

Professor Sam Ball Eulogy

Professor Sam Ball, Deputy Chair of the Academic Board, 1986-87 and then Chairman, 1988- 91, died on Wednesday 9 December 2009. Six days previously he had visited the University to meet old friends. Typical of Sam's humour he had always listed the University of Sydney as his one and apparently only 'club' in his *Who's Who's* entry.

Of Jewish background, son of Sarine and Joseph Patrick Ball, Samuel Ball was born 9 January 1933 in southern Sydney during the Great Depression. A bursary boy, and first in his family to go on to higher education, he attended Canterbury Boys High School in the early post war years. After training to be a primary school teacher at Balmain Teachers' College, Sam undertook studies at night at the University of Sydney graduating with a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Education in 1956 and a Master of Education (Honours) in 1961. His great passion as a primary school teacher was teaching gifted children in the Special Opportunity Class at Artarmon Public School in 1957-58. In 2008, half a century after he had left Artarmon, his opportunity class celebrated what had become known as 'The Sam Ball Years'. His experience at Artarmon soon stimulated his interest in education and learning.

After a period as Lecturer in Education at the University of Newcastle 1959-62, Sam Ball pursued what was becoming the norm for many of his generation of educational researchers- postgraduate and doctoral studies in the United States of America. He spent periods in the mid-west as a Lecturer at North Dakota, 1963 and Iowa, 1962-64 where he completed his Ph D. What brought him international prominence was his move to the East Coast and the association with emerging children's television programmes. From 1964 to 1968 he was at Teacher's College Columbia, rising to become Associate Professor. While maintaining his associations with Teachers' College, he then became the senior research psychologist in the educational studies division at the Educational Testing Service at Princeton for a decade from 1968. His initial task was to evaluate *Sesame Street* then the best-known children's television programme in the USA, Canada, Britain and Australia.. In a series of reports and articles he soon became known throughout the English-speaking world for his study

of *Sesame Street* and for the *Electric Company*, a televised remedial reading programme. At the time, there were few academic studies of the effect of television on learning particularly amongst urban and disadvantaged children. Sam Ball had developed complex research studies involving insight and inventiveness. Along with his colleague Scarvia Anderson he later produced major texts based on his ideas and methods for evaluating educational programmes.

Sam Ball was appointed to a chair in education at the University of Sydney in 1978, serving first as Head of the Department of Education within the Faculty of Arts and then the new School of Educational Psychology, Measurement and Technology once the Faculty of Education was created in 1985. Apart from children's television, his other research interests had been in educational psychology where he had made a number of major contributions particularly through the prestigious *American Journal of Educational Psychology*, where he remained editor from 1978 until 1984. At Sydney, Sam taught both educational psychology and the new field of curriculum and programme evaluation which had emerged in part of emerging government support for new educational programmes which then required to be evaluated. Sam was now consulted in this area and also developed new courses in curriculum evaluation and educational measurement. He also co-operated with his colleague Herb Marsh in evaluating the peer review process of manuscripts submitted to journals.

Sam soon appeared as a judge in a box on the popular TV quiz show 'Sale of the Century'. This soon led to a few raised eyebrows and even uplifted fingernails. When the Vice Chancellor called him to account for his accounts for such appearances, Sam replied that he needed to research the media from the inside. A new standard had been set for outside earnings.

By then a large ebullient man, with a black beard, confident in his own ways after his American experiences, Sam did not let criticism disturb his equilibrium. And general academic respect for his work was seen when he took on the position of Secretary of the Australian Conference of Professors of Education 1984-88.

By the late 1980s, Sam Ball had moved beyond the Faculty of Education to take part in central governance of the University. The University of Sydney was then on the

edge of the major changes that would engulf it over the next two decades. Sam was part of the first wave of re-structuring. He helped to see through the amalgamation into the University of the Conservatorium of Music, the College of Arts and Sydney Teacher's College. He was also a member of the interim Board of Governor of the University of Western Sydney which had an initial association with the University of Sydney. Outside the University, he was a member of the Carrick Committee review of Education which would have a major impact on the school curriculum, creating a Board of Studies, as well as changing the balance between public and private providers of schools.

While Sam Ball was caught up in re-structuring of education in and outside the University, one of his major contributions, perhaps still unrecognised, was his work to overcome educational disadvantage. Given his own background, and his own research, it was natural that he should take up this cause. In 1985, under a scheme known as Succeed, he persuaded the University to bring 24 disadvantaged Year 11 students into the University for extra tutoring. By 1988, as Chair of the Board, he promoted the Broadway scheme- a pilot programme targeting school students with non competitive entry marks. Nine Faculties accepted 200 students below the normal cut off. The scheme brought criticism outside the University from such media commentators as Alan Jones and even from within the University by the Dean of Medicine who feared the scheme could force up the cut off for other students. The introduction of the Broadway scheme was one of the most significant new developments in the history of the University marking the continuation of the tradition of catering to students from a variety of social backgrounds. In attempting to overcome the problem of equitable social access, it was perhaps Sam Ball's most significant legacy to the University

Sam's last post at Sydney was Pro Vice Chancellor (Community Affairs) 1991-95. Here he began the development of a university alumni association and annual fund raising campaigns, as well as promoting the funding for endowed chairs. His affable nature and ethnic background seems to have helped Sam to revive the ideals of philanthropy that had helped to sustain the University in the past.

By 1993, Sam had crossed over to Victoria becoming chief executive of the Board of Studies there and overseeing changes to the Victorian Certificate of Education. He later took up consultancies in Australia and the Philipines and then was adviser to the United Arabs Emirate Minister of Education and Youth.

In this brief eulogy I have tried to reflect on Professor Sam Ball's human qualities as much as his academic achievements. Sam was intimately involved in my appointment as Lecturer in Education almost three decades ago. I remember him as one without academic pretence and malice: a man who kept his smile as he aged. He was open to new ideas although he could never get used to such terms as 'gender', once telling me that he was going to stick to 'sex'. I understand that he kept this vow.

John Cleverley was one of Sam Ball's closest academic colleagues. He remembers Sam in the following way.

My most vivid memories of Sam are of his non-solemn side and his work for others. They are of an affable, gently provocative man, with a social conscience, challenging the values of the closed shop of Sydney. A meeting one-on-one with him widened into a frank discussion of the big topics of life.

At that last Xmas party attended here in Sydney just last December, Sam and I spoke at some length. And just as I was leaving, he called out to me 'Hey don't go without saying good-bye'. I didn't. And I and many others in the University would wish our conversations with Sam could have continued.

Professor Sam Ball is survived by his second wife Marita, whom he met here at Sydney in 1975, and by his children Catherine, John, David, and Rachel.

I would like to thank Honorary Professor John Cleverley and Emeritus Professor Don Spearritt for advice and information in preparing this eulogy.

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