Rethinking foundation skills and democratic responsibility with a little help from AJ Nelson.

Professor Sue Shore
International Graduate Centre of Education
I acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians across the lands on which we live and work and pay my respects to elders past and present, and to those future elders who work with us in education to promote a strong future for Indigenous children, adults, families and communities.

I extend my appreciation to ACAL and SACAL, the local organisers of this conference for the invitation to present the Arch Nelson Address at this Annual ACAL conference in Adelaide.

Thursday 24th September 2015.
‘Policy windows’ (Ryan 2011) shaping a field

- Australia Reconstructed
- Australia’s Language & Literacy Policy
- Working Nation
- Skills for Australia
- National Foundation Foundations Skills Strategy
I draw on work that explores ideas of social imaginaries and use that to frame an understanding of national metropolitan imaginaries that have undue influence on understandings of what a foundations skills field has all Australians in the 21st century. (See also Rizvi 2011; Taylor 2004).
Nelson’s suggestions for activism

1. take the sting out of illiteracy
2. successful workers reduce undesirable tension, build confidence and develop motivation
3. we need much more research... involve people.
4. improve public understanding of the less literate
5. success of volunteer schemes needs professional adult literacy officers.
6. a broadly representative adult literacy movement
7. students as actual participants
8. lifelong attitudes towards education... self-confidence; develop strengths not just remedying weaknesses in reading and writing
9. avoid the error of simply blaming the schools

Drawn from Nelson’s influential text *My Dear Ministers* (1989)
Raising awareness and commitment to action

Adult learners have high quality learning opportunities and outcomes

Strengthening foundation skills in the workplace

Building the capacity of the education and training workforces to deliver foundation skills

National Foundations Skills Strategy
Drawing out three themes across these points in time

- The national space
- ‘Awareness’ and projectisation
- Educators as professionals
“Social imaginary is a way of thinking shared in a society by ordinary people. It consists in the common understandings that make everyday practices possible, giving them sense and legitimacy. In this way, a social imaginary is both implicit and normative: it is embedded in ideas and practices and events, and carries within it deeper normative notions and images, constitutive of a society” (Rizvi 2011).
nbn’s recently commissioned report shows how such work is achieved in creating a national imaginary of Australian lifestyle that bears little resemblance to many local spaces.

David Graeber’s 2013 paper *On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs* provides further food for thought in relation to the future labour force.
Rethinking the national space through geospatial understandings of cities – Australia’s remote index.
Our north’s future will come from its people, its ingenuity, its diversity, and its proximity to Asia. Covering 40 per cent of Australia’s land mass, our north has the resources, the connections across the Tropics, and the land, skills and institutions that the Indo-Pacific region needs; a region that has the savings and the markets to drive northern prosperity.
Indigenous Australians of working age who live in remote areas are over three times more likely to be on welfare than other Australians of working age. The major source of personal income for more than 50 per cent of Indigenous Australians (aged 18-64) in remote areas is income support or Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). In very remote regions this jumps up to more than 60 per cent. A range of factors contribute to higher levels of income support and CDEP in remote and very remote areas including the lack of job opportunities, participation in customary activities and entrenched intergenerational poverty and social dysfunction (Australian Government, 2015, p. 137).
Creating ‘common sense’ imaginaries about worthy and unworthy citizens

Unwilling parents
Unwilling children
Unwilling teachers
Unwilling workers
Unwilling traditional owners

(Shore, 2010; 2015)
OECD frameworks/racialised human capital

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>The body of facts, principles, theories and practices relevant to a field of work or study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>The ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. Skills are commonly further classified into:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- cognitive skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- technical skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- interpersonal and intrapersonal skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- communication skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency/Application</td>
<td>The ability to use knowledge and skills appropriately in real-life contexts and situations. Competency is often conceived in terms of capacity to exercise responsibility and act autonomously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal attributes</td>
<td>The personality traits, behavioural dispositions and physical characteristics, such as strength, manual dexterity, height or even personal appearance, which may have a value on the labour market.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rethinking awareness

*Projectisation problems and opportunities*
Raising awareness and commitment to action:
The 1990s
mobilization of knowledge of the poor ...

drawing on methods driven by the poor and for the poor ...

a slow and risk-laden process...

‘The Alliance’ has a strong bias against “projects” and “projectization” that underlies almost all official ideas about urban change.

Whether it be the World Bank, most Northern donors, the Indian state or other agencies, most Institutional sources of funding are strongly biased in favour of the “project” model, in which short-term logics of investment, accounting, reporting and assessment are regarded as vital
Raising awareness and commitment to action

**LiteracyNet** – provides useful information on adult literacy – **link not working**

Department of Employment Education and Training (1991) *Australia’s Language: the Australian language and literacy policy* Canberra, Australian Government Printing Service. ... **gone**
The possessive investment in whiteness is about assets as well as attitudes; it is about property as well as pigment. It does not stem primarily from personal acts of prejudice by individuals but from shared social structures that skew access to resources, opportunities, and life chances along racial lines.

(Lipsitz, 2000, p. 519)
Policy windows: not always what they seem
Educators and activism
### Professions and the national space

**Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification**

Education and training services are delivered by teachers or instructors who explain, tell or demonstrate a wide variety of subjects. The commonality of processes involved, such as the labour inputs of teachers and instructors, and their subject matter, knowledge and teaching expertise, uniquely distinguishes this industry from other industries.

*See Shore (2010) for an exploration of adult literacy occupational knowledge.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Mining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Construction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Wholesale Trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Retail Trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Accommodation and Food Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Transport, Postal and Warehousing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Information Media and Telecommunications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>Financial and Insurance Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Professional, Scientific and Technical Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Administrative and Support Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>Public Administration and Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Health Care and Social Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Arts and Recreation Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Other Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Expanding the boundaries of activism: contesting normative professional and policy windows.
Some features of neoliberalism

- Greater Choice
- Individual Freedoms
- Market based principles
- The market sets the rules
- Diminish state responsibility for a social contract.
Education not neutral

1. benchmarks of efficiency and productivity (and their opposites inefficiency and waste) that identify whether one is extended a conditional invitation to participate in an improvement agenda;

2. a conscientious, proactive national decision maker and a recalcitrant ‘other’ – who maintains beliefs about the importance of the participation process;

3. the neoliberal metaphor of the measured life as a framework for determining the worth of one’s participation and the extent of ongoing invitations which seem to increasingly oscillate around a contemporary culture of saving the children and demonising the adults
Returning to Nelson’s writings it would seem there are still many commonalities with his 1980s concerns for improving the capacity of the adult literacy field to respond to basic education provision and our more current concerns about the opportunities contemporary policy windows offer us to be involved in similar activities.


