

**Imagining a Project:
networks, discourses and spaces - towards a new archaeology of
urban education**

Martin Lawn, University of Birmingham
Ian Grosvenor, University of Birmingham

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the creation of new forms of historical research in education which uses and reflects the changes in methodology and substantive concerns of other disciplines across the shifting boundaries of scholarly work on the social. It is based upon a practice developed out of a series of international seminars and an unfunded research proposal. It is an attempt to use contemporary theory in cultural studies, geography and the sociology of technology to assemble arguments for a new approach to urban education history in which the silences of the field and the method, the restlessness about its boundaries and practices and its contemporary possibilities are collated into a proposal of work. This is called the new archaeology of schooling.

Creating New Forms of Work

This paper is concerned with the creation of new forms of historical research in education which uses and reflects the changes in methodology and substantive concerns of other disciplines across the shifting boundaries of scholarly work on the social. It is an odyssey into the silences of description and explanation which exist in the records, subjects and narration in the span of education. It does not begin with a statement of theoretical exposition and a clear strategy for achieving a productive analysis. Instead it begins with the concerns of a group of historians of education, drawn from two continents, and working in a range of institutions. It is not a lack of interest in the history of education which they had in common but in the way that history of education defines, creates, interrogates and produces subjects and so, delineates the field of study. As the paper develops, its authors assemble arguments for a way forward for themselves in which the silences of the field and the method, the restlessness about its boundaries and practices and its contemporary possibilities are collated into a proposal of work. This is called the new archaeology of schooling.

Using Harold Silver's statement, as a basis for a meeting, that 'It is difficult to believe that historians have made almost no attempt to reconstruct the classroom, the culture of the classroom, the social relations of the classroom' an appeal went out, in 1994, to historians known to be working in classroom or method related research to 'a working conference about research in progress' in Birmingham, UK. The conference was targeted at the silence about classrooms and in doing so, opened up the problems of 'noise' about systems and people in the field and the need to further

explore the working of the school. Because of the difficulty in using previous models or examples of classroom histories, and the fact that it was not constructed as a meeting against any dominant model, the meeting had to find itself through the process of discussion, report and works in progress. By the end of the meeting, and consequent seminars in following years in Toronto and Rotterdam, it was clear that there was a direction, a common interest, indeed an explosion of interest, but that this unity of interest was not theoretically bound. There was a pluralism of approach so that an interest in the problems of using images was allied to a concern for images of classrooms; the ways of understanding documents use was united with an exploration of past pedagogy; and an interest in the silences about experience from primary sources was combined with the outside classroom influences which shaped them. Indeed the practical success of the meetings was partly managed through the form they took; the speculative nature of the meeting was matched by experiment with its form. Evidence and discussion, the pedagogical tools of the group, were bound by a shift from paper delivery to workshops on image interpretation, a shift of place from one type of classroom to another, the use of artefacts and so on. So that the questions about classrooms, space and pedagogy were echoed and enriched by the deliberate shifts in style and place by the seminar itself. The initial questions about a curriculum mediated by particular spaces or the ordered routines in classrooms, created to raise questions about reconstruction and representation, were amplified by the move to new places and new orderings of people, spaces and relations. The ulterior aim of the seminar, to offer an opportunity for cross - germination and collective work between disciplines and nations, was definitely aided by the shifts in its form and in locale. No explanation, treated within one site or view of the field, could be expected to prevail outside its natural environment. As examples, 'English' ways of writing and explaining had to face 'European mainland' traditions and dominant 'American' explanations of the historical developments of schooling had to face explanations using contrasting conceptual structures. Initial defensiveness moved to recognition of difference, slight loss of membership and encouragement of risk.

If there were innovations made [or circulated] during the meetings, they were in the incorporation of the idea of textual silences and the use of images as evidence with the consequential problems of analysis. Over the time of the meetings [and the subsequent emergence of the group as a network within the European Education Research Association], their disciplinary basis shifted from a mainly university historians group to a group consisting of historians working with texts and images, fine art historians, museum faculty, literary scholars and film historians and social scientists. Boundaries became porous and common ground was sometimes found within cultural and material histories and their wider references.

The initial aim of reconstructing the classroom, its culture and social relations, had expanded, reflecting the conceptual problems and expertise available in the group. The idea of reconstruction had itself become deconstructed and the idea of the authentic reconstruction, focussed on visits to local and national museums, had to live in tension with the ideas about perceptions of authenticity and alternative explanations and reflexivity. Additionally, new theorizing about the systematic relations between designs, artefacts and people raised experiential evidence about the silences in the act of reconstruction. Similarly, methodological

innovations, in the use of filmic evidence or the importation of other critical frames to analyze images, raised issues about the representation of classrooms. Single forms of portrayal or symbolic depictions or key artefacts were no longer treated as convincing by themselves and attention turned to the relations between representations and a way in which they could be used in conjunction. Boundaries to explanation were fragile; each case had its own interpretation but new theorizing was tested against experience and back to the case. New concepts, seen as viable in analyzing classrooms, included space and technology, both overshadowed in the past by narratives of personal endeavour and professional/ state growth in education surfaced in these historical conversations.

Although the seminar series began with the idea of the classroom, it functioned as a space in which issues about the categories, traditional areas of inquiry and representations in urban education and its methodology were explored. The purpose of this paper is to explore the shape of a possible history of urban education project, an imagined investigation into the archaeology of schooling which builds on discussions in these seminars. In this sense this paper is an echo of earlier conversations. It presumes an openness amongst historians of education to the possibilities inherent in new cross - disciplinary approaches in social science and in the application of critical theory. At the same time, choices and directions about useful concepts and methods for the study of classrooms are proposed here in a contribution to those earlier conversations and not as a form of closure to them.

This proposal moves into its imaginary phase at this point. The paper is based upon a research proposal, that emerged out of the network and seminar series, produced for the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK. It was rated as a triple Alpha by our peers, the highest grade, but it did not attain any funding in that round. This meant that it cannot be resubmitted and so, in effect, remains a proposal. It remains a project, stillborn as a work of imagination. This kind of interdisciplinary project will always cause problems for funding councils. The spirit of these times is that new technology cannot be gainsaid, as the miracle solution for all problems, and so inquiries into dead technologies seems arcane and even disruptive. It is possible to 'read' the rejection in this way as it is obviously counter intuitive but the probability is that funding is limited and interdisciplinary work has few natural allies. [It still leaves questions about the role that historians of education are licensed to occupy and inquiries which are regarded as legitimate and natural for them and those which are not !]

The imagined project was to be based upon one city in England. The city, with its history of urbanisation, industrialisation, de - industrialisation and technological change can be viewed as representative of the metropolitan experience of Europe's capitalist commodity societies. One of the features of cross-cultural work which had emerged out of the seminars was the particularity of the situation we viewed within the city in which we worked. It defined itself successfully as a Learning City, that is a city which focussed upon the learning opportunities of its citizens across the range of public sector provision and with public/private partnerships. Yet, in common with other areas of England, many of its schools were built either in the 1950s or the turn of the century. This fact, almost invisible to local scholars and teachers, was in contrast to European partners, who went through rebuilding and redesign programmes regularly, and with the USA,

which, because of its urban policies, often built schools in the new suburbs and demolished the schools of the inner ring. Most teachers in the city had taught in its older Victorian schools in their career and many students were trained as teachers within them. These schools had been designed in the late 19th century, and were influenced by private school design of the mid 19th century. The consequences of this social fact had not been explored except within single school histories, autobiographies and general histories of education. The key aspect which emerged within our imagined project was to try to conceptualize the city and its schools in such a way that the 'invisible' aspects of the schooling in the city should emerge as the main focus.

Imagining an archaeology of urban education

Urban education has moved through a series of reconstructions since its foundation as a local state operation in the late nineteenth century. The end of the nineteenth century saw a shift in the West from education based on voluntary enterprise to a system where the state increasingly controlled the education of the urban child. Institutions, buildings and employees were designed and formed in a process by which cities created modern futures through the invention of the public sector. Contemporary policy on education has already, and will continue to, radically alter the shape of urban education. Yet we know very little in depth and breadth about what known periods of reconstruction had on urban education and city schooling, what similarities and differences these periods had in their intentions towards education and their impact upon it, how cities were mobilized for change and how over time changes become sedimented or displaced in the system? As the late twentieth century is a period of significant educational change, it is imperative to review the scope and impact of changes in urban education.

City schooling has traditionally been studied as if it was geographically positioned within known fixed organizational boundaries, within invisible cultural settings and distant ideologies. The development of schooling in cities has been recorded, within the history of education, as a phase of local government, as an administrative problem or within rare school histories. Urban education as an area of historical study has been most concerned with class and control. Yet new substantive and methodological questions and approaches have been produced which allow a re-viewing and re-construction of the rise of schooling in the city. The project seeks to utilize new forms of theorizing to understand urban educational change in the past and present. It is concerned with the modernisation of urban schooling and the temporal and spatial processes of its construction and reconstruction, and in doing so, focusses upon the educational networks, discourses and spaces in the city.

Education cannot be viewed within this project as a bounded phenomenon distinct and separate from other areas of social policy. The shifts in city working can be illuminated by a range of new theories of explanation and understandings of networks in markets, discourses and symbols in public space, post-Fordist working, entrepreneurial cultures etc. However they can also be used in new historiographical ways as well, breaking down the limited chronologies of development and progression, of department and organizational history, and of the circumferential problematization of city life.

What is the experience of living in the modern city? The city is the quintessential site of modernity, the locus of the modern experience. The modern city was 'light, ordered and predictable', but it was also a site of flux, of movement and dislocation, of the transient, the fleeting and the contingent. It was/is a site of heterogeneity and diversity; of cultural bifurcation; of local traditions and mass consumption, of variability and multiplicity. It was/is a space of 'variable geometry, formed by locations hierarchically ordered in a continuously changing network of flows: flows of capital, labour, elements of production, commodities, information, decisions and signals'. The modern city was/is a place where the residues of previous pasts continue to shape the present, where the vernacular landscape reflected the layered 'traces of previous generations'. It was a space in which elements of the population were confined in a range of institutions with common architectural languages: the asylum, the workhouse, the infirmary, the prison and the school. It was/is a space of strangers and casual encounters and engagements, where the experience of social and cultural differences were/are intensified. To live in the modern city was/is to experience fragmentation, commodification and marginalisation. To experience life in the city was/is to engage with 'immediacy, impact, sensation', to be modern was/is to live in an environment of visual impression. The experience of city life was/is central to the production of meaning and identity.

What of the modern school in the modern city? The concept of networks is a good point to start an inquiry into the way that the city was organized and mobilized into and by means of an urban education programme. The current Learning City initiative in our chosen city appears to depend less on hierarchies and markets than on networks although it is managed by the local education authority. These networks may have characteristics of business networks (equivalence relations and trading), local power networks (common interests and social relations) and professional networks (knowledge exchange). It is this idea of mobilizing through informal and formal relations between actors (relations, partners, officials, specialists etc), we argue, which could be important to an historical understanding of urban education yet it is under used. Networks aren't just groups of individuals with fixed attributes but nodal points of contact in circulating relations, usually operating on a small scale, sometimes hidden, with a mutual orientation in which cooperation and obligation are paramount, and reliable sources of information and action are sought. Networks are also a source of conflict and of changing alliance but they are useful as ways of analyzing processes of power and organizing. The use of the concept, networks, in this proposal is congruent with its explanatory literature and it is seen as a helpful way of illuminating the links between agencies, action programmes, council and commercial organizations, city sectors [public, private and voluntary]. There is a further way which we would like to explore the use of network theory in this project. Our concern with the modernization of urban education is not just with actors in networks. Historians have generally concentrated on the lives of individuals and their institutions and while this will be of concern [within the framework above], our interest goes further into the material aspects of networks. Education as a field of study, and especially history of education, have taken only brief considerations of the spaces and technologies contained within it. New ICT technologies have brought with them into the study of education interests in networks of knowledge, relations between technology and identity, designed interactions and control, teaching/learning strategies. This has thrown the

past into relief and raised new questions about the relationship between teachers and technology. The relation between actors and technology is complex. Actor network theory, produced by sociologists and researchers in science and technology, assumes an active not passive relation between actors in a network [actors may be human or machine]. This theory treats technologies as active members of networks, determining solutions, circulating ideas, circumscribing actions and not as passive objects to be picked up, ignored or contained.

This is a social view of technology in which a complex set of artifacts, actors and structures, and a set of socially constructed principles, procedures and processes, devised to function effectively and realize a purpose, are all in play. In the modernization of urban education, it will be necessary to see technology as a material structure (spaces, walls, furniture, tools), as working procedures and also as a series of ideas and knowledge systems within the process of mobilization. Seabourne, the specialist historian of school architecture, stated that teachers are much more influenced by the physical environment than they often realize - 'at any rate consciously'. Yet the designers of those spaces of specialist education had purposes in mind which shaped urban educational experience: according to Thomas Markus, it was social control: '[Control] is in the buildings which were adapted or purpose built, the space thus created, and the material contents of this space - furniture and equipment. Above all, it is in the order imposed on the human bodies in this space, down to their tiniest gestures, including the gaze of their eyes.' Such a spatial examination of schools [and other educational spaces] would concentrate on how the building is designed for use (flow, observation and constraint) and the way in which the fixedness of the material technology shapes its function through order, classification, compartmentalization, segregation etc. Cuban said that 'Organizational structures drove teachers into adopting certain instructional strategies that varied little over time. By structure, we refer to the way a school space is physically arranged; how content and students are organized into grade levels; how time is allocated to tasks; and how rules govern the behaviour and performance of both adults and students'.

Yet while there is historical evidence about the emergence of this regularised space in the city, there is little operational evidence. There are 'silences' about the practice, meaning and culture of schools in the urban past. How did managers, teachers and children interact with and shape designed space? What were the routines of the modern school and classroom, what kind of activities did it contain, and what sort of expressions and lives inhabited its space? What was its pedagogical order, and how was the curriculum mediated in its spaces? What was the lived reality of teacher and pupils' lives in and around that classroom? What were the intended and unintended outcomes of educational innovations in the modern city? What were the silent, residual, embedded and sedimented practices of schooling? How did links between architecture, pedagogy, examinations, curriculum, artefacts and ideology shape pupil and teacher lives in the modern city?

Our concern in this imagined project is with generating a thick description of the intended and unintended outcomes of educational innovations and restructuring, the processes by which cities organized their education services, the way that people worked in mobilizing networks, the way that

institutions and buildings were designed for educational purposes and the sedimentation and impedance of meanings, technology and work cultures. How layers of change - of language, of buildings, of teaching aims and skills - coexisted with the new organizing direction. Older, sedimented cultures of work, buildings designed for different purposes, decayed networks of influence, overtaken technology and the decline of past emblems of change are silent or less visible in periods of change. As it is easier to describe the intended outcomes, a contrastive methodology, based upon the idea of montage, will be introduced to approach questions of the unintended.

Research Methodology

The design of this imagined project is spiral, linking together time periods and their structures (schools and local governance), buildings (designed spaces and tools), organisations (vision, management and supervision) and professionals (associations, skills and training). The major city chosen for this research project has an extensive (but under-used) education archive, including individual school records from the nineteenth century, architectural plans, education census data, photographs and local administrative records. Many of these sources are under used but they record and classify a wide range of source material about the processes of urbanization and its educational institutions in three representative periods. These are the first period of growth [mid 1880s to early 1900s], the second major period of development [1940s to 1960s] and the emergence of the new institutional shift in education [1980s onwards]. The motto of the city is 'Forward' and in each of these time phases the city was engaged in a process of imagination and restructuring as modernising discourses circulated within networks of power and altered people, circumstance and material contexts. In addition, the last two chronological periods would allow the production of new sets of oral resources about the texts, practices and use of discourses, spaces and technologies in the city.

The project would begin by identifying and systematically examining the multiple overlapping and intersecting sociospatial networks of power which operated across the City in each of the three time periods. The networks of power - the interconnections between industrialists, urban planners, politicians, philanthropists, building suppliers, architects etc. - would be plotted and their relations across the City mapped. For each time period three questions would be asked: Who exercised power in the City? How where networks of power mobilized in the city: through urban committee structures or informal association, through political affiliation or religious identification : through economic and commercial activity or philanthropic work ? What were the constituent elements of the modernizing discourse promoted by the dominant power groups in the city.

Discourse is not simply a language of descriptors, it has material effects through its creation and circulation. Schools, in this sense, represent a congealed ideology sites where money, labour, social values, political concerns and artistic ideas translate into a cultural object, a physical space with overlapping sets of technological and design solutions. A case study approach involving detailed study of a number of public spaces (schools) over time can enable a level of generalisation about urban schooling to be developed. At the same time specific spaces can offer their own variations and twists in terms of development. Using a case study approach, the processes of association and action, of circulation and interconnection intersecting sociospatial networks of power would be

investigated and to explore the complex interfaces in the total social relationships of schooling - the ways in which schools, pupils, teachers, educational activities in general, related to wider social experience in the City - would be explored. The material impact of discourse on schools would be mapped using evidence of changing patterns of consumption and production. Evidence of sedimentation in terms of routines, regulations, organisational roles, resource use etc., would be identified. Further, using case study spaces the links between discourse, school design, pedagogy, examinations and curriculum would be subjected to close analysis and how they functioned to shape the 'separation, segmentation and segregation' of childhood and teacher lives in the urban environment would be investigated.

For each case study space the same four questions would be addressed: How did teachers, children and parents use and experience schools as designed public spaces? How did technology and design solutions shape teacher work and pupil experiences to advance educational reform and renewal? How did material structures sediment working procedures and limit and impede educational reform and renewal? What were the relationships between the school as a centre of learning and its immediate community?

In sum, each case study space would be analysed as a circulation point of the organizing discourse, a source of modernizing myths and controlling images, as an expressions of points within networks. The use of a case study approach would provide a series local chorographies; small-scale models of urban educational experience, within the cityscape.

Bloch observed that the deeper the research, the more the light of the evidence must converge from sources of many different kinds. In order to construct these chorographies and to pursue the research objectives and questions identified multiple sources of evidence would be gathered together and analysed to establish the characteristics of power networks and discourse in each time-period and the nature of schooling in each case study space.

Physical sites constitute primary evidence. A new source of information, recognised but under used by educational historians is to be found in the continued use of school buildings designed and built in the first two periods of the study. Fieldwork would be used as a research technique to look at the dense and complex artifactual evidence of the cityscape, and within it the landscape of the urban school. These school buildings are chronicles of change and use, they are inscribed with educational ideas and practices. Marks of use, building alterations, plans versus usage, professional 'satisficing' of spaces, technology and fabric interface, national and local regulations all worked upon the sites of schooling. Cultural identities, expressed within Imperial formations or local communities, have been at work reshaping the fabric and the spaces of the building and evidence of this is still available for reclamation. New technologies are occupying the building and re-imagining its use, in new ways; the combination of a lifelong learning agenda and electronic communications and media may be altering the spaces, procedures, personnel, fabric and purposes of buildings designed over a hundred years ago.

As the use of new forms of theorizing to aid understanding of urban

schooling and the processes of construction and reconstruction of education is central to this research project, the questions asked of the multiple data sources would necessarily be different to those posed in existing educational histories. Further, while the sources to be used in this imagined project would not raise problems for historians perhaps [with the exception of buildings as data] the conjunction between them, the way that we feel different sources should be placed in relation to each other might. It is not just a question of accumulation. Of course, the idea of a 'thick description' of educational continuity and change, involving the use of multiple data sources in relationally - based narratives of schooling in the city, located in the wider social context of urbanization, is one goal of this project as are the traces of cultural sedimentation and disjuncture. But within this project, given its aims, this kind of historical/ ethnographic reporting might be supplanted by the use of montage, a way of articulating the multiple ways of understanding the complexity of urban schooling. So, juxtaposing the verbal and the visual, the planner and the pupil, the teacher as employee with the commercial entrepreneur, the record with the recollection, the building with the imagined space might create more effective ways of evaluating change in the city in its multiple layers. An archaeology of schooling.

Towards a new archaeology of urban education

The late 20thC UK focus on 'learning' as a key concept in the educational process, present in most new policy statements across education sectors and through overarching idea of a learning society, brings into relief the contemporary past and the educational discourses and structures which delineate it. 'Learning' defines this new process, something often obscured in the past when describing the schooling process, yet it conceals in turn 'teaching'. If we are now in a Learning Society, were we in a Teaching Society? Past emphases on national structures (schools, local authority systems etc), on buildings (designed spaces and tools) on organizations (management, supervision etc) and on professionals (associations, training etc) are increasingly revealed by the shift towards processes, virtual education spheres, public/private mix, flexible working, networks and technologies. This shift places the former emphases into relief, by their absence, silence or radical re - specification in the construction of the Learning Society , so questions about the past can be asked which may not be present in the history of education. It is this history of education, as a chronicle, an interpretative field of study and as an ideological practice which has to be the focus of this proposal as well; an analysis of the 'Teaching Society' cannot be attempted without an exploration and a critique of the construction of the 20thC English history of education.

This project emerged out of a journey, in which intuitive moves were dissected through pluralistic seminars, experience and theoretical critiques. It resolved itself, in this form [of a research proposal], by developing an approach which is Janus - like. It is producing a bi-argument about the silences of the educational past and the necessity to create new instruments, within a material and cultural archaeology of education, to explore that past. In so doing, it uses the contrastive case of the future of education [learning] which then amasses vicarious issues better suited to theoretical insights derived from post structuralist and post modern theorizing, currently untainted by any involvement with history of education. The process of looking back is not privileged by a stable positioning and involves looking forward as well. Interrogating and accumulating, the project looks backward and forward simultaneously.

Without funding in the UK, there is no material existence for projects. Intellectual work becomes more and more divorced from material developments when it exists as an imagining of possibilities and not an engagement with sources.. This project has a choice. It may become a work of creative fantasy, digging ever deeper into its Buvard and Pecuchet existence, or it will struggle through with borrowed time, shady deals, meagre resources and luck. But it will always exist in this, its imagined form.