Leaders in the Sociology of Education: Intellectual Self-Portraits

Alan R. Sadovnik
Rutgers University-Newark, USA

and

Ryan W. Coughlan (Eds.)
Guttman Community College, City University of New York, USA

Leaders in the Sociology of Education: Intellectual Self-Portraits contains eighteen self-portraits written by some of the leading sociologists of education in the world. Representing the United States, the United Kingdom, and Hong Kong, the authors discuss a variety of factors that have affected their lifetime of scholarship, including their childhoods, their education and mentors, the state of the field during their “coming of age,” the institutions where they have worked, the major sociologists during their lifetimes, the political and economic conditions during their lifetimes, and the social and political movements during their lifetimes. These autobiographical essays reveal a great deal not only about their work and their influences, but also about themselves. Taken as a whole, the book provides sociology of knowledge about the creation of sociology of education research since the 1960s. It reveals a number of important themes central to all of the authors’ work, including educational inequality; the influence of the classical sociological theorists, Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim; and the influence of more recent classical sociologists of education, Basil Bernstein, Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman. The authors’ research represents a variety of theoretical and methodological orientations including functionalism, conflict and critical theory, interactionist theory and feminist theory, as well as quantitative, qualitative and mixed-methods research. Finally, the editors discuss a number of lessons to be learned from the lives and works of these sociologists of education.
Leaders in the Sociology of Education
LEADERS IN EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

Volume 9

Series Editor: Leonard J. Waks, Temple University, Philadelphia, USA

Scope:
The aim of the Leaders in Educational Studies Series is to document the rise of scholarship and university teaching in educational studies in the years after 1960. This half-century has been a period of astonishing growth and accomplishment. The volumes in the series document this development of educational studies as seen through the eyes of its leading practitioners.

A few words about the build up to this period are in order. Before the mid-twentieth century school teaching, especially at the primary level, was as much a trade as a profession. Schoolteachers were trained primarily in normal schools or teachers colleges, only rarely in universities. But in the 1940s American normal schools were converted into teachers colleges, and in the 1960s these were converted into state universities. At the same time school teaching was being transformed into an all-graduate profession in both the United Kingdom and Canada. For the first time, school teachers required a proper university education.

Something had to be done, then, about what was widely regarded as the deplorable state of educational scholarship. James Conant, in his final years as president at Harvard in the early 1950s, envisioned a new kind of university-based school of education, drawing scholars from mainstream academic disciplines such as history, sociology psychology and philosophy, to teach prospective teachers, conduct educational research, and train future educational scholars. One of the first two professors hired to fulfill this vision was Israel Scheffler, a young philosopher of science and language who had earned a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania. Scheffler joined Harvard’s education faculty in 1952. The other was Bernard Bailyn, who joined the Harvard faculty in 1953 after earning his Ph.D. there, and who re-energized the study of American educational history with the publication of Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study (University of North Carolina Press, 1960). The series has been exceptionally fortunate that Scheffler provided a foreword to the volume on philosophy of education, and that Bernard Bailyn provided one a foreword for the volume on the history of American education. It is equally fortunate that subsequent volumes have also contained forewords by similarly eminent scholars, including James Banks of the University of Washington, who has been a creative force in social education for decades and the prime mover in the field of multi-cultural education.

The Leaders in Educational Studies Series continues to document the growing and changing literature in educational studies. Studies conducted within the established academic disciplines of history, philosophy, and sociology comprised the dominant trend throughout the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1980s educational studies diversified considerably, in terms of both new sub-disciplines within these established disciplines and new interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary fields.

Curriculum studies, both in general and in the particular school subject matter fields, drew extensively from work in philosophy, history and sociology of education. Work in these disciplines, and also in anthropology and cultural studies among others, also stimulated new perspectives on race, class and gender.

This volume, like previous volumes in the series, brings together personal essays by established leaders in a major field of educational studies. Subsequent volumes in the series will continue to document other established and emerging disciplines, sub-disciplines and inter-disciplines in educational scholarship.
Leaders in the Sociology of Education

Intellectual Self-Portraits

Edited by

Alan R. Sadovnik
Rutgers University-Newark, USA

and

Ryan W. Coughlan
Guttman Community College, City University of New York, USA
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When Leonard Waks asked me to edit the Sociology of Education volume in the Sense Publishers series on Leaders in Educational Studies I first looked at two of the volumes already published, one in the Philosophy of Education and one in the History of Education. After reading the chapters in these books, it was easy to follow most of their organization to outline the plan for this volume. We decided not to include a Foreword and Afterword written by two sociologists of education. Rather, we have used our introduction to outline some of the major themes in the chapters and then let the contributors speak for themselves.

I decided that I wanted to include a diverse range of individuals with respect to race and gender, as well as theoretical and methodological orientations. I also wanted an international representation with scholars from not only the United States, but Europe and Asia as well. I wanted these individuals to be of significant stature in the field, thus limiting the list to senior scholars.

After compiling a list of 30 possible contributors, I received 12 no’s leaving me with the 18 authors (including me) in the book. The reasons for those who said no were varied, but the most common reason was they were too busy on ongoing research projects. The 18 contributors comprise a sample of the most important scholars in the sociology of education writing since the 1970s and in one case before.

The original list was more diverse with respect to race and ethnicity and gender. This volume has 13 males and 5 females; one African American and one Latino; four scholars from the U.K. and one from Hong Kong. Although this does not adequately represent the diversity of the field, these sociologists of education certainly capture the richness of work over the past five decades and the diversity of theoretical and methodological orientations.

Midway through the submission period I asked my graduate assistant Ryan Coughlan to co-edit the book. He had been an important contributor as co-editor of Sociology of Education: A Critical Reader (2015) so I asked him to work on this volume as well. Having him as co-editor provided a second pair of eyes to the editing process; but more importantly he offered the views of an up and coming scholar on the contributions in each chapter.

Editing this book provided both of us with the pleasure of reading about the lives and works of a distinguished group of scholars. The chapters provided a sociology of knowledge with respect to how and why each contributor chose to do their research and in many cases how their lives and families affected their work. Taken as a whole the chapters provide an important history of the sociology of education and display the important themes in the field.

Alan R. Sadovnik
Rutgers University, Newark
1. LEADERS IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Lessons Learned

The Sociology of Education is no different in form than other fields of scholarship in that it depends wholly on the creativity, passion, assiduousness, and luck of the women and men who commit themselves to the advancement of the discipline. Surely world events and the political economy of a given time and place bear tremendous responsibility for shaping research agendas and directing intellectual thought, but it is the humanity and individuality of the scholars who interact with all that surrounds them that defines an academic field. As such, an intimate look into the careers of a selection of leaders in the sociology of education has much to offer those seeking a better understanding of the present state of this field of study.

History and lineage are keys to understanding the present and looking towards the future. It is not coincidental that each of the authors of the intellectual self-portraits in this volume discuss the scholars who inspired them and shaped their own academic journeys. After a brief look at the origins of the sociology of education and the people who inspired the current leaders in the field, it seems logical to consider some commonalities in the lives of the scholars who have shared their stories in this book. A number of themes cut across the lives of these scholars and offer some compelling insight into how the sociology of education has taken its current form. The experiences that turned the people profiled in this book into leaders in the sociology of education have left them with lessons for future scholars in the field. Before concluding this chapter and turning to the individual self-portraits, it will be well worth the time to take a moment and highlight some of the invaluable advice that these leaders in the sociology of education have proffered.

INSPIRATION – THE ORIGINS OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Given the contents of this book, it is safe to assume that those of you reading this introduction have a strong foundational knowledge of the sociology of education. Rehashing the origins of the sociology of education in a manner common to textbooks and college lectures would guarantee that we lose your attention to other tasks. Those interested in a more in-depth discussion of the origins of the field should read our introduction to Sociology of Education: A Critical Reader (2015). While we will refrain from providing our take on the origins of the sociology of education, we must pause to acknowledge the manner in which the founders of sociology, in
general, and the sociology of education, in particular, inspired the current leaders in the field.

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), who is often credited as the father of sociology, has undoubtedly shaped the minds of all scholars who consider themselves sociologists. Whether one ascribes to Durkheim’s functionalist perspective of society, vociferously critiques this work, or chooses to set the work aside altogether, it has an undeniable presence in all of our lives. Several of the intellectual self-portraits that follow specifically discuss the way that Durkheim’s work has shaped their intellectual journeys, and a number of the authors even list one of Durkheim’s pieces of writing as one of the most influential works they have read.

Gerard Postiglione devotes a good deal of attention to a discussion of how he brought the canonical work of western thinkers, including Durkheim, to his Chinese audience. When discussing the act of bringing Durkheim to Chinese audiences, Postiglione writes,

The aim for most Chinese scholars at the time was to construct the field with Chinese distinctiveness while keeping abreast of the international mainstream of the field. The field had to be established under “Marxism and Chinese realities.” There were also critiques of Durkheim, which were interesting to me since Durkheim resonated in some ways with Confucian discourse and contemporary party dictum on social harmony.

While likely unsurprising to this audience, many of the current leaders in the sociology of education, similar to the audience that Postiglione encountered in China, have offered deep criticisms of Durkheim’s functionalism. Many of these critiques are rooted in the work of two other thinkers credited with providing a foundation for the sociology of education: Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Max Weber (1864–1920).

A portion of Hugh Mehan’s intellectual self-portrait looks to identify the roots of the sociology of education. In seeking an understanding of the inspiration for this academic field, Mehan writes,

Marx, Weber, and Durkheim (the “founding fathers” or “holy trinity” of sociology), each in their own way, was driven by an appraisal of and attempt to remedy the malaise engendered by modernity: alienation, inequality, hyperrationality, domination, anomie.

The two phrases—“founding fathers” and “holy trinity”—that Wexler uses to describe Durkheim, Marx, and Weber clearly resonate with many of the other current leaders in the sociology of education. Although Durkheim’s omnipresent position in the sociology of education is hard to deny, the current leaders in the sociology of education place a far greater emphasis on the inspiration they have found in Marx and Weber. Steven Brint writes, “Reading Max Weber was the decisive intellectual experience of my life.” Philip Wexler notes that his reading of Marx became unmeshed with his day-to-day living at an early age. He writes,
I read a lot, from an early age, and by high school, I was moving around intellectually, between Marx and Nietzsche. But, it was not just books. Rebellion, in daily life and in art, was already displacing indifference and what we learned to call “conformity”… To have a reflexive critical stance toward whatever was going on, whatever was being taken for granted as natural and better, was something I seemed to have imbibed early on, and which I brought to the intellectual work that has drawn my attention for so long.

The inspiration for many of the current leaders in the sociology of education did not always come directly from Marx and Weber, but rather it came from Marxist and Weberian traditions. Many of the current leaders in the sociology of education came of age in a period of time when the works of Bowles and Gintis and Coleman were gaining prominence. All three of these scholars brought a heightened attention to conflict theory and the inequalities defining the modern education system. Lois Weis writes,

Putting forth their well-known “correspondence principle,” Bowles and Gintis argue that schools directly reproduce social and economic inequalities embedded in the capitalist economy… [Their] neo-Marxist sensibilities critique the capitalist economy as the driving force behind the “need” for profit and domination as in conflict with the political economy that promotes democracy and equality. This conflict plays out in classrooms where students are marked by a larger and highly stratified economic structure, and this notion of stratified social structures and the relationship between such structures and educational institutions became the centerpiece of my own thinking on this subject for many years hence.

Weis shares this source of inspiration with a number of the other current leaders in the sociology of education. Whether or not the current leaders in the sociology of education found Bowles and Gintis’ arguments to be compelling, they all undeniably came to operate in a field guided by these ideas. As Brint notes, “The weight of sociological work at this time was on the reproduction of class, racial-ethnic and gender privileges through schooling.”

These themes of social reproduction and inequality were given particular emphasis through the work of James Coleman. Not only did Coleman inspire many of the current leaders in the sociology of education to ask questions about inequality and education, but his work also led to a heightened focus on empiricism in the field. In Barbara Schneider’s intellectual self-portrait, she writes,

Reading the work of James Coleman… about how to determine which interventions were actually creating a “true” effect, my thoughts of becoming a teacher educator were soon replaced by a strong desire to learn more about how relationships, power, authority, roles, responsibilities, and moral imperatives affect human behavior and shape the institutional systems they inhabit.
Schneider goes on discuss the ways in which this work inspired a career of searching for empirical evidence to support theoretical constructs in the sociology of education.

It was the possibility that high quality evidence could be used to explain social phenomena that motivated my interest and research studies in exploring new ideas for data collection and analytic methods that measured a true effect and others that approximated causal inference.

Many of the sociologists of education in this volume came of age during the battle between the old and new sociologists of education in Britain and France. With the publication of Michael F.D. Young’s *Knowledge and Control* (1977), Basil Bernstein and Pierre Bourdieu became the intellectual leaders of the new sociology aimed at analyzing social class inequalities in education. Geoff Whitty writes of Bernstein,

The sociologist whose work, in my view, remains most helpful in thinking through the relationship between social class and school knowledge is Bernstein, who remained the dominant presence within the sociology of education in the UK until his death in 2000 and indeed beyond. He died just three weeks into my Directorship of the Institute and both the Institute and the field knew they had lost their greatest contemporary scholar. (Power et al., 2001)

Bernstein was the Karl Manheim Professor in the Sociology of Education at the Institute of Education at the University of London, and was succeeded in the chair by two of the contributors to this book Whitty and then Stephen Ball.

Of course, inspiration for the current leaders in the sociology of education was not limited to the “holy trinity” of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx or the handful of other scholars noted above. As you explore the intellectual self-portraits in the chapters that follow, you will find that the current leaders in the field have found inspiration in countless places, both expected and unexpected, from within the field and outside of the field, and from scholarship as well as life experience. The next section offers a brief discussion of a number of themes that arise from these life experiences of the current leaders in the sociology of education. Undoubtedly, the lives of the current leaders and some of the common themes that emerge from their stories help illuminate how the field has come to take its current form.

**EXPERIENCE – THE LIVES THAT SHAPED THE LEADERS IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION**

The scholars who contributed to this volume were given tremendous freedom in constructing their intellectual self-portraits, which has led to a collection of autobiographies that approach this challenging form of writing in varied ways. Stephen Ball eloquently captures the difficulty of the task as well as offers insight into the care that those profiled in this book have given to their writing.
Here I must account for myself, make myself coherent, write my biography and thus write myself into existence—at least some parts of myself. And I will do that, I will submit myself to the genre of biography and its rules and tropes. Nonetheless, as I write I am also made aware of the limits of my coherence, and of the fictional quality of some of what follows. As a life and as an intellectual journey my personal trajectory is only sensible, to me, as a set of ruptures and tensions and inconsistencies, which remain unresolved and are difficult to explain.

Ball brings attention to the reality that intellectual journeys are non-linear, that the experiences that shape scholars are often hard to identify and that fact, folklore, and fiction often meld together when attempting to produce a coherent self-portrait. Despite the challenges of writing such an autobiographical piece, the book’s selection of current leaders in the sociology of education succeed in offering clear narratives of their intellectual journeys. While there is no single storyline that dominates the chapters that follow, there are some themes worth highlighting in this introduction.

Many of the scholars profiled in this book trace their intellectual journeys back to their families and their childhood; a number of them consider how their social, economic, religious, cultural, and educational roots primed them for careers in the sociology of education. A significant portion of these family histories involve struggles that range from overcoming structural racism and classism to surviving the Holocaust. Jomills Braddock attended an all-Black segregated elementary and secondary school and lived with the grief of having his sister-in-law murdered in the Birmingham church bombing. Following this event, Braddock committed himself to the pursuit of ending racism, and his lifetime of work on desegregation is a testimony to this commitment. Alan Sadovnik directly connects his family history to his work as a sociologist. He writes,

Both of my parents were Holocaust survivors and the Holocaust became a major theme of my childhood. As I grew into adulthood, I learned a sense of social justice from my parents, which would come to shape much of my work as a sociologist.

Another group of the current leaders in the sociology of education found their passion for this area of study not from their own family history of struggle, but rather through a family that emphasized a need to work towards a more just world. James Rosenbaum writes about the inspiration he found in his father’s charitable and social justice-oriented pursuits.

Like many people, I entered sociology out of a concern for social justice and equity. This decision was largely inspired by my father, a pediatrician who had many low income patients, from whom he learned about the dynamics of poverty and its pervasive effects. His experiences working with low income populations led him to work in progressive causes which he considered to be preventive medicine. He started the first poison control hotline in the state of
A. R. SADOVNIK & R. W. COUGHLAN

Indiana, advised the first Headstart program in Indiana, worked with Planned Parenthood, and spoke publicly about the need for increased supports for disadvantaged populations. My awareness of poverty and my commitment to social justice came out of my admiration for my father and his work.

While most of the scholars profiled in this book pinpoint a spark that flamed their passion for the sociology of education, some do not. Roslyn Mickelson goes so far as to title her chapter “The Accidental Sociologist of Education.” Regardless of how they arrived in this field of study, each of the current leaders in the sociology of education share the experience of doctoral education. The commonalities in the experience of doctoral schooling end at the fact that each of these scholars did it. Several have intensely fond memories of building lifelong friendships and immeasurable bonds with their mentors. A. H. Halsey speaks warmly of his close relationship with mentor and co-author Jean Floud. Similarly, Alan Sadovnik places great emphasis on the inspiration he found under the mentorship of Basil Bernstein. And Lois Weis discusses how her time conducting research in Ghana and the people she met on her travels dramatically reshaped her perspectives about power, privilege, and oppression.

Weis is not alone in finding inspiration in international and comparative studies. Carlos Alberto Torres’ chapter focuses attention on how living and learning across multiple countries has shaped his thinking and his scholarly work. Adam Gamoran goes a step further, credits some of his success to gaining an international perspective, and implores others to seek solutions beyond the boundaries of what is known to them. He writes,

From my research on Scotland and Israel, I learned that insights about education in the U.S. are greatly aided by international comparisons. When we focus on our own system alone, we are often blind to possibilities that are rare in our system (such as school-leaving examinations) but common elsewhere.

Whereas the issues of social class and race inequalities dominated research in the field, some scholars, especially Sara Delamont ensured that gender inequalities in education were placed squarely on the table. She writes:

There is a serious problem in educational research around the erosion of women as authors and as subjects. Work by women is cited less than work by men, because while women cite male and female scholars, most men overwhelmingly cite only work by men. Over time that means research by women does not get included in the literature. Because most of the research on women has been done by women, that means that studies of women also slide below the horizon of the discipline. This claim is documented for many social sciences and the evidence is reported in Delamont. (2003)

The scholars in this book have examined their various research questions through a variety of theoretical lenses and methodological approaches. For example, some
of them do a good deal of theoretical work (Ball, Ramirez, Sadovnik, Torres, Weis, Wexler, Whitty); some do mostly quantitative work (Braddock, Gamoran, Halsey, Rosenbaum, Schneider); some do mostly qualitative research (Delamont, Mehan, Sadovnik, Weis, Wexler) and some do mixed methods research combining quantitative and qualitative on one project or using one or the other on different projects (Brint, Epstein, Mickelson, Postiglione, Whitty). Whichever methodology they each have used, as a whole they have demonstrated the power of theory and method in the sociology of education.

Perhaps the single life experience that bifurcates the scholars in this collection more than anything else is whether or not they spent time teaching in the education systems they later wrote about and taught courses on at the university. The experience of working in elementary and secondary schools inspired a good deal of the scholarship conducted by those with such a teaching background. Joyce Epstein made the deliberate choice to gain experience as an elementary school teacher before pursuing her doctoral work. She writes,

I wanted to know about the “real world” of teaching and delayed entering a doctoral program… I learned about classroom teaching, school leadership, and the wondrous diversity of children’s skills, talents, and challenges. I learned about the persistent press on teachers’ time; strong and weak principals; how school innovations come and go; and problems that arise when teachers accept slow learners or naughty students as if they were predetermined. Teaching was valuable and, to this day, influences my ideas about what teachers should and should not be asked to do as professional educators.

One experience common to all of the current leaders in the sociology of education is working within the structures of the university. The scholars discuss topics ranging from the pursuit of tenure, to the unending task of securing research funding, to taking on administrative responsibilities. While each of the leaders in the sociology of education profiled in this book has had unique experiences in academia, they all share in the fact that they have tirelessly pursued new knowledge in an effort to better understand how our education systems operate and what they could do to improve.

Some scholars—such as Francisco Ramirez, who has developed a world society perspective and applied it to education, gender and development—have devoted themselves almost entirely to a focused topic of study. Other scholars—such as James Rosenbaum, who has studied topics ranging from tracking to the effect of place on educational outcomes, to college-preparedness—have pursued a diverse set of research interests. Regardless of the depth and breadth of their work, each of the current leaders in the sociology of education profiled in this book has made significant contributions to the field.

The experience that these scholars have amassed is invaluable for future generations of sociologists of education, and the following section attempts to summarize some of the key lessons that can be drawn from the chapters that follow.
ADVICE – LESSONS FOR FUTURE SCHOLARS IN THE FIELD

Each of the intellectual self-portraits that follows offers a distinct set of lessons for readers that results from the unique journey that each scholar has traveled. One common lesson that results from these stories is that life in academia is unpredictable, requires flexibility, and involves taking on a wide range of roles. The scholars who tell their stories have all worn multiple hats and jumped between jobs ranging from researcher, to teacher, to mentor, to practitioner, and to administrator. At times these current leaders in the sociology of education have felt well-prepared to take on each of these roles, and at other times they have had to learn on the job. Several of the scholars profiled in this book highlight the importance of embracing change throughout their careers and welcoming unexpected opportunities for taking on new research agendas, collaborating with colleagues, and building relationships across sectors.

In Gerard Postiglione’s intellectual self-portrait, he recounts the story of traveling and teaching in Europe following the completion of his doctoral work. While traveling through the Middle East, he received a telegram offering him an interview for a faculty position in Hong Kong. When he accepted the job, Postiglione imagined “another brief sojourn of international teaching and research experience.” Instead, it led to an entire career working in China, where he remains to this day. Several of the other authors in this book discuss following unexpected pathways that led to rich experiences and opened them to teaching and researching opportunities which shaped their careers. While none of the authors suggest diving into jobs and taking on research projects without careful thought, their lives highlight the benefits of maintaining an openness to unexpected opportunities.

Along with remaining open to new opportunities, the intellectual self-portraits that follow also highlight the importance of remaining open to new collaborations and to building strong relationships. Barbara Schneider recounts stepping away from a position as associate dean at the age of thirty-five to conduct research with James Coleman. While some may wonder why she would have given up this post, Schneider discusses the importance of remaining true to her passions. She writes,

An associate dean for research, at thirty-five, it became apparent that this career path was leading me astray from what I truly enjoyed most. I was passionate about studying problems, especially those related to educational inequities, challenging conventional assumptions about perceived opportunities, analyzing data, and rethinking how results could and should influence education practice and policy. I regrouped, cut my losses, and took an unusual career path, beginning an eight-year collaboration with James S. Coleman, at the University of Chicago, whose gracious tutelage shaped my intellectual interests and analytic approach into a bona fide sociologist.

Schneider’s self-reflection reminds readers that they must not lose sight of why they chose to enter academia and be lured away from accomplishing the goals they
set out to achieve. While the lessons from the stories that follow certainly suggest maintaining an openness to unexpected pathways, they also indicate that one should remain grounded and true to their interests.

Many of the scholars in the book were high level administrators for part of their careers—Brint, Gamoran, Postiglione, Ramirez, Sadovnik, Schneider, Weis, Wexler, Whitty. Whitty summarizes the conflict between the administrative and research roles that they all have faced:

Soon after I was appointed as Director of the Institute of Education, University of London in 2000, someone referred to me as ‘Geoff Whitty, who used to be a sociologist of education’. As the post of Director at IOE is roughly equivalent to President and Provost combined in a US higher education institution such as Teachers College Columbia, I have to admit that there were times during my ten year tenure as Director when I was distracted from sociology of education by administrative and financial preoccupations. However, I have always seen my primary academic and professional identity as a sociologist and continue to do so…

Perhaps the most enduring theme and lesson that permeates the chapters that follow is the importance of building relationships. The current leaders in the sociology of education speak of cultivating a wide range of bonds with different kinds of people. Roslyn Mickelson tells the story of a relationship she built with a staff member in the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools who proved essential in aiding Mickelson’s efforts to obtain student-level data. More commonly, the scholars in this book discuss the growth and joy that resulted from building life-long bonds with mentors and mentees. Alan Sadovnik recounts the story of his final visit with Basil Bernstein before his death and the honor of speaking at Basil’s memorial service at the Institute of Education. Knowing the fulfillment Sadovnik found in his relationship with Bernstein, it is not surprising to see Sadovnik discuss the strong bonds he has built with his own mentees. He writes,

I am very proud of the mentoring I did with my students who completed their dissertations, most of whom have gone on to academic careers, either in teaching or administration, with one remaining in an executive position in a non-profit. I believe I had a profound impact on their academic development and careers.

The clear lesson from the intellectual self-portraits by Mickelson, Sadovnik, and others in this book is that the people encountered through working in this field not only enrich our work but also bring unimaginable joy to our lives.

Life in academia can be challenging. At times the work can be overwhelming and isolating. Rejection of all kinds is common—journal articles are turned away, jobs are offered to other candidates, access to data is denied, and applications for funding are set aside. The scholars in this book are successful not because they avoided rejection, rather they are successful because they persevered through rejection.
In an easily relatable story, Roslyn Mickelson discusses the need for perseverance through rejection, particularly early in one’s career.

I submitted the first version of what would become “The Attitude/Achievement Paradox Among Black Adolescents,” to the American Sociological Review. The reviewers were swift and brutal in their rejection of the manuscript as not ready for primetime. I was not prepared for the rejection. It figuratively knocked the wind out of me and left me intellectually paralyzed for almost two years. Eventually, I garnered the capacity to return to the piece. I sent the revised manuscript to Sociology of Education, which published it in 1990 after multiple revisions.

Those working to establish their careers today would do well to remember this story. Mickelson struggled with rejection, but she did not let it overtake her. Instead, she persevered, revised her work, and ended up publishing an article that has had a tremendous impact on the field.

One final lesson from the intellectual self-portraits that is worth drawing attention to comes again from Barbara Schneider. She discusses “the struggle of being willing to stick one’s neck out” and proceeds to note that “research, if it is to be meaningful, will not please everyone.” Being willing to expose oneself, stand by your research, and face a public and chorus of policymakers who may prefer to ignore scholarly findings takes courage and a deep commitment to the field. Central to this commitment has been the analysis of educational inequality and the application of research to ameliorate such inequality. All of these contributors have made the analysis of educational inequality central to their work, with some playing an active role in trying to solve problems of educational inequality. It is this courage and commitment to the sociology of education that distinguishes the selection of scholars profiled in the pages that follow.

CONCLUSION

Shortly after submitting his intellectual self-portrait for this volume, A. H. Halsey passed away. His contributions to the sociology of education were undeniable and his impact on the lives of those lucky enough to encounter him were immense. A. H. Halsey is the contributor to this book with the greatest longevity in the field, and as a tribute to his life we wish to conclude this introduction by bringing attention to the words that Halsey uses to commence his chapter. Halsey reminds all of us that our individuality is both a source of inspiration and an obstacle to high-quality sociological work and that we must be both passionate and ruthlessly skeptical if we wish to continue advancing this great discipline. In Halsey’s words,

Experience of life prejudices each and every one of us. I, now in my nineties, declare myself a committed ethical socialist and have done so for over fifty years; but also I have become a disciplined sociologist. The commitment
leads me to passionate advocacy of a particular form of society—the active
democracy of an informed citizenry. The discipline compels me to seek truth
through empirical evidence, with ruthless scepticism as to sources and methods
and with disrespect towards arbitrary authority. But Reader beware! Greet my
scepticism with your own scepticism and always remember that words can
and do change their meaning as they move through time and space. You are
confronted here by an elderly Englishman who has lived and learnt through
over ninety years of economic, political, social and cultural change.

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Ryan W. Coughlan
Guttman Community College
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My career in education – moral and occupational – has been marked by dramatic changes and dramatic continuities in what it means to be educated. As a sociological life and as an intellectual journey my biography seems to consist of a set of ruptures and tensions and inconsistencies. These remain unresolved and are difficult to explain but form the backbone of the story I will tell here. Thinking back, the tensions that have made up my personal experience of education have perhaps made necessary a constant need to challenge and unsettle myself, to reconsider, move on, or perhaps move away – to be something else. Here I will attempt to give an account of some of these tensions and of myself in relation to them. In doing so I will write myself as much more coherent that I ever was. I will submit myself to the genre of biography and some of its rules and tropes but avoid some others.

Convention incites me to envisage myself here as a singularity, an individual scholar who writes and thinks as an isolated mind within a network of abstract intellectual influences. However, I am not that singular, I have benefited from and been formed and changed by a whole set of intellectual collaborations and friendships of different kinds. I have been very lucky to have worked within series of exciting and dynamic and demanding research teams with people like Richard Bowe, Diane Reay, Meg Maguire, Carol Vincent, Carolina Junemann, David Gillborn, Nicola Rollock and Antonio Olmedo who have both required and enabled me to think differently, to think outside of the limits of my own intellect and think better. I have also been supported and challenged by people I have written with like Michael Apple and Maria Tamboukou, and I have benefitted from working with several generations of research students who have made it necessary me to explain myself better or have picked up and run with my ill-formed provocations in exciting ways. When I think and write, I am a composite of these experiences and exchanges. The biography I construct in this narrative is very much a collective effort.

A CHILD OF WELFARE

I was a child of the British welfare state, of the National Health Service, of free milk and orange juice, although my school career beyond primary school was set within a longer, pre-welfare history of class divisions and social privileges. I am now a neoliberal academic working for a global brand, ranked in international comparison.
sites, for performance related pay in an HE system organised around class divisions and social privileges. The virtues and values of the welfare state, which were the common sense of my childhood, are now reviled and blamed for the state we find ourselves in. In relation to these different regimes of policy the meaning of education and what it means to be educated have been profoundly transformed over the course of my experience of education. Sometimes in relation to this transformation, as Judith Butler puts it “I am other to myself precisely at the place where I expect to be myself” (Butler, 2004). I am going to try to construct a narrative of myself in relation to the move from the welfare state to the neoliberal state, and the related, messy, reiterative interplay between my experiences of education and my evolving intellectual preoccupations as a sociologist of education.

My schooling began at Oak Farm Primary School in the London Borough of Hillingdon, and continued at Charville Lane Primary in Hayes. These were in all senses ‘ordinary’ schools, full of other ordinary children just like me. The schools still exist. My primary schooling was mainly uneventful and relatively successful. Jennifer Appleyard, whose parents owned the local toyshop, was top of the class in most subjects. I was one of her closest rivals. On the whole, I was good with words but not with numbers. I dreaded Mr. Robinson’s mental arithmetic classes and the mustard coloured exercise books – I can still remember the humiliations of calculations in the head that were done too slowly or too hastily. Class positions were allocated by end of year exams and a system of stars given for ‘good work’ displayed around the classroom wall. Charville Lane served a skilled White working class community, the pupils came from a new build council housing estate to the west and owner-occupied houses to the east. The distinctions in terms of income and lifestyle seemed minimal. I was from the latter. I was confident and comfortable at school, I was in my place, a ‘fish in water’, as Bourdieu put it (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 43). Like John Burnside (2014, p. 58): ‘The older I get, the happier my childhood becomes.’

We were prepared with some care for the 11+ examination, although I was blithely unaware of its purpose and significance. I passed with a score that enabled my parents to choose from a second tier of London grammar schools – Hayes Grammar was the local grammar school, but I went to Bishopshalt, a boys grammar school two bus rides away back in Hillingdon. I was the only child from my school to go there. My best friend Colin Campbell and many of my other classmates ‘failed’ the 11+ and went to the local Secondary Modern school, Mellow Lane. Our friendship did not long survive the division. Colin’s attempts to ‘call for me’ to ‘go out’ were met with my mother’s repeated refrain “he’s doing his homework”. He stopped coming. As Alan Johnson (2013, p. 124) says in his memoir of a west London childhood, thinking about his friends who passed and failed the 11+ ‘our performances on that day would largely determine our futures’.

My move to Bishopshalt signaled the end of my childhood. It was a disaster, my cosy world of class friendships and supportive and kind teachers was a thing of the
past. I now found myself in a Bourdeurian nightmare. My habitus encountered a social world of which it was certainly not the product. Just like Alan Johnson, who attended Sloane Grammar, I was adrift in an alien world of gowns, masters, Latin, rugby and cross-country running. Michael Cornes and I were the only working class boys in our year; his father — a pilot — drove a plane. The other boys, most of whom barely even acknowledged my existence, were almost without exception it seemed, the sons of lawyers, doctors or stockbrokers — so much for social mobility. The teaching was dull, didactic and repetitive, lots of talk, board writing and snap questions. The teachers were aloof and disdainful. I was now a ‘fish out of water’, frightened, isolated, and very ill at ease. My social and cultural capitals and my logic of practice, which had served me fairly well at primary school, were ill-attuned to the institutional habitus of the grammar school. Class distinctions were everywhere and my established dispositions were rendered null and void (Bourdieu, 1986). As Owen Sheers says of his time at Oxford, there seemed to be a secret rulebook that everyone else had access to but me (The Guardian, 13th June 2015, p. 13). I assumed the mantle of school failure by the end of the first week. In the exams at the end of the first year I came 30th out of 33. Much of my time at home was spent struggling with gnomic homework tasks, which made little sense to me and for which my parents were unable to give much practical help. Even my facility with words, which had stood me in good stead at Charville Lane, now seemed inadequate. I lacked the right turn of phrase, the correct grammatical construction, the proper tone and style. My practical sense had no purchase on this world of middle class taste, entitlement and easy accomplishment. I was lonely, unhappy and increasingly alienated. My sense of myself as a learner was changing – I still resent the casual but damaging symbolic violence done to me by the school and the ‘masters’.

Because of a change in my father’s work, I moved after one year to Havant Grammar School, which had a very different social class mix to Bishopshalt. Even so, my relation to and interest in schooling remained strained, to say the least, for several years to come. Sport and English literature were my only real interests. For some reason Mr. Halford, my French teacher, saw ‘something in me’ worth working on and in collusion with my mother sought to show me the error of my ways. I began to recover some enthusiasm for schoolwork and was allowed into the 6th form (16–18 years) ‘on probation’ and for the first time I encountered teachers who could interest and inspire – thank you Mr. Rigby. Most of my grammar school teachers could not teach their way out of a wet paper bag! I find the continuing romantic attachment to the grammar school in English education policy circles laughable, except it is also damaging. The good experiences of a lucky and usually privileged few are used to stand for a whole system that was best at producing failure.

NEW UNIVERSITIES!!!

At age 18 I got a place at Sheffield University to do History and Social Studies but decided not to go. As a result I lost touch with almost all of my school friends. After
seven years in the dull backwaters of grammar schooling I wanted to be in the ‘real’ world earning a living. I spent 18 months exploring various career options before University re-emerged as a more preferable option than banking or librarianship. I got a place, through the clearing scheme, at the University of Essex, a ‘new’ university. Indeed, the most politically radical and socially diverse of the post-Robbins1 ‘new’ universities. In size and social make up and architecture it was rather like a large comprehensive school – it could not have been more different from Oxbridge and the ‘redbricks’. I received a student grant which was about the same as I was being paid by the Portsmouth Library Service. Being slightly older than most 1st years and chastened by the world of work I reveled in the opportunity to read and attend lectures. I began as a politics major – or Government as it was called – but found the subject boring and quickly switched to sociology and chose the sociology of education as my specialist area. I hoped that this would help me make sense of my own experience of education. My tutor for this was Denis Marsden and his book Education and the Working Class, written with Brian Jackson (Jackson & Marsden, 1962), was of course on the reading list. Denis and the book played a key role in making sociology something that I wanted to do. The book offered a practice of sociology that made absolute sense to me. It dealt with inequality in a nuanced but visceral way. Inequality as grounded in mundane struggles and compromises, and in the aspirations, failures, complexities and pain of real lives. It is a book I return to often and refer my students to often. It is a timeless classic and its insights are constantly being re-invented by sociologists and educational researchers who think they are saying something new. Reading the book was an extraordinary experience. It was about me, about my life, my experience, my successes and failures, my struggles. The book remains as potent now as it was then, and it anticipated a great deal of Bourdieu’s conceptualization of class processes and the textures of class life.4 It tries to explain ‘success’ as a way of understanding failure, but it is also about the costs of such ‘success’. I first read Education and the Working Class at more or less the same time as I read Charles Wright-Mills’ The Sociological Imagination (Wright-Mills, 1970) and it seemed like a paradigm example of Wright-Mills’ version of sociological practice as the linking of ‘personal troubles of milieu’ to ‘public issues of social structure’ and historical social forces. It was sociology with a human face. As Wright-Mills put it: ‘The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society’ (1970, 12). In this case, the relations were between education policy, selective schooling and social class inequalities. Alan Bennett has acknowledged that the book provided the basis for his play The History Boys, which is set in Cutlers’ Grammar School, Sheffield, a fictional boys’ grammar school. The play follows a group of history pupils preparing for the Oxbridge entrance examinations under the guidance of three teachers with contrasting teaching styles. Education and the Working Class is about class mobility, class inequality and waste, and about what Denis describes as a ‘blockage’ – selective education. In stark contrast to the sometimes pathologising focus on working class failure in much of the contemporary sociology of education, Education and the
Working Class worked with a sample of 90 ‘successfully’ working class children. That is, children who passed the 11+ and went to Huddersfield grammar school, like Jackson and Marsden and many of whom went on to higher education. In postmodern fashion, the two writers are in the text, they are two of the 90. The book is also about them.

In my second year at Essex Colin Lacey’s *Hightown Grammar* (1970) was published, based on an ethnographic style study of Salford Grammar school. While *Education and the Working Class* focused mainly on the home end of the class relations of schooling, *Hightown* looked primarily inside the black box of schooling at the processes of distinction, division and exclusion. Again this was a book that captured the processes of schooling to which I had been subject, I was enthralled and outraged. This kind of research was a channel, a productive one it seemed, for the resentments arising from my secondary school career, that shaped what I was and what I might become. Here was a way of confronting and analyzing the ‘hidden injuries of class’ that are deeply embedded in the English education system. Denis Marsden and Colin Lacey were significant influences in my career as a sociologist – both in terms of substance and method. Colin as my PhD supervisor at the University of Sussex, a model of support and provocation, and Denis as a sympathetic tutor and later one of the examiners of my PhD thesis – published as *Beachside Comprehensive* (1981). The Beachside study sought to trace Denis and Colin’s concerns with social class successes and failures into the era of comprehensive education. Denis’ pamphlet on comprehensive education policy *Politicians, Equity and Comprehensives* (Marsden, 1971) also played a key role in my emerging interest in the relationship between policy and practice in education. At the time and for sometime to come policy research and research in and on schools existed separately attended to by political scientists and sociologists respectively. I became increasingly interested in understanding the complex ways in which the two were connected.

Another encounter with policy and in retrospect a symbolic moment in the bigger story I am trying to tell here also occurred in my time at Essex. Despite my protests with many others on the streets of Colchester in 1970, a protest I helped organize, Margaret Thatcher then Secretary of State for Education ‘snatched’ away my free school milk. She also raised the cost of school meals. In a sense the welfare state and the school as a site of welfare were thenceforth under question. A new post-welfare political logic was being adumbrated. Much later Bob Jessop’s book *The Future of the Capitalist State* (2002) was important in helping my make sense of Schumpeter’s displacement of Keynes as the architect of policy and the concomitant reworking of the form and modalities of the capitalist state – the emergence of the competition state.

From Essex I moved to Sussex, another but very different ‘new’ university, to do postgraduate work in Sociological Studies. Again the generosity of the state supported and made possible my continuing education in the form of an ESRC studentship, which funded my MA and then my PhD work. At the end of the
studentship I was lucky enough to get a job as a Lecturer in Education, at Sussex. I had already been doing some teaching in the department. As Heads of Department both Tony Bailey and Tony Becher were incredibly supportive and I had come a long way from Charville Lane. Nonetheless, the class gap between my primary school and university occasionally made itself felt and still does sometimes. There are still moments at which my ‘distinction’ becomes apparent and the structuring and reproductive work of the ‘corporeal hexis’ come into view – when my voice or embodiment or tastes are out of place.

My PhD and subsequent research at Sussex, focused on the relations between social class, schooling and education policy, were undertaken within the sensibilities and epistemology of ethnography. I became part of a community of British ethnographers, inspired by the Chicago School of Sociology, and through the late 1970s and 1980s regularly attended the St Hilda’s college seminars initially set up and run by Peter Woods and Martyn Hammersley. I edited some St Hilda’s books and a book series of school ethnographies with Ivor Goodson. My research methods drew inspiration both from Colin Lacey’s work, which was based in the Manchester school of anthropology, and the Chicago school of sociology – I read George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, and thence Howard Becker and Anselm Strauss – both of whom I was later lucky enough to meet.

Ethnography as a research sensibility and a research practice mirrored the tensions of my institutional experiences. It rests on being neither insider nor outsider, but both Stranger and Friend as Hortense Powdermaker (1966) puts it in her intellectual autobiography. Even so I retained a sense of dissatisfaction with the direction and possibilities of my work partly in relation to the theoretical and critical limitations of symbolic interactionism and partly in relation to the parochialism of Sussex. My burgeoning interest in policy made me realize the extent to which the real action was going on elsewhere, back in London.

I was also exercised by the problem of who or what I was. Within the disciplinary norms of the sociology of the time it was assumed that we were all a ‘something’ – a Marxist of a specific variety (Althusserian or Polantzian or Gramscian), a feminist of some kind, a critical realist or whatever. We were supposed to be enfolded gently in the affirmations and ‘transcendental teleologies’ (Foucault, 1972, p. 172) of one theory or another. This was more than a matter of perspective; it was an allegiance, a sense of identity and ontological security, a basis of mutual recognition and distinction and sometimes therefore a source of public disputation and conflict. Knowing who you were, where you stood, being a something, being a ‘wise fool’, seemed to have many attractions.

I read widely and tried out various ontological positions for size but none seemed quite to fit. As ‘cognitive and motivating structures’, as ‘already realized ends – procedures to follow, paths to take…’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 53) they did not seem to work for me, they did not fit me, or perhaps I did not fit them. My moral career at secondary school and as a university sociologist seemed to be mirrored in my theoretical career – both were couched in a sense of unease, a kind of nomadism.
Even so, Bourdieu, who has made his appearance above, was to become increasingly significant in my practice of sociology, his ‘experiments’ with habitus, capitals and field provided the method for a series of ESRC funded research projects stretching across 20 years, interrogating the subtle and persistent ravages of class inequality, increasingly played out in new ways across the fuzzy terrain of various education marketplaces. I was comfortable with Bourdieu’s refusal to articulate a joined up social theory and his emphasis on the generative interface between theory and data. *Distinction* (1986) remains for me his outstanding book and underpinned my later preoccupation with class advantage and the class strategies of the middle classes (Ball, 2003b; Vincent & Ball, 2001).

However, in the mid-1980s another French theorist, another Professor of the College de France, who died in 1984, was about to intrude into my modernist anxieties and re-write them. In 1985 with relief and excitement I returned to London to become Tutor for the MA in Urban Education at King’s College, following in the footsteps of the admirable Gerald Grace and Geoff Whitty, both now colleagues at the Institute of Education. Aesthetically and demographically King’s had much in common with Bishopshalt Grammar – “how nice to hear a demotic accent” remarked a Professor of French at a reception for new staff – but intellectually the challenges and opportunities were invigorating. The MA attracted teachers from across London and beyond who wanted to explore critical perspectives that they might bring to bear on their understanding of the relations between schooling and the urban – Meg Maguire was one of my early students. The course syllabus I inherited required me to read widely in the then dynamic fields of urban theory and state theory. However, the most significant and challenging and compelling reading was Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1979). In some ways this was like reading Denis Marsden – a version of what is sometimes called ‘the Foucault effect’ (Gordon et al., 1991) – again it was about me and my experience of schooling, but now I read myself as a subject in the ‘eye of power’ (Foucault, 1980). Like Marsden and Lacey, Foucault’s attention was focused on mundane processes and quotidian practices, on minute institutional divisions and categorisations, on ‘the little tactics of habit’ (1979, p. 149) but as part of ‘an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust’ (ibid., p. 158), and as modalities of power – discipline and regulation. I began the MA course each year by taking students out for a walk around the area of Waterloo station, to look at the Victorian schools, the Peabody housing estates, and the local laying-in hospital. I wanted them to see the urban landscape as a grid of power, and as literally and in effect the architecture of the modern state, as a ‘disposition of space for economico-political ends’ (ibid., p. 148). Concomitantly, inside these institutions, ‘Technical social science began to take form within the context of administration’ (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 134), that is, as professional expertise – teachers, social workers, sanitary engineers, doctors emerged as state actors and enactors of the state. *Government* in the 19th century, as the ‘political technology of the body’ (Foucault, 1979, p. 26), was increasingly concerned with the minds and bodies of its *population* – and their wellbeing and thus the ‘health’ of the nation and its security.
As Foucault put it in the title of one of his College de France lecture series, *Society must be defended* (2004). In visiting the buildings we were beginning a genealogy of ourselves as the effects and subjects of power and as managers of the population. In 1990 I edited a collection of papers drawn from a conference held at King’s (Ball, 1990a), which brought together a set of papers which deployed Foucauldian concepts and methods to explore schooling.

The relationships between policy and practice also made sense to me in Foucauldian terms. Disciplinary power was still very evident in the organisational and pedagogical practices of schools. Regulation – biopolitics – was evident in the left-over eugenics which underpinned the 11+ examination I sat, and the claims made in the Norwood Report (Norwood Report, 1943), the dangerous and unsafe basis for tripartite education, that it was possible to identify three types of child with three types of mind by testing for ‘intelligence’. The welfare state came back into view, in a very different way, through a very different lens. William Beveridge, architect of the British welfare state was a president of the Eugenics Society. The struggle between eugenicists and environmentalists at the LSE – hotbed of eugenics in the 1930s – was the starting point of the sociology of education in Britain (Ball, 2008).

Foucauldian analytics and concepts were becoming increasingly important to the objects of my research concerns – I was making increasing use of discourse, power and subjectivity as tools in my work on education policy. Equally important to me was the style and stance of Foucault’s work, the kind of scholar and intellectual he was, and his own struggles not to be ‘a something’ and to avoid and erase disciplinary boundaries. I was attracted to what Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983, p. 121) call his ‘ethical and intellectual integrity’ and his efforts to ‘produce a new ethical form of life which foregrounds imagination, lucidity, humour, disciplined thought and practical wisdom’ – his *pessimistic activism*. In many respects Foucault only really makes sense when his substantive works are read and understood in relation to his refusal to accept the inscriptions and limits and structures of ‘normal’ social science and the rejection of all possible foundations of belief and thus the constant challenge of ‘not knowing what and how to think’ (Burchell, 1996, p. 30).

As Johanna Oksala (2007, p. 1) suggests: ‘To get closer to Foucault’s intent, it helps if one is willing to question the ingrained social order, give up all truths firmly fixed in stone, whilst holding on to a fragile commitment to freedom’. There is a dual ambivalence here, one aspect in relation to scholarship and one in relation to the practices of government within which we are enmeshed and the relationship between to two – power/knowledge. Confronting this ambivalence involves finding ways to work in the tensions between technologies of competence and technologies of the self. Finding ways to create our own lives through action and thought ‘within a space of uncertainty’ (Taylor, 2011, p. 80). We are always freer than we think. I will come back to that.

The essential point about reading Foucault is that he requires us to confront not simply the ways in which we are produced and made up as modernist and
neoliberal researchers but also the ways in which we might be revocable – how we might be different. He makes me appropriately uneasy, or rather speaks to my unease, in a productive and generative way. This is a productive unease that is different from the nomadic dissatisfactions of my earlier career. It requires a constant struggle against the governmentalities of scientism to find a proper rigour, a thoughtful reflexive and practical rigour—a rigour that goes beyond the niceties and safety of technique to find a form of epistemological practice that is not simply self-regarding. Similarly, Bourdieu was critical of what he called the ‘intellectualist bias’ which always arises when researchers are insufficiently critical of the ‘presuppositions inscribed in the act of thinking about the world’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001, p. 39) and the failure to grasp ‘the logic of practice’ which is embedded in this.

As Foucault put it: ‘Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write’ (Foucault, 1972). In not remaining the same he is also it has to be said decidedly inconsistent. The search of an essential Foucault is a fool’s errand. Nonetheless, this inconsistency, the constant revision of thought, creates spaces for the readers and users of his work to be creative and to be adventurous. All of this is demanding and liberating in equal measure.

With the wisdom of hindsight and in contemporary sociological parlance I can think about this now as an attempt to escape from the powerful binaries that demarcate the sociological field and a renunciation of the grand theoretical divides that make up the history of sociology. That seems about right – but while in the midst of my discomforts and dilemmas what it was that discomforted me did not seem so clear cut and my responses certainly did not seem intellectually coherent.

LIVING THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

Higher Education is now a very different place from the one I entered as an undergraduate and later as a lecturer. I began working in a ‘new’ welfare university and now find myself living the life of a neoliberal academic, a neoliberal subject. In this sense, in some respects, as I did at the beginning, I am again writing and researching about myself, about my performance and reformulation – now within the incitements of neoliberal productivity. The practices and technologies that make up and re-make HE have changed inexorably as a result of a ratchet effect of many small moves, initiatives and reforms over 40 years. These have worked upon the funding and accountability of and access to HE, in different ways, to change what it means to teach and research in HE. Universities are now sites of calculation, investment and productivity, thoroughly integrated into the discourses of the economy. The practices and technologies to which I refer produce a ‘dense network of vigilant and multidirectional gazes’ (Foucault, 1979, p. 176) and ‘lateral effects’ which run through the basic ‘message systems’ of HE – curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and management. At their most visceral and intimate these practices and technologies
effect the transformation of our social relations and practices into calculabilities and exchanges, that is into the market form – with the effect of commodifying of our educational practice. This is a ‘remoralisation’ of our relation to the state and to ourselves (Peters, 2001, pp. 59–60).

Needless to say both Bourdieu and Foucault are more than a little helpful in thinking about neoliberalism. Foucault’s 1978–79 College de France lectures *The Birth of Biopolitics* (Foucault, 2010) offer a remarkable genealogy of liberalisms and concomitantly of the state and the diabolical interplay between globalization and neoliberalism – *New liberalspeak: a new planetary vulgate* as Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001) call it. In different ways Aiwah Ong, Jamie Peck, Wendy Larner and the wonderful John Clarke, also help me think about and research neoliberalism, have all worked with and used Foucault to interrogate the mobile technologies of neoliberalism. That is, both the big-N, the neoliberal political economy ‘out there’ and the little-n, the neoliberal ‘in here’, in our daily life and in our heads, in our appetites and instincts. The latter, the little-n, is in HE realised through a set of local practices which articulate the mundane rhythms of our email traffic, our form-filling, or peer reviewing, and re-modulate the ways in which we relate to one another as neoliberal subjects – individual, responsible, striving, competitive, enterprising. The former, the big N, the constantly expanding realm of exchange relations and competition within education and education services, has generated a new iteration of my policy community ethnographies, worked on with Carolina Junemann (Ball, 2007; Ball, 2012a; Ball & Junemann, 2011) and Diego Santori (Santori, Ball, & Junemann, 2016) which had begun in 1980s (Ball, 1990b). These ‘network ethnographies’ are informed by a range of political sciences literatures which attend to the shift from government to governance, especially the writing Bob Jessop, Mark Bevir and Chris Skelcher. This parallels and in part draws upon Foucault’s account of the shift of emphasis within processes of government from *discipline* (welfare) to *governmentality* (neoliberalism). Perhaps if I am creative enough I can establish a kind of coherence here after all?

The latter, the little n, has generated a series of papers on performativity (e.g. Ball, 2003a, 2012b, 2015b), with an appreciative nod to Judith Butler and J-F Lyotard. Performativity is a key mechanism of neoliberal management, a form of hands-off management that uses comparisons and judgements in place of interventions and direction. It is a moral system that subverts and re-orient us to its truths and ends. It makes us responsible for our performance and for the performance of others. The technologies of performance (the REF, H-Index, impact narratives etc.) constantly generate new and excruciating visibilities within which we as academics relate to one another, and in relation to which we must seek our place and our worth and to fulfill our needs and desires. We are constantly expected to draw on the skills of presentation and of inflation to write ourselves and fabricate ourselves in ever lengthier and more sophisticated CVs, annual self-reviews and target setting and performance management audits, which give an account of our ‘contributions’
to research and teaching and administration and the community. Typically now applications for posts and for promotion run to 40/50 pages and are littered with scores, indexes and ratings intended to demonstrate our productivity. We are constantly incited to make spectacles of ourselves and the danger is that we become transparent but empty, unrecognisable to ourselves in a life enabled by and lived against measurement. Our days are numbered – literally. These techniques do not simply report our practice; they inform, construct and drive our practice. The force and brute logic of performance are hard to avoid. To do so, in one sense at least, means letting ourselves down, in terms of the logic of performance, and letting down our colleagues and our institution. These are also ‘dividing practices’, which work to identify, valorize and reward the successful and productive – the ‘affiliated’ (Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 98), and to target for exile or for reform those who fail to re-make themselves in ‘the image of the market’ (Gillies, 2011, p. 215). As a result there is for many of us in education a growing sense of ontological insecurity; both a loss of a sense of meaning in what we do and of what is important in what we do. There is a sense of constant change and concomitant anxiety and insecurity and increasing precarity – what Lazarrato calls the ‘micro-politics of little fears’ (Lazzarato, 2009, p. 120) – neoliberal affects. Performativity works to render teaching and learning into calculabilities, it also generates market information for choosers, enables the state to ‘pick off’ poor performers, and makes it possible to translate educational work, of all kinds, into contracts articulated as forms of performance delivery, which can then be opened to ‘tender’ and competition from private providers by means of ‘contracting out’.

In the nexus of all of this, I again find myself out of place and uncomfortable. My habitus is ill-adjusted to market sensibilities. This is not a version of HE that seems to have much to do with intellectual curiosity, creativity or critique. I am as I said before ‘other to myself’ (Collini, 2012).

My intellectual responses to these ‘problems’ are constructed through a method of research and analysis which is, clearly, deeply paradoxical. This is made up of a commitment to ethnography on the one hand, and the adoption of Foucauldian analytic sensibilities on the other – an unstable but productive aporia. That is, a particular and confrontation between theory and data. This is evident in the relationships and affinities which connect up policy network analysis (Ball, 2012a) and microphysical flows of power, and the dualistic analysis of policy as text and discourse, as topology and dispositif, as agency and subjectivity (Ball, 2015b). This draws on the need, as Michael Apple (1995) puts it, to think post and neo together, at the same time. So somewhere in this elision between hermeneutics and post-structuralism I remain concerned about very modernist problems of inequality and social injustice in relation to social class and race in particular. My work on choice, that essential neoliberal practice of envy, rivalry and striving, and means of exercising and reproducing privilege, has been one focus of this in various sectors of the education market (Vincent & Ball, 2001; Rollock et al., 2014). Welfarism and
neoliberalism have produced very different political economies of education but
very much the same structural inequalities. The more things change….

WHAT AM I?

In relation to all of this I have begun to try to attend to the possibilities of refusal
and contestation and in particular to think about subjectivity as a site of struggle
– a modern form of politics for a modern form of government. That is, to think
beyond or alongside resistance about the possibilities of refusal. With Antonio
Olmedo (Ball & Olmedo, 2013), I have tried to think about some of the most
intimate aspects of our experience of ourselves and the possibilities of certain ‘arts
of existence’ in relation to contemporary neoliberal education and the confrontation
of governmentality on its own grounds. This rests on Foucault’s conceptualisations
of neoliberal government as a particular configuration of the relationship between
truth and power and the self (and thus ethics) or what Dean terms ‘the rapport
between reflexivity and government’ (Dean, 2007, p. 211) and draws in particular
on some of Foucault’s later work on ‘the care of the self’, parrhesia – truth-telling
– and ethics (Ball, 2015b). In his later lectures, Foucault identified two avenues
of the care of the self as the two primary concerns of western philosophy: ‘On the
one hand, a philosophy whose dominant theme is knowledge of the soul and which
from this knowledge produces an ontology of the self’. And on the other hand, a
philosophy as test of life, of bios, which is the ethical material and object of an
art of oneself’ (Foucault, 2011). It is the latter with which I am concerned in this
biography – on paper and in practice. That is, who or what I am and how could I be
different?

Within all of this as an academic subject I am made uncomfortable again, out
of place once more, my home in the ivory tower is being flattened by neoliberal
bulldozers to make way for a fast-fact HE franchise in which all knowledge has is
price. I began with both fond memories of and a critique of welfare education and
end with a critique of neoliberal education, and have inhabited and struggled with
the discomforts of both. I am left with a sense of process rather than destination,
unease and refusal rather than affirmation, in a space in which I am (im)possible
and in which sociology as a vocation as something I do, is being re-inscribed as
a resource for the management of the population, which is how it began. This is a
space nonetheless in which I continue and struggle.

In the end I wonder who and what it is that I have written here. What kind of
fiction is this Stephen Ball who comes into view in the pages of this article? Is
it someone I might be or might become, or is it a character who never was and
who otherwise does not really exist? There were fleeting moments in the text when
I seemed to glimpse someone I recognise, but at other times there is really nothing
but smoke and mirrors, an aspiration, a fabulation, a re-writing of the self or to
paraphrase Foucault – a deliberate, self-conscious attempt to explain and express
myself to an audience within which I exist and from whom I seek confirmation.
NOTES

1 This chapter draws upon another version of what I have become. That is, S. J. Ball ‘Accounting for a sociological life: influences and experiences on the road from welfarism to neoliberalism’. doi:10.1080/01425692.2015.1050087: Published online: 30 Jun 2015, British Journal of Sociology of Education.

2 A test of intelligence used for allocation to different types of secondary schooling.

3 The Robbins Report (the report of the Committee on Higher Education) was commissioned by the British government and published in 1963. The report recommended immediate expansion of universities, and the number of full-time university students rose from 197,000 in the 1967–68 academic year to 217,000 in the academic year of 1973–74 with “further big expansion” thereafter.

4 See Ball (2011).

5 These were published by Anna Clarkson’s father Malcolm in his Falmer Press imprint – Anna has been my book editor at Routledge for many years.

MY FAVOURITE TEXTS BY OTHERS


MY FAVORITE PERSONAL TEXTS


REFERENCES


**Stephen J. Ball**  
*Institute of Education*  
*University of London*