

Peter Kallaway: Shaping South African Education History

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The 1976-1977 uprising brought a new awareness to the importance of school education in South Africa. During the 1970s, the state, conscious of the growing skills shortage in the country, started to invest more substantially in Black secondary education. This led to a sudden expansion of the urban secondary school population. However, very few (whether within the state or within the liberation movements) expected the revival of intense resistance to come from school students. Researchers (sociologists, political analysts, historians) scrambled to make sense of it during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Throughout the 1980s, the school crisis only deepened. In this context, the history of education emerged as a noteworthy sub-discipline, and Peter Kallaway was at the heart of it.

During the 1980s and 1990s, Kallaway, who began his career as a school teacher in the late 1960s before switching to academia, established himself as the go-to person on education history. He argued that education was a crucial site of political struggle in South Africa, and in order to transform it, it was essential to understand it as thoroughly as possible.

Most revisionist Marxists were interested in Black schooling only insofar as it was functional to capitalist development. They had a top-down approach, concentrating on state policy and the influence of various sectors of capital. Kallaway, while influenced by some of the Marxist arguments, insisted that it was impossible to make sense of the education crisis without placing it in a broader historical context. He was probably the leading figure among a new cohort of historians of education, often linked to the History Workshop movement, who were interested in complicating and humanising the picture. New studies emerged in the 1980s and 1990s on the long history of mission education in the region, including subtle examinations of the complicated relationship between missions and the various

regional colonial/settler states. The mission-educated Black elite, with all its complexity and contradictions, became an important focus of study. Writers also pointed to a long history of resistance by students. Bantu Education, which replaced the missionary system from the mid-1950s, came under careful scholarly scrutiny. In line with the emerging social history of the time, much more attention was given to the experience 'on the ground' of school students and teachers.

Aside from numerous scholarly articles and books, Kallaway edited two crucial volumes on the history of education, which, to my mind, shaped the sub-discipline. In 1984, Kallaway edited *Apartheid and Education: The Education of Black South Africans*. The volume included chapters by well-established historians such as Tom Lodge, Robert Edgar, and Deborah Gaitskell, as well as education specialists who would later become leaders in their field, such as Penny Enslin, Pam Christie, and Linda Chisholm. The volume combined deep history on the origins of Black education with a careful examination of Bantu Education. It was concerned to draw on these historical insights to shed light on the 'current crisis.' Among other issues, contributors critiqued the recently published report of the reformist De Lange Commission of 1981. As a history student in the 1980s, *Apartheid and Education* was one of those seminal Ravan Press publications that shaped my intellectual development. It drew education firmly into the orbit of social history. In 2002, Kallaway brought out his second major edited volume, *The History of Education Under Apartheid, 1948-1994* (published by Pearson Education/Maskew Miller Longman). In post-apartheid South Africa, education issues were as urgent as ever. This volume drew together a wide range of established and new writers in the field. The volume dissected education under apartheid in terms of material/structural issues, state policy, popular resistance and ordinary human experience. While apartheid was technically over by 2002, it was more important than ever to review its legacy and impact on education.

Kallaway had a longstanding interest in comparative colonial education. This was given full expression in his co-edited volume with Rebecca Swartz, *Empire and Education in Africa: The Shaping of a Comparative Perspective* (UKZN Press, 2012). In this collection, the authors attempt to assess broad common themes in international colonial education policy and practice, while also drawing attention to local particularity. Once again, Kallaway took the role of facilitator, drawing together diverse writers in the field and bringing them into a dialogue.

From as early as the 1970s until the 2020s, Kallaway supervised, worked with, and influenced numerous scholars working in the field of South African education history. As a remarkably energetic scholar-activist, Kallaway has continued to be an important voice addressing the dysfunction and structural inequality in post-apartheid education.