

EDITORIAL

Inquiring into educational policies: a special issue on the contribution of Stephen Ball

The reforms that followed the socio-economic crisis which unfolded in 2008 should not be considered as completely new, but rather as the acceleration of a longer trend in educational change (Ball, Maguire, and Goodson 2010). However, the scale of the transformations leads us to question whether the crisis might represent a turning point leading either to the intensification of market reforms or to their weakening as part of a wider reassessment of the links and tensions between inequalities, economic performance and taxation (Carpentier 2012). Stephen Ball is one of the key scholars who have explored the origins of these educational transformations and examined their implications for pupils, students, the educational workforce and the wider society. His policy cycle approach (Ball 1994; Bow, Ball, and Gold 1992) led him to develop research in key interconnected areas of education policy which are more than ever relevant to the understanding of the current context. These include the relationships between the intersected inequalities (in terms of social class, gender and 'race') in societies and access and participation in education (Ball 2003a; Gillborn 2008; Reay, David, and Ball 2005; Vincent et al. 2013); the policies related to choice (Ball and Vincent 1998), marketisation and privatisation (Ball and Youdell 2008); the channelling of power through performativity (Ball 2003b) and the development of (increasingly global) networks (Ball 2012).

This special issue of the *London Review of Education* gathers six papers reflecting on the contribution of Stephen Ball to educational research, policy and practice. There are many ways of looking at this and the specific approach chosen here is to look at how his ideas travel (in the broadest sense) and to explore the ways in which they are used and recontextualised. This task informed the successive versions of the papers which were enriched by the comments from our anonymous reviewers.

A key common reflection from the papers is that the contribution of Stephen Ball's research to the exchange of ideas is driven by a capacity to cross many boundaries. First of all, the papers show how his research incites dialogues between and across disciplines, theories and methods. The combination of the approaches of Foucault and Bourdieu (Ball 2013) and the use of the policy cycle do not only contribute to methodological and theoretical developments in the sociology of education and policy sociology but are also widely used by wider communities interested in exploring education policy. Another cross-boundary aspect which became apparent in this special issue relates to the dynamics between research, policy and practice. For example, the papers highlight many occurrences when Stephen Ball's research led some teachers and other education professionals to recontextualise the way they experienced policy and, as a result, to reflect on their practice (Ball and Olmedo 2013). This sense of empowerment is made all the stronger when his research invites us to reflect on policy and practice rather than offering advice or guidance on what should be done. Obviously, another aspect of the circulation of ideas is geographical. Ball's work has

resonated with people from many countries and his approach has become increasingly global. The six articles cover the UK, Finland, France, Norway, Spain and Sweden, Australia, the USA and Brazil but of course many others could have been added.

The papers cover the contribution of Ball's research from various perspectives and contexts while identifying potential challenges and possible ways forward. In the first paper, Michael Apple explores the contribution of Stephen Ball to the critical sociology of education through his combination of structural and poststructural traditions. Then, the role of the organic public sociologist is discussed in the light of Ball's clear engagement with most of the nine tasks considered by Apple as essential to the critical educator (Apple 2013). Helen Gunter shows that by 'not researching leadership', Ball made educational professionals reflect on the social, political, economic and cultural contexts influencing the identity formation of school leaders and the dynamics of power which construct their day to day practice.

Matthew Clarke's paper explores how Ball's well-known paper on 'the teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity' resonate with teachers and help them to make sense of the impact of the neoliberal inspired performative agenda on their practices and lives. Clarke discusses the possibility of combining the Foucauldian approach used by Ball with psychoanalysis in order to understand the subjectivities of teachers when dealing with ideas of resistance and capitulation. He mobilises the Lacanian idea of a concomitant enjoyment in capitulating but also in resisting performativity.

Agnès van Zanten and Sonja Kosunen explore the influence of Ball's research on school choice in five European Countries. They show how the circulation of ideas is strongly dependent on social and political contexts. For example, some research communities have used and adapted Ball's research in order to analyse and critique the gradual implementation of neoliberal policies on choice, privatisation and marketisation in their countries.

Jefferson Mainardes and Luis Armando Gandin show the influence of Stephen Ball's work on Brazilian educational research and practice acknowledging an impact on curriculum change by teachers. They have also identified some challenges related to language, translation and availability of his recent work as well as instances when the policy cycle tends to be used as an uncritical method rather than a critical theory.

Bob Lingard and Sam Sellar explore Ball's increasing attention to the 'global/national imbrications in policy production and implementation'. They show how he has responded to the need to globalise the policy cycle. Looking at his recent work, they examine how Ball has, with other colleagues, developed new methodologies and concepts such as the public/private mix and the construction of global network which contributes to a better understanding 'the policy sociology in education in the context of neo-liberal education'.

In the last paper, Stephen Ball offers some reflections on this special issue.

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