

Changes to EI policy impact people’s ability to access education and training options, particularly related to ABE. To clarify, training is no longer the answer to employment problems. Many are expected to find work directly, and for people who face multiple barriers, training is not seen as the best answer. EI policy is controlled by powers outside the province, yet provinces can influence access to work and training through Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDA). But this is the sticky part of the policy because there is a veiled focus on labour rather than development (or training). As statistics show, people with lower levels of education are most
vulnerable to labour market changes, as can be seen in the literature review by the differences in unemployment rates between groups who have various levels of education.

In 2014/15, MAVED led a number of strategies in the Skills and Training Plan that targeted investments to align training programs with regional and industry needs. Christie Clarke’s ‘Blueprint for Jobs Plan’ had a heavy focus on the trades, and institutions were asked to align their training to these industry needs. This was a directive by MAVED, as it was linked to funding. VIU aligned 25% of its activity to the list of high demand jobs, which required no changes to its programming. As a comprehensive institution, VIU already had many trades and degrees that fit the profile MAVED was seeking. MAVED was also a key partner in developing a 10-Year Skills Training Plan for Youth, which recognized youth as an integral part of the province’s prosperity and B.C.’s skills training agenda. Recognizing the unique needs of Aboriginal British Columbians, MAVED developed Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Policy Framework and Action Plan to improve post-secondary outcomes for Aboriginal learners and to position them to take advantage of economic opportunities (Ministry of Advanced Education, February 2014).

The shift of responsibility to moving people to work had devolved to the provinces, and EI clients were forced to take an active approach to returning to work by creating a work action plan, finding training courses and making arrangements with providers, and possibly contributing financially. Plans had to be job-related, and they had to be linked to local market conditions as well as the individual’s capabilities. But clients needed information about the labour market and training opportunities that existed. This had always been an issue previously, and study respondents believed the issue of not knowing about ABE existed today. HG responds, 'I just don't think they know about it ... how would you hear about ABE?' and HV and EU recall,

We used to put posters out and used to advertise ... provide information sessions.
What do we do now? I haven’t seen very much of anything from VIU about ABE.
You have to find them. Who are they? Where are they? When you know where and who they are, you can figure out how to get them here. (HV)
It is a misunderstanding of what the purpose of ABE is all about ... a kind of time warp some of it is caught in. I think society and government see ABE as it did ten years ago and it's obviously moved a long way and needs to move a long way from
that. It's a much more reflective, innovative, supportive approach to student learning ... but new models are needed (EU)

These comments make the assumption that people on EI (as well as IA or other ABE prospects) would not be able to find information about ABE. With the focus on training, EI clients would need to have information readily available about how ABE aligns with employment training. At the same time, there is an assumption in these comments that provided information was available, EI clients would then attend. The literature review indicates this is not necessarily so.

Meanwhile, in terms of EI claimants accessing ABE courses at VIU, several study participants commented that EI was problematic because the policy did not support clients in the same way it used to. One government representative (TQ) argued that labour market agreement programs are too targeted on specific employment opportunities that on the surface appear to be supportive, but in essence actually constrain the learner. The view was that learners on EI or IA are pushed towards programs that are short and designed to be offered around typical work hours because they are offered through privatized training options. Depending on which employers were part of the discussion on training needs influenced the type of programming that was eventually offered. Other respondents, like MG and DQ, believed policies stated EI clients should only be considering work. 'No, you can’t go to school because you have to be looking for work ... I don’t know what the policies are now, but that is all I ever heard from students' (MG) or 'If you're on EI, you can take a flagging course or some super low level skilled training, but if you can't read, you cannot take an English ABE class to become literate and I think that was a huge step backwards in terms of policy (DQ). These comments demonstrate a discourse shift away from training for PSE and other purposes, including social purposes, to training for an improved economy by getting people back to work – in whatever form. ABE courses, do not train people for employment – they act as prerequisites for further ‘academic’ training; hence, ABE has seen a significant decline in EI funded students.

As well, the current individual client-centered approach that EI takes, from a self-help perspective, can be difficult to manage for people who have lower education levels. The self-help process allows the provincial and federal governments to find efficiencies by having fewer government employees assisting EI clients, and contracting training to the private sector means
additional savings, as the Employment Insurance Act (2018) included measures for “organizations to provide employment assistance services [and] employers, employee or employer associations, community groups and communities in developing and implementing strategies for dealing with labour force adjustments and meeting human resource requirements” (Section 60.4 a) and b)). Education, a service that the government would see as expensive in a neoliberal framework, is missing from this group of stakeholders. Of course there are options for training at PSE institutions, and prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) and high school certification are available, but this education jargon could be confusing to EI clients. Further, there is an added focus of on the job training through work experience that would be appealing to an adult population – especially older workers. Early intervention strategies (students in high school getting on the right path early) is a plan to ensure people do not end up in ABE in the future.

ABE is technically available through WorkBC, but it has been significantly de-emphasized, and clients need permission to enroll in the program. With globalization and technology driving a need for higher levels of skills, employers are looking for more advanced skills than would be found in a high school diploma. There is also a new focus on self-employment training strategies, as this priority can get people back into the labour market fairly quickly and supports the free-market ideology that people must look after themselves while contributing to the national economy. Further, EI stated business owners were not eligible for EI. For those not interested in entrepreneurship, taking other training where skills gaps exist can be required. If clients refuse, do not attend, or are terminated by the training program, disqualification from EI benefits is likely. Similar to welfare policy, these harsh consequences put people at the beck and call of the province and the state, as employment is intended to be an economic driver rather than a function of social responsibility. Training decisions are left to actors within the EI system, actors who are the judge and jury. These powerful people who decide how policy is to be implemented do not necessarily have the same intentions or values as the policy makers, yet their influence in the system is profound (Lipsky, 1980).

5.5 Summary

In summary, changes in BC’s political, economic, and social discourses from 1995 to 2015 resulted in policy changes that had significant impacts on VIU’s ABE program in terms of who could access
it. ABE initially served under-skilled learners, but an analysis of the discourse suggests a narrowing focus of ABE’s purpose, and discursive events and policies related to a new university structure impacted ABE participation in direct and indirect ways. As the social worth of ABE declined and ‘the obsession with PSE being a machine for feeding the labour market’ (FG) continued, ABE adapted and its new purpose focused on transitioning learners to PSE programs – a pathway that many high school drop outs are not interested in. The provincial government’s desire to increase PSE spaces for people who could afford them reproduced the class structure the NDP were trying to rid, as difficult structures (environments, schedules, prerequisites, tests) and funding challenges were reproduced. These challenges were ultimately related to funding issues and unsupportive ‘work first’ policies pushed down by the state. In Chapter 6, I present a discussion that identifies and explains causal elements of the participation phenomenon occurring at VIU.
Chapter 6: Discussion

To explain participation in ABE at VIU, I reflected on the interdependence between government and institutional actors as they participated in policy making processes. These relationships and actions have been controlled by policy where neo-liberal influences exist. In consideration of Foucault’s historiography, archaeology and genealogy, I thought about how relationships have been exposed between past and present, between what can and cannot be said, and between who produces the rules, the power relations, and the inherent values exercised within (Gale, 1999). Forms of policy and power influenced how actors thought about ABE within a bound policy network (Ball & Junemann, 2012) which, in turn, affected participation in ABE. In this study, four different areas of policy and practice affected participation: ABE’s changing purpose, governance policy, funding policy, and social policy. Embedded in all policy areas were aspects of power. I begin by discussing ABE’s changing purpose and governance policy in depth and then I proceed to discuss how actors acclimatized to these directions. Actor acclimatizations impacted participation in profound ways. Finally, I discuss funding and social policy and how these impacted participation.

6.1 Political Discourse and the Altered Purpose of ABE

As explained in Chapter 5, what is meant by ‘ABE’ and what is meant by ‘priority’ have become muddied, as these terms have been used loosely in throne speeches, budget letters and policy discourse in ways that support BC’s political agenda. The provincial government has control over the way ABE can be prioritized, and it would appear that vague policy language and general discourse assumed readers and listeners would understand what ABE is, what it is meant to accomplish, and how it should be prioritized. However, powerful actors and changing government ideology actually directed ABE’s purpose and how it would be prioritized within the context it resided. Stubblefield (1981) agrees because “adult education derives its purpose from the values inherent in the political and social system in which it is embedded” (p. 20).

Practices resulting from an imposed government policy framework demonstrated federal and provincial governments have been instrumental in shaping behavior at VIU. More specifically, the federal government withheld important funding and the BC government
undermined what was traditionally understood as a public institution by imposing a new structure that was an extension of economic policy and included reduced funding (Levin, 2017). The new structure allowed power, underpinned by neoliberal ideology in federal initiatives, to define problems, shape agendas, set parameters, and outline solutions, while BC’s goals and priorities were reproduced in PSE frameworks (Walton, 2010; Woodside-Jiron, 2004). Historical perspectives and research findings outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate the consistent view that power and neoliberal values are hard at work at VIU, where revenue generation, student outcomes, operational efficiencies, accountability measures, and self-promotion are of concern (Ball, 2003). Herein lies a clash in values and VIU must grapple with two very different socio-political positions – a commitment to social democracy and a commitment to neoliberalism.

Discourses related to Malaspina’s restructuring shared in Chapter 4 and 5 demonstrate that certain values were used to rationalize the need for institutional change and changes to ABE’s purpose. With globalization, technological change, and free markets demanding higher credentialed people, the perception of ABE’s purpose shifted from a social program that assisted with various purposes to a program that assisted with transitioning to higher credentials. This shift occurred due to ‘governmentality’ – a mechanism whereby powerful players and structures mold actor thinking and behavior in ways that make sense in their context (Foucault, 1980). Linking credentials to employment requires the general public to gain higher levels of education to compete for jobs – even though it is not clear whether these credentials would be used as a screening device, as a way to ensure ability, or as a way to ensure obedience (Cheechi, 2006). Nevertheless, aligning PSE to the job market set the stage for governments to demand VIU offer specific programs. These controlling discourses, presenting as policies, changed ABE’s purpose.

The shift in ABE’s purpose actually began during the 90s when NDP policies focused on employment, while social safety net policies weakened – even though low paying jobs needed some level of skills and education (Cheechi, 2006). When the Liberals came into power in 2001, market ideology and policy reforms were well under way and were used to further rationalize PSE restructuring. Values and incentives of market policies provided the impetus and legitimation for certain actions and commitments like enterprise, competition, and excellence, but they also
delegitimized others like social justice, equity, and tolerance (Ball, 2003, p. 179). The latter commitments are critical for ABE.

To rationalize change and legitimize reform, the federal government described a need for public sector efficiencies and cost cutting strategies. This view permeated to the provincial level where a focus on educational standards, improved outcomes, and additional accountabilities were imposed on the public sector and PSE to justify a need to be competitive in a knowledge based economy (Taylor, 2001). To voters, this seemed responsible, but to VIU and ABE, these changes created challenges because policy perspectives were rooted in different spaces of practice and realms of context (Ball et al., 2011b). Policies related to programming had competition, individual benefits, privatization, free markets, and reduced government responsibility at the core of change, as the Liberals used the term ‘access to education’ as a powerful way to convince the public that change to PSE (and ABE) would encourage BC to be more competitive on a global scale (and quality of life would be better).

Conversations about changing the purpose of entire institutions would follow. BC’s goal to use PSE to drive the economy created an opportunity for Malaspina to become a full university, but its identity would change. Concerns about identity did emerge, but the Nanaimo community saw the change a public good; a ‘local’ university could serve many needs. Political rhetoric rooted in economic rationalism allowed BC to fiddle with educational policy such as entrance requirements and funding targets to ensure efficiency and productivity. Lesley (2018) claims these rules, which honed in on cost effectiveness and government intervention, were a deliberate way to promote competition – a fundamental condition of neoliberal ideology. These powerful controls affected how ABE would be positioned at VIU, unbeknownst to VIU.

The BC government’s requirement for VIU to offer ABE was seen as a benefit and a challenge. ABE’s former purpose of serving many needs did not align with neoliberal values or VIU’s new identity, so VIU assumed power by repurposing government terminology (e.g. ‘open access’) to frame ABE’s purpose as a transition program instead of a social program. This mechanism – the use of language to situate thinking – would be a form of governmentality (normative power) used to make ABE ‘fit’ to serve PSE and government purposes, while social purposes were abandoned.
6.2 Governance Policy and its Impact on Participation in ABE

Neoliberal ideologies and changing accountability frameworks required by the federal and provincial governments situated VIU as a competitor within the PSE structure and set the context for change. This context created structural conditions that influenced stakeholder perceptions and positions through powerful legislation. This legislation had both positive and negative impacts on stakeholders embedded in the system.

6.2.1 Context and the Need for Change

According to Braun et al. (2011), context is an ‘active’ force that continuously constructs and develops policy imperatives and expectations; this active force can be seen throughout Malaspina’s/VIU’s history where power and governmentality intersect and influence ABE participation.

As a college and then a university-college, Malaspina had many restrictions on its activity. This perspective influenced decisions for moving to full university status. Autonomy and relief from government powers were desirable (Office of Educational Planning, May 1, 2005), but transitioning from a community college to a university-college to a university involved a process that was deeply embedded in historical, organizational, economic, political, and social contexts that framed the institution and what ABE was, what it would become, and who would participate in it.

The devolution of control to VIU did not entirely occur, which allowed for interference by government, as seen in budget letters and the decision making powers allocated to the BoG. The legislated change that transformed Malaspina into VIU involved a change in governance, an extremely important structural change that shifted power and subjugated workers as consulting objects (Ball, 1990), but not entirely. Governance used normative power to structure problems and solutions in ways that actors did not question (Hajer & Wagenaa, 2003). Foucault (1980) names this change ‘positive unconsciousness of knowledge’ (p. 106). Actor conversations about VIU revealed they were collectively subjugated and controlled through forms of rationalization and institutionalization (Locke, 2004). Their collective memory allowed them to draw upon aspects of VIU’s culture and situated necessities to produce a ‘take’ on policy (Braun et al., 2011,
p. 586) and their situation. This ‘take’ emerged as part of VIU’s changing context rather than a ‘forced’ acceptance. For example, policy actors were influenced by hidden agendas and mechanisms framed as ‘open access’, which ultimately controlled thinking (Ingersoll, 2005). VIU is not really ‘open access’ as there are entrance requirements that ABE serves as ‘access’. During interviews, actors referred to these actions but did not contemplate the consequences until asked (Ball, 2003, p. 23).

In terms of moving to a full university, both Malaspina and government actors used legitimization strategies to support this change for their own benefit, even though ABE instructors did not initially agree with the change. The context was ripe for Malaspina, which used its policy networks to lobby for change. It even used neoliberal arguments such as increased prestige, new student markets (especially high paying international students), research grant funding, and more autonomy to advocate for change (Levin, 2017; Office of Education Planning, May 1, 2005). These reasons had significant ramifications for ABE and high school drop outs. The interest to become a university, unbeknownst to Malaspina, legitimized BC’s interests to position Malaspina as a competitive school in a growing PSE market where consumer choice was growing (Davies & Bansel, 2007). Kopeky (2011) suggests the rhetoric of freedom that was to be gained with autonomy was a ploy to condition Malaspina to conform and become competitive (p. 258). People with higher levels of education (e.g. baccalaureate graduates) would drive the economy, while ABE and its ‘lower’ level credential would be seen as unimportant. In a sense, Malaspina became partners with the government, as they justified one another’s thinking and leveraged each other’s desire for change, while lower level ABE students who had less economic clout were lost in the shuffle.

6.2.2 Stakeholder Perceptions, Positionality and the University Act

Key components for understanding participation in ABE relate to Foucault’s work on understanding where power can be located, and the how and the who with which power operates. Powerful rules, values and ideologies underpinned policies and discourse practices at VIU as part of broader societal structures. These rules and values created structures that were used to determine agency within and outside of VIU, as perspectives on ABE were altered.
Perspectives tied to actor positionalities within the new university eventually effected understandings of ABE and associated policies regarding who could or would participate in ABE. This was done through governance in the institution.

First, the University Act created VIU’s governance structure and transferred a certain level of power. Some actors embraced this power, but for ABE instructors, power remained invisible to them (Breeze, 2011; Foucault, 1980; Taylor, 2004). This was confirmed by study participants who were not deeply invested in the policy process created by the governance structure, as they had not taken active roles in interpreting or translating policy or participating in governance. They did not ‘do’ policy – policy did them (Ball et al., 2011a). This is similar to Maguire and colleagues’ (2015) findings, as actors on the ground dealt with daily priorities and pieces of the landscape while remaining distant from what was happening at higher levels of VIU or government (p. 494). They were docile subjects, tightly governed instead of being freed by a self-governing structure (Davies & Bansel, 2007). They exhibited dependency and compliance, as they “relied heavily on ‘interpretations of interpretations’” of policy and political rhetoric (Maguire et al., 2015, p. 494). They did not know names of policies or policy details but recalled what they heard about policies. Participants also made assumptions about how policies supported ABE students (or not) as they drew from their ‘historical archive of teaching’ or ‘field of memory’ (Foucault, 1972). Some believe drawing on this field can lose general validity, but Ball et al. (2011b) reason memory and experience are important for critique since it is information actors work from.

Power embedded in the new governance structure ensured ABE instructors followed what they were told, for they hoped to teach another day (Maguire et al., 2015, p. 496). Unless policy affected them directly, it was not part of their immediate consideration. Their descriptions of events and experiences demonstrated they believed policy was created by government or administrators (‘them’) and was to be followed. They were accustomed to “a language of assault, a sense of being battered by policy and policy expectations” (Ball et al., 2011b, p. 633). Put another way, study participants saw themselves outside the direct gaze of policy, as their location in the structure impacted how they acquired, accepted and reproduced policy meanings. The most obvious example was the differing views of ABE’s purpose and changes in understandings
of ABE that occurred over time; yet actors did not see how the Act’s rules, norms and regulative frameworks caused this shift, as values and logics aligned with government’s (Ingersoll, 2005).

The Act also created various levels of power that impacted the entire structure, right down to who would participate in programs. The Board of Governors (BoG), Senate and Faculties (with their distinct memberships) had specific decision-making power related to what programs would be offered, how they would be designed, how people would access them, and how much they would cost. These factors directly impact who can and will participate. Decisions on these matters rested with committees that had hegemonic control, as processes embedded in the functioning of these groups conditioned actors to think and act in particular ways. In VIU’s case, governance limited what would be discussed, who would be part of the discussion, and how practices would be carried out (Gale, 1999), and focusing on university programs was the most important thing. VIU’s processes subjugated actors who were placed (either by appointment or election) on committees to assist with control, but not question it. Interestingly, administrators were the only participants in this study to refer to the importance of VIU’s governance structure, demonstrating others did not realize the power that resided there. Rules ordered how ABE (and others) could be involved, and existing power relations between committee members added further complications. To clarify, a master-servant binary existed among appointed government representatives, appointed administrator representatives, and elected faculty representatives. This power dynamic existed during decision-making, as appointed Chairs controlled what was added to agendas, how and where items appeared, and how and when meetings transpired. Faculty and Senate meetings used Robert’s Rules of Order to organize how information was received, how actors offered input, and how topics were discussed, and administrators were named Chairs in the Act (the Dean or President respectively). Dye (1975) and Burchell et al. (1991) assert these formations are objects in their own right, as they controlled thinking.

As items appeared on agendas and were discussed, views were shaped. The structure used social, cultural, and economic lenses to control how actors thought about and reacted to problems. For ABE, an area concerned about its livelihood, there was no choice but to align with university priorities to remain a part of the institution. This is in line with Ball and Junemann’s (2012) thinking, as VIU’s policy network encouraged particular views on what problem ABE
policies were trying to solve and what the response could be. The University Act itself demonstrates how governments impose powerful agendas and rules to change the way organizations operate (Jane & Wagenaar, 2003), and how these rules dictate behavior.

Along with controlling human interaction, the University Act also had taken-for-granted assumptions that logistical and rational collaborative approaches would be used to solve problems and align others to change (Levin, 2017, p. 115). For VIU, standards, scheduling, assessment, and funding were controlled and legitimized within a framework of university prestige, a framework that did not support former views of ABE. New ideas about ‘university’ standards replaced, blended with, or segregated former ‘college’ logics of ABE (Levin, 2017), and processes and practices that ‘university’ programs used for admission and scheduling became standards adopted by ABE; it was the ‘logical’ thing to do. But Hallinan (2005) argues institutions that change admission qualifications show a clear statement of their values, and Brown (2013) adds that universities gain a ‘quasi monopoly’ in determining future stratification of society. Formal open access ideology found in the college system became problematic for some university programs, and new ‘selective’ entrance requirements were adopted. Therefore, a ‘performativity discourse’ was set over and against a ‘humanist discourse’ (Ball et al., 2011a, p. 613). What Ball and his colleagues assert is internal conversations, practices, and contexts naturalized structures and standards that were meaningful to government and to VIU’s system, but not for external groups like referral agencies or students who did not understand why they could not access certain programs simply by enrolling in them. These naturalized processes were not critically reflected upon, as study participants (external actors in particular) suggested VIU’s practices legitimized VIU’s needs over students’ needs (Taylor, 1997).

In other words, earlier perspectives on ABE were replaced by thought patterns and expectations from government and the institution, while community needs were no longer as pressing. ABE aligned with institutional needs for stability, and this justified ABE’s existence at VIU. However, it also segregated other knowledges on how ABE could meet the needs of students who had not been successful in similar structures. This is a huge issue for participation, as argued by Quigley and Fingeret in the literature review. By following internal rules and using common terminology like ‘prerequisite’, ‘grading scale’, ‘entrance requirements’, ‘admission’,
‘withdrawal’, ‘timetable’, ‘calendar’, and other institutional jargon and standards, ABE positioned itself to be a peer to other programs, while serving those programs with students who wanted ‘access’ to PSE and needed to understand that jargon. For students who did not want more PSE, these internal rules and jargon could be frustrating. ABE replicated institutional processes without critically reflecting on how this would impact students who never graduated. These and other mentalities encouraged ABE to act in ways that maximized VIU’s and its own needs instead of students’ (Kopeky, 2011).

A third consideration in relation to the University Act is the same powerful structure that enabled ABE to remain at VIU and be part of a Faculty also placed limits on what it could or could not do as part of a larger network of relations and obligations (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003, pg. 151). The network created a mutual dependency by legitimizing ABE as a servant program, as captured by participant comments in Chapter 5. Meyer (2001) claims structure created hierarchical order, while assumptions about VIU’s structure tied ABE to VIU in a dependent relationship (Walton, 2010, p. 138). To further explain, government budget letters named ABE as an ‘access’ program. ‘Access’, used within the context of PSE, created particular understandings. Here VIU and the government were part of a common network of power relations, institutional practices, and political forces that used ‘access’ as a way to benefit VIU and the economy. But tensions with historical perceptions of access challenged this view, particularly perceptions that ABE served many purposes. These different understandings created struggles for control in political processes and social relations, as ABE was originally at odds with what was intended (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 25). Governmentality was induced as actors were pressured to conform their thinking to what VIU and the government wanted ABE to be. The BoG, Senate and Faculty discussions framed ABE as a university pathway to address the new selective admission requirements, and ABE adopted these practices for itself at the expense of a student group whose members were not all interested in a pathway to PSE.

Fourth, VIU’s governance structure affected ABE’s ability to maintain relations with community organizations who were part of the extended policy network. These relationships were important during the 90s, as the Premier’s summit sought stakeholder relationships. These stakeholders could influence adults to participate. But the new university hierarchy did not value
external voices in the same way it had as a college, as accountabilities were framed by institutional and governmental values rather than community values. Instead, insider voices influenced relationships in ways that shifted and built upon VIU’s terrain (Bruchell et al., 1991 and Mchoul & Grace, 1997; Koteyko, 2006) instead of the community’s terrain. Commentary from non-profit actors, Indigenous educational counsellors, and long term ABE instructors drew attention to the many hoops adults had to jump through to go to ABE, the loss of the downtown presence, and the disappearance of community relations. Students also had to meet requirements of different organizations – VIU’s, IA’s, EI’s, employer’s, and family’s, and certain voices mattered more than others. Actors from external organizations commented that public actors from VIU, social services, and employment insurance could be belligerent and unsupportive, making participation in ABE more difficult. These ‘other’ voices have not fully been considered in the past, but this view presents them as part of the problem. Lipsky (1980) cites many examples of the power ‘street bureaucrats’ have as policy implementers, and one Indigenous education counsellor corroborates this view by stating, “there wasn’t really a whole lot of support for the idea of adult education” (ML). Longer term employees claimed increasing participation meant working through policies with trusting relationships, which disappeared when the institution became VIU.

At the same time, VIU’s new hierarchy provided only partial autonomy that Davies and Bansel (2006) argue was ‘piecemeal functionalism’. The autonomy allowed for continued interaction with former partners and decision making on how programs could be helpful for high school drop-outs, but VIU was blinded with possibilities of inventing processes for university students. With expectations to compete for students and scarce funding, the government forced VIU to deploy neoliberal tactics that would be detrimental for under-educated people, as ABE had to compete for students and funding too. Thus, ABE’s own functionalism mimicked institutional processes as it tried to fill university seats at a low cost with prepared learners. The new structure actually pressured ABE to take over the government’s responsibility of moving under-educated or un-employed adults to self-sustainability. Decentralizing tasks without providing funding put VIU in an awkward place to fulfill government policy directions while struggling with its own (Kopeky, 2011). In a nutshell, ABE had some autonomy within its own
Faculty to choose actions that strained or even contradicted the prevailing value system (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003, p. 57), but these decisions would need to be passed by the BoG or Senate as top decision makers. Most actors on these powerful committees were outside the everyday functioning of ABE programs. In short, ABE had to rely on Senate to approve its priorities and directions, but this body and its ‘university’ faculty dominated representatives outnumbered ABE representatives 21 to 3. Of course government logics and institutional needs would prevail, not ABE’s or students who needed something different.

Fifth, while the Act generally allowed Faculties to decide on program offerings, VIU had to participate in the economy at the same time (Davies & Bansel, 2007). The government fueled tension here by directing the general public to empower themselves through alignment of education with economic choice. This put pressure on VIU to respond to consumer demand for more university programs. From this perspective, administrators, faculty, and government used rational logic to argue for health, science, technology and online programs, programs that reshape class structure through meritocratic competition of the technical elite (Brown 2013). These programs were more prestigious than ABE and were needed to drive the economy. These programs, and the addition of master’s degrees, caused VIU to grow vertically and created stratification within the institution as well as externally, as it positioned the institution as a competitive player in the PSE field by creating an environment conducive to ‘higher’ learning (Brown, 2013). The ‘pre-university’ level did not fit well, especially when block funding required VIU to prioritize programs alongside an ABE commitment. VIU’s hierarchical structure legitimized the reallocation of funding to more prestigious university activities, demonstrating neoliberal values had made their way all the way down to the program level, and governmentality ensured actors accepted internal competition for funding as the new norm (Kopeky, 2011, p. 257).

The University Act also required a change in actor responsibilities, a political move that highlighted how governmentality positions actors to behave in certain ways. As ABE grappled to make sense of and resolve its new identity as part of a Faculty in a university, competing institutional logics created challenges that ultimately affected actor perspectives from their position within the organizational structure. The university’s and ABE’s new identities were a “radical departure from the principles and values of the community college” (Levin, 2017, p. 130).
Some institutional positions were elevated because VIU was now a ‘university’ and because actors were expected to participate in making rules and setting the direction for and management of the institution’s business and affairs. For some, particularly those in Faculties that offer university level programming, knowing they had this power changed their frame of mind. In discussion with study participants, it appears that ABE has not yet come to terms with its assigned power to govern its own activity, or perhaps participants understand their place is at the bottom where they take direction out of fear of challenging a ‘stable’ environment. The fact that many participants could not name policies that impacted ABE participation might suggest a lack of concern with equalizing the playing field for marginalized learners, as their location seemed to create indifference, avoidance, or irrelevance (Ball et al., 2011a).

This consideration is important, as it is a direct result of powerful neoliberal influences. Actors who are the most vulnerable keep their heads down and do what they are told out of concern that policies or priorities will change in ways that will negatively affect them. According to Spolander et al (2014), the reliance on funding with the requirement of accountability weakened actors’ ability to advocate for social and economic change and required them to meet evaluation criteria (p. 305). Government pressures also required them to enhance productivity, increase profit, and reduce costs; this can only happen in competitive environments where they look after their own interests, which reflects neoliberal ideology. Hence, aligning ABE to the rest of VIU’s activity was good for some instructors and for some student groups who wanted further PSE. While ABE actors continue to cite the University Act as the key policy keeping ABE alive at VIU – the same policy allows and, at times, encourages VIU to prioritize other programs over ABE. With a focus on credentialism, it is understandable that ABE would behave as it has. Complacency alongside competitiveness allowed ABE to be controlled, but it also allowed it to remain at VIU so actors could keep their jobs.

To recap, the University Act created a power structure necessary to respond to government policy changes while giving some autonomy and power to VIU to create its own only policy. This structure controlled the how and the who of policy, but perspectives on these powerful functions were tied to actor locations within the policy network. Governance could not be achieved through the bureaucratic state alone but through the coordination of complex, shifting flows of
power, that helped ‘responsible’ citizens help themselves (Mulderrig, 2012, p. 794). This model created a shift in the role of government and the role of citizens. Policies, as interpreted by actors, ultimately controlled who could or would participate in ABE, as actors used their own power and location within the system to passively or actively acclimatize policy in the new governance framework, making them ‘responsible’. In the next section, I describe how actors adapted to policies, but also influenced them and helped them create new ones to suit their own needs in a complex policy environment.

6.3 Power and Policy: Stakeholder Acclimatization and Neoliberal Alignment

In this study, structural change set VIU up for a blending of interests, values, norms, power, trust, and experiences (de Leon & Varda, 2009, p. 63) and for the creation of tensions. Understandings of what ABE is and what participation looks like were bound by a collective consciousness of VIU’s history in Nanaimo. Foucault (1980) refers to this as the ‘spirit’ of understandings or ‘community of meanings’. As policies and understandings changed, tensions resulted, which required actors to acclimatize in both passive and active ways. In this section, I discuss how individual views were exercised to show power and policy position simultaneously as they referred to laws, regulations and structures within their own contexts (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). Power did not just extend downward, but also originated and permeated from these groups. By examining lived experiences of actors located within the context of VIU’s historically constituted epistemes, I show that workers were inert and consenting objects as part of a social norm, while having some power at their disposal (Olssen, 2003). These actors drew on their own experiences and locations in the policy framework, while allowing the new governance structure to limit thinking. Actors became purposeful by adapting to (or, in some cases, resisting) political agendas that either aligned with or were outside of immediate interests. Adaptations, or what I refer to as acclimatizations, aligned with each participant group’s thinking, and resulting actions impacted participation for high school dropouts.

6.3.1 Government Representatives

Perspectives shared by government representatives advised that all levels of education have value; however, they acknowledged VIU’s new structure refocused value to higher levels.
Representatives believed VIU – as a university — would bring prestige to ABE such that students would want to be a part of a ‘higher education’ school. This view was supported by ABE instructors who indicated adults preferred PSE adult environments over high school environments. These and other ‘rational’ views encouraged the government to actively legitimate ABE’s existence within a university context. But these views were also informed by a neoliberal assumption that people would engage in opportunities to advantage themselves, even though the prestige created by a university does not typically privilege high school dropouts (and it hardly brings them prestige!). Instead, a university context at VIU had counter effects for people who did not see themselves as worthy of advantage. By folding ABE into the University Act and naming it as an ‘access’ provision, the government actively legitimized institutional change and exposed a neoliberal philosophy that under-educated people would magically participate in education.

This thinking was flawed because higher level programs had to be prioritized to build the new university. Including ABE in the mix of PSE programming and not funding it properly made ABE a competitor among other ‘higher’ level programs as it competed for funding and for capable students that would transition to PSE. This new priority was a departure from the historical mission of ABE in terms of who programming was for, and it effectively limited under-educated people from access (Levin, 2017). After all, a university is for smart people who have economic, social, and cultural capital to participate in its programs (Ra, 2011).

While including a provision for ABE in the Act seemed to ensure ‘access’ would remain, the Act also allowed the government to passively acclimatize to policies and standards that VIU set for itself. For example, the province set caps on how much institutions could charge for tuition and subsequent increases even though the BoG set fees locally. Fee and tuition caps for ABE were removed by the government, who claimed it was simply allowing institutions to charge (Ministry of Advanced Education, December 4, 2014). This policy change had an underlying expectation that it was reasonable that individuals should pay for something they would personally benefit from and it forced VIU’s hand by under-funding the institution. VIU accepted the imposed neoliberal values and went ahead and implemented fee and tuition changes, while the government absolved its responsibility. This is an example of collapsing the distinction between government and people, as it draws citizens into the process of governing and implicates them
in policy decisions (Mulderrig, 2012, p. 707). The government passively acclimatized to VIU’s direction knowing full well that the addition of fees would create access issues for certain populations. ABE articulation is another example that demonstrates government’s passive acclimatization, as standards set by ABE articulation groups prepare adults for more education rather than work. The government did not interfere since this direction aligns with developing more qualified people to drive the economy.

6.3.2 Administrators

VIU administrators saw ABE as a government mandated program that must be offered. Although under-funded, ABE was also seen as a program that enabled access to more important VIU programs – degree programs – where government targets also had to be met. If VIU had to offer ABE, administrators expected ABE students to transition to other PSE programs as a sort of conditional requirement. Thus, VIU passively adapted to a mandated government policy as an access policy and recruitment strategy. Accountability and funding were so tightly wound together that the mandate drove passive acclimatization. Ball (2003) refers to this as an opportunity to act related to capacity but without the necessary resources to have a full strategy (p. 24). This concept is important for understanding social change.

ABE’s competitors – the school district (who wanted more students) and other VIU programs (who wanted more funding) – were normally viewed as education partners. Yet words like targets, entrepreneurial, accountability, efficiency, and competition were used in educational documents and policies and by actors to reveal that education was no longer a social good but a market driven product. The threat of further funding reductions for not meeting targets added stress, as externally imposed measures of performance threatened sanctions (Biesta, 2004; Bowl, 2017). VIU’s administration had to actively pursue policy acclimatization to compensate. First, it pointed to government reporting guidelines to actively pressure ABE with metrics on student transitions as a way to increase PSE numbers. Second, VIU enacted ABE ‘fee’ policies (application, tuition, student activity, student service) to assist with funding shortfalls. These neoliberal tactics ensured individuals bore the cost of their own development, while VIU received the much needed
funding. It also put more responsibility for recruitment on ABE instructors, who had little influence on higher order decisions related to resources. As Ingersoll (2005) touts, problems arise when those in the middle are subject to unreasonable or competing or contradictory demands or are not provided with the necessary power and resources to get the job done adequately. In the extreme case, those caught between impossible demands and limited resources illustrate one of the classic problems of management: holding employees accountable for things they do not control (p. 108).

The pressure to transition students to PSE and the addition of fees impacted the type of students who enrolled in ABE. Not all students were interested in more schooling after ABE, and the fees, even with AUG, limited who could participate in ABE and higher education. Fees were an active way for VIU to adapt to a funding shortfall, but ABE students could not get loans. By adding fees to ABE, VIU set the stage for enrolling students who had the capital to participate in ABE and transition to other PSE programs, and it limited possibilities for those who did not.

6.3.3 ABE Instructors

ABE Instructors also demonstrated policy acclimatization as they passively and actively conformed to the University’s needs and their own needs. They blamed both the government and VIU administrators for creating inhibiting policies like EI, IA and fee structures, and for prioritizing university programming over ABE; yet, they passively enforced these policies by not trying to understand or challenge them. They did not advocate for change or offer other solutions because they were beneficiaries of being employed in a publically funded institution (Ladwig, 2014) and worried about their future at the institution. Therefore, they abided by the rules in passive ways for what made sense to them (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003). They worked day to day, trying to get students through ABE, and they waited for the next policy to arrive. They held on to dominant logics, values and practices because “stability [was] the default position” (Levin, 2017, p. 138).

At the same time, they actively adapted departmental policies and practices to further the institution’s needs, as well as their own. Brian et al. (2006) and Croll et al. (1994) refer to them
as policy and practice mediators who are implementers of change. For example, course standards and program structures had been actively adapted over time to reflect institutional norms. This demonstrates that power did not always force their hand but was a political process made up of a complexity of relationships that operated through institutional relationships (Taylor et al., 1997). ABE grading and assessment procedures were typical of educational environments, even though these procedures were often resisted by people who had dropped out. According to Fenwick (2010), these standards are integral to education policy, for they ensure a fabricated quality that requires a particular action towards a perceived problem. Kopkey (2011) adds that testing and other standards use hierarchical techniques and sanctions to strengthen the power of the norm and highlight the individual’s responsibility to be homogeneous (p. 258). These standards order texts, identities, objects, and bodies to assemble into practices that are not usually questioned – except by those who do not wish to conform (e.g. drop outs). In this study, instructors recognized that ABE’s entrance assessments and scheduling standards were problematic but argued that they were ‘good for students’ to ensure success and to ensure fairness (Ingersoll 2005, p. 105). Thus, ABE employees refused to challenge their assumptions on an equitable, controlling policy (Kopeky, 2011). Schedules, similarly, were artificially constructed timeframes and did not necessarily align with students’ work or family commitments. Instead, they reflected societal norms desirable for institutional structures and instructors.

These adaptations seem selfish; however, intentionally disadvantaging certain groups of ABE students was not what ABE instructors or policies were trying to do. These were norms by which instructors lived by, a habitus that “provide[d] a way of thinking which powerfully illuminate[d] the processes by which social reproduction can take place routinely and unplanned” (Ball, 2003, p. 17). Instructors lived by unconscious rules of formation that regulated their discourse (Mahon, 1993) and situated meanings that were not necessarily obvious to them. In general, instructors had two ontological positions: one where they strategized by weighing choices in relation to outcomes, and the other where they followed a pre-adapted disposition with no deliberation or conscious planning. It was the latter approach that occurred, as it was assumed that their structure was dictated by collective agreements or powerful administrators.
The Collective Agreement is silent on admission and scheduling policy, which gives a window of opportunity to the Faculty to address these concerns.

In terms of articulation, ABE had a choice to adapt (or not) to provincial course outcomes. Adapting assumes standards, but here a disconnect exists between ABE and other VIU Faculties because ABE’s prerequisite courses would not be accepted internally without provincial approval. This suggests a lack of trust in ABE instructors and their professionalism. ABE, therefore, adapted to standards to be justified by the system in which it lives, a system where standards are tied to quality and a culture of performativity, and where measurement is used to judge performance. ABE standards, then, are a type of ‘credentialism’, albeit at the lowest level of the university where specific high school grades are needed to enter the system, rationalizing ABE’s purpose.

While some functions appear to be self-serving, both administrators’ and instructors’ perceptions and adaptations, according to Ball et al. (2011a), resulted because there was little to no space for ‘alternative’ interpretations (or actions) due to actor positioning within the institution (p. 613). Compliance with government directives, alongside reduced funding, created a situation where VIU actors had no choice but to force ABE to align with the rest of VIU. Fundamentally, it was about ABE’s survival; without ABE feeding VIU, and without students paying fees and adhering to internal standards, ABE would most likely not exist at VIU. For adults not interested in standards or moving onto higher education, they chose not to enroll.

6.3.4 Indigenous Education Counsellors and Not-For-Profit Representatives

Indigenous Education Counsellors and non-profit representatives were removed from VIU’s immediate policy network. They typically help under-educated people access services, including education, but education is not the sole reason for their existence. As a result, their perspectives were impacted by being on the peripheral. For example, Indigenous Education Counsellors saw ABE as part of colonization of the western world. The choice of the word ‘colonization’ could be considered akin to neoliberalism, where colonization required conformity with expectations. However, this view came from a place of passive resistance, as western knowledge was seen as more valuable than Indigenous knowledge, at least from educational and labour perspectives.
Views were not dissimilar for non-profit representatives who saw ABE as a colonized component of a large, intimidating institution ‘up on the hill’. This perspective reflects the changes in ABE in that it is no longer a holistic program, but instead a program that reflected institutional values and standards. Because these two groups did not have direct relationships with institutional policy in the same way insiders did, it is understandable their views were different. Nonetheless, both groups passively acclimatized to policy and practice changes at VIU possibly because they did not see the changes as their fight or as impacting them directly. These representatives worked with people not well served by the social safety net, so the focus was often on addressing basic needs for clients. Furthermore, as outsiders, their perspectives on ABE’s purpose and policy related to participation demonstrated their exclusion from the internal consciousness of the institution. Relationships that once existed with ABE as a way to actively bend policy to support marginalized people no longer existed.

Perhaps power and neoliberal values are to blame for the demise of ABE’s external relationships. This was most obvious in comments from external actors. But accountability, funding, and standards policies created a competitive environment that became the primary focus for VIU, and nurturing external relationships became secondary. External actors cannot actively adapt policy to support ABE students without having relationships with VIU’s ABE department.

Each group’s perspectives were driven by a form of governmentality where daily roles, experiences and locations impacted actor thinking within a broader policy network. Changes to the institution’s structure forced compliance with policy or adaptation, sometimes through new policy at a local level. This affected access, as a new ‘university’ way of thinking led the priorities.

6.4 Funding Policy

Funding limits and required efficiencies forced VIU into a situation where reallocation was necessary. In fact, funding policy is at the heart of much of the ABE participation phenomenon. To explain funding problems, I break this section into three categories that mimic funding analysis in Chapter 5: institutional funding, department funding, and student funding.
6.4.1 Institutional Funding

Malaspina/VIU has been controlled by the provincial government for close to fifty years. The Premier and Minister of Advanced Education formerly set the institution’s direction and its priority areas, but direction setting today is more complicated with commercial, philanthropic, charitable and voluntary organizations vying for control through investment (Ball 2008). By drawing attention to inefficient systems at the federal level, federal and provincial governments were able to rationalize funding decreases while increasing accountability requirements. BC now sustains its relationship with VIU by providing a funding structure that holds ABE (and the rest of VIU) hostage. VIU is expected to follow the government’s wishes and correct complex social problems through a framework of disciplined and unsupported positions (Ball, 1997, p. 261).

With globalization and changes to higher education, Ladwig (2014) proposes that VIU had no choice but to become ‘isomorphic’. This means VIU and its actors were pressured through economic control and other external forces. The province was underfunded, so it placed legal, financial and technical requirements on VIU and put the institution in a situation where it was forced to meet eligibility requirements for funding, while ensuring efficient spending as a whole. Much needed funding would make self-determination for VIU out of the question. Yet, funding challenges and accountabilities were not new to an institution that struggled throughout the 2000s. With a new mandate, a funding reduction in 2008, and ongoing inflation, focusing on undergraduate degrees as an institutional mandate made offering other programs like ABE difficult. Prestige drove VIU’s behavior as it became more hierarchical and more entrepreneurial (Ladwig, 2014), and internal competition meant only the fittest would survive (Levin, 2017). Reducing funding allocations gave the government permission to intervene, and free markets complemented VIU’s hierarchy (Lesley, 2018). In other words, reduced funding put actors in a dependent relationship with government (Goodin & Grix, 2011) and free markets dictated which programs needed to be offered to meet labour market needs.

Labour shortages that were identified by private sector companies led the government to a targeted approach that required PSEs to respond (BC Blueprint for Jobs), putting ABE in a vulnerable place because of its ‘low’ level. With limited funding, VIU faced a trade-off between equity in the form of opportunity to access, and efficiency in the form of program and student
selectivity (Checci, 2006). Inefficiencies pushed equity out, as the government and VIU (the policy actioner) rationalized a neoliberal agenda with fewer dollars (Basu, 2003). Centralizing financial control was one of the most radical changes typical of neo-liberal practices (Basu, 2003).

Malaspina’s open admission policies, which were tied to social and public beliefs about access to colleges and programs like ABE, could no longer be prioritized in a university environment that emphasized merit, academic abilities, and individual accomplishments. These values replaced the social ‘helping’ and ‘social responsibility’ values of a college, particularly since university students would provide higher levels of funding. Even though much of the PSE sector was still using terminology like ‘access for all’ with fair opportunity for all – a neoliberal perspective – deep cuts of financial support created unequal access, particularly for the disadvantaged (Brown, 2013). This was compounded by the fact that universities are elitist and the logic of merit, intellectual purpose, and competition among students and faculty are expected and cause problems in a class based society (Levin, 2017, p. 129). With this in mind, the move to full university status shifted VIU’s culture to be more elitist, which was a concern for ABE and an important contextualizing factor related to who would receive institutional funding and who could participate in the new structure.

This shift towards elitism was not easily visible in discourses related to ABE, but budgets told the story. The loss of social responsibility was disguised in government letters where there were symbolic commitments to ABE as a stated ‘priority’ – without specified funding. This approach is expected when neoliberal values are at work. VIU needed to achieve this stated priority in order to receive funding it was already spreading very thin. Governmentality and power shaped VIU’s thinking and its development, as the government used faculty and administer aspirations for university status to propel the institution towards a new logic where policies and practices went against the former egalitarian mission of Malaspina. Access policies became problematic for people who never graduated from high school because they were focused mostly on university access. As Brown (2013) puts it, there is an access opportunity trap where students seek to gain a positional advantage over other students; without addressing class inequalities, “there is little prospect of increasing intergenerational social mobility” (p. 682). Stated another way, social justice has been reduced to fair access within BC’s PSE sector.
6.4.2 Internal ABE Funding

VIU was put in an interesting predicament with its new designation. In agreement with Levin’s (2017) findings, the new university structure, an expanding mission, and tight resources meant a culture shift was inevitable. The requirement to meet labour market gaps – and offer ABE – meant VIU had to pick and choose where funding would be allocated. VIU wanted to support a university mandate but had to meet government priorities, so internal dollars had to be diverted. In effect, ABE was a cipher of government policy for VIU, as government had the power to ‘override’ VIU’s priorities by requiring ABE targets (Ball et al., 2011a).

But VIU’s Board of Governors had power too. The BoG was central to decision making at the local level and had power to set funding policy directions. Senate also had power to set academic program direction. Together these bodies placed administrators, staff, faculty and students in subordinate positions. The BoG and Senate chose to fund certain programs and policies that could have been delayed, suspended, or not adopted. Thus, these groups retained significant power. But they also included deliberation as part of the democratic decision-making process; collective goals, values and possible impacts were intended to be discussed in meetings (de Leon & Varda, 2009). Administrators, faculty and staff could influence decisions, but each had one vote. Yet, their roles were not insignificant, as they had advocacy opportunities. Unfortunately, faculty stratification, frayed relationships, and increased ‘university like’ responsibilities made advocacy difficult. ABE needed more support because it was no longer seen as the accepted ‘socially’ responsible program it once was. Instead, ABE was fully aligned to university programming as VIU’s way to respond with fewer resources. The situation, as Ball (2003) touts, pushed 'contexts together, as a social totality', making behaviors and strategies 'necessary and appropriate' (p. 22).

Competition, prestige, and fewer resources caused instability for ABE, which caused instructors to redefine their role in the institution. Ensuring targets were met, while transitioning students to other programs, achieved stability for ABE, but it also attracted a different student population. Neoliberalism shifted ABE towards consumerism and a duty to self rather than duty to a broader collective (Ball, 2003) – a survival strategy. Unknown to this study’s participants was that the government used VIU and ABE to achieve its own economic goal of developing a
more educated labour force, while containing public costs at the same time. Internally, ABE’s budget was trimmed to bare bones to redirect funding for other ‘university’ programs. Funding for substitute instructors, internal faculty leaves, curriculum development, field trips, or other important learning activities were removed, which impacted departmental morale. The budget consisted predominantly of faculty and administrative salaries, and the Faculty’s teaching load remained at the former college level of 24 hours of student contact time per week – two to three times university instructor workloads. On the upside, ABE’s budget proved to be efficient.

VIU’s administrators also had control over resources crucial to ABE participation. Block funding policy required funding recommendations to come from below (Ingersoll, 2005). Administrator’s roles required them to manage budgets, including providing supports for students. Resource management also allowed administrators to provide a range of direct and indirect levers that exerted accountability at the Faculty level. While administrators approved Faculty decisions on entrance requirements, scheduling, program design, and curriculum design (Ingersoll, 2005), power structures were of the ‘power with’ type (with Faculty) (Burnner, 2002); ‘power over’ structures were saved for budget decisions. Ultimately, limited internal funding impacted the location of program delivery and affected who participated (see section 6.6).

### 6.4.3 Student Funding

Funding changes and the focus on the individual instead of the collective can be seen in ABE policy changes at the student level. Selman and Selman (2009) claim that a continued focus on individual instead of collective action is pervasive in Canadian society, as individual survival is exemplary of neoliberal ideology in practice. With new pressures of doing more with less, and staying true to spending requirements outlined in the BTAA, VIU is living neoliberal values.

First, changing government ideology unraveled and re-created former policies, which often creates confusion for the public. Shifting perspectives is typical when governments react to changing markets or when new governments are elected and have different values. As governments struggled to educate people for participation in the labour market, ABE tuition policy at Malaspina/VIU changed five times over a twenty year horizon, flip-flopping from having tuition, to being free, to having a nominal ‘support’ fee, to being free, to having full tuition. These
constant changes make it difficult for the general public to keep track of what is going on in ABE unless information about the present state of programming is consistent, readily available and frequently shared. What occurred in reality was a change was made, a blast of communication went out that may or may not have reached intended targets, and the change was forgotten. Community members who missed the initial message may not have had other avenues for finding out about programming or costs, particularly if no relationship with the institution existed. Thus, incomplete or incorrect information about ABE may have circulated or did not circulate at all.

The literature review indicated that available current information is a critical piece of the participation puzzle (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982; Rubenson, 2010); therefore, current and relevant information must be communicated often to potential students and agencies supporting them. This is particularly important when there are supports for fees. For example, the Adult Upgrading Grant (AUG) supports ABE students who are classified as ‘low income’ (annual income less than $23,647). In 2015, 16.5% of Nanaimo residents were ‘low income’ (Stats Canada, 2016). Given that provincial policy requires these people to claim their income level to receive AUG, and federal policy requires these people to claim AUG as additional income (even though ABE costs cannot be claimed as educational expenses), there are risks associated with accessing AUG. Risks include the potential to move up an income bracket, claw backs if any other income is received, or less income due to additional taxation. The risks are great and the arbitrary low income threshold makes no sense for struggling students making just over $24,000. AUG and CRA policies are contradictory and leave people with limited options.

Finally, what was most noticeable in funding policy conversations was that students had minimal to no power to voice their concerns in a system created for them. Their ability to have a say in policy creation and implementation is limited. Student representatives are part of larger governance structures at VIU where they have influencing and voting powers, but their voices are out-numbered on committees dominated by institutional representatives. In terms of funding policies created by government, prospective students have no voice at all.

What this all means is government funding is a critical component for access to public education. The federal and provincial governments have put VIU in an unrealistic position by asking it to be everything to everyone with limited dollars. By using accountability and efficiency
expectations, VIU has been pushed into what Foucault refers to as a state of governementality, where insiders are forced to think about their work in particular ways. Actors compete with each other for students, for money, for prestige, and for ways to support students. A lack of funding and an expectation to meet targets has pushed VIU and ABE into a place where students must support themselves. While low income students can access some funding for costs, federal policies reverse these efforts, sometimes leaving low income students in a worse place than when they started.

6.5 Failing Social Net

Over the past twenty years, dominant discourse in BC has changed the landscape from a social welfare focus to a market driven focus (Davies & Bansel, 2007). In fact, a neoliberal agenda has been at the heart of this transformation, as the federal government downloaded its responsibility to the provincial governments. The kinds of impacts the welfare regime can have on structural conditions is blatant here. Corporations have been given power to reconfigure education to align with the labour market as a way to create ‘productive’ beings, and social policy and human well-being are no longer federal or provincial priorities. New models now force self-care through a form of knowledge and freedom that education is supposed to provide. For those who cannot take care of themselves, they are made to be lesser forms of beings. This is not just individuals but also organizations like schools and hospitals or parents (Davies & Bansel, 2007). The feeling of ‘lesser than’ is at the heart of stigma, which will be discussed in the next section.

When asked about policies that deterred adults from participating in ABE, income assistance (IA) and employment insurance (EI) policies were named most often next to funding policy. Yet, actors in this study had not actually read these policies; instead they relied on general conversations about them to come to this conclusion. Their experiences with IA and EI clients were tied to their location in a network where priorities had shifted, impacting their thinking. There had been little to no ABE marketing, and relationships between workers in important non-profit or government agencies and VIU representatives were fractured. As a result, it is believed under-educated adults often had to find out about ABE on their own and participate accordingly. VIU had some support on campus for sharing information, but funding limitations prohibited
engaging in outreach. With IA and EI policies focusing on work first principles, clients of social policies were often pushed towards work instead of education.

Chapter 5 explained that there was some opportunity for IA and EI clients to attend education, but it was limited. Further, social service policies, similar to government and VIU policies, have been constructed in a way that empowers certain people to have control over the agency of others. IA and EI provisions were framed as untenable by the end of the 90s because they ‘produced dependent people’. Policy was therefore changed to force individuals to pursue self-improvement for their own economic well-being. According to Davies and Bansel (2007), the “‘passive’ citizen of the welfare state becomes the autonomous ‘active’ citizen with rights, duties, obligations and expectations—the citizen as active entrepreneur of the self; the citizen as morally superior’ (p. 252). Not only does the new model focus on self-improvement, but it also waves collective responsibility for the marginalized. With the newfound focus on self, policy ‘allows’ a return to education for people on assistance provided certain criteria are met—e.g. an ‘approved’ individual plan. These plans ensure a place in the system for an approver, but not necessarily a place for the individual in need, which reproduces class. Policy, then, not only controls actors at the furthest reaches of the system (students), but it also controls actors who are part of the system itself (workers). When policies support beneficiaries, they also support implementers by ensuring they have some role to play in the process.

The decision of whether criteria are met rests with government front line workers, or ‘street bureaucrats’ (Lipsky, 1980). These street bureaucrats can choose to support adults by interpreting policies and helping them access economic, social, and cultural capitals that people on IA or EI typically do not have access to. Without access to this capital, under-educated adults can easily be denied access to education. Put another way, policy and access to capital puts front line workers in a position of power. From this view, the situation for people who currently rely on the social safety net is challenging because neoliberal values expect them to manage complex systems. Accessing a PSE institution is not an easy task for someone who has never done it, so expecting individuals to step up for themselves, according to Kopeky (2011), is the most effective form of social control. Kopeky (2011) claims that hegemonic social control in learning is achieved by relying on self-motivated, self-regulated and self-policed strategies (p. 258). This form of social
control keeps under-educated individuals under-educated, as they often do not know what questions to ask, where to find support, or where to get financial help. Many of them do not even consider education as an option. Without access to forms of capital, the marginalized are stumped before they even start, intensifying class (Ball, 2003).

But street bureaucrats must also deal with a neoliberal agenda. They are also required to enhance productivity, increase profit, and reduce cost as part of what they do. They, like educators, experience governmentality in that they adopt neoliberal ideas through the use of standardized policy that justifies their services and their actions (Spolander, 2014). Power is not ‘transferred’ to social workers but conditions how they think about how to deal with particular circumstances – a form of governmentality (Burchell et al., 1991). The policy implementer is framed as having the power, while the policy receiver is framed as powerless (Kopeky, 2011, p. 251). With costs and productivity embedded in the social service framework, front line workers have become commoditized – similar to educators. As outlined in Chapter 5, social policies have some wiggle room to allow clients access to education, but the provision requires prospective students to provide a plan. As already mentioned, without the economic, social, and cultural capital to create such a plan, these adults have no clue where to begin. Even if students had a plan, social policy actors make judgements about client’s return to education by evaluating the potential level of success that can be achieved and how this success relates to increased profits and productivity based on their own experiences and knowledge. These considerations dictate investment decisions.

It has already been observed that relationships between ABE and social policy providers have mostly disappeared, resulting in groups working in isolation from the provision of universal services. With social service providers and non-profit agencies working in silos, finding appropriate pathways for students is more difficult. Spolander et al. (2014) believe keeping providers separate allows other markets (e.g. private markets) to emerge, which further reduces the social safety net because profits and efficiencies become the center of restructuring. Social policy no longer supports people in an explicit way, and governmentality, informed by a neoliberal lens, has forced workers to think about accountability, productivity, and efficiency. The absentee interaction and collaboration on the part of actors who work with under-educated
adults has resulted in an individualized approach where people must help themselves while the collective approach that encourages helping others has been pushed aside. These one-off interactions allow people to be judged and adds to stigma felt by those on the receiving end.

6.6 Stigma, Power, Policy and Neoliberal Ideology

Neoliberal values embedded in government ideology and policy assume people want to advance themselves, but for those who dropped out of high school, committing to more years of schooling is not often a consideration when they lack capital needed to invest in themselves (Ra, 2011). Chapter 5 presented views on psychological barriers that prohibited adults from advancing; with this in mind, it appears adults at lower levels of education are being further stigmatized through ABE at VIU.

6.6.1 Naming VIU as a University

A simple institutional name change – from Malaspina University-College to Vancouver Island University – leads people to believe the institution is something different than what it was. The word ‘university’ brings with it certain social values, a place for ‘higher’ learning and a certain prestige that was not part of the institution’s former ‘college’ culture. The name university insists a new status is inevitable, and the name alone changed internal and external perspectives on who VIU is and what it is for. In short, the social value of a university does not align with ABE’s historical purpose as a second chance ‘social’ program.

Academic achievement and research are values bestowed on universities that make them prestigious. Prestige privileges opportunity over equity, and the market values certain qualities and kinds of students at universities while devaluing others (Ball, 2003). This creates a variety of issues for ABE, as VIU’s new identity means opportunity for certain adult students. For some, VIU’s new identity took on a negative connotation. External groups who previously had connections with ABE and referred students to ABE struggled with the new structure. VIU was now the institution up on the hill, a place disengaged from the broader community. The term ‘up on the hill’ was used several times by study participants, even though the institution’s physical location never changed. Also used was the term ‘ivory tower’, representing respect, distinction and an overall ‘higher’ worth of programs positioned in majestic buildings. These terms portray
a position of snobbery, a sense of wealth, and a feeling of intellectual superiority – traits consistent with individualism in a neoliberal framework. The very suggestion that VIU was an ivory tower means ABE would not be accessible to certain groups of adults who did not fit the mold of high achievers attending a prestigious institution. Interestingly, this view of prestige, articulated with the same choice of words, was also expressed by ABE instructors who pointed to the ‘other’ (other VIU programs or VIU instructors) as being ‘up on the hill’ in their ‘ivory tower’. This shows that ABE instructors had an understanding of the context, and it suggests that they, too, felt marginalized in the new environment despite the fact that they were part of it. Braun et al. (2011) propose this is because they were positioned to see, understand and experience policy activities from ‘where’ they were as policy actors (p. 562) – in this case, closer to the bottom of the hill and unimportant compared to university faculty and programs.

6.6.2 Conceptualizing Stigma

While this study focused on policies that supported or negated adults accessing and participating in ABE, psychological barriers were often named as hindering participation – even though none of these psychological barriers were listed as something that policy should deal with. Study participants claimed feelings of fear and shame were worthy of consideration when thinking about adults returning to education, as these emotions related to past educational experiences. Frank and Zhao (2005) agree, as social psychological processes exist within schools and have lasting effects (p. 201). However, participants did not frame these barriers as part of learner’s motivation. Rather, fear, shame, and terrible past experiences were framed as something participants could get over.

Scholars listed in the literature review (Beder and Valentine, 1990; Blunt and Yang, 2002; Buttell, 2000; Darkenwald, 1977; Flynn et al., 2011; Henry and Basile, 1994; Oiakawa and Arrowsmith, 2001; Paladanius, 2002; Rubenson, 2010) claim dealing with psychological barriers is not simple. Insider perspectives demonstrate educators are deeply committed to education’s value and worth, so they fail to critically reflect upon why education has not worked for so many people, particularly lower socio-economic groups. Spolander et al. (2014), Whitty (1997) and Ahl (2006) claim there are taken-for-granted assumptions about education that place dispositional
problems as the responsibility of the individual. These assumptions result in unchallenged education and policy frameworks that are now layered with neoliberal values because they require people to find their own pathways. The lack of motivation as a consideration in this study demonstrates educational actors do not recognize the different views on education’s worth. Whitty (1997) furthers this point by adding that many educators have become disengaged from wider social movements and the reality of the outside world, which creates a disconnect between the way insiders think about education and the way outsiders think about it, a point Quigley (1987, 1990, and 1992) and Fingeret (1983) allude to in their work. Evans (2007) supposes that highly structured environments offer opportunities for those following clearly defined routes, and these same structural opportunities hold individuals responsible for failures (regardless of other barriers). Put another way, an ‘opportunities for all’ environment often makes ‘unsuccessful’ people feel worse about self. Evans (2007) sees non-participants “as having a past and imagined future possibilities, which guide and shape actions in the present, together with subjective perceptions of the structures they have to negotiate, the social landscapes that affect how they act” (p. 92-93). Ziegahn (1992) concurs, as the public view is such that opening doors allows people to be successful, when in reality an open door with a silent message acknowledges the stigma of illiteracy. Illiteracy is not openly discussed and is not accepted, so illiterate people don’t want to be ‘outed’ or admit their secret. Levin (1992) recommends that researchers need to carefully consider non-participation from the perspective that “the most serious barriers are rooted in our basic ideas about the provision of education” (p. 267).

In line with this thinking, psychological barriers persist, as this study’s participants suggest. This was confirmed when one of the most prohibitive barriers – educational costs (for tuition, transportation, child care, other institutional fees and books) – was eliminated for people living at or below the poverty line. With the removal of the financial barrier, it was expected that this socio-economic group would access ABE in huge numbers, yet this was not the case. Hallinan (2005) offers that psychological theories of human development highlight that normative institutional environments can negatively affect a student’s psychological state for years. And Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of psychological needs implies that along with food and shelter, people need to belong so they strive to satisfy others. This is at the heart of educational...
judgement. As long as basic survival needs are met (food, shelter, safety), satisfying others and other interpersonal interactions are critical. However, in competitive environments, this can be difficult. Nonetheless, Maslow identifies belonging as necessary for self-esteem.

The question becomes how can students who never graduated from high school feel a sense of belonging in a university? Study participants who worked at Malaspina/VIU for more than twenty years and external participants observed that VIU’s environment is not conducive to creating a sense of belonging or to supporting self-esteem for adults with lower levels of education. On the contrary, the university and its social values created an environment where people who dropped out of high school felt ashamed about their inadequacy. Viewpoints on this topic vary depending on the actors’ location because modes of behavior, meaning and thought required a situational response to this difficult problem (Ball et al., 2011b, p. 636). In part, a lack of belonging stems from the idea that higher education is a ‘privilege’ for lower social groupings, while it is an expectation of middle class groupings (Lesley, 2018, p. 29). Class, therefore, contextualizes people’s lives and affects opportunities and choices. “In effect education policy is a focus on class struggle. Struggle for opportunity, advantage and closure, and for the distribution of scarce resources” (Ball, 2003, p. 52). Bourdieu (1973) framed educational problems as related to class and differences in cultural capital and habitus. According to Bourdieu (1973), cultural capital is inculcated into children as part of their socialization process; particular behaviors, activities, artifacts, and language are privileged and the habitus of these privileges is located inside one’s head. Habitus continues into adult life and is what educators need to focus on changing if access to and success in education is to occur. Including ABE in PSE may have had the intention to take stigma away, but it has emphasized it due to the elitist nature of a university. At VIU, its location on a hill as a place where intellect and competition between ‘smart’ people exists and suggests adults who never graduated from high school are challenged to understand how they fit in.

6.6.3 Persistence of Stigma in ABE

The feeling of stigma is not new in AE, for it has been associated with ABE for decades (Beder, 1991; Davidson, 2008; Martini & Page, 1996). According to Kopeky (2011), those who are able to
adapt to requirements of the environment will profit from it, while those who cannot adapt will not profit. It would appear that today’s ABE is like other forms of higher education – a version of meritocracy that is orientated towards individualism. VIU’s newly created environment further solidified stigma, particularly in relation to standardized admission and scheduling practices that drew attention to students’ educational abilities. Critical theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Henry Giroux, and Michael Apple have argued that “the school system serves the interests of the dominant culture in maintaining its hegemonic position in society” (Pare, 2004, p. 9), and what is happening in ABE suggests this is true.

Learning has been presented as a powerful tool for success, so it has been framed as an obligation (Kopeky, 2011). At the same time, individualization in the form of competition is encouraged in education and employment, which creates challenges from an obligation standpoint. More specifically, individual problems are not seen as system failures but as individual failures, so unsuccessful people are told to be more responsible. Research on stigma indicates people may be more prone to seek help for education if barriers they face are not dispositional in nature (Martini & Page, 1996; Rubenson, 2010). This is because self-esteem is threatening because it points to inadequacy. Institutions judge people by their ability, and students internalize the judgement of inadequacy as they compare themselves to others. At a basic level, adults who did not graduate from high school are judged as not meeting the minimal requirement for both the labour market and the university that trains for labour market access.

To clarify, when Malaspina moved to full university status, long term instructors, Indigenous education counsellors, and non-profit representatives sensed it would be difficult to attract under-educated adults to ABE because of the association with a university; a place of ‘higher’ learning was not a place of ‘lower’ learning. In fact, participants from every group admitted that VIU was ‘intimidating’ and ‘hard to access’. With ABE now serving mostly high school graduates and some university students, high school drop outs cannot envision themselves belonging in this environment. Stigma, which is located in their head and is related to a current level of ability and low capacity for moving into higher levels of PSE, is simply too great. Yet, high school drop outs accessed ABE at Malaspina in fairly consistent numbers during the university-college days. This was when programs were more holistic, delivered off campus, and considerate of student’s goals
whatever they were. These programs enrolled mostly high school drop-outs because they were located in ‘general’ areas and provided additional support. These off-site locations allowed students to feel a sense of belonging because students saw themselves in each other, they felt part of a community of likeness, and the location was accessible in a less ‘institutional’ space on ‘neutral’ ground. This sense of belonging is what Maslow referred to as necessary for participation to occur. Martini and Page (1996) would agree that an ABE store front worked for people who sought assistance in a way that was less visible.

The external location also provided another benefit: well developed relationships with community partners, a critical component of a policy network. The loss of these relationships was mentioned mostly by external actors, with the exception of two twenty plus year ABE instructors, which demonstrates an overall lack of understanding of the value of relationships for social policy work for the other participants. Being ‘in’ community allowed partnerships to support mutual clients in a more private way. However, once the Liberals clawed back funding for holistic programs, the hard to reach high school drop-outs would not necessarily be able to find out about ABE, or they would have difficulty with transportation, with not knowing anyone in a large daunting place, and with being terrified to reveal their level of education in a place of intelligence. When Outlooks left downtown, relationships with service providers left too. High workloads and institutional responsibilities, productivity requirements in neoliberal ideology, limited possibilities for interaction and sharing information did not occur.

According to study participants, there was minimal to no ABE advertising and relationships were severely strained, so how could potential students find out about ABE, even if they wanted to attend? Under-educated people often do not have the competencies to engage in a decoding process necessary to consider opportunities, so obtaining something as simple as information could be challenging. The assumption and expectation in neoliberal ideology is that consumers understand institutional processes, and they possess the requisite cultural codes and competencies to enable them to engage with choice; but, there are considerable differences in levels of information and awareness among different socio-economic groups (Lesley, 2018, p. 26). Power and privilege are embedded in class structure, and people who dropped out in high school do not typically have access to power or privilege to help them along. Ball (2003) shares
this thinking, as he advises that middle and upper class families utilize social and cultural capital to maximize opportunities for self and maintain educational advantage, while low income families do not have access to the same levels of capital and do not know how to leverage opportunity. The result? Class reproduction, with the under-educated not participating in ABE.

6.6.4 Stigma Embedded in Institutional Hierarchies

Despite the removal of Malaspina’s binary university-college divide, internal stratification of programming within VIU remains. In consideration of cognitive and social needs, it has been noticed by this study’s participants that students at lower educational levels feel stigmatized by VIU’s environment and the people inhabiting it. Lesley (2018) claims this is related to identity and class solidarity, for under-educated people do not fit the university environment and its intellectual presence. In fact, resisters of middle class education culture do so because “identities are rooted in social and cultural norms and value systems ... bound with the expressions and suppressions of identities” (Lesley, 2018, p. 27). Academically oriented middle class students comply easily with school norms of academic excellence because those norms satisfy their intellectual needs (Hallinan, 2005, p. 140). But academic needs are not the same as psychological needs, so Hallinan argues students who find learning difficult or who are reluctant to participate need a different kind of normative culture where psychological needs have a wider acceptance.

Universities prioritize academic achievement, so students (and faculty) become more aggressive, competitive, and goal-oriented, which threatens the ‘under’ educated. Malaspina, formerly a ‘non-selective’ institution, became ‘selective’ as a university. Admission policies and other standards, which ABE replicated, dictated who could enter the institution. In addition, VIU’s hierarchy created classification boundaries through separate decanal areas of knowledge (Lesley, 2018); by separating the university into departmental strands like Faculties and programs, classification levels are institutionally framed to exercise control over these knowledge bases, creating stratification. ABE students are stigmatized as ‘lower level’ where all subject areas are rolled into one ABE decanal area. Students are guilty by association regardless of the knowledge level they possess when they are located in ABE to do ‘upgrading’. Lesley (2018) believes classifications “strongly impact the nature and quality of educational experiences of people”
To state the obvious, exclusivity serves more than just regulation; it further marginalizes and impacts participation.

ABE students and faculty were nested in the hierarchy and were part of the conditioning of relations through proximity. Ladwig (2014) explains that the hierarchical nature of nested layers patterned authority structures and created organizational or individual rationality while conditioning the effects between and within layers of the system (p. 5). Filling ABE seats with students destined for other PSE programs set ABE and VIU up to deliver on government accountabilities. But as Mezirow (1975) and Thomas (1990b) warn, ABE now attracts the ‘cream’ because it is offered in a university environment, it requires entrance standards similar to other PSE programs, it is delivered similar to other programs with rigid schedules and set start and end times, it includes similar evaluation strategies, and it has required outcomes that have little to do with what was happening in a real life. In short, ABE attracts students who have already been successful in similar education structures.

Institutional performance measures also put ABE actors in a situation where they have an unconscious preoccupation with filling seats with higher functioning students who are more likely to succeed (rather than with more challenging, multi-barri ered students in need of support). ABE’s admission requirements, similar to university requirements, force this scenario, as students must demonstrate academic abilities before they are permitted to enter. These are powerful controls operated by people inside the education system and serve people within that system. For outsiders, these policies do not align well with their world view, as school and learning are over-regulated, too rigid, and not aligning with jobs or other aspects of their lives. Ball and Youdell (2008) indicate ABE’s current state is in a market form, as it is widening the gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged by “changing how equity and social justice in education are understood” (p. 81). Levin (2017) adds that competition between schools has led to the development of local economies where student worth is based on whether they will be an asset or a liability in relation to accountability metrics; full-time students, baccalaureate students, and international students are preferred over other types because they are rationalized along performativity standards. ABE is nested at the bottom of the hierarchy and stigmatized because of its lower intellectual level and lower performativity standards (Hallinan’s, 2005). Since social
aspects of schooling (community, climate, ethos) are treated as subsidiary preconditions for academic learning (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987), fixing something like psychological problems in a context where intellectualism is highly valued is problematic.

Interestingly, the feeling of stigma was not unique to students; ABE instructors felt it too. The way faculties are organized into units and subgroups created concentrated relations that reproduced class structure within VIU (Frank & Zhao, 2005, p. 220). Ball (2003) frames class as “something that happens in a human relationship” when identities, perspectives on social worlds, and lifestyles collide (p. 7). Swanson (2005) adds that structural arrangements influence the type of coordination, for how class forms depends on context and the “interplay of identities, in specific locations, for particular ends” (Ball, 2003, p. 176). Because ABE is ‘preparatory’ for something else (i.e. other Faculty programs), and other Faculty programs have their own ends, a hierarchy is created where ABE is ‘lesser’ than. This ‘lower’ classification created instructor stigma. In addition, ABE is located in its own building with a limited grid of power to draw upon (Ball, 2003). The geographic location of ABE, which is ‘down’ the hill, physically positions ABE instructors and students on a lower level, leaving them feeling devalued, vulnerable, marginalized, and ghettoized.

While this type of social control has been embedded in VIU’s workplace culture and is less obvious than formal rules and regulations, it is no less real in its impact on employees and students. The pervasiveness of this type of control makes it difficult for ABE faculty to enact the power that has been bestowed on them as a Faculty because they know their own actions must be reviewed and approved by Senate, the highest academic power which is dominated by university faculty and administrators who do not really care about what happens ‘before’ university. Even though ABE instructors are professionals with similar credentials to other faculty, they feel stigmatized, like their students, nonetheless. Hallinan (2005) likens these feelings to a university culture where norms and values influence actors to think and act in ways that result in these social consequences (p. 130). In VIU’s new policy network, Hallinan submits the university’s normative culture plays a role in socializing ABE students and faculty, as they develop an understanding of themselves in relation to others. In other words, they measure themselves against the norms established by VIU and the abilities of their peers (Hallinan, 2005, p. 143).
These feelings create stigma, which ultimately affects people’s ability to participate and instructor’s ability to change the way they do things.

6.7 Summary

In summary, neoliberal ideology has allowed state and provincial governments to abdicate their responsibility for the welfare of citizens through policies and structures that require individuals to look after their own needs. Without a commitment to targeted funding and policy measures to support people who are lack a basic education and skills to get good jobs to support themselves, these people will continue to face inequities and barriers, including dispositional barriers, to access VIU’s ABE program. Employment Insurance and Income Assistance are not robust enough to support people, and block funding policy provides too much wiggle room at the local level. Furthermore, when Malaspina became a university, this has led to the creation of a new physical and social environment at the institution where higher academic achievement is privileged over lower level educational development. The institution’s new title makes claim to a level of prestige, and the social and cultural environment that has been created stigmatizes people who have not previously been successful in education.
Chapter 7: Implications, Recommendations and Conclusions

This final chapter summarizes the implications of study findings, provides my thoughts on where I see the need for further research, offers recommendations on what could be enacted to deal with the present concerns related to views on policy and structural conditions, and ends with some concluding remarks.

7.1 Implications of Findings

From this study's findings, governmentality (e.g. how people’s thoughts and behaviors are shaped by government through policies), funding (how inappropriate funding has ramifications), and power (who has power controls the outcome) account for who can participate in ABE at VIU.

First, this study suggests that socio-political positions of governance (federal, provincial and local) impact adult participation in profound ways. This finding is similar to Desjardins and Rubenson’s (2009), Desjardins’ (2015, 2017) and Boeren’s (2011, 2016) findings, as the state uses governmentality to control behavior at other levels within the state. Neoliberal ideology underpinned changes to the rules on how to support unemployed people and how to support provincial education strategies. These changes set the stage for other policy makers at provincial and local levels to structure their own policies in similar ways. In Canada and BC, a focus on free markets and competition created a neo-liberal environment and neo-liberal thinking at all governance levels, which required individuals to look after themselves. This reproduced class structures and inequality, not only for students but for various stakeholders within the bound system. ABE, a marginalized program in the mix, appeared to have heightened challenges to look after itself, so it repurposed itself to be better positioned in this new system. In other words, the federal government’s approach is consistent with what Epsing-Anderson, Desjardins, Rubenson, and Boeren alluded to when they argued that welfare regimes impact participation at the local level.

Furthering the idea of governmentality, social policy at the provincial level, which has been downloaded by the state, has replicated federal ideology by requiring those most in need to prove themselves worthy of support. The focus on 'work first' represents the idea that individuals must be responsible and self-motivated. This can be seen clearly when changes to IA policy
occurred and when the BC government used policy to alter the former Malaspina University College structure with no additional funding. By making people on IA more responsible to look after their own affairs, the government actually hampered advancement of these people. Similarly, in naming the institution a university without providing funding, the province also hampered the ability of VIU to move forward. To be blunt, neoliberal ideology found in provincial policy forced the institution and prospective ABE students into a situation where autonomy and freedom were simply not accomplishable.

Governmentality also occurred at the local level where VIU’s new form of governance shaped people’s thinking and actions. The newly created structure became a microcosm of the state in that free markets and accountability measures created a competitive environment where programs had to prove themselves worthy of investment amongst themselves. ABE, the least desirable in a group of post-secondary programs, had to adapt and prove itself worthy among the big university players – those with prestige. This change in ABE’s purpose affected who ultimately participated in the program.

In addition to governmentality, VIU funding policy impacted participation. When the federal government clawed back transfer payments in the 1990s, it created a situation where the province and Malaspina University-College needed to consider other ways to survive. As the federal government financially starved the province, the provincial government put neo-liberal educational and social policy institutions into a challenges place where less financial, social and career support was offered to adult learners, and people struggled. Clearly, governments retained control of institutions, people and their behavior through funding.

When the federal government reduced funding, the province had to create an action plan to fund provincial level services like education. Putting requirements on institutions without funding them accordingly demonstrates neo-liberal ideology whereby individual institutions like VIU needed to make a plan to somehow support themselves. The concern over educational funding trickled down to ABE, and this impacted ABE’s purpose, how the program would be delivered and for whom. This response impacted people’s thinking, as it caused students and instructors in ABE to believe that they were not as important as others in the institution. With not enough money to go around, the ABE instructors became marginalized within the bounded
VIU system. Similarly, this is how many ABE students feel about their situation too. In short, funding pressures were downloaded from the federal government, to the province, to the institution, to the individual. Those adults who could not afford education would not be able to participate and others would continue to be marginalized.

Two other policies changed and were reflective of the shrinking investment in social welfare. Income Assistance and Employment Insurance changes meant fewer people would qualify for income support, and those who were eligible would not have the same level of support to return to education. This change had significant impacts on who could participate in ABE, as the lack of funding in these areas reproduced class and inequality. Poor people continued to have few opportunities to move out of the social structure marginalizing them; similarly, the ABE program faced the structural challenges of a university reorienting itself towards the market and away from providing access to education for impoverished and otherwise marginalized adult learners.

The third impact, power, was created through governance structures themselves, as decision-making rested with powerful government bodies. Yet decisions were based on the knowledge and experience of the people in those positions of power. Ministries made decisions to change policies in both positive and negative ways, and these were felt at the institutional level in the local context. VIU’s governance structure appointed decision-making powers to various actors on the Board, Senate, and Faculty Councils. Yet provincial pressures to be competitive and meet the needs of the market, with no additional funding, created an unstable environment where decisions were made to suit the needs of the institution rather than the people whom the institution would serve, a neoliberal response that was normalized within the system. In other words, providing decision-making powers with no funding put VIU in a quandary – would it support university programs where substantial fees could be collected from students and where demand was increasing, or would it support ABE where fees were at the control of the government? There really was no contest, as the decision to make money from students was practically made for VIU through the funding structure.

At the same time, the new structure allowed VIU to make more decisions on what programs it would offer. Block funding, a policy change, allowed the institution to offer an array of
programming based on regional needs, but given that other policies did not support marginalized students to come to school, investing in ABE was reconsidered. Many policies and practices at the local level (funding, program outcomes, admission requirements, schedules, and other standards) were put in place, but for whom? My study findings show how policies in these areas created barriers for students and impacted the environment in ways that heightened stigma, but interviews with stakeholders showed that they believed the policies came from the top down so nothing could be done about them.

From all of this, what has become very clear to me is that people behave according to policies, their environment, their history, and what they believe to be the best way forward, as they interpret the contexts in which policies are developed and their understanding of them. Governmentality resides in these environments where power has normalized thinking. My research laid bare the contexts and positionalities of the actors in this study and the challenges they faced as part of a complex system. In a sense, interviewees' understandings of their situation showed they were caught in the policy world in ways similar to how their students were caught. Research participants' understandings of their situation and their ability or inability to act reflected a similar plight as ABE learners' ability or inability to act. That is, actor agency was hampered by their normalized perspectives on the restrictive power of policies.

Another factor that became clear to me is that policies were often interpreted as negative because they affected ‘choice’ and represented ‘accountability’, values found in the private sector. These views were the result of a particular neoliberal socio-political government ideology in that public education should be run more like a business than an institution for social and economic development (Ball, 2015). Constraining resources and requiring people to look after their own interests is at the core of this thinking.

Finally, there were and are opportunities to challenge and change policy in systems where power is located, but this requires a change in thinking and in perspectives. The current model is one of low commitment to ABE and a tendency for governments to support those who are already better off. Research studies like this one which was done at the local level, and those done at the national level, can help federal and provincial governments and PSE institutions understand why the current structure is problematic for achieving the goal of competitiveness.
and economic development. All people must be included in the plan if the province and country are to achieve well-being alongside economic development. It is my hope that anyone who reads this study will consider the recommendations herein to “confront the problem of standing outside [their] own history, outside of [themselves] and do ethical work on themselves before they move forward” (Ball, 2015, p. 310).

7.2 Recommendations for Further Research

According to Stjelja (2013), case studies are extremely valuable because of their in-depth approach which often stimulates further investigation and theory building. This study was able to build on the idea that policy, context and self all play a role in participation in ABE. I have six recommendations for further research.

First, although I investigated policies, documents and views of actors who were directly involved in influencing participation in AE due to their locations and roles in a complex system, I was unable to access social policy actors’ views (e.g. those who implement IA and EI policy). Examining these perspectives in a future study could provide further insight into the participation problem since this policy area was identified as an important barrier from a participation perspective.

A second area that could be further researched in relation to ABE participation at VIU is VIU’s internal community. Several participants identified the stigma of ABE for both students and instructors. This study did not examine relationships among school actors, so studying the social psychology of VIU could provide more insight into how actors understand current belief systems about ABE and its purpose at VIU. Considering the voices of other university personnel could help uncover whether policies are supportive of ABE and whether psychological barriers in relation to students and instructors are part of a historical habitus that has evolved in the new university environment and is contributing to that perception.

A third area for further research would be to consider the perspective of local adults who never graduated from high school. These voices form an important perspective that might confirm or challenge some of the claims made in this study. It is these voices that could also provide a view of what this group truly desires from an educational and employment perspective and how their experiences in trying to obtain these desires relate to policies. Feagin et al. (1991), calls on social
scientists to understand these marginalized voices in relation to powerful organizational structures that influence their lives and over which they have very little control (p. 60). Using an ethnographic study to allow the voices of those who have not graduated from high school and have not participated in ABE to be heard could shed light on the types of programs needed for them and the policies to support these directions. It is this group's voices, as a silenced population, that could also be the most inspiring and provide important empirical evidence for policy change. Drawing on these voices also gives insight into the local context in which they are dealing with. It should be noted, however, that these adults are among the most difficult to access in research.

A fourth area for further research is to examine ABE participation from a BC perspective by examining other BC institutions that have gone through similar changes as VIU. Four other BC institutions have experienced this change (one - Emily Carr - does not offer ABE). Kwantlen Polytechnic University, University of the Fraser Valley, and Capilano University all had ABE when they were colleges and university-colleges, and they continue to offer ABE today as universities. Engaging in a cross case study (Lieberman, 2005) that includes these institutions could either support or challenge this study's findings.

A fifth area for further research is to examine ABE participation from a BC perspective more generally. A sampling of BC institutions that offer ABE (school districts, not-for-profits, colleges, universities, and private institutions) could be examined to see how policy, context, and views on dispositional attitudes come together to affect participation in ABE more broadly. This would be a much larger study, and could certainly involve both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Finally, this study could be replicated from a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective through Investigating policy is a language project because thinking is achieved through discursive practices that are generally controlled by government and those in power (Fairclough, 2004). Therefore, challenging thinking requires critiquing discursive practices which gain dominance. To do this, Ball (1997) suggests tracing the development, formation and realization of policies through a context of influence, text production, practices and outcomes (p. 266). Using CDA as a methodology would allow scholars to explore the ways positionality, language and power set the stage for experiences and relations that impact allegiance, loyalties, and disciplinary commitments in complex networks and how these relations play out in the interpretation and enactment of
policy (Maguire et al., 2015). In essence, this approach would examine how discourse constrains or enables thinking, speaking and writing about ABE, and could reveal the hegemonic structures that maintain injustices and inequality in ABE while giving voice to those who have been silenced.

7.3 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Like Boeren (2016), a feeling of sadness came over me as I formulated these policy and practice recommendations because similar recommendations have been put forward by authors in previous studies and not implemented. This tells me that while my recommendations may be important and appropriate, only slow progress on change will likely be made. Commitment on behalf of the federal government, the province, the institution, and individuals is required if any changes to who participates in ABE are to be made. Yet change is always possible. I align my recommendations below with the main themes that emerged from study findings.

7.3.1 Purpose and Power

The change to ABE’s purpose – focusing on those who want to go on to university – serves only some students. This is a good thing for some, but VIU needs to consider the broader purposes of ABE as well. ABE Faculty, and Academic and Career Preparation staff clearly support the need to reconsider how they will support non-university ‘career’ preparation for ABE learners as part of the VIU ABE purpose.

**Recommendation #1 – ABE Purpose:** With many adult students wanting to focus on skills for work, ABE should consider opportunities to support education in the workplace and other forms of education. Re-conceptualizing ABE and rearticulating the purpose is one way to return to ABE’s grass roots as an agent of change (Finger & Asún, 2001). VIU has the power to add or change programming to focus on employment or other skills for the labour market (Kilpi-Jakonen et al., 2015) or programs of social interest. This change will also require public policies that are explicitly targeted for less educated/skilled workers, and it will require partnerships with local employers or other community organizations. Scheduling of courses should align with work or other appropriate hours and employers and other partners will need to participate in outlining skills
they need for the workforce and other activities. Government or employer incentives should be provided to encourage participation.

7.3.2 Governance Policy and Power

VIU’s new governance model is a powerful structure that enables and controls thinking and voice. While this structure and other forms of discourse have effects on the way people think about ABE, this same structure can be used to further change the way people think about ABE.

Recommendation #2 – Structural Rules and Voice: VIU’s governance structure regulates voice and power through enabled and controlled mechanisms. Opportunities exist to advocate for a more robust form of ABE, inside and outside the regulated structure. As a legislated voice at VIU Senate and Faculty tables, ABE has opportunities to change program requirements and address community needs through new forms of programming. ABE needs strong representatives to participate in VIU governance and should find allies interested in social change. ABE could host workshops to help various groups understand what ABE is and what it can be in order to drive up ABE’s importance in a region where high drop out and high poverty rates occur. Discussions about how ABE supports access to education and employment can engage many to think differently about this important work.

Recommendation #3 – Institutional Alignment: Using ABE for access to post-secondary education (PSE) is necessary, but it needs to be seen as an Access for All program through targeted measures. Scheduling and admission policies do not work for many students who previously dropped out of school. The VIU off-site ABE program was a one solution for hard to reach students, as it was a non-threatening and supportive option. VIU should consider finding ways to re-establish a downtown site, and ABE should work closely with other VIU Faculties to find ways to better support students transitioning to the campus and into PSE programs and to other aspects of life (work, social mobility, etc.).

Recommendation #4 – Rebuild Relationships: Reduced funding and increased accountabilities have created strained internal and external relationships. ABE and VIU should endeavor to develop relationships between each other and with other actors, as VIU’s hierarchical structure
has power built into it by licensing authority through committee participation (Goodin & Grix, 2011). The way to increase ABE power and influence is to develop a strong network that focuses on social policy issues. VIU representatives need to form critical relationships with strong, knowledgeable people (de Leon and Varda, 2009, p. 64). Developing strategic alliances with other like-minded practitioners and community activists can be an effective means of creating the kind of critical base from which to make counter-arguments and build support (Shaw & Crowther, 2014). Creating a high level of interdependence and trust is paramount (Lin, 2001), and creating awareness amongst a broad social base is critical for the success of literacy programs (Tuckett, 2015). A horizontal approach that addresses common problems may be a good way forward (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003), but ABE instructors also need to create relationships with deans, faculty members, board members, staff, administrators, and external members (community and government at all levels) to encourage ideas and have discussions about the importance of sharing responsibilities and nurturing social development. VIU cannot claim it is aiding in Nanaimo’s social development if it cannot enroll disadvantaged community members in programs.

**Recommendation #5 – Government Expectations:** The federal and provincial governments need VIU to implement their policies, but more discussions about appropriate funding that matches target expectations needs to continue. Democratic participation will always be limited by those powerful forces and interests that rely on conformity, so taking into account the politics framing the way problems and solutions are represented is critical (Shaw & Crowther, 2014). Government representatives at all levels need to endeavor to have conversations with PSE administrators about expectations on funding and target issues so that PSE stakeholders can have opportunities to influence not only expectations but government understanding on how policy impacts prospective students. Advocacy groups could also help, particularly student and faculty unions. Data on who is accessing education and who is not could be provided to help government understand the situation and demonstrate how current policy keeps under-educated people down.
**Recommendation #6 – Economic Demand:** The federal and provincial governments want to be competitive on a global scale, but this requires all levels of adults to be engaged in the labour market. Thus, government must include those with the lowest levels of education in education and training plans to lift people up. VIU administrators, other BC PSE administrators, and representatives from local social development partners such as non-profit agencies, Indigenous Education partners, IA and EI, and other community agencies must lobby government to help representatives understand that enabling participation of the lowest levels of society in employment and education opportunities creates higher functioning communities.

### 7.3.3 Stigma and Power

Stigma is difficult to address, and having ABE embedded in a prestigious university further highlights how lower level students can be stigmatized. Nonetheless, there are several ways stigma can be addressed at VIU as a start.

**Recommendation #7 – Removing Stigma in a Name:** Education and knowledge are transformational and help people participate fully in today’s society; BC has a huge opportunity to change how people understand education and transformation in new teaching universities like VIU. Both the federal and provincial governments should make information available about what programs VIU and other teaching universities offer and what their mandate is. This will help demonstrate that some PSE institutions have a different focus on what they do and that they welcome all levels of students. Federal and provincial governments, as well as VIU, should make this information available to various social and employment agencies and to the general public to support marginalized people in understanding they are welcome in the institution.

**Recommendation #8 – Removing Stigma Through Motivation:** Fear, shame, and motivation can be addressed through a bottom up approach that involves educators, employers and under-educated people who work in collaboration to design a new educational model that is relevant to job-focused and other forms of learning. This model inextricably links education, government, and employment, so policy changes that include supporting funding streams will be expected. ABE and other VIU programs should partner with each other and with government and employers
and community agencies to deliver education in workplaces and in community as a way to encourage motivation and help people understand they are worthy of a better life. Federal and provincial government subsidies will be necessary to help create motivation. ABE and VIU administrators should start this discussion.

**Recommendation #9 – Removing Stigma by Changing Habitus**: Resurrecting VIU’s off-campus location is an excellent way to change the environment and reintroduce learning to people who do not see themselves as worthy. Partnerships between VIU and community organizations could create environments more conducive to these learners, and space could be provided through reciprocal agreements. A one size fits all approach does not meet the various needs of adults and ignores the political, social, and economic factors that marginalize people in the first place (Degener, 2001). Students need to have input into the design of ‘their’ space, the structure of ‘their’ program, and the learning that will take place to ensure ‘their’ needs are served. For students who wish to attend PSE, they could be introduced to the campus in a more supportive way through VIU and community people assigned to that work. ABE should start this conversation with some of the non-profits organizations that promote and support literacy.

**Recommendation #10 – Removing Stigma by Leveling Class**: An off campus site can create a more welcoming environment from a habitus perspective. A methodical process of introduction to the campus and to allies who understand the need for social change could encourage students to make the transition, while ABE provides support to them. Transition to the workplace could also occur either during the educational program or at the end of it. ABE, in collaboration with other social programs from VIU, should educate the broader campus and community on acceptance of diversity and the importance of inclusion of all people. Additionally, VIU should work with federal and provincial governments to create targeted policy measures that would address structural inequities given that the low skilled are the most likely to be excluded from participation opportunities (Saar et al., 2013).
7.3.4 Funding Policy and Power

Funding is at the heart of many of VIU’s problems. In fact, reduced funding and increased accountability measures created the competition, and some would argue the accountability, government wanted to see in universities like VIU. But this can be unhealthy when internal groups are competitive rather than collaborative. If ABE is to be seen as a welcoming and supportive environment where change happens, the funding model must be addressed.

**Recommendation #11 – Improve Institutional Funding:** Provincial targets and expectations are unrealistic under the current funding model. Faculty, Senate and VIU’s BoG should continue internal discussions, including hosting Town Hall open discussions, about how programs are currently funded and how they could be funded to help VIU actors understand that the current policy approach does not work. VIU actors have power to critically reflect on and discuss how to re-frame VIU’s situation to lobby the state and the provincial government for appropriate funding. Administrators and VIU lobby groups should be questioning both provincial and federal government motives and engaging the public in dialogue to create understanding and to discuss options for change. In the meantime, VIU must evaluate its current programming while considering its values to strategically invest in sustainable programming and to find internal solutions. This includes considering the nature of its region to ensure relevant programs remain.

**Recommendation #12 – Improve ABE Funding:** Using budget letter information and institutional data to show the actual cost of all VIU’s programs, particularly ABE, can allow VIU’s administration to lobby the provincial and federal governments for ABE funding changes. The new model should target federal and provincial government funding, particularly for those who have not graduated from high school. This funding could also support the establishment of an off-site location for students who are not comfortable going to the university’s larger campus. However, ABE needs to rethink its program model to ensure it fully supports students’ needs (rather than the institution’s needs). VIU and ABE administrators need to start conversations with government ministers and local MLAs, and these conversations need to be followed up with other stakeholder voices to show collaboration among the people.
**Recommendation #13 – Improving Student Funding:** Receiving funding support for education and related supports like transportation, books, and child care is critical for students who have not graduated from high school and have socio-economic challenges. VIU administrators must work with the provincial and federal governments to ensure people who receive these supports are not disadvantaged by other policies (i.e. CRA policies, IA policies, etc.), and ABE instructors need to work closely with front line workers on these policies to ensure conflicts are ameliorated. Additional targeted measures funded by both provincial and federal governments should be available for people on an as-needed basis; financial support for basic needs like food, housing, transportation, and childcare (for example) needs to be available for high school drop outs and other ABE prospects who face barriers to returning to education.

7.3.5 **Social Policy and Power**

The current social safety net requires people to be self-motivated to propel themselves forward. This is difficult for people on IA or EI when they do not have a basic education or the economic, social and cultural capital to help themselves. Policy actors are given rules to follow, but various government policies conflict with one another and/or are demeaning. Former collective approaches were not overly successful, but they were better than what exists today.

**Recommendation #14 – Making Social Policy More Supportive:** IA and EI policies need to fully support upgrading and training in a more inclusive way. If federal and provincial governments want to be globally competitive, they must support training people in things that interest those people. This means policies need to consider needs of all people who are out of work or under-educated and how best they can be supported. ABE instructors, agency representatives, and students who are under-educated can provide insight on what the needs are. Government representatives responsible for IA and EI policy should reach out to these people to learn more about their needs, and stakeholders (government, PSE, non-profit, indigenous communities, employers) who have power to make changes need work together to identify what changes must be made to meet prospective students’ identified needs.
Recommendation #15 – Improving Support for IA and EI Clients: ABE instructors must work with the Faculty dean to find ways to rekindle relationships with community actors who deploy social policy, as considerable joint effort and action is required to make change at the local level. Addressing differences between adhering to values of liberal market behavior or values of social justice is the goal. VIU administrators need to start conversations with government regarding the need for targeted policies to level the playing field for people on IA or EI. Reconnecting ABE faculty to community actors who value social justice would move conversations in a more public way. Ladwig (2014) suggests a critical way to reform goals is to leverage the power of networks. Finding better ways to support participation in ABE through targeted policies or through the development of a more fitting type of program could profoundly change the current situation. Incorporating Noddings’ (2013) views of transforming power from power over, to power with, is a good way to sustain mutual benefit and is at the core of the relationship building. This can begin through an internal conversation to see where relationships with community organizations currently exist and who key people are. For example, VIU’s Social Sciences and Health and Human Services faculties are doing some interesting things in community that could be leveraged. ABE’s dean should lead the internal discussion to leverage values of social justice in education.

Recommendation #16 – Ministry Collaboration: When adult education is embedded in mutually interdependent and coherent institutions, equal access is difficult to promote due to variations between education systems, labor markets, and participation opportunities (Saar et al., 2013). Ministries typically work in a vacuum, so conflicting policies can occur, as demonstrated in this study. The push and pull of the various levels of government make it difficult to achieve particular outcomes (El-Khawas, 2005). Policy could be much more effective if ministries would collaborate with one another to discuss common goals and to create a united front when developing policies. The Prime Minister of Canada and the Premier of BC should endeavour to ensure ministries are working collaboratively on policies so they do not conflict with one another.

7.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to better understand what accounts for who participates in VIU’s ABE program. An examination of ABE’s purpose at VIU led me to a qualitative case study that
included what policies supported or negated that purpose, what policy actors thought about ABE’s purpose, and what recommendations could be made to further support participation.

This case was of interest to me because I have been involved in ABE at VIU for most of my career, and I have a desire to address participation problems as an educator and as a member of society. The unit of analysis was ABE participation in a bounded system – a university – that has a long history of delivering various programs to meet the needs of the local region, including offering ABE. I gathered data from various sources, including throne speeches, Service Plans, tuition and funding policies, social policies, institutional policies, white papers, reports, media releases, budget letters, enrolment reports, admission policies and other documentation important for considering what accounts for who is currently participating in ABE. I also engaged in face-to-face interviews with different stakeholders (administrators, staff, ABE faculty, government representatives, not-for-profit representatives, and Indigenous Education Counsellors) to understand how they make meaning of policy in their contexts and how this impacts participation. Interview questions were semi-structured and provided a rich source of data to complement document and policy analysis.

Engaging in this research study through my EdD studies at the University of British Columbia has allowed me to see that participation in adult education cannot be examined in a vacuum. Institutional training systems, labour market systems, and welfare systems are inextricably linked, and actors must not only collaborate and coordinate their policies if increased participation in adult education, particularly for those who are at lower educational levels, is to occur (Saar et al., 2013), but they must also challenge their own thinking on why they understand things the way they do. Policy and power are at the heart of these systems, and it is important that scholars, policy makers and practitioners recognize how policies and power interact in ways that affect people’s thinking in positive and negative ways. Educators can learn from each other’s experiences, particularly at the micro and meso levels where policy and power create the conditions for the systems to work together and create the places that enable (or disable) educators to do their work and students to participate.

Power is an important factor that plays out in the everyday lives of educators in their various roles in the policy framework, but educators – as leaders – need to understand how
power affects thinking and the incredible power they have themselves to question norms and make changes within their own governance structures. These changes could benefit marginalized learners in significant ways. By engaging in critical reflection and challenging assumptions about educational policy and practices, school and social structures, and governance systems, educators can break out of the hierarchical structures of education that reproduce class, thereby freeing them (and the people they work with) from the structures that bind them. This is a call for reflexivity and conversation, and for educators to pay acute attention to how language and discourse condition thinking based on what is said, what is assumed, and what is overtly missing from the conversation. If institutional educators were able to challenge themselves to be the change agents for policy at the local level, it becomes possible to influence broader systems to create a very different world where all citizens are taken care of and have full access to knowledge and skill development.
Bibliography


Manning, C. (May 6, 2015). We’re citizens, not subjects. We have the right to criticize government without fear. *The Guardian.* [Opinion]. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/06/were-citizens-not-subjects-we-have-the-right-to-criticize-government-without-fear


Dear Colleague,

As you may be aware, I am Dean of the Faculty of Academic and Career Preparation at Vancouver Island University (VIU). However, this year I am also a doctoral student in UBC’s Department of Education, and in this capacity, I am conducting a research study entitled “Investigating Non-Participation of High School Non-graduates in Adult Basic Education: Investigating Bounded Agency at the Local Level – A Case Study”. As a doctoral student, I am inviting you to participate in my study. I am focusing my study on understanding why fewer high school non- graduates are participating in Adult Basic Education (ABE) at VIU, and I would like to discuss with you what could or should be done about this phenomenon. You are invited to participate in this study because you work or have worked in the ABE Department at VIU in Nanaimo, and you have been involved in developments or events that are relevant to this study.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate in an interview that would last approximately one (1) hour in length. It is preferred that the interview will take place in a face-to-face environment; however, if this is not possible, the interview can be conducted via Skype or telephone. I would also like to audio record the interview for precision of data collection. Once the interview has been conducted, you will be provided with a transcript of your responses for your review and edits. A follow up email, phone call, or face-to-face meeting will be scheduled to ensure that I have captured your responses accurately.

I hope to use the information you provide, in conjunction with analysis of existing policies, reports, and other historical documents, to help me understand the current situation of reduced participation of high school non-graduates at VIU. My intent is to challenge some assumptions about ABE, shed light on aspects of a participation problem that may have previously been hidden, and provide insight on future directions for increasing participation in ABE. Your participation will in no way be linked to job performance or evaluation.

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. All data you provide will be treated confidentially. If you would like more information or have any questions about the study, please contact me at jean.maltesen@viu.ca or call me at 250-716-6710. You have until September 12th to respond. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Jeannie Maltesen, EdD Candidate
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
Appendix B – Recruiting Email for Administrators

Principal Investigators:
Dr. Kjell Rubenson, Professor
Dr. Pierre Walter, Associate Professor

Co-investigator:
Jeannie Maltesen, EdD Candidate
Department of Educational Studies

Dear Colleague,

As you may be aware, I am Dean of the Faculty of Academic and Career Preparation at Vancouver Island University (VIU). However, this year I am also a doctoral student in UBC's Department of Education, and in this capacity, I am conducting a research study entitled “Investigating Non-Participation of High School Non-graduates in Adult Basic Education: Investigating Bounded Agency at the Local Level – A Case Study”. As a doctoral student, I am inviting you to participate in my study. I am focusing my study on understanding why fewer high school non-graduates are participating in Adult Basic Education (ABE) at VIU, and I would like to discuss with you what could or should be done about this phenomenon. You are invited to participate in this study because you work or have worked as an administrator at VIU in Nanaimo, and you have been involved in developments or events that are relevant to this study.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate in an interview that would last approximately one (1) hour in length. It is preferred that the interview will take place in a face–to–face environment; however, if this is not possible, the interview can be conducted via Skype or telephone. I would also like to audio record the interview for precision of data collection. Once the interview has been conducted, you will be provided with a transcript of your responses for your review and edits. A follow up email, phone call, or face-to-face meeting will be scheduled to ensure that I have captured your responses accurately.

I hope to use the information you provide, in conjunction with analysis of existing policies, reports, and other historical documents, to help me understand the current situation of reduced participation of high school non-graduates at VIU. My intent is to challenge some assumptions about ABE, shed light on aspects of a participation problem that may have previously been hidden, and provide insight on future directions for increasing participation in ABE.

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. All data you provide will be treated confidentially. If you would like more information or have any questions about the study, please contact me at jean.maltesen@viu.ca or call me at 250-716-6710. You have two (2) weeks to respond. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Jeannie Maltesen, EdD Candidate
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
Appendix C – Recruiting Email for Ministry Representatives

Dear Sir or Madam,

You are invited to participate in my research study entitled “Investigating Non-Participation of High School Non-graduates in Adult Basic Education: Investigating Bounded Agency at the Local Level – A Case Study.” This research is being conducted as part of an EdD dissertation in the Department of Educational Studies at UBC. I am focusing my study on understanding why fewer high school non-graduates are participating in Adult Basic Education (ABE) at Vancouver Island University (VIU), and I would like to discuss with you what could or should be done about this phenomenon. You are invited to participate in this study because you work or have worked in the Ministry of Advanced Education, a ministry responsible for creating policy related to ABE in the post-secondary system. You may have been involved in developments and events that are relevant to this study.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate in an interview that would last approximately one (1) hour in length. It is preferred that the interview will take place in a face-to-face environment; however, if this is not possible, the interview can be conducted via Skype or telephone. I would also like to audio record the interview for precision of data collection. Once the interview has been conducted, you will be provided with a transcript of your responses for your review and edits. A follow up email, phone call, or face-to-face meeting will be scheduled to ensure that I have captured your responses accurately.

I hope to use the information you provide, in conjunction with analysis of existing policies, reports, and other historical documents, to help me understand the current situation of reduced participation of high school non-graduates at VIU. My intent is to challenge some assumptions about ABE, shed light on aspects of a participation problem that may have previously been hidden, and provide insight on future directions for increasing participation in ABE.

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. All data you provide will be treated anonymously. If you would like more information or have any questions about the study, please contact me at [jeannie.maltesen@shaw.ca] or call me at [250-716-6710]. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Jeannie Maltesen, EdD Candidate
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
Appendix D – Recruiting Email for Local Agency Participants

Principal Investigators:
Dr. Kjell Rubenson, Professor
Dr. Pierre Walter, Associate Professor

Co-investigator:
Jeannie Maltesen, EdD Candidate
Department of Educational Studies

Dear Sir or Madam,

You are invited to participate in my research study entitled “Investigating Non-Participation of High School Non-graduates in Adult Basic Education: Investigating Bounded Agency at the Local Level – A Case Study.” This research is being conducted as part of an EdD dissertation in the Department of Educational Studies at UBC. I am focusing my study on understanding why fewer high school non-graduates are participating in Adult Basic Education (ABE) at Vancouver Island University (VIU), and I would like to discuss with you what could or should be done about this phenomenon. You are invited to participate in this study because you work or have worked in an organization in Nanaimo that typically works with clients who could access the ABE program at VIU. You may have been involved in developments and events that are relevant to this study.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate in an interview that would last approximately one (1) hour in length. It is preferred that the interview will take place in a face-to-face environment; however, if this is not possible, the interview can be conducted via Skype or telephone. I would also like to audio record the interview for precision of data collection. Once the interview has been conducted, you will be provided with a transcript of your responses for your review and edits. A follow up email, phone call, or face-to-face meeting will be scheduled to ensure that I have captured your responses accurately.

I hope to use the information you provide, in conjunction with analysis of existing policies, reports, and other historical documents, to help me understand the current situation of reduced participation of high school non-graduates at VIU. My intent is to challenge some assumptions about ABE, shed light on aspects of a participation problem that may have previously been hidden, and provide insight on future directions for increasing participation in ABE.

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. All data you provide will be treated anonymously. If you would like more information or have any questions about the study, please contact me at jmaltesen@shaw.ca or call me at 250-716-6710. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Jeannie Maltesen, EdD Candidate
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
Appendix E – Recruiting Email for Education Coordinators

Principal Investigators:
Dr. Kjell Rubenson, Professor
Dr. Pierre Walter, Associate Professor

Co-investigator:
Jeannie Maltesen, EdD Candidate
Department of Educational Studies

Dear Sir or Madam,

You are invited to participate in my research study entitled “Investigating Non-Participation of High School Non-graduates in Adult Basic Education: Investigating Bounded Agency at the Local Level – A Case Study.” This research is being conducted as part of an EdD dissertation in the Department of Educational Studies at UBC. I am focusing my study on understanding why fewer high school non-graduates are participating in Adult Basic Education (ABE) at Vancouver Island University (VIU), and I would like to discuss with you what could or should be done about this phenomenon. You are invited to participate in this study because you work or have worked at an Aboriginal Band Office in Nanaimo and may have been involved in developments and events that are relevant to this study.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate in an interview that would last approximately one (1) hour in length. It is preferred that the interview will take place in a face-to-face environment; however, if this is not possible, the interview can be conducted via Skype or telephone. I would also like to audio record the interview for precision of data collection. Once the interview has been conducted, you will be provided with a transcript of your responses for your review and edits. A follow up email, phone call, or face-to-face meeting will be scheduled to ensure that I have captured your responses accurately.

I hope to use the information you provide, in conjunction with analysis of existing policies, reports, and other historical documents, to help me understand the current situation of reduced participation of high school non-graduates at VIU. My intent is to challenge some assumptions about ABE, shed light on aspects of a participation problem that may have previously been hidden, and provide insight on future directions for increasing participation in ABE.

Please note that your participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. All data you provide will be treated anonymously. If you would like more information or have any questions about the study, please contact me at [jmaltesen@shaw.ca] or call me at [250-716-6710]. Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Kind regards,

Jeannie Maltesen, EdD Candidate
Department of Educational Studies
University of British Columbia
Appendix F – Participant Questionnaire

Preamble: Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today about non-participation in Adult Basic Education at VIU. As a reminder, I am an EdD student at UBC, and my goal is to better understand why fewer numbers of high school non-graduates are participating in VIU’s ABE program. This semi-structured interview should take approximately one hour, and there will be an opportunity for you to review your responses at a future date that is convenient for you. I would also like to remind you that you are in no way obligated to answer all questions, and your responses will remain anonymous. Since I would like to ensure that I capture your responses as correctly as possible, I will be audio recording the interview for transcription purposes. Also, please be reminded that you can withdraw from the study at any time without consequences, as your participation is entirely voluntary. Are you comfortable with these parameters? (If the participant is comfortable with taking part in the interview, proceed to questions below. If the participant wishes to withdraw, thank the participant for his/her time.)

1) Please describe what you think the purpose(s) of Adult Basic Education (ABE) is/are.

2) How well do you think VIU serves this/these purpose(s)?

3) What policies support the purpose of ABE? Explain. (government?/institutional?)

4) What policies challenge the purpose of ABE? Explain. (government?/institutional?)

5) What do you see are the greatest barriers for fulfilling the purpose(s) of ABE at VIU? Explain.

6) What recommendations would you offer VIU to ensure the purpose(s) of ABE are met?

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. If you have any additional questions, concerns, or comments, don’t hesitate to contact me. Here is my card. (Hand participant your business card). I will follow up with you within a month’s time so that you can review your responses and make any changes you feel are necessary. In addition, I will provide you with an executive summary of my study once it is complete. If you would like a copy of the final version of the study, I can also provide that for you as well. Thank you again for your time and your willingness to participate in this important study. (Shake the participant’s hand)
APPENDIX G – PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

Dear Colleague,

As per the email I sent you earlier, you have been invited to participate in my study entitled “Investigating non-participation of high school non-graduates in adult basic education: Investigating bounded agency at the local level – a case study”. I am currently conducting this research as part of an EdD dissertation in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia, and upon your request, I will send you the full research proposal. My co-supervisors are Dr. Kelli Rubenson (Professor) and Dr. Pierre Walter (Associate Professor), both from the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia (UBC). You have been asked to participate in this study because you work or have worked in an organization that is likely to work with people and/or policies that are relevant to this study, and you would bring an important perspective to the investigation. Your participation in this study will involve a face-to-face interview which will last approximately 1 hour. If you are unable to participate in a face-to-face interview but would like to participate via Skype, this can also be arranged; this interview format will also last roughly 1 hour.

Study Overview

This study will investigate the phenomenon of why fewer high-school non-graduates are accessing the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program at Vancouver Island University (VIU) in Nanaimo, BC. More specifically, this study will draw upon various policies, reports, historical documents and individual interviews to understand how changing policies and structures have created or eliminated barriers for high school non-graduates wanting to access ABE within the context of one institution’s history. The theoretical framework used in this study will be the coupling of a policy paradigm framework with critical theory. Using this approach will allow me to trace the history of how changes in policies and structures have impacted upon the accessibility of ABE at VIU for the target group in question. The shifts and changes in policies and perspectives will be examined by taking into account the institutional context over a 25 year period. It is hoped that this research will fill a gap in the literature in that very few studies have focused on how stakeholders who create, implement, and work with policies perceive their work and how these perceptions, which may or may not change over time, impact upon the work they do in ways they may or may not intend.

Interview Procedure

The interview will be held at a time and location that is convenient to you; this will be sometime between March 2014 and December, 2014. While a face to face interview is
preferable, Skype can be used as an alternative if it is not possible to meet face to face. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed.

**Transcript Review**

The interview will be audio recorded and will be transcribed. This transcript will be sent to you via email to give you the opportunity to add, delete, or alter any of the transcript's information. If you would prefer to meet face-to-face to review the transcript, I will make arrangements with you to do so at your convenience.

**Storage and Use of Interview Data**

The data collected and used for Jean Maltesen’s doctoral dissertation through the UBC will be stored in a secure location and will be retained by the researchers for five years in accordance with the ethical guidelines of UBC. You will receive a copy of the dissertation upon your request. The findings may be presented at workshops.

**Identity**

For the purposes of this study, the identity of all participants will remain anonymous. All participants will be given pseudonyms so that their identity will be protected. Should your statements be included in the study, your quotes will be anonymized through the use of a pseudonym. Your assigned pseudonym will be kept in an alternate secure location than the data to ensure that your identity will be kept anonymous. This information will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study.

**Right to Withdraw**

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study for any reason at any time, without consequence. You may notify me by email, by letter, by phone, or in person to indicate your withdrawal. If you withdraw from the study, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request.

**Questions/Concerns**

If you have any questions concerning this study, please feel free to ask any of the researchers indicated above. If you have any questions about your right as a participant, you may also contact the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or toll free at 1-877-822-8598, or you may email RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.
Participant Consent Form

- I consent to participate in the study described above, and I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time, without consequence.
- I understand that I will remain anonymous; any statements or comments made by me through the interview process and used in the study will be assigned a pseudonym to protect my identity.
- I agree to have the interview audio recorded for accuracy of data collection, and I understand that I will be provided a transcript of the interview for my review and edits.
- A copy of this form and the participation letter will be retained by me for my records.

(Printed name of participant)

________________________________________ Date: __________________________
(Signature of participant)

________________________________________ Date: __________________________
(Signature of co-investigator)
Jean Maltesen, EdD Candidate
Department of Educational Studies, UBC

Dr. Kjell Rubenson, Professor and Principal Investigator
Department of Educational Studies, UBC

Dr. Pierre Walter, Associate Professor and Co-Investigator
Department of Educational Studies, UBC

240