

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF

Disability Studies

Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association · Association Canadienne des Études sur l'Incapacité

Canadian Journal of Disability Studies

**Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association
Association Canadienne des Études sur l'Incapacité**

Hosted by The University of Waterloo

www.cjds.uwaterloo.ca

cjdseditor@uwaterloo.ca

**This document has been made accessible and PDF/UA compliant by Accessibil-IT Inc.
For more information go to
<http://www.accessibilit.com>**



Ball, S.J. (2013). *Foucault, Power and Education*. New York, NY: Routledge. ISBN 978-0415895378.

Reviewed by Mark Castrodale
Doctoral Candidate, University of Western Ontario
mcastrod@uwo.ca

In *Foucault, Power and Education*, Ball engages in the *practice of self* to re-examine his own understandings and uses of Foucault. In discussing Foucauldian theory, analytic concepts, and related methods of inquiry, the author demonstrates their usefulness in launching critiques of educational processes, institutions, and policies. He considers how Foucault has shaped his thinking about the possibilities and limits of knowing. This book is a valuable resource for students, course instructors, and researchers in the fields of Disability Studies in Education (DSE), education policy, and Critical Disability Studies (CDS), among others. Ball asserts the need for critical, self-reflexive scholarship and suggests avenues of thought for undertaking this endeavour.

Chapter Outline

In the first chapter, Ball begins by admitting that drawing on Foucault is challenging, yet it can be liberating, productive, and generative as it opens new possibilities for thought and action: “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” (4-5). He articulates how Foucault’s work presents analytic tools for revealing structures of power and opens possibilities for thought and freedom, where freedom represents a site of ongoing struggle. For Ball, Foucault is particularly useful in comprehending power as productive where power “flows through architecture, organizational arrangements, professional expertise and knowledge” to shape bodies and conduct, individualize, and produce certain types of subjects (6-7). In contrast with how Fou-

cault's work has been taken up in the field of education in terms of discipline, docility, subjectiv-ication, normalization, and repression, Ball asserts that inserting the *subject* "between power/knowledge" allows for a deeper comprehension of how power produces particular realities. In this way, individual subjects have agency and freedom to resist being constituted in particular ways and may constitute themselves.

Ball discusses how the human sciences and particular knowledges have led to the profes-sionalization of care, where groups or institutions "speak *knowledgely about* "others", subaltern groups, who are concomitantly rendered silent" (15). According to the author, "discourse is re-lated directly to power, to regimes of truth and grids of specification—the dividing, contrasting, classifying, and relating together of objects of discourse" (23-24). He asserts the importance of not ignoring epistemes in order to uncover what is spoken and from which speaking positions.

In Chapter 2, the author connects education to disciplinary regimes including normalizing and dividing practices. These practices involve the division of normal and abnormal; the ranking of knowledges; record keeping and organization of tables, rhythms, repetitions, and cycles; the testing and calculating of aptitudes; comparisons of human abilities, classifications, and grouping by performance, measurements, and examinations; and the moving and allocating of bodies in spaces. The author links some of the ways learners are individualized and pathologized by hu-man sciences, in particular educational psychology and special education, which create and legit-imate "new sites of truth" (74). Schools express humanity, and the limits of humanity. The book deal with pedagogy as tied to furthering state objectives, and that which is often targeted at creat-ing learners in relation to the norm. Educational systems, structures, organizations, and tech-niques shape particular subjects as part of a grid of power, employed by states as an apparatus to train and position teachers, learners, and families. Discourses structure ways of knowing, what

can be said and thought. As such, official knowledges or truths about intelligence or cognitive development shape how particular subjects are constituted.

According to the text, education and related policies are linked to population management, government, and the elimination/exclusion of “inferior, degenerate, abnormal” (63). This grounding is related to the Foucauldian construct of *racism*, referring to “the “scientific” identification of genetic groups or classes or categories, that...establish divisions within the species, in relation to the norm, which then become the focus of scientific, political, ethical practices—subject to regulation” (62). The aim to foster fit populations is closely tied to eugenics and “the break between what must live and what must die” (63). Ball links this concept to racism in the Foucauldian sense to technologies targeted at creating knowable, measurable, healthy, regulated populations. He discusses *new racism* and relates this concept to exclusionary educational practices.

In Chapter 3, the author demonstrates the usefulness of genealogy in the context of education policy as a way to examine the *history of the present* by emphasizing the importance of the voices and perspectives of the excluded and marginalized. Standards, assessments, monitoring, and performance become linked to notions of ability and the constitution of particular sorts of subjects who are divided and marked by difference. Ball relates this to special education where differences between normal and abnormal learners are tied to how normalization and exclusion are embedded in educational policies and regimes of practices through individualizing discourses.

In the final chapter, Ball discusses agency and resistance, ethics, and neoliberalism. He questions the role of academics in contemporary times and reflects on his own writing as it is shaped by neoliberalism in a landscape of “individualization, inequality, insecurity, depoliticisa-

tion and financialization” (133). The author situates his own work as positioned in the neoliberal university and enabled and constrained by polemics of performativity, productivity, self-surveillance, and competition. Lastly, the author discusses the nature and function of academic research and writing, and the role of education researchers as positioned subjects working such a culture.

Relevance

A number of key concepts emerge as salient for researchers, policy analysts, and scholars engaging in the fields of Critical Disability Studies (CDS) and Disability Studies in Education (DSE). Ball problematizes the dominance of psy-sciences in constituting disabled subjects and ways of thinking about disability in educational systems and institutions. According to the author:

The psy-sciences as a discursive formation produced and continue to produce new categories and systems of classification which are then inscribed into the everyday practices of institutional life and institutional orderings in terms of concepts like “intelligence”, “ability”, “hyperactivity”, “normal development”, “behavioural difficulties”, etc. (76).

As such, this book facilitates for a deeper examination of the norms, attitudes, and classificatory systems of thought on ability and attributes of individuals in educational settings. This book opens possibilities to reflect on fields of knowledge such as psychology and traditional special education in relation to expertise and regimes of professional practices as sites of truth, classification, and representation of disabled subjects.

Ball demonstrates how Foucault’s work may be useful in unsettling assumptions, norms, and modes of thought and practice in educational settings and systems: “School systems, with few exceptions are rooted in a history of classifications and differentiations, in particular those

that are articulated by performance, which is taken to be an indicator of something deeper—ability” (51). He discusses the ways in which eugenics is embedded in education thought and policy, raises critical questions about what counts as truth and knowledge in educational systems, and promotes the inclusion of subjugated knowledges of excluded and marginalized persons. Importantly, the author explores subjectification and the making of subjects and relates care of self as a practice of self-constitution. Considering subjectification opens new possibilities for considering how disabled subjects might engage in technologies of self to shape who people are and might be. Ball highlights how education is implicated, involved, and invested in processes and procedures establishing the limits of humanity. As such, the author demonstrates how social actors such as teachers are employed in the apparatus of state governance supporting the making of a fit, healthy, secure, and regulated society.

Ball engages in reflexive practice by detailing his own use and understanding of Foucault and how this relates to practice of self as truth telling. He earnestly reflects:

Reading Foucault has made me question what I do as a scholar and social critic, and ethically who I am and what I might become...He makes me uneasy, in a productive and generative way. He has unsettled my sense of the claims I might make about my work, purposes, and its role in the enterprise of modernist human science (3).

He takes up Foucault’s work with a desire to self-reflexively re-think his research and himself. The strength of this book is that it engages readers in this endeavour: to think more carefully, critically, and deeply about our own intellectual works, writings, thoughts, and actions. Ball demonstrates the need for self-reflexive thinking on the uses of Foucault in education policy and research. The point is not only to be critical and think critically, but how one may productively encourage, develop, sustain, and evolve a lived ethic of critical thought. Ball frames this book as

part of the *care of the self*, as a way to explore one's existence and the human condition, and as a way to

transgress and to unsettle by beginning to write a history of educational present, and rewrite the history of education policy... That is, to rewrite education policy as a history of *practices, and truths and subjects, and of relations of power and of government*... to turn education policy inside out, using exclusion and abjection to think about policy rather than policy to think about exclusion (152-153).

Ball links this practice as examining the history of “classifications and exclusions, and to the ways of which these divisions, alongside others, set limits to the possibility of humanity” (153).

The author offers a clear, succinct, and thought provoking discussion of how and why Foucault is relevant to education scholarship and policy, and effectively introduces key Foucauldian concepts to wider audiences. He urges education researchers to pay closer attention to Foucault's later works on subjectivity, ethics, resistance, and freedom. The author (re)casts Foucault's works as engagement in struggle, as a site to examine structures of power and open up new spaces for thought and action. Far from repressed and docile, subjects have agency and freedom. This is a book about the politics of knowledge in education policies, processes, and institutions, what knowledges count as truth, and how particular discourses acquire the status of scientificity. It is about the education writer and researcher. A key point Ball makes is that reading and using Foucault necessarily pushes, prods at, and moves educational scholars to think otherwise, reflect critically, and constantly place themselves within their work and world among others.