

Professor Richard Aldrich: An appreciation

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Professor Richard Aldrich (1937-2014) was one of the most outstanding historians of education of his generation. He had a particular connection with the Journal of Educational Administration and History, making several contributions to its pages early in his career, and serving on its editorial board from 2003, when it began to be published by Routledge initially under Roy Lowe's editorship, until shortly before his death. Two Festschriften to celebrate his work were produced after his retirement (Whitehead and O'Donoghue 2004; Crook and McCulloch 2007a). A number of obituaries have already been produced, including by his close colleagues Roy Lowe, Ruth Watts and Jeroen Dekker (Lowe 2015; Watts and Dekker 2015), and a memorial event was held on 6 February 2015 at the UCL Institute of Education (IOE), where he had been a staff member for thirty years. This further note seeks to provide an appreciation of his career and of his contribution to the history of education.

Richard Aldrich's educational career began with his schooling first at Deansfield Junior School, Eltham, where he successfully sat the eleven-plus examination one year early and proceeded in 1947 to the Roan School for Boys in Greenwich. He took an undergraduate BA Honours degree in History at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge from 1955 until 1958, where he won the Harvey History Prize and the Board Prize for History before graduating with an Upper Second. He then took a secondary history Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) degree at King's College, University of London (KCL), and was appointed in 1959 to a teaching post at Godalming County

School, Surrey. He stayed at Godalming for six years, teaching history at all levels together with some other subjects and serving as a housemaster. In 1965, he moved to Southlands College of Education, a Methodist college in Wimbledon for the education and training of teachers, where he was first lecturer and from 1967 senior lecturer in history. He taught there on General Certificate of Education Advanced level courses in history as well as on the PGCE and the increasingly important Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree, with a particular emphasis on the history of education (details on Aldrich's education and early career are from Crook and McCulloch 2007b, and from his curriculum vitae dated 1973 (Aldrich 1973)).

Pursuing his interests in the history of education, in 1970 Aldrich completed an MPhil thesis at KCL under the supervision of Professor A.C.F. ('Rudolph') Beales, on 'Education and the political parties, 1830-1870'. He then enrolled for a PhD, again with Beales at KCL, but Beales then died and Professor Kenneth Charlton took over his supervision from October 1972. At this point, Aldrich was presented with a significant and unexpected opportunity. Until then, KCL had been widely regarded as the main centre for the study of the history of education in the UK, with other centres including those at the universities of Birmingham, Leeds, Leicester and Sheffield. Although the IOE had promoted the separate disciplines of education such as philosophy, sociology and psychology since the directorship of Fred Clarke in the 1930s, it had depended on the resources of KCL to provide teaching staff in the history of education. Now, with student numbers increasing in the context of the London B.Ed. (a four-year honours degree) and the growth of the PGCE, postgraduate advanced studies and research degrees, the IOE finally took the step of advertising its own lectureship in the history of education. Aldrich applied for this position, and was appointed to it as from 1 September 1973. His PhD supervisor, now Kenneth Charlton,

supported his application, cautiously describing him as 'a sound scholar and a conscientious teacher', but also as 'most amiable in conversation' and probably a good colleague (Charlton n.d. 1973?).

Aldrich was well aware of the opportunity to develop and build up the subdiscipline of the history of education. As he observed in an article for the Times Higher Education Supplement the following year, although it had been largely overshadowed by sociology and philosophy, history of education was undergoing a 'quiet revolution' with the launch in 1967 of a History of Education Society, and the creation of a new journal, History of Education (1972), alongside the JEAH which had been introduced in 1968 at the University of Leeds. Aldrich regarded this fresh expansion and organisation in the history of education as being part of broader developments in historical studies in general, including advances in social history. At the same time, he argued, being mainly based in university departments and colleges of education the history of education should always be aware of its significance as one of the disciplines of education and of its contribution to interdisciplinary and topic-centred approaches, with a key role in helping to link up other disciplines (Aldrich 1974). Aldrich was thus in the vanguard of an expanding field of study. Moreover, in the following two decades, it was he who was chiefly responsible for the IOE supplanting KCL as the leading centre for the history of education in the UK. This position was consolidated after Charlton's retirement in 1983 and KCL's effective withdrawal from the area.

In his own area of research, Aldrich at this stage in his career focused on the politics of education in the nineteenth century. His early articles in the JEAH explored different aspects of this theme. Aldrich's first paper in this journal, published in 1973, investigated the significance of the grant of 1833 for the beginnings of state involvement in education (Aldrich 1973b). In this article, he drew attention to the

state's reluctance to become actively responsible for the education of the people, and linked this to the later problems and limitations of the national education system that eventually developed: 'If Radical pressures had brought some comprehensive plan for national education into existence in the 1830s many more children in 19th century England and Wales would have received education, and many of the divisions which still exist in our educational system today would have been removed.' (Aldrich 1973b, p. 5). This was a general thesis that was to be successfully developed by Andy Green in his major work Education and State Formation (Green 1989), and more recently highlighted by Stephen Ball's JEAH paper on the reluctant State (Ball 2012). It provided an alternative view from that of E.G. West, who preferred to dwell on the notion that a localised, market-based system of schooling would have been more effective than one organised from the centre (West 1970). It also differed significantly from the historical interpretations of the period being offered by Marxist historians led by Brian Simon and Richard Johnson who emphasised social class antagonisms, and in Johnson's case the then fashionable notion of social control (Simon 1960; Johnson 1970).

Aldrich's work characteristically engaged with political conflict and the role of individuals in educational reform, while being less concerned with social class. It offered a revisionist approach when compared with the traditional accounts of gradual liberal progress that had been familiar in texts in the history of education before the 1960s, but a less vivid and more circumspect and complex interpretation than that of Simon, who was the leading historian of education in the UK at this time (McCulloch 2010; McCulloch 2011, chapter 4). In fact, much of his research highlighted the importance of Conservative politicians such as Sir Robert Peel in the 1840s and Sir John Pakington in the 1860s in promoting a state education system (e.g. Aldrich 1980;

Aldrich 1981; Aldrich 1983). As he insisted, 'The image of a united, obstructionist Conservative party, fundamentally opposed to all state intervention in education, is not consistent with the evidence. Indeed, had it been given to Peel to become Prime Minister again, it might well have been he, and not his most loyal follower Gladstone, to whom it would have fallen to establish, through the medium of school boards, a genuinely national system of education.' (Aldrich 1981, p. 19).

By the 1980s, Aldrich was an established national figure in the history of education, but it was at this time that national education policies began to challenge the position of the field itself. Its role in teacher education courses began to come under attack, while new pressures also undermined its profile in Masters courses. In this moment of anxiety for the future of the subdiscipline, Aldrich, who had himself risen with the wave of expansion in the 1970s, came to the fore as a leading defender of a field in the throes of contraction. As a member of the executive committee, and later the president, of the History of Education Society, he assumed the role of a national standard-bearer on behalf of the field. The interest that he had always shown in current educational policies was translated into the formation of a new History of Education Society study group on historical perspectives on current educational issues, explaining the contemporary relevance of the history of education (Aldrich 1988). His later work did much to explain the antecedents and origins of contemporary developments such as the National Curriculum and the Department for Education and Employment (Aldrich 1992; Aldrich 2000). He became increasingly impatient with other historians of education who denied a close connection between the past and the present (Aldrich 2014a). He also cogently defended the rationale for a historical dimension to initial teacher training, and called for its reinstatement (Aldrich 1990).

A further aspect of Aldrich's work on behalf of the field as a whole was his increasingly international profile. This began with invited visits to different parts of the world, such as a summer school appointment at the University of Western Ontario in 1985, including a paper on 'Perspectives on British educational historiography' to a joint session of the Canadian History of Education Society and the Canadian Society for the Study of Education. In August 1989, he was invited for a study tour of Brazil. By the 1990s, he was assuming a prominent role in the International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE). In 1994 he became only the second UK-based president of ISCHE, after its founder Brian Simon, and he attended every annual meeting until his final illness.

Recognition from his own institution soon followed from these activities. In 1992 he was promoted to the position of reader, and in 1995 to a professorship. Initially given the general title of professor of education, in 2000 this was amended to professor of the history of education, Aldrich thus becoming the first to be awarded this title in the IOE's history just as he had been the first lecturer in this field. He retired from the IOE in 2003, but remained active. Indeed, his writing at this time was increasingly broad in scope while remaining scholarly and authoritative. In 2002, he produced a magisterial and definitive centenary history of the IOE, which received the notable honour, especially for a celebratory institutional volume, of being shortlisted for the History of Education Society book prize (Aldrich 2002a). Then there were two tightly edited works, the first surveying the development of several different aspects of education of education during the twentieth century and up to the present (Aldrich 2002b), the second exploring the relationship between the public and private spheres of education since the eighteenth century both nationally and internationally (Aldrich 2004b). A volume of his selected works for the Routledge world library of

educationalists book series confirmed his international standing and represented the broad range and diversity of his contributions to the field (Aldrich 2006).

There was still time for a late flowering of Aldrich's work, a set of publications that were more provocative and challenging than many of his earlier writings and that soon attracted attention worldwide. The first of these was a classic piece on ethics and the history of education that soon became a standard work on the topic (Aldrich 2003; see also Aldrich 2014b). The second was a paper on education for survival in historical perspective, a mature reflection on human struggles with the environment that was extensively downloaded in electronic form (Aldrich 2010). Still more startling were Aldrich's discussions of neuroscience and education which drew on a wide range of literature and addressed similarly large and profound themes (Aldrich 2013; Aldrich 2014c).

Richard Aldrich's educational career, then, was long and distinguished in equal measure. He was a major figure in the development of his field who responded creatively to both its opportunities and its tribulations. He never doubted that there were significant lessons to be drawn from the study of the history of education, and preached a healthy respect for historical evidence as a vital aspect of the study of education in general. Indeed, he took seriously all three of what he defined as the prime duties of the historian of education: the duty to the people of the past, the duty to our own generation, and the duty to search after the truth (Aldrich 2003).

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