Rethinking adult education and lifelong learning research: the utility of an analytics of governmentality and “assemblages”.

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Introduction
Lifelong learning has been taken up as a prominent policy discourse over the past decades in the adult education field, particularly in Europe. It has been researched from many perspectives (Jarvis, 2009). Some of this recent research (re)visiting lifelong learning and adult education has been inspired by Foucault’s work, particularly his later work on governmentality (Fejes and Nicoll, 2008). This paper contributes to this research and focuses on productive ways of utilising an analytics of governmentality perspective and assemblages in rethinking research on lifelong learning and adult education. I suggest that taking up the analytical concept of the assemblage (as suggested by Dean and Hindess, 1998), provides a way of more clearly exploring the linkages and relays between policies and practices at centres of calculation, authority and government with everyday practices. It is particularly useful in highlighting the shifts in ways of governing workers from social liberal (welfarist) to advanced liberal regimes (Miller and Rose, 2008). Further, an analytic of governmentality has been found useful for analysing “governing” in multiple sites away from the “high office”. It takes up by ‘low-status regions of applied knowledge such as social work and nursing’ (p.94) and practitioners for whom it provides intellectual tools that ‘enable them to make sense of the situations in which they found themselves: the ways of thinking and acting that they were obliged to enact and the cramped spaces and conflicting practices they inhabited’ (Rose et al., 2006, p.94).

This paper firstly outlines an analytics of governmentality, neoliberalism and advanced liberalism and then briefly illustrates the use of assemblages within an analytics of governmentality to my research on learning at work and the “worker as learner” – a lifelong learner in Australia, by foregrounding the linkages between the shifts in regimes for governing workers from social liberal to advanced liberal regimes, through industry, industrial relations and vocational education and training reform programmes.

Analytics of governmentality
The analytical perspective used in my work, based on Foucault’s notion of governmentality is known in the “governmentality” literature (Rose et al., 2006) as an analytics of government, or more narrowly and specifically focused, an analytics of governmentality, a different perspective on questions of power, authority and subjectivity for contemporary political rule in advanced liberal democracies. This perspective is understood nominalistically: not as a concept or a theory but a
perspective ‘that brings into view a heterogeneous field of more or less calculated attempts to shape the conduct of persons, populations and things towards desired ends’ (Du Gay, 2000, p.168). As Dean (2010) argues, an ‘analytics is a type of study concerned with an analysis of the specific conditions under which particular entities emerge, exist and change … An analytics of government examines the conditions under which regimes of practices come into being, are maintained and are transformed’ (Dean, 2010, pp. 30-31, emphasis in original). It questions our taken-for-granted or common sense ways of thinking and doing things that make them natural or essential to popular conduct in life and thus detached from their historical circumstances.

As Rose (1999) succinctly asserts, it is not to start with the more obvious questions of the social sciences – ‘what happened or why? It is to start by asking what authorities of various sorts wanted to happen, in relation to problems defined how, in pursuit of what objectives, through what strategies and techniques’ (p.20). It seeks to ‘interrogate the problems and problematisations through which ‘being’ has been shaped in a thinkable and manageable form, the domains and sites where these problems were formed, the techniques and devices invented, the modes of authority and subjectification engendered and the telos of these ambitions and strategies’ (Du Gay, 2000, p.168, emphasis in the original).

Like Marx, there is no general theory of government or the state prescribed in Foucault’s work that can be just taken and systematically applied to other studies (Rose et al., 2006). Thus, this analytics of governmetalitity perspective implies ‘framing investigations [not in] terms of state or politics, … [but] more productive[ly] to investigate the formation and transformation of theories, proposals, strategies and technologies for the ‘conduct of conduct’ ‘(Rose, 1999, p.3). It is concerned with government, not as the ‘State’ as in political theory, but rather refers to ‘all endeavours to shape, guide, direct the conduct of others, whether these be … the members of a household, the employees of a boss, the children of a family or the inhabitants of a territory [and] embraces the ways to govern ourselves’ (Rose, 1999, p.3). It recognises, that ‘government at a distance’ has become a key mode of operation of liberal modes of government – operating through the dynamics of translation and particular technologies of government which link ‘experts in distant sites to the centres of calculation, non-political modes of authority distanced spatially’ (Rose, 1999, p.50).

The productive benefit of an analytics of governmentality perspective for research in lifelong learning lies also in its ability to answer the challenge of finding, ‘a language of analysis which is no longer dependent on the image of the state and on fixed separation of private and public spheres, which can accommodate itself to the inherent multiplicity (of programmes, agents, authorities, objectives) of governing’ (Dean, 1999, p.72). Further, one of the strengths of an analytics of governmentality as a perspective is the way it has made visible the liberal rationalities of government – classical, social liberal/welfarist and neo-liberalisms. Using this perspective, writers on governmentality, following Foucault, have provided insightful analyses of the shifts at play in the West over the past century, tracing the effects and reinventions of liberal government; the formation of what Rose (1999) calls the ‘social’ and the emergence of neo-liberalisms and advanced liberalism in many OECD nations. Following Rose (1993) and Dean (2010), I distinguish between neo-liberalism as a
dominant rationality and the society of liberal democracies that have gone beyond 'the social', using the term 'advanced liberal' or advanced liberalism to describe the latter.

**Assemblages**

Another key analytical concept that I suggest is useful for researching lifelong learning is the assemblage. This term is used by writers on governmentality (Dean, 2010, Miller and Rose, 2008) based on the later work of Foucault (1991) and translated as an analytical concept from the writings of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Assemblages 'link material content (passions, actions, bodies) and enunciations (laws, plans, statements) not in linear fashion but rhizomatically' (Deleuze and Guattarai, 1987, 85-91 in Li, 2007, p. 265). Dean and Hindess (1998) use the term assemblages in clarifying their view of government as,

inventive, strategic, technical and artful sets of 'assemblages' fashioned from diverse elements, put together in novel and specific ways and rationalised in relation to specific governmental objectives and goals. These assemblages comprise a whole host of mundane and humble practices, techniques, and forms of practical knowledge which are often overlooked in analyses that concentrate on either political institutions or political thought (p.8).

Dean and Hindess (1998) in examining five key domains provide a useful framing for an analytics of assemblages. I have used this framing in my research as a means of analysing the disparate domains that 'made up' the advanced liberal regimes governing paid1 workers in Australia in the late twentieth century and the technologies and techniques of training used in organisations. A key focus was the assembling of a new subjectivity – worker as learner - the lifelong learner.

Dean and Hindess (1998) suggest that in investigating these complex 'assemblages of government' a focus is on five inter-related domains: forms of problematisations; techniques and technologies; modes of reasoning; the shaping of identities and agencies and the ethos of these governmental practices. Further, different styles of problematisations linked with a particular ethos of governmental practices, such as neo-liberalism, will see different situations as problematic (Reich, 2002, Reich, 2008). Particular modes of reasoning make these problems thinkable and calculable in a particular (con)text. These modes of reasoning may be knowledgeable discourses, such as the systems of thinking linked to academic disciplines like economics, psychology and accounting or the expertise and know-how of specialists – educators, trainers, managers, workplace assessors, mentors and coaches. But it is through the techniques and technologies of government, such as forms of notation, the types of training, the ways of collecting information, the quantitative and

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1 I am using the term worker to mean paid worker throughout the text. This is to recognise these limits, in acknowledgement of the feminist debates on work, and the discussion in work-learning research on the boundaries of work and activity Fenwick, T. (2006) Tidying the territory: Questioning terms and purposes in work-learning research. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 18, 265-278.
qualitative calculations (Dean, 1999) that enable objectives and plans to be realised in partial and partisan ways.

Technologies is a key concept here, especially as an important element aligned with programmes and their rationalities. Technologies, ‘in the sense of complex heterogeneous relations amongst disparate elements, stabilized in particular ways’ (Barry et al., 1996) help us to connect exercises of power at the molecular level, such as the school, with the strategies to program power at a molar level, such as government policy papers and legislation (Barry et al., 1996).

There are some broad types of technologies which deploy the agency and capacities of individuals and populations. These include the technology of the contract, so popular in education and training in the form of learning contracts and learning plans; the technologies of citizenship, with the multiple techniques of self-esteem and empowerment, and the technologies to evaluate and monitor performance – the technologies of performance (Dean and Hindess, 1998). The other domain is concerned with the ways in which agencies and authorities attempt to shape and direct the conduct of individuals and the shaping of the identities of those whose conduct is to be governed, or what Du Gay (1996) suggests, the ways ‘they actively “make up” people’ (p.54).

**Utilising an analytics of governmentality and Dean & Hindess’ approach to assemblages in lifelong learning and adult education research**

An analytics of governmentality perspective and assemblages in my research is used to investigate the emergence of the worker as learner in the reform programmes in Australia from the mid-80s. In taking up the analytical concept of the assemblage, it provides a way of more clearly exploring each of the domains of an analytics of governmentality, highlighting the linkages and relays between them and linking policies, practices at centres of calculation, authority and government with everyday practices. These domains, as described by Dean and Hindess (1998, pp.95-96) are: problematisations (of the skilled worker in the discourses of national competitiveness); ethos of government (neo-liberal and neo-social liberal); modes of reasoning (human resource management and development; new public management and human capital economic rationality); technologies and techniques (technologies of accounting and auditing; contracts and the technologies of training, particularly the learning organisation and competency standards); and the formation and shaping of identities (the worker as learner). It uses a research site (training and development practices in child protection agencies in NSW) in the late 1990s – a time of significant crises; inquiries; and a Royal Commission to investigate the technologies of training.

The linkages and relays foregrounded in discussion of the assemblages, is also significant for rethinking policy studies beyond policy/practice dichotomies. For example, in relation to vocational education and training policy reforms, this perspective highlights the linkages between national government policies, governmental programmes, political rationality, multiple sites of translation, technologies of training and expertise, and the subjectivity of workers, and enables a rich analysis of the specific reforms in this place and time. Similarly in adult
education policy in Australia there have been shifts to a dominance of economic rationalities, measurement of vocational outputs etc.

There is not room in this short paper to detail the research in relation to each of the domains (see Reich, 2002, Reich, 2005, Reich, 2008). Rather I will highlight key aspects of each domain and its utility in researching lifelong learning. Although as a textual device I will discuss each domain separately, its strengths lies in the linkages and relays between them and concurrency.

Ethos of government – neo-liberal and neo-social liberal mentalities
The analytics of assemblages encouraged the focus on particular ethos of government - neo-liberal and neo-social liberal mentalities (Girdwood, 2007) which became linked to the particular “technologies of training” such as the learning organisation; competency standards in this place and time. It also highlights the ways in which neo-liberal mentalities were assembled with the reform programmes. I suggest an alternative to understanding neo-liberalism, (or economic rationalism as it is more commonly called in Australia), as an ideology or political philosophy as was most common in the literature on reforms in Australia. Rather, I argue for it being thought of as a discursively forceful and dominating governmental rationality. This opens new spaces for making visible the political rationality underpinning technologies of power in modern government (Lemke, 2001) with education being made an economic issue and governmental problem. Thus it enables an analysis which de/attaches the ethos of government (eg. neo-liberalism) from a particular technology of power. In this way I would contend (about the learning organisation, Reich 2002) that lifelong learning is not essentially a neo-liberal technology but is rather associated and accommodated with that ethos of governing at a particular time and space, this technology enabling the ethos to be translated to distant sites.

Modes of reasoning - human resource management and development; new public management and human capital economic rationality
The analysis of the key modes of reasoning is also significant in foregrounding the ways modes of reasoning such as human resources management; human capital economic reasoning and new public management and the associated technologies and techniques, such as accounting and auditing and development of markets, assemble advanced liberal regimes of governing workers and new subjectivities, such as the worker as learner. My interest here is not in disciplinary knowledge as purely theoretical but more as a mentality of governing, linked to technologies and techniques of governing. What are the techniques that are assembled to translate these knowledges into the practical and technical? To use Hindess’ example – ‘Keynesian economic management was made possible by the superimposition of an abstract theory of the national economy as a functional system upon a technology of national economic accounting’ (Dean and Hindess, 1998, p.10). The strength of the analytics of assemblages is foregrounding the linkages of, for example, the knowledgeable discourses and “theories” with the technologies and techniques to make them practical. It provides a productive approach to “interdisciplinarity”.

Technologies and techniques - the technologies of training, particularly the learning organisation and competency standards and technologies of accounting and auditing; contracts.
The focus on technologies of training, such as the learning organisation and competency standards, helps us to understand the "practical" ways that advanced liberal vocational education and training and public service reform programmes are translated to multiple sites. It is through the translation of these technologies and associated techniques the ethos of government, eg neo-liberalism; the modes of reasoning; lifelong learning and the problematisations are translated and assembled with new subjectivities in local sites. Similarly, other technologies and techniques are assembled with modes of reasoning in advanced liberal ways in Australian sites and contexts such as, accounting and auditing and the development of vocational education and training related quasi-markets.

**Problematisation of the skilled worker**

Two other domains of the assemblage for governing workers as learners are problematisation and forming and shaping new identities and subjectivities. As I argued in the 2008 publication (Reich, 2008), the complex assemblages for governing workers in Australia inhabiting workspaces and places, were dismantled and (re)assembled in advanced liberal ways largely through government reform programmes in industry, industrial relations and vocational education and training, with the skilled worker problematised and (re) assembled as the ‘worker as learner’. In my research, a focus on the learning organisation as a technology of training or learning was clarified by the linkages to the problematisations of the skilled worker in the discourses of national competitiveness.

**Formation of identities – the worker as learner**

This perspective provides different insights into how new subjectivities are assembled, and how workers as learners are governed at a distance. It is also significant in rethinking the child protection “professional worker” as a worker as learner linked to the technologies of the learning organisation and a different way of thinking about the possibilities of resistance in the counter-authoritative discourses and social and institutional practices of professions. Government in this view can be seen as a risky and calculated process of striving towards an “ideal”. Government is never absolute and intended programmatic successes can at best be understood as partial, containing elements of failure, opening up spaces for resistance.

**Concluding thoughts: Implications of researching lifelong learning today**

The analytics of governmentality perspective and assemblages I have used can assist us to open up new ways of analysing the complex, inventive and contemporary forms of liberal government, including lifelong learning. As the global economic crisis reverberates around the globe, different state responses have been proposed to the dominance of neo-liberal mentalities and markets of the past decades. In Australia, the ‘new’ Labor government, had promises of national visions, dealing with skills shortages, and areas traditionally seen as welfarist social policy – education, housing, health. However, I suspect that the reforms and shifts to neo-liberal mentalities of government and advanced liberal regimes of governing Australia which have been made practical in the social and institutional practices of governing are not likely to be completely reversed and a social liberal welfarist regime reassembled, despite the current global economic crisis and the recent denouncement by the Prime Minster of “neo-liberal policies” (Rudd, 2009). Many of the programmes have been undertaken by contractors; league tables imposed in school education etc. The recent events in UK and other European countries indicate
that the mantra of the balanced budget and fiscal cutbacks that accompany it are back.

Studies in governmentality by describing the historical conditions that we take for granted,

   enhance the contestability of regimes of authority that seek to govern us in the name of our own good … and share with Marxism and critical theory a profound unease about the values that pervade our times. … If they have a political function, it is to strengthen the resources available to those who, because of their constitution as subjects of government, have the right to contest the practices that govern them in the name of their freedom (Rose, 1999, p.60).

This quote highlights the significance and utility of this perspective in that it opens spaces to unsettle and challenge what has been taken for granted often by being silent and marginalised and to see new possibilities and spaces for contestation.

References


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