

Trends in the administration and history of education: what counts?

A reply to Roy Lowe

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Introduction

In this paper we intend taking up Roy Lowe's invitation to contribute to a discussion that he began as the new editor.¹ Roy set himself a challenging but necessary task in reflecting on the original aims of the Journal and how these might be understood from our contemporary position as an

¹ R. Lowe, Editorial: Trends in the administration and history of education, *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 36/1 (2004), 3-8.

editorial board and as subscribers. As members of the Editorial Board we participated in the discussions about how the Journal can build on its achievements and move forward to best represent knowledge production. As such we accept the identity that we have inherited:

Its title reflects what were then and remain still two key elements in the provision of formal education: first, its administration and management and secondly its history and antecedents. Through the deployment of historical research and scholarship to the study of education it becomes possible to establish significant insights and perspectives which throw light on present practice, highlighting that which is novel and that which owes its form to the past.²

Lowie then goes on to examine the changing context of educational administration, and how the history of education has been transformed, and as such the Journal needs to reflect the increased complexity of educational matters in how it reports research and theory. From this analysis Lowie presents a challenge for the Journal to be the best,

It has the opportunity to become one of the sites for the interpretation and analysis of the transformation of educational administration which is underway at this time. It has the chance to reflect some of the best new work in the history of education, building on and extending the varied new approaches to the discipline which have emerged in recent years.³

Our contribution in working for this aim is to focus on knowledge production, and we do this by presenting an analysis of our purposes in researching and theorising in education, and the issues we need to engage with in creating a distinctive identity for educational administration and history. Our account begins with a description and promotion of how we understand the purposes of the Journal which we then go on to problematise through giving a dual account of particular developments in New Zealand and England. We use this to support the case for a dynamic approach to critical knowledge production both within the field as a whole and certainly within the Journal.

What's it all about?

The prime purpose of our work is knowledge production. In particular, we seek to describe, understand, and explain learners and learning. We want to know what, how and why learners

² Ibid, 3.

³ Ibid, 8.

learn and how they might learn better. The scope of this work and our orientation towards it requires us to focus on three main themes:

People: the workforce that supports and enables learners and learning;

Spaces: the settings in which learners learn;

Time: when learners learn.

Learners, be they 5 or 65 years old, need to be supported through their learning by others. In creating specialised places for learning, such as a school or university, then we create a division of labour which is normally based on hierarchy and credentials (including remuneration structures). We tend to identify when the space is open for learning, and normally the people who support that learning are employed and deployed according to a schedule. Learning in other spaces (home, community, workplace, internet) still requires a workforce and is located in time, but this tends to be more informal and flexible. We learn in the home and the workplace but we are less likely to have overt formal learning scheduled as a regular activity. But we still learn there, and given the short amount of time we spend in compulsory education (in hours per day from infant to young adult) then we might argue that a wider perspective on learners and learning enables us to create accounts that are more realistic and tangible than a prime focus on schools and schooling.

Knowledge production within and about this work is concerned with first, knowers or who the people are who know about learners and learning; second, knowing or what it means to know about learners and learning; and, third, knowledge or what we know about learners and learning. A focus on knowers means that we need to look at how students as knowers know about themselves and their learning and how those who work to support learners: parents, partners, teachers, researchers, community groups etc., know, and whether we give sufficient recognition to their knowing. Knowing is a complex matter but it affords us the opportunity to enquire about dispositions to learn and how this is revealed through the practice of learning, whether this is a clearly identifiable learning event or an ongoing process of reflexive realisation. Knowing can be

through drawing on resources we already have such as our experiences, and formal bodies of knowledge located in theories and research evidence.

In seeking to describe, understand and explain knowers, knowing and knowledge about learners and learning, then we need to take a critical approach. This can be confused with belligerent opposition based on sectarian divides, where we entertain and sustain ourselves with attacking others and their work. The approach we take is that critical work is not inevitably oppositional but is vital, and at its heart is scholarship and dialogue. We would argue that it takes three main forms:

Critical application: where we take a technical approach and ask: is this correct? What we do is to look at the accuracy and logic of argument and the methods used.

Critical meaning: where we take an analytical approach and ask: what does this mean? What we do is to create a narrative that aims to describe, understand and explain meaning.

Critical commitment: where we take an activist approach and ask: what can we do to change this for the better? What we do is to be explicit about our value system and how we are working for change.

In taking a critical approach we would like to make our own position and how we have experienced positioning as clear as we might before we begin our main analysis. In doing this we would want to reveal the tensions and dilemmas in our work, and no doubt create contradictions that through ongoing dialogue we can explore and work through with the field as learners and as knowledge workers. We have decided to present a short narrative of recent educational change in New Zealand and England, and from this generate a framework for how we undertake work that is critical in its application, approach to meaning and establishes our commitment.

Challenging perspectives

We have both been teachers in schools that have undergone restructuring in the late 1980s and have become researchers and teachers within higher education where our professional practice continues to be shaped by these developments. We present Figure 1 as a parallel account of a particular legislative moment designed to bring about restructuring for schools in New Zealand and England.

Figure 1: The dynamics of educational restructuring

New Zealand	Questions	England
<p>In 1989, <i>Tomorrow's Schools</i> established the era of self-managing schools that were (fiscally) efficient and accountable to their communities. As a direct result of the reform agenda agencies of the state were co-opted to ensure schools met agreed outcomes. This included the Education Review Office (ERO) that undertook reviews of schools that were available for public dissemination; the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) that were responsible for public examinations and curriculum; and the Teachers Council that set standards for teacher registration. Woven into this legislative framework were further requirements that all teachers be registered, meet performance standards (1997) and a set of professional standards (1999).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ What does this restructuring have to say about the role of the state in education? ❑ What does this have to tell us about changing roles in educational institutions such as a school or a local authority? ❑ What does this have to tell us about established power structures and whether hierarchies have been challenged or remain? ❑ What does this have to tell us about how the education workforce are answerable for the completion and standard of their work? ❑ How are these changes linked to international developments, and is educational structuring an example of globalisation? 	<p>In 1988, the <i>Education Reform Act</i> established (a) the centralisation of teaching and learning through the introduction of the National Curriculum; and, (b) the decentralisation of the funding of education through site based management in the form of Local Management of Schools and Grant Maintained Status. In 1992 the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) was established to undertake privatised external inspections of schools according to an established framework of good practice. In the 1990s the performance culture was accelerated through the publication of school results in league tables, the imposition of performance targets on schools, and the introduction of performance related pay for teachers.</p>

The two accounts show remarkable similarities in the restructuring of education, and the questions we raise are based on the themes generated by Lowe in regard to his account of the development of the field: role of the state, roles, hierarchies, accountability, and globalisation. As Figure 1 indicates, since the reform of educational structures in both England and New Zealand in the late 1980s schools, teachers and leaders work in an increasingly bureaucratised environment. Consequently there is a machinery of bureaucracy that has been established to oversee, regulate

and publicly comment on the leadership and administration of schools.⁴ And while bureaucracy has always been present in schooling systems as Lowe points out, it is the *persistence* of bureaucracy to define what 'counts' for leaders and learners that should be a focus of concern for a journal such as *Journal of Educational Administration and History*.⁵ Apple has cogently argued that neo-liberal reforms have exacerbated the privileging of some forms of knowledge (that of the privileged who are located at the core of all aspects of political, economic and social life) and the rejection of 'other' knowledge (that of the less privileged, those 'othered' who are predominantly located at the margins).⁶ Thus it is not erroneous to suggest that those schools that cater for the needs and interests of the privileged (exert influence on core concerns such as knowledge production and distribution).⁷ Similarly, Lowe's editorial points to his concerns that there has emerged a particular history of schools and schooling that has identified and reproduced the interests of the state at various historical moments.⁸

Hence a more productive set of questions in regard to Figure 1 have to be around how we get underneath the meaning and actuality of change. For example, we could ask about how policy initiatives in both countries might be linked? Is there evidence of policy borrowing, and how has this taken place both formally through access to published research and informally through fact finding visits? Furthermore, we might want to ask about how and why the organisational arrangements to enable restructuring in these schools has been labelled educational administration in New Zealand, and educational management, and more recently school leadership, in England?⁹ Asking such questions enables us to see that historical enquiry provides us with arguably unique opportunities to reject ways in which knowledge has been defined,

⁴ T. Fitzgerald, H. Youngs & P. Grootenboer, Bureaucratic control or professional autonomy? Performance management in New Zealand schools, *School Leadership & Management*, 23/1 (2003), 91-105.

⁵ Lowe, Trends.

⁶ M. Apple, (2003) Schooling, markets and an audit culture, *Educational Policy*, 14/4 (2003), 614-621.

⁷ J. Blackmore, *Troubling Women: Feminism, Leadership and Educational Change*. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999).

⁸ Lowe, Trends.

⁹ H. Gunter, Labels and labelling in the field of educational leadership, *Discourse*, 25/1 (2004), 21-42.

produced and commodified, and to re-assert our engagement with/in a critical framework that simultaneously challenges knowledge workers (professional researchers usually in higher education, and researching professionals usually in schools, colleges and government agencies) invert their taken-for-granted ways of knowing and engage in scholarship and dialogue that reveals the tensions and dilemmas in our work and the possibilities for critical inquiry. This is possible, we argue, if we articulate:

What knowledge counts

Whose knowledge counts

How this knowledge is produced

And adopt an activist approach that seeks answers to questions concerning:

Who is privileged in the production and dissemination of knowledge?

Who is positioned on the margins and how does this positioning occur?

How might agency and structure interact and intersect with knowledge, knowing and knowers?

An underpinning disquiet is that while we might, on the one hand, seek to describe, understand and explain knowers, knowing and knowledge, we are challenged, on the other hand, to question how our own knowledge as professional researchers in higher education 'counts'. If, since the reforms of the late 1980s, schools are more inclined to focus on 'what counts' in terms of providing information regarding their effectiveness and improvement initiatives, school leaders require the production of empirical research that will have an immediate and/or long-term effect on practice. This has stimulated a call for research to be *applied* and *relevant*; that is, applicable and immediately available to school practitioners and their professional work. What might then be the implications for research in the liberal traditions of the history, philosophy, psychology and sociology of education? We suspect too that the call for applied research may be a plea for a 'checklist of things to do on Monday morning' in order for teachers to prove in some way that their work 'counts'. And in similar ways, these pressures have been applied to academic work and the contribution of academics to informed debate and professional practice. In other words, knowers,

knowing and knowledge 'counts' for how we understand and practice our craft whether as professional researchers or researching professionals. One of the ways differences between us might collapse is that we are, as claimed in the opening section of this article, all learners with particular identities located within, but not necessarily trapped by, our own ontologies and epistemologies.

Knowers, knowing and knowledge in the field

The questions we raise from the above account requires us to look at ways in which we can approach these matters. We intend to take this forward through presenting a typology of knowledge production to support our critical evaluation of Roy Lowe's account of the field. This typology is in Figure 2 and is intended to have a heuristic purpose "to illuminate rather than stifle, and to open up rather than create barriers... to aid thought rather than replace it."¹⁰

¹⁰ H. Gunter, and P. Ribbins, (2003) The field of educational leadership: studying maps and mapping studies, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 51/3 (2003), 260.

Figure 2: What counts?

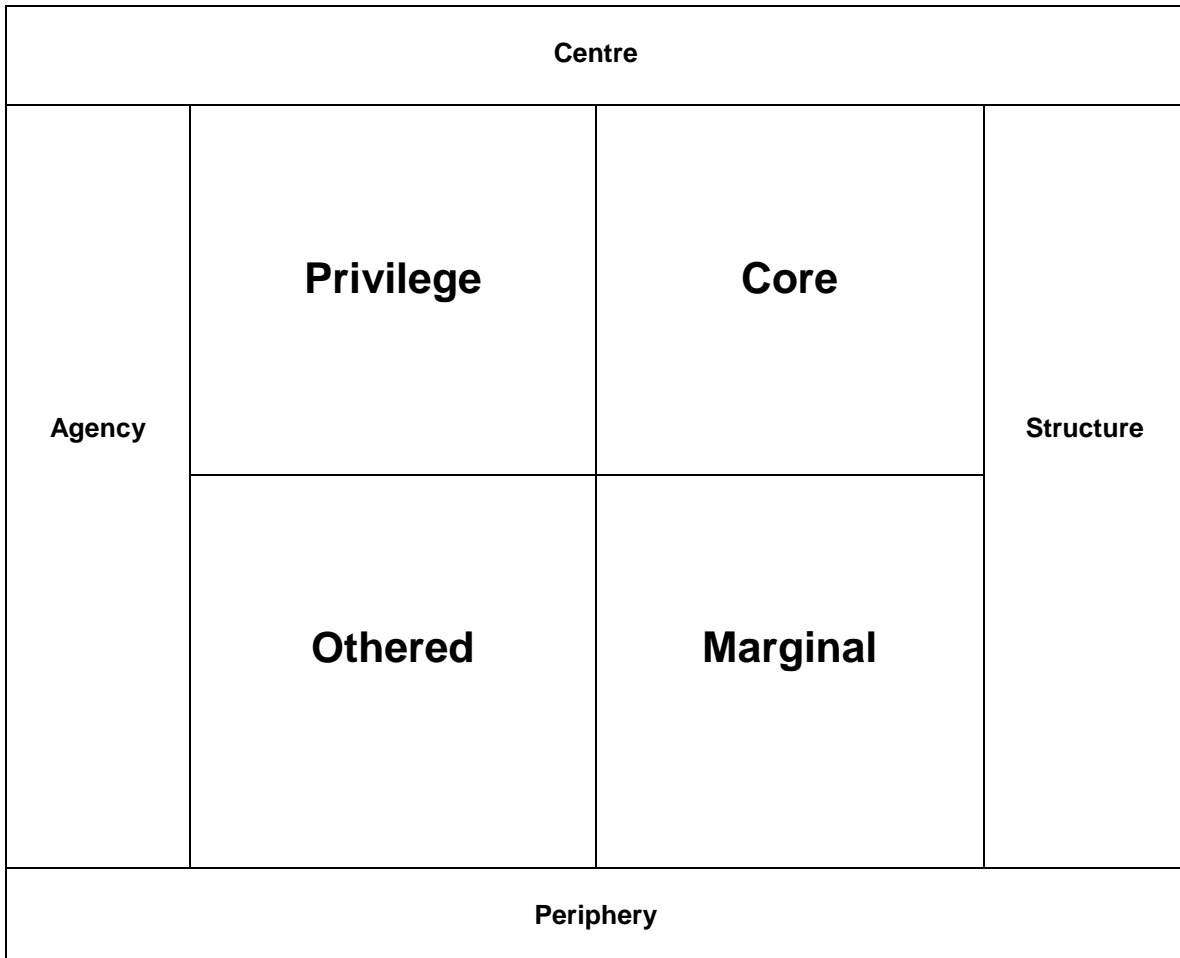


Figure 2 enables us to represent two dimensions: first, we can examine space on a dimension from centre to periphery; and second, we can examine choice on a dimension from agency to structure. Space is concerned with where our gaze falls and so where we look creates a centre and hence a periphery. Choice is concerned with action and so if we look at what a person is doing we attribute agency and hence deny structure.

The *privileged* position assumes that we recognise who can, and we attribute agency to make choices, and the *core* position assumes that we recognise what can be done, and we accept the conditions that determine this. In contrast, the *othered* position assumes that we recognise who cannot, and how agency is moderated through being on the outside. The *marginal* position

assumes that we recognise what cannot be done, and we accept the conditions that determine this. This framework is essentially about how our approach to theory and research within the field is shaped by our underlying ontologies and epistemologies. We create legitimacy through the questions we generate about learners and learning, and so we reveal our dispositions that shape our enquiries. This is why historiography of our work is so vital, so that we subject what has gone, what is happening, and why might happen to rigorous questioning regarding where our gaze has fallen, and why. We intend to show that while critical application is helpful to us in undertaking our work, it is not enough to just examine data and arguments for flaws. Furthermore, while critical meaning takes us an important step forward, there is always the danger that our work is misappropriated. Hence, we would argue for critical commitment, where through intellectual work we open up as far as possible our political commitment to knowledge, and where we locate ourselves on the field terrain.

Our position is that education is a field of study and practice. We both do it and seek to describe, understand and explain it. We do this not just for curiosity or to give meaning to our lives but also so that we can do it and study it better. There are three main dimensions which we need to take account of in: first, our orientation towards our work (where our gaze falls); second, the scope of our work (where we draw the boundaries); and third, the values underpinning this work (what are we doing it for). These enable us to make choices in regard to focus or what we will be examining, and intellectual resources or what ideas, theories, and data will be drawn on to structure and give meaning to our enquiry. Our argument is that there is no discipline of the history of education or of educational administration, but a range of disciplines such as history, philosophy, economics, sociology, politics, which can be a resource in regard to method, information and theorising. For example, in Lowe's editorial he focuses on schools and educational administration and draws on history to research this. We would want to suggest that the implicit positioning of learners at the periphery could be inverted to stimulate our theorising about what 'counts', and how historical study could be complemented and developed through economic or sociological or political analyses.

Lowe states that *educational administration* and the *history of education* are 'two apparently discrete fields'.¹¹ Certainly the historical administration of formal education and the 'new managerialism which surrounds education today'¹² presuppose that our focus is on (organisational) structures: types of schools, timetables, curriculum, allocation of resources, policy, governance, inspection, teacher work practices and so forth. Associated with this typology of educational administration is the history of schools and schooling that has recorded the nuances of institutional changes and more recently the 'new history of education'¹³ that has reinterpreted and re-presented knowledge of our past to place at the centre of these narratives trajectories of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and age to describe, understand and examine the extent to which learners and learning have experienced continuities and

¹¹ Lowe, Trends, 3.

¹² Ibid, 5.

¹³ Ibid, 7.

discontinuities at various historical intersections. Yet, we ask, what might happen if schools and schooling is placed at the periphery and learners and learning at the centre of analysis? What might happen if we focus less on the boundaries that separate epistemic communities into separate fields of educational administration and the history of education, and instead focus on the nature of their activity and what claims for distinction are made in regard to that activity? What might happen if we shift the focus away from restructuring as a form of globalisation and put colonialism at the centre of our enquiry, and what might this say about how different forms of western capitalism are re-colonising territory and economies? What might happen if we shift the focus away from institutions such as schools towards the communities that they are meant to serve and how an analysis of the interplay of agency and structure reveals the lived experiences of indigenous peoples, social class, and gender?

Such a juxtaposition of focus and intellectual resources opens up a range of possibilities for how we move forward. Arguably such an approach suggest that Lowe's editorial might have shifted in its focus from schools and institutions to people, places and position. To continue with this viewpoint, we would like to make the case that educational administration and history might not be 'two apparently discrete fields'¹⁴ particularly if we work with an interconnection between

People;

Spaces; and

Time

and, if we argue that it is a framework for understanding the development of educational administration and the history of education as part of the same field with a shared understanding of their core concerns (with the capacity to choose the focus and the intellectual resources which shape the enquiry).

A re-reading of Lowe suggests that he is equally concerned with the complexities and contradictions embedded in the people/spaces/time nexus. We pointed out at the outset of this

¹⁴ Ibid, 3.

paper that these three themes could be interplayed to provide a focus on learners and learning that might transcend the boundaries that we too frequently establish in our own knowledge work and knowledge production. We would like to return to the three main forms of a critical approach that we proposed and formulate ways in which this might inform 'what counts'. Figure 3 presents our thinking on this.

Figure 3: Critical Approaches

	Critical application	Critical meaning	Critical Commitment
Knowers [People Spaces Time]	Who are the learners and what are their immediate and future needs? How are learners organised for learning? How do educational institutions respond to their historical, social and economic circumstances? What impact do these institutions have on learners and learning?	What are the goals of the educational professional and wider communities in learners and learning? How might learning benefit learners and community?	Whose interests are established and promoted? Who allocates the work activities of learners and teachers?
Knowing [People Spaces Time]	What is required for learners to be able to learn? How might these resources be utilised? What do learners do when they are learning?	Who will directly benefit from learning that takes place? What difference will learning make for learners, communities and schools? How do we know that learning is taking place?	Who has access to the knowledge produced? How can those on the margins exercise agency? Who makes the decisions about knowledge production and learning?
Knowledge [People Spaces Time]	How might educational institutions have met the current and future needs of its learners and community? What changes are required to be made for learners and the leadership of learning? What forms of established knowledge (such as history) is being and might be used by learners in their learning, and in the study of learners and learning?	Whose voice is heard? Who will do the work? What agency does each individual have and how might this be exercised? How might forms of established knowledge (such as history) be drawn on to help learners and the study of learners and learning in creating meaning about learners and learning?	Who occupies a privileged position? How might learners 'on the margins' make choices to enhance their learning? How might forms of established knowledge (such as history) support changes to learners and learning?

Agendas for Journal development

In terms of the *Journal of Educational Administration and History* we would like to suggest several possible ways in which a critical approach might develop these 'two apparently discrete fields'.¹⁵

Roy Lowe in his 2004 editorial pointed out that the administration, management and history of schools and schooling had preoccupied the journal for thirty six years. And while his analysis of the historical development of formal schools in England and Wales is, in our view, a sound interpretation of the field, we would urge colleagues and readers to engage in research that asks a number of fundamental questions of sources in an attempt to position knowers and knowledge production at the centre of our theorising. These questions are:

1. What knowledge and whose knowledge is placed at the centre of the state agenda for schooling?
2. How does the production and reproduction of knowledge inhibit agency from pupils and schools located at the periphery?
3. How might the history of the administration of schooling be re-conceptualised if schooling structures were not the central concern of our research and theorising?
4. In what ways can the new histories of education focus on the production of knowledge, the agency of learners, and sites of re-production?
5. How can practitioners and researchers act as knowledge workers, knowledge producers and change agents?

This is by no means an exhaustive list and emerges from our own positioning both in the field of educational management and the history of education. We are advocating that the 'old' histories of education that concentrated on elite schools, elite teachers and heads and the schooling of the elite were a necessary part of the evolution of knowledge for/about schools and schooling. The more recent focus on issues of social class, race, gender, teachers and classrooms is arguably a secondary stage in this evolution. Thus these histories might be usefully located at the periphery in order for a new history of educational administration and history to emerge that questions

¹⁵ Ibid.

knowledge, knowing and knowers and which advocates for a critical approach that locates learners and learning at the centre of our work and practices. The challenge for the *Journal of Educational Administration and History* is to stimulate a revolution in our research and theorising by shifting our focus from structures to people, spaces and time.