

Imagining a future, living in the present and remembering the past.

Introduction

Over the time that I have been writing this piece, the terrorist events in London, Manchester and then London again have unfolded. That sentence has been re-written twice with an increasingly heavy heart, adding a new place and a new UK atrocity each time. No doubt other academics, in other parts of the world, sit in front of their keyboards numbed by equally hideous events close at hand. The relationship between the global and local is increasingly complex as intellectually we reach out, but things that happen on our doorstep vividly bring home the way that the political becomes personal. Images of broken young lives pose difficult questions about the role of 'the academy'. The future seems bleak, the present uncertain, can the past offer any clues how problems arise and offer any solutions for a way out? The Manchester bomber, Salman Abedi, was described in *The Times* as 'dropping out' of university before being 'radicalised' relatively recently (*Times*, 24/5/2017: 4). This puts education, in and outside classroom settings, at the heart of the problem. There is a difficult question to be faced as to why, and how, a distorted form of 'education' succeeded in capturing his soul, where current formal education failed (him) so dismally. The following discussion cannot of course answer such a complex question. In reflecting on the issues and debates within the *Journal of Educational Administration and History* under the editorship of Helen Gunter and Tanya Fitzgerald, it seeks to emphasise the imperative for academics to be engaged beyond academia so that we can bury that invidious phrase, 'merely academic', and make a full contribution to the future relationship between higher education and wider society.

The remit for this short piece was to identify themes emerging from the articles in this edition by Julie McLeod, Duncan Waite and Eugenie Samier, to consider how these themes reflect on the current field, and to identify their ongoing relevance. Additionally, I was asked to consider the current challenges that the field is facing and what this means for research and journals such as this one. My short response is that our research has to matter. It has to matter to us as individuals so that what we do is worthwhile; it has to matter that we can provide rigorous research that is reliable so that it can inform policy makers and administrators; and it has to provide teachers and students with a greater understanding of why they are doing what they are being asked to do. In a forthcoming article for *History of Education Review* I identified three dilemmas for the historian of education and the longer answer to the editors' request for this journal is framed by those dilemmas that are also apparent in the articles in this edition. I asked 'Who is our audience?', 'How do we frame our data analysis' and 'how do we write up our research?'

An overarching theme that emerges from the authors and the editors here are the problems inherent in attempts to escape from binaries and boundaries that work to silence peripheral, or marginalised, voices. Julie McLeod highlights how the feminist agenda, that took so long to become established in the academy, then resulted in a normalising effect that can, itself, become a form of governance. Eugenie Samier reminds us of the hegemonic Western nature of much writing that, despite our best efforts, sustains an intellectual hierarchy that overlooks many voices. Duncan Waite reflects on the difficulties of the journal editor seeking to encourage a diversity of articles and authors but in turn hampered by expectations of language and expression in submissions from new authors and new countries. The current editors of this journal have regularly charted progress against their original aims in volume 40, mindful of the need to embrace diversity, but conscious of the need also for the journal to present a coherent representation of the current state of the field and its place in it. Contributors to the journal write from perspectives informed by sociology, philosophy, economics and politics; the sources they use reflect those approaches and provide some bridges across binaries. In the final section I identify an area that has been less explored in this journal that has seen some interest in related journals such as *History of Education* and *Paedagogica Historica*. The materiality of schooling explored by historians of education has sought to explore areas of education where official documents provide little evidence (Burke, Cunningham & Grosvenor, 2010; McClellan, 2016; Nieminen, 2016). The section reflects on how the use of fiction, specifically in relation to understanding the changing role of the head teacher, might provide an additional relevant perspective on the field.

Audience

The journal aims and scope advise that it 'brings together researchers, policy makers and practitioners', yet it is not clear how that happens given the constraints of publication in an academic journal that Waite identifies. 'Bringing together' suggests that we might expect submissions from all three groups, but most articles tend to be written by active researchers hoping for a more varied audience. As a forum for debate by representatives of the three interest groups, the long lead in for journal articles is perhaps not the easiest path to take. All three authors in this edition recognise the potential diversity of the audience (even if not the contributors) and the difficulty of doing justice to all three groups. Recently this has become further complicated by political agendas that seek to employ education as a means to the end of employability rather than an end in itself. Bringing together three groups suggests that each group may have different priorities although they may all aspire to create fully engaged and informed citizens.

In their editorial Helen Gunter and Tanya Fitzgerald discuss the 'uberisation' of the academy, 'just in time' solutions and the creation of the 'uber learner'. The metaphor reflects many concerns over the gap between what students expect of their time at university and what, drawing on views of a liberal education for its own sake, academics seek to provide. Somewhere, long before students have entered university, communication seems to have broken down. Cuts and cutbacks erode provision especially where it appears to be valued less by the customer / student than the provision of bite sized credit accumulation. In developing the metaphor, and attempting to overcome the divide between what students think they need and what academics think the students should have, we might consider the implications of a 'Gett – isation' of education that responds to the challenges of the Uber, and just in time solutions.

The stand-off between Uber and the drivers of the London black cabs will be familiar to anyone who has raised the subject with their cabbie. There is little mutual understanding or sympathy; unfair competition is frequently cited and often allusions made as to the Uber interpretation of employment laws. Gett is a similar operation to Uber but in London includes over 50% of the familiar black cabs. Gett, finds common ground between old and new. Drivers (as with academics) 'have the Knowledge' as the result of a long apprenticeship and examination, whereby a detailed understanding of the geography and road system of London is required, before becoming a licensed driver (lecturer). At the same time Gett uses new technology to work through an app that enables a similar call up by the customer and automated payment system to Uber. It is now possible to imagine a future that incorporates the best of two systems that currently appear to be in opposition. It also recognises the lessons that can be learned from a system that may now be outdated but provides a solid and invaluable base for moving forwards.

London black taxis improved their provision, by responding to the change demanded by their customers, without losing the advantage of acquiring their specialist knowledge, as anyone who has benefitted from a cabbie's negotiation of back roads around the impenetrable jams being endured by those in satnav directed Ubers will testify. Academic journals provide cutting edge research and reflection that is assured through the process of peer review. Readers can have confidence in the authors in the same way that we can have confidence that the cab will take us to our destination.

Duncan Waite offers insight into the difficulties of launching a journal that challenged established boundaries and attracted cross-disciplinary readership. He identifies the status hierarchies that exist between journals that affect the submission of articles and the gatekeeping involved to ensure receptivity. If the audience for JEAH is to be extended beyond the academy so that we do more than

talk amongst ourselves and make what we say 'matter' to the outside world (at least a better phrase than the 'real world') then there is a challenge for the future that JEAH is well placed to meet. Part of this is outside journal editors' control but moves towards Open Access may, for those who can afford it, help create new audiences. Those audiences might include policy makers, they might also include administrators, teachers and the public. As Waite explains, maintaining the status quo is not enough, editors will need to be creative and open to 'alternative ways of knowing, being in and portraying the world.' One of the striking aspects of JEAH over the last ten years is the way in which both authors and editors already write for a wider audience. The problem has been whether that audience can access the work. In the editorial for volume 43 (4) Gunter and Fitzgerald stated 'we intend engaging in activist intellectual work because as knowledge workers we are directly involved in democratic processes, we want to speak up and be listened to.' (Gunter and Fitzgerald, 2011: 284). Working through over two hundred articles that have appeared under the current editorship it becomes apparent that there is an ongoing self-reflective agenda whereby this journal provides the space for authors engage in work that speaks to those in and outside the academy. There is an aspiration to help both individuals and public bodies to understand the purpose of education in the 21st century, without giving in to a neo-liberal agenda, that seeks to anaesthetise young people from the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake as they work their way through their academic journey to employability and beyond.

Content and analytical frameworks

The title of this journal infers that articles are primarily focused on current issues in educational administration 'and' that some historical contextualisation as background to the discussion might be expected. Advice on submitting to the journal notes that 'The journal publishes papers that contribute to and historicise debates on educational administration, leadership, management and policy in a range of settings.' Such advice assumes that authors will be attuned to details of current research in their administrative field and be aware of the difficulty that the provision of 'a' historical context infers. It also assumes that the prime duty of the exploration of the past is in the understanding of the present, with all the generalisation that involves (Aldrich, 2003). In addition to the diversity of class, race, gender, geography and religion that an international perspective requires there is also an ethical dimension that, in order to plan for an inclusive future, there is a necessity to recognise the vast range of minority concerns in the present, as well as trying to locate the experience of those who may have been written out of the past.

Eugenie Samier's article raises the tensions that have arisen as a result of the globalisation of knowledge creation and the increasing complexity of the 'way we perceive and think about education and its administration and leadership'. In the process of breaking down intellectual / disciplinary boundaries arguments become ever more intricate in the creation of the critique of neo-liberalism and globalisation. The more we seek to be inclusive the more we become driven back towards a 'West -non West dichotomy that is problematic in its over generalisation and homogenising of both categories'. Samier identifies internationalisation and globalisation as two of the most important topics in educational administration, yet the challenge that sets up for articles of between 3000 and 6000 words is immense. She rightly notes the significance of education that goes beyond formal schooling in 'more traditional societies, particularly those with extended family structures, a more collectivist society and where community is critically important'. So, on the one hand in order to be thorough in our exploration of the historical dimension to a specific issue we have to drill down within a local context but on the other, in an increasingly globalised world where people and ideas are constantly on the move some overarching frameworks have to be applied to bring a range of detailed studies together.

Authors have employed a range of intellectual frameworks through which to analyse their research for example Pierre Bourdieu (Addison 2009; English, 2012) and Hannah Arendt (Tamboukou, 2010; Morgan, 2016). Concepts such as neo-liberalism (Saltman, 2014; Winton & Pollock, 2016) and managerialism (Eacott, 2011; Hall, 2012) allow for an identification of wider trends within educational administration and leadership. The Special Issue in 2013 set a research agenda for rethinking 'leadership' in education. It reflected the overarching theme already identified in the current papers of 'thinking about leadership, leaders and leading grounded in histories not bounded by historical categories, images and metaphors'. Scott Eacott encouraged readers to 'think with, beyond, and where necessary against what is argued in the spirit of the intellectual enterprise' (Eacott, 2013: 113).

Most articles over the last ten years work within a relatively short time frame through which to examine current policy developments to trace where, or how, ideas and practice have evolved. Authors not only work within the rigour of theoretical and analytical frameworks for analysing their data, they are also deeply embedded within the political context of their production as practitioners. The time frame for discussion frequently coincides with increased state intervention in education and concerns over the de-professionalization of teachers and the distribution of power, or lack of it, in education systems. Unsurprisingly Foucault's writing has significantly informed the analysis presented in the journal. Samier observes his perspective applies as much to the international

context as to the national and can build some bridges between this divide. In issue 45 Richard Niesche set his detailed examination of a Principal in a socially disadvantaged school in Australia against an international movement towards accountability and performance through a Foucaultian framework that resulted in new ways of thinking about the possibilities of school leadership. He cited the example of Angela who 'considers her work highly political and is constantly engaging with contested terrain of meeting performance benchmarks, following the expectations of the state education authorities, and delivering the appropriate level of care for the students and community in the pursuit of equity and social justice.' (Niesche, 2013:151). At the beginning of this section I reflected on the difficulty of ensuring that the journal can 'bring together' practitioners and researchers. Niesche included long quotations from interviews with the school principal in his article, which is one way to include a variety of voices. However of course that method is also subject to the power of the author who decides which sections of an interview to quote. In the next section I think about the dilemma of how we write up research in this field.

Writing and presenting research

In thinking about the future of both research and the role of the academic journal yet again the problem of accessibility presents itself. The standard format for journal articles that requires a literature review to establish the author's authority within the field, a methodology section to demonstrate the rigour of the research before often an all too brief summary of the findings or philosophical / theoretical discussion do not lend themselves to easy reading by those not already familiar with the field. While the availability of electronic download might increase accessibility by a wider academic audience, there is also the disadvantage that Duncan Waite notes that articles are read in isolation, fracturing the intended holistic nature of a journal edition. The themed Special Issues that present carefully structured responses to current concerns should perhaps only be accessible in their entirety. For example, issue 47 (2) focuses on the impact of neo-liberalism on educational administration beginning with an article that returned to Adam Smith. The editorial noted that returning to original intellectual resources that underpin neo-liberalism 'shows the need to examine not only the material, but also the emotional impact of competition' (Gunter and Fitzgerald, 2015: 103). While the ensuing articles are by their nature freestanding, the readers' understanding of the wider concerns over neo-liberalism and education are enriched through reading the edition in its entirety. Immediately we are back at the binary between academia and those in policy making and educational practitioners that the journal also seeks to engage in order for our research to make a difference in the wider field.

Barriers between academia and 'the rest' were keenly felt in the early days of feminist studies and recognition of the validity of feminist approaches that sought to add gender to analytical categories of race and social class. McLeod's article traces how the 'strong feminist orientation' of articles under the current editorship has been visible in opening up 'avenues for reframing and rethinking the field of educational administration'. She charts the fast-moving nature of the political narrative of feminist involvement in education together with the construction of policy memory. Echoing my observation at the beginning of this article that academic research must 'matter' McLeod observes that received accounts in relation to feminism and educational administration 'matter first because memories of early reform animate or circumscribe present-day actions. Second they matter because such accounts can side step or obscure from view the complex and mundane ways in which feminist reforms were also concerned with the organization and administration of education'. The journal sets itself up to offer a critical analysis of current policy making that recognises how often the origins of current practice have been misrecognised. This is partly why Foucault's analytical frame has proved so effective in disrupting an assumed linear progression that does not take account of discontinuities and contextual difference. With such valuable insights to offer, together with the possibilities that changing technologies offer in disseminating ideas, is this a point to stop and consider how the journal might better bring our research into a wider forum? Given the clear relevance of the articles in this journal for an extended audience, it would seem timely to consider new ways / formulas for communicating our ideas to non-academics that build on the reliability of information and research that publication in a journal confers. Is there a place for shorter 'policy briefings' as part of the journal's provision where currently authors might present their work in a disconnected series of articles, blogs, policy advice, tweets etc etc etc. McLeod reminds us that throughout their term of editorship 'contributors and readers have been invited to re-imagine what might be possible under the sign of educational administration.' In the final section of this piece I reflect on whether some attention to fiction might offer a way to counteract some of the binaries that each of these authors has recognised as constraining and frustrating our ways of thinking.

Imagining past, present and future

There is a striking absence of articles in the journal that focus on the imaginary as a way into articulating aspirations for the future, understanding of the present and recognition of the role of the past. Pat Thomson's article in issue 46 is a significant exception that explores the representation of leadership in contemporary children's literature. She argues that 'Because these fictional accounts deal with issues of power and justice more openly than many mainstream educational administration texts, this makes them particularly useful in the preparation of potential school

leaders' (Thomson, 2014:367). Thomson offers us a 'political reading from an adult perspective of the social and political inferences and workings of specific narrative representations of the world, in this case schooling' that works from a concern 'about the ways in which the work of headteachers is increasingly constrained by the tasks of regulation, risk management and surveillance to become an increasingly risky and burdensome practice.' (Thomson, 2014: 370). Thomson's historical overview of the school story genre that rose to popularity in the interwar period in Britain is used as a backdrop to her detailed consideration of how head teachers' power is portrayed in current children's literature. She makes a compelling case for bringing such literature to the educational leadership classroom. There is yet more to be gained through analysis of historical fiction set within a school as a valid historical source for deeper interrogation as well as a device for teacher educators.

The formulaic nature of the interwar girls' school story would seem to have little potential in developing research into the field of educational administration. As Thomson notes, current analysis recognizes the conservative nature of the informal education that these stories offered their readers. The narratives also sit firmly within a national boundary that appears to confirm rather than ameliorate the geographical hierarchies identified by Samier. There is inevitably a danger too that they contribute to the nostalgia discourse identified by Mcleod by suggesting to the historian that the stories reflected a utopian past where the headmistress reigned supreme, before the advent of any national curriculum and OFSTED was nowhere to be seen. As fictions however, they can escape the ethical problem of overlooking the individual experience in attempts to chart broad changes in attitudes. In recognizing them precisely as part of the imagination they also allow the imagination to run free in reflecting on how headship, to continue with this example might, or could, have evolved. Thomson's article emphasizes the power of the Head and the gendered expectations for female behavior that are apparent in the interwar school stories.

If we compare the British series of *Dimsie* stories by Dorita Fairlie-Bruce with, for example an American series such as the *Marjorie Dean* series by Pauline Lester (Josephine Chase) we can identify a construction of femininity that rises above national borders and offers us a transnational way of thinking that enables us to engage in writing 'a history *with* nations that is not a history *of* nations.' (Yves-Saunier, 2013:8). Although in the stories the headmistress does indeed hold the ultimate power, a significant plot device on both sides of the Atlantic is the abiding respect and friendship that develops between the head and the heroine. In the two series mentioned above this friendship goes beyond school days and leads us to reflect on the effect that neo-liberalism and managerialist policies in schools that create an 'us' and 'them' divide may have today on intergenerational

relationships. In turn, this offers us the potential to imagine a future where relationships of understanding between teachers and pupils might develop to bridge the current divide.

Conclusion

One of the privileges of being on the editorial board for JEAH has been working with a team of editors and authors who are deeply committed to Helen Gunter and Tanya Fitzgerald's premise that the journal brings together researchers, practitioners and policy makers. The articles in this edition demonstrate how much has been achieved in the research and publications over their editorship where the imagined future can be explored by careful analysis of the present and detailed understanding of the past. The articles also highlight the problematic nature of 'the' future, 'the' present and 'the' past where overarching narratives can obscure the experience and aspirations of minorities. Each article identifies the need to escape from shifting but obstinate binaries that constrain both what how we think and what we do. In the introduction I reflected on the active role that academics should try to play in ensuring that today's and tomorrow's education is fit for purpose. Throughout this piece, informed by the themes that have emerged from this edition I have tried to suggest how the journal can move forward, utilising the energy and enthusiasm that authors have for making their research matter. Reading through back editions has been both enjoyable and instructive, it has also highlighted the longevity of relevance of academic publications in our field. Education provision and policy across the world moves rapidly in reflecting political and social change but secure grounding of analysis in robust theoretical and philosophical frameworks creates an archive of relevant material on which to build. The challenge moving forwards is to find ways to make more public and more visible the rigorous critique of current trends that continue to marginalise and even alienate those teachers, lecturers and students currently working through the system

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