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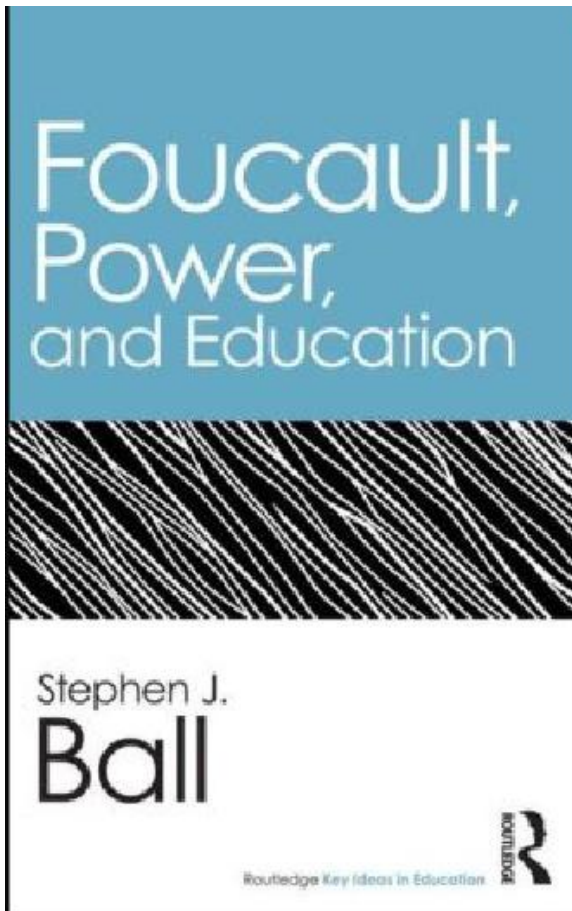
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Finding One's Self Through Foucault: An Essay Review

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Stephen Ball has been thinking with and writing about Foucault for over twenty years. Beginning with *Foucault and Education* in 1990, Ball was one of the first to bring Foucault to education in edited collections that brought an international cast together to address topics across education policy. This most recent Foucault book is a departure from those earlier circlings in Ball's effort to *enact* Foucault in a policy genealogy of UK schooling. In doing so, Ball produces an accessible book in Routledge's Key Ideas in Education Series that does not so much cover new ground for him as demonstrate how to inhabit a Foucauldian analytic from the inside.

As an established scholar and academic on education processes, institutions, and policies, Ball now finds himself in a state of discomfort, unsettled with the idea of having surrounded himself with historically established clichés, with nothing new to explore or challenge. Spending years in the process of becoming a “*something...a wise fool*” (p. 1, author's emphasis), Ball realizes that he has become confined and restricted, without a definite identity, falling into routinized codes of inquiry. Re-discovering Foucault at this particular crossroads has led Ball to reaffirm the *practice of self* as truth-telling by “seeking...a space beyond traditional disciplinary or theoretical positions. . . subject[ing] those positions to analysis and critique. . . set[ting] himself staunchly against the notion of a universal or self-evident humanity” (p. 3). By getting reacquainted with Foucault, Ball takes up Foucault's challenge “to become someone else that [he was] not in the beginning” (p. 10).

Ball is acutely aware of Foucault's omnipresence in the print media, knows full well that yet another book espousing Foucault's contributions is entirely unnecessary; many find studying Foucault to be “too big, too deep, and too hard” (p. 22). Yet rather than offering a reconstruction of Foucault, Ball offers an intimate account of personal conversations with Foucault's ideas, using these to teach himself a new place in scholarship, to “confront not the ways in which I am determined but rather the ways in which I might be revocable” (p. 3). Ball intends to do this while “finding ways to work in the tensions between

technologies of competence and technologies of the self” (Ibid.). Studying Foucault has set him free to reassess his subject position, as Ball acknowledges that Foucault “has unsettled my sense of the claims I might make about my work, its purposes, and its role in the enterprise of modernist human science” (Ibid.). Ball understands that “the challenge is not to agree with Foucault but to be disconcerted by him, to be made to think in new spaces and to consider new possibilities for



thought” (pp. 4-5). After all, **Foucault** has reminded Ball that the limits of knowledge are also the possibilities of knowing.

In the first chapter then, Ball shares the many ways that Foucault’s methodologies have helped him *un-clutter* his mind. Through his own work on performativity, especially as applied to changing meanings within the realm of education practice, Ball finds that Foucault’s concept of *bio-power*

and the genealogical hybrid *power/knowledge* are particularly useful in discerning power embedded in mundane “minutiae of everyday life” (p. 6). Ball is particularly inspired by Foucault’s insistence that to better comprehend power relations, “the *subject* needs to be inserted between power/knowledge” (p. 15, author’s emphasis). As an academic, **Ball** appreciates Foucault’s stance on the *author function*, in “writing as a practice of freedom” (p. 7), as



a way to self-shape, problematizing and working “between abutments and anticipatory strings and dots” (p. 17), being completely aware of *epistemes* and what it means to contribute to a discourse.

In chapter 2, Ball seeks to complete “a set of ‘critical’ and ‘effective’ histories of education policy...” (p. 38), with a focus on genealogies that are inspired by Foucault’s method, rather than on Foucault himself.

These genealogies have “a primary focus on practices rather than laws, on discourses rather than rhetorics, on techniques and procedures rather than structures” (p. 38). Ball’s goal is reflexive in nature—to “be working on myself, trying to re-position or re-write myself in relation to what sort of practice education policy analysis might be” (p. 39). He engages this task by writing a history of *classification* and a history of *blood* in education policy.

Ball’s historical context is the late 19th and early 20th century British school system which he describes as “ramshackle, ugly and smelly” (p. 39). State education emerged in the 19th century to complete the school system that was partially built by the church and charities. Despite their limitations, schools had a very specific role to play. Teachers were positioned as “modern” and “moral” guides to stop the spread of poverty and immorality among the masses (p. 41). Schools were part of the government’s work to establish a “general network of power” which included “orphanages, hospitals, reformatories, prisons, ‘homes’ and asylums” (Ibid.). They sought to address the “problems of population” (p. 53) in order to avoid the immorality, diseases and chaos of the lower classes. Much like factories, schools were modeled on systems of comparison and evaluation and quickly established classification practices to differentiate “‘bright’ boys and their ‘failing’ counterparts” (p. 42).

Next, he moves into a history of classification. Ball identifies two techniques of power—discipline and regulation.

Disciplinary power focuses on the individual and breaks down “places, time, movements, actions and operations... into their components such that they can be seen...and modified” (p. 46), while “regulatory power . . . is concerned with the life of the body of the species, and is ‘globalising’ rather than individualizing” (p. 45). Education was key to discipline because it broke learners down into identifiable components that could be seen, manipulated and modified.

Examinations allowed schools to capture human characteristics in numbers, record them and make them visible. Normalization was another key component of discipline, regulation and the ability to classify individuals. Ball highlights the importance of the norm, claiming that it actually created the individual learner who “emerged as a subject of pedagogy in relation to the norm” (p. 52).

Ball then turns to the history of blood which places focus on the urban population, specifically, the “‘excluded’, the educational ‘other’” (p. 55). In the 19th century the government focused on the “urban” problems of health, education and sanitation in an attempt to control moral decay in the population. It was widely believed that social problems spread through the parents and that schools and other institutions were the answer to controlling the flow of these problems. This signaled a shift in the approach of government from “fixing and demarcating territory” to “allowing circulations to take place...controlling them, sifting the good and bad, ensuring that things are always in movement...” (p. 57). The government also started to worry about

creating a fit population. This meant that the government would attempt to regulate and marginalize *abnormalities* in the population. Key to identifying abnormalities was the notion of *naturalness* which appeared in the way that populations were regulated, self-interested, and statistically knowable. This led to a *racism* that classified knowable individuals within the population as normal or abnormal and, more starkly, allowed for the emergence of eugenics and, quoting Foucault, “the break between what must live and what must die” (p. 63) to secure the health of the population.

Eugenics and statistics made measurement of phenomena in groups possible. Moreover, through the employment of a norm, it became possible to statistically classify the normal and the abnormal in education, especially through the means of assessment and the *psy-sciences*. These created new categories of knowability in individuals and new ways to regulate populations. Classification, blood, abnormality, and the *psy-sciences*, among other things, Ball claims, led to an education that divided and excluded individuals and was even “*used to define the legal limit to humanity*” (p. 80, emphasis in the original).

In chapter 3, Ball moves the history begun in chapter 2 into the present, weaving together classification and exclusion, discipline and regulation. In doing so, he firmly rearticulates his goal of presenting a Foucauldian genealogy that rejects linear narratives of causality in favor of events coming together in tangles. Taking up Foucault’s frame of the exile and the leper in

Discipline and Punish, Ball situates this genealogy within the context of education policy but also “outside, from the point of view of obscure and obscured individuals” (p. 83). By examining the history of policy through the eyes of those excluded and classified by it, he seeks “not to make sense of our history in the present but to make it unacceptable” (p. 87). He then asks how these interwoven factors create new educational subjects and make current education issues “thinkable.”

With a reflexive detour, Ball begins rewriting this history by acknowledging that he is also rewriting himself and with this Foucauldian move makes himself deeply vulnerable to the “‘cutting’ and ‘dissociating’” of genealogy (p. 87). After situating and implicating himself as a sociologist of education, Ball then shifts his focus from reflection on method to the working through of the genealogy itself, tracing the birth of his field and education policy in the eugenics movement of the 1930s. Here, as socialization through schools emerged as the policy solution to the uneven reproduction of different social classes, “blood is rearticulated as culture” (p. 92). With this shift from the biological, genetic regulation, culture and the family became “a new grid of intelligibility within which educational success and failure could be located” (p. 91). Thus, Ball argues, “within contemporary education, educational research and social policy...morality and ‘intelligence’ have become tightly ‘entangled’ in relation to social class, race and disability” (p. 97).

From this reworking of the history of education policy, Ball then steps back to examine how this grid of intelligibility undergirds four current issues in education. He turns first to the organization and instruction of learners, who are “laid out Linnaeus-like, on their tables in their biological natural order” (p. 101) according to notions of fixed and innate ability. Then, he explores the current “regime of numbers” (p. 103) that emphasizes standards and competition and results in close monitoring and assessments of performance. Next, Ball considers the connection that is drawn between middle class families and normality. Embodied in policy such as parent choice, this rearticulation of blood as culture “reinstates patterns of differential access to opportunity” (p. 112), creating boundaries that limit and exclude others. Finally, Ball explores the unstable and changing boundaries between normal and abnormal in special education, examining how “the overburdened ‘defective child’ of the nineteenth century is reproduced and continuously refined in twenty-first century education policy” (p. 115). Through these particular cases, Ball shows the ways in which “normalisation and exclusion...are deeply embedded in the everyday practices of contemporary, mainstream schooling...and are constantly reiterated and reworked in policy and legislation” (p. 115).

In tracing this history, Ball arrives at a picture of education as abjection—a division and classification that casts away some educational bodies as base, defective, or otherwise outside the norm. We see the social and human sciences, including Ball’s

own field of sociology, uncomfortably implicated in the creation of particular educational subjects according to division and difference. By drawing out this history of education policy and practice, Ball tries “to create a space within which it might be possible to begin to think differently about schooling” (p. 118).

With classic Foucauldian methodology, Ball ends where it all began for him with the uncomfortable cracks in his very own practice, the things that for him seemed broken in his own world as a scholar. This last chapter of Ball’s book specifically addresses the interrelationality of subjectivity, neoliberalism and ethics. In the attempt to unpack his own historical present, he examines how “we are subjects in relation to new practices of governmentality and the ways in which we might struggle to escape or engage those practices” (p. 120).

Ball’s use of Foucault’s later work is his guiding lens to examine the current educational climate. Specifically he is concerned with how the pervasive governmentalities of neoliberalism work to shape educational consciousness and sensibilities, with how these governmentalities have molded an altered form of education practitioner. “At its most visceral and intimate neo-liberalism involves the transformation of social relations and practices into calculabilities and exchanges” (p. 132). Inside neoliberalism the ethos of the educational worker is commodification. Ball maintains that the paradox of neoliberalism is that it portrays a hands-off approach to governing and yet has become

the water in which we swim. Neoliberalism has seeped into our pores, inciting us to take on certain forms of self-government that focus on our individual *agility*, our fitness; a certain self-surveillance has become part of the technology of our living.

Critical to Ball's work as he situates subjectivity soaked in neoliberalism is the ontological framework of Maurizio Lazzarato. Lazzarato's work, according to Ball, posits five states of being which form the social landscape of neoliberalism: "individualization, inequality, insecurity, depoliticization and financialization" (p. 133). These interrelated and interdependent ontologies of neoliberalism find their most poignant coercive power in what Ball calls the "key mechanism" of neoliberalism: *Performativity* (p. 137, emphasis in original).

Ball explicates the extent to which neoliberalism's tool of performativity has rewritten the job description in the neoliberal university. With poetic characterization Ball crafts a litany of neoliberal subjectivity. The subject under the regime of performativity is made "calculable rather than memorable" (p. 136), "malleable rather than committed, flexible rather than principled... [p]roductive rather than truthful" (p. 139). "[E]xperience is nothing, productivity is everything" (p. 136). "[C]omparisons and judgments, and self-management" (p.137) have made us "transparent but empty, unrecognisable to ourselves. . . [S]ocial relations are replaced by informational structures. . . [We are made] responsible for our performance and

for the performance of others" (p. 138). Neoliberal subjectivities are "making the individual into an enterprise" (p. 141).

From the death of man in *The Order of Things* to the return of the subject via practices of the self in the later work, Foucault gives Ball permission to place care of the self at the center of ethical practice. In the matrix between discursive practices, power relations, and an ethics of the self, we can find "ways out" (p. 143). "The processes of resistance and liberation are in part, in the modern context, processes of knowing and caring for the self" (p. 151). Foucauldian genealogy helps Ball unpack the political mechanisms of his present circumstance in a way that reveals the historical contingency of the self. Understanding the self as something that is produced as opposed to something that is essential can help us recognize that we can be otherwise. By revealing how we are governed, we can explore ways of writing ourselves differently.

Themes that cut across the book include the academic sort of discomfort that accompanies any (re)turn to Foucault and the practices that develop in terms of a reflexivity of the self that asks hard questions about one's disciplinary home and taken-for-granted assumptions. Doing a genealogy of UK schooling while documenting the methodology involved, Ball interweaves all of this with a reflexive layering of his own discomforts as an academic in the neoliberal era. The intimacy of Ball's engagement with Foucault becomes a performance of uncluttering his

mind as he puts to work the Foucauldian toolbox. Networks of power, normalization, biopower, power/knowledge: all are used to make sense of such topics as neoliberal subjectivity and the question for which Foucault has been much taken to account for of a way out.

So why write another book on Foucault? Ball offers readers a “Foucauldian workbook” (p. 25), “tools from Foucault’s toolbox” (p. 35) as “starting points” (p. 25) to open lines of inquiry, especially as he examines relations between Foucault’s concepts and methods (histories and genealogies) and larger questions within education and education policy, stepping away from traditional social science. Methodologically, genealogy comes alive as a practical application where it becomes thinkable and visible. You see the limits and the problems that come with it. As Ball situates himself, our own positions in the neoliberal university become clearer. They help the reader see how history is so much an entangled web. In this, Ball not only practices reflexivity, but incites it in his readers.

To conclude, as Ball says at the end of chapter 3, “There’s a lot to give up” when we take Foucault seriously. We have experienced this ourselves as we wrote this review. In a very Foucauldian way, we are left unsettled and discomfited just as Ball was in his (re)engagement with Foucault. What we experienced keenly was that our scholarly attachments to certain modes of thinking about time, materiality and ethics needed to shift if we are not to be captured

by the neoliberal imaginary. It is as if we have to perform ourselves as the future life of difference in order to elude that containment. Ball’s book, like Foucault’s work, is a toolbox in that endeavor.

About the Reviewers

This collaborative review grows out of a course, Foucault, Qualitative Research and Education Policy, taught by Patti Lather, Professor in the Department of Educational Studies at Ohio State University. Dr. Lather’s work examines various (post)critical, feminist, and poststructural theories in the contexts of education policy and feminist and qualitative methodologies.

Priya Rama is a doctoral student in the Department of Arts Administration, Education and Policy at Ohio State University. Her research interests include narrative inquiry through an auto-/ethnographic lens, exploration of identity as impacting knowledge acquisition and qualitative research that focuses on written expression, reflexivity, and multicultural perspectives.

Jeremy Luke is pursuing an M.A. in Philosophy of Education at Ohio State University. His research focuses on how social networks and institutional discourses influence the search process of parents who are looking for a charter school for their child.

Megan Sanders is a doctoral student in Educational Psychology and Philosophy at Ohio State University and is interested in the interplay between identity and motivation.

Jeffery Dunn is a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Studies at Ohio State University. His primary area of interest is the philosophical and cultural foundations of education.

postcolonial contexts and the interface between art curriculum and contemporary art practice and discourse.

Bee Kim Koh is a doctoral student in Arts Administration, Education and Policy at Ohio State University. Her research interests include decolonization of curriculum in

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