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Author(s): Michael Cross

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A Historical Review of Education in South Africa: towards an assessment

MICHAEL CROSS

The development of the schools crisis, between 1976 and 1980, appears to have had the effect of committing many social scientists to a more serious approach to the study of education in South Africa. This is expressed through the attempt to review the traditional schools of thought, and redirect the theory and history of South African education. To some extent, it represents a broader widening of the debate, expressed, for example, by the publication of the de Lange Report in July 1981 as well as the release in July 1985 of a Human Sciences Research Council Report which identified *apartheid* as the cause of conflict in South Africa.

The outstanding feature of this development is the emergence of a new generation of educationists and historians of education with a viewpoint startlingly opposed to the 'liberal' and 'conservative' tradition. They argue that any objective analysis of an education system must be accomplished with the use of the tools of political economy [1]. It is stressed that the dominant traditional approach which presents education or schooling as an independent field of enquiry, divorced from the wider political, social and economic context within which policies are formulated, is no longer acceptable. Further, the attempt merely to describe the development of educational policy, without at the same time trying to problematise either the process itself of schooling or the historical context of which it forms a part, is also criticised [2]. In short, the view of South African educational developments broadly accepted by the liberal academics for some time has come to be seen as inadequate.

Not only does this new school argue for the use of the tools of political economy; in addition, it maintains that those social scientists of the early 1970s who pioneered this approach in the broader fields of history and sociology have either neglected education or have examined it solely in relation to the economy. Thus the new school of thought within educational studies can, at the same time, be seen as a 'revisionist front' of the early political economy tradition in South African studies [3].

This paper is designed to review the most significant moments of recent educational historiography, with special emphasis on what has been written about the schooling of black South Africans. An attempt will be made to provide a critique and reassessment of the way the specific nature of South African education has been conceptualised. In so doing, it will be necessary to examine aspects of other traditions in the writing on South African education, most notably that of the 'liberal' school which attracted so much of the ire of the new materialist school. It must be emphasised that this article is merely an exploratory foray into the historiography of South African education and that a great deal of work still needs to be done to fill out the overall picture.

Dominant Schools of Thought in Education in South Africa

The development of educational historiography in South Africa since the beginning of the twentieth century seems to have been the history of a contest between three main schools of thought: the nationalist/conservative, the liberal, and radical/neo-Marxist.

The nationalist-conservative tradition has dominated historical literature on education both before and after the consolidation of the apartheid system in education. Embedded in the conservative doctrine of Christian National Education (CNE), this historiography tends to glorify traditional Afrikaner values and to promote Afrikaner nationalism, thus developing an excessively 'White-centred' view about the history of education in South Africa. Although some of its central ideas have been widely shared amongst some educationists in English-speaking institutions, historically it has predominantly remained an attribute of Afrikaans-speaking educational circles. As it is not the main concern of this paper, only a brief summary of its major developments will be considered.

Two outstanding trends can be distinguished in the early nationalist educational historiography. The first includes names like Lugtenburg (1925), Coetzee (1936 and 1941), Bot (1936 and 1951), Du Plessis (1939), Fourie (1940), etc. [4]. The second comprises several theses on education presented to the universities of Pretoria and Potchefstroom between 1948 and 1950 by Symington (1948), Venter (1950), van Tonder (1950), Ploeger (1954) and many other publications and reports on Afrikaner traditions and education for blacks [5]. The former reflects the struggle for preservation of Afrikaner educational tradition as part of the struggle against British anglicisation policies. The latter came as a response to the Afrikaner aspirations through an appropriate description and interpretation of Afrikaner values, beliefs and institutions. In both cases a linguistic and cultural renaissance of the Afrikaner people as proclaimed by du Toit and van der Lingen in the mid-nineteenth century was the major concern [6]. This assumed the form of a Christian National Education Movement, which involved the creation of CNE schools (1902-1907), reassessment and reformulation of the CNE policies, and the establishment of respective institutions to stimulate the debate such as the Institute for Christian National Education (ICNE).

Coetzee, one of the prime movers in this development, in an article published in 1948, gave a rationale for the critique and reactions manifested by Afrikaners in previous decades. Separate schools with mother-tongue as the medium of instruction were justified on "religious, psychological-educational and national-cultural grounds for the maintenance of Afrikaner identity". In 1948, he explained the same issue in this way: "We as Calvinistic Afrikaners will have our CNE schools: Anglicans, Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Jews, liberalists and atheists will have their own schools" [7]. Coetzee was supported by men like H. G. Stoker, D. J. van Rooy and P. J. S. de Klerk, while educationists and sociologists like du Plessis and Bot remained critical and "impatient at clerical meddling in their profession" [8].

Essentially, CNE proclaimed that education must be adjusted to the life and world view of the Afrikaners: all school activities must reveal the Christian philosophy of life, Calvinistic beliefs, and promote the principle of nationalism in education, i.e. the national ideal, traditions, religion, language or culture of each social group. From the 1920s onwards, these ideas were associated with the need for Afrikaner pre-eminence in the sphere of the state and the restructuring of the relations between white and black people in the light of the CNE doctrine, in contrast to previous concern for the survival of Afrikanerdom.

The most well-known of CNE writers dealing with education for blacks were du Plessis, Fourier and Nel [9]. Du Plessis (1935) was concerned with cultural disintegration

amongst Africans and suggested that black societies should undergo a Christian transformation but retain their 'Bantu' character [10]. Fourier (1940) emphasised the need for preservation of the intrinsic qualities of the African culture and maintained that teaching should be in the mother-tongue in order to ensure that "the national pride of the Africans is not harmed" [11]. Nel undertook the task of demonstrating that segregation was aimed at the development of "a racially genuine Bantu culture" [12]. In general, most Christian-Nationalist writers advocated complete segregation of Africans, instruction in the vernacular, restoration of the 'Bantu culture' and Christianisation with a minimum degree of 'westernisation'. Assimilationist and egalitarian policies held by liberals were categorically rejected. For blacks would lose their culture and Afrikaners would sink to the level of the *kaffirs* and would ultimately be dominated by them [13]. For this reason, as Nel has pointed out, education policy for blacks should be formulated according to the viewpoint of the Afrikaner nation, i.e. the CNE foundation [14]. These ideas were picked up by theorists of anthropological orientation like Eiselen, Cook, Eloff and Verwoerd, who ultimately became predominant in the Afrikaner ranks. Using their influential positions within the state they converted them into state policy during the 1950s and 1960s [15].

During the last two decades, the Afrikaner tradition has been characterised by a more systematic theoretical commitment. The distinctive feature of this development was the creation of new disciplines more adjusted to the CNE tradition in the field of educational studies. Viljoen and Pienaar in what has probably been the most widely-prescribed book in the sphere of education in South Africa over the past decade formulated a new theory and philosophy of education based on CNE, positivist and phenomenological tradition. This is known as *Fundamental Pedagogics* (1971). The underlying assumption in fundamental pedagogics is that during a scientific practice one has to bracket "all faith, superstition, dogma, opinions, theories and philosophies of life and the world" [16] in order to discover the 'universal essences of education'. However, these essences as a new knowledge should be applied by the scientist (pedagogician) into the life-world of every day to enrich the culture of the group to which he belongs [17]. On the same lines, Stone (1982) has been searching for a new approach in comparative education which to his mind will establish the balance between the two sides of educational reality, the common and the diverse. These, he argues, are of equal importance to comparative research [18].

Furthermore, Coetzee has recently announced the replacement of history of education by what he calls "metagogics". In his article, *Metagogics: a new discipline* (1983), he criticises the history of education on a number of grounds. The most important of these appear to be that history of education "burdens the students with a mass of irrelevant facts" and that it has no utility for either the present or the future. What is required, he argues, is an alternative discipline which for him has "more scope, advantages and potential to cope with all educational demands in a technical and functional world rapidly approaching the year 2000" [19]. This would enable one "to plan ahead and anticipate the necessary steps or corrective measures for preventing the entropic situation in future through an adequate methodology embodying a multi-disciplinary view, system theory and the detection of variants" [20].

These new ideas have considerably influenced the way people think of education in South Africa. They rapidly became dominant in the Afrikaans-speaking universities, ethnic universities and colleges of education. They are reflected in the writings of many Afrikaner educationists and black writers like (for example) Luthuli, Nkgware and others [21]. Strong criticisms, however, have been addressed from liberal and radical circles, particularly in English-speaking institutions [22].

Nationalist-conservative ideas were from the beginning of the century confronted with

an emergence of a vigorous liberal tradition, stressing the importance of African schooling and criticising the policy of “total segregation of Africans” as proclaimed by CNE theorists and other conservative writers.

The concept of liberalism, within the South African context, has been the object of diverse studies. In its general use, M. Legassick distinguishes two main meanings. In one sense, the concept of liberalism is used to characterise “those who give priority to the freedom of the individual and thereby cherish those institutions of bourgeois society—the rule of law, an independent judiciary, a free press, freedom of speech and association and conscience, etc., which are supposed to safeguard such freedom”. It is also used in an economic sense, he argues, to define those “who believe in *laissez-faire*, the free interplay of market forces untrammelled by the state” [23]. These general meanings change and assume different nuances in different societies and at various stages in their historical development. In the South African context, however, liberalism has developed a specific meaning. M. Legassick characterises this as follows:

In South Africa ‘liberal’ too, has acquired another meaning . . . that of ‘friend of the native’ . . . In this sense, ‘liberalism’ is, in some sense, identifiable with ‘tender-mindedness’ or, in the context of the view of South African society and ‘native policy’ . . . a force trying, on the one hand, to minimise or disguise the conflictual and coercive aspects of the social structure, and, on the other, to convince selected Africans that grievances they felt could be ameliorated through reforms which liberals could promulgate. [24]

The notion of reforming the conditions of oppression of blacks has been a consistent thread in liberal ideology; it has acted as a basis for the creation of a harmonious capitalist society based on the principles of political and economic liberalism. This ‘benevolent paternalistic’ attitude, to use the words of the historian Shula Marks, was at no point concerned with the *abolition* of the basic conditions of that oppression. M. Legassick has, in addition, noted that those liberals whose allegiance has been close to the Chamber of Mines have had, as a common ideal, the “desire to transcend a repressive policy which gives no outlet for African expression of grievances without granting to Africans significant political power to determined white destinies” [25].

In her book, *Liberalism in South Africa, 1948–1963* (1971), J. Robertson has made the point that in South Africa liberalism has been determined by the context in which different groups have found themselves. She points out that, in general, liberals have advocated two alternative solutions to the South African ‘colour problem’: total separation and parallel institutions. The theory of parallel institutions (‘separate-but-equal’ education) was liberal orthodoxy until about the 1930s [26]. P. Rich, in *White Power and the Liberal Conscience* (1948), shares the view that the ‘separate-but-equal’ tradition was a part of the ‘liberal tradition’ during the 1930s and 1940s. The liberals, he argues, “looked, as did the government itself, via a strategy of territorial segregation, to the rural reserves as the main repositories for African political and economic rejuvenation” [27]. This was to change as the National party became its main mouthpiece, and as the effects became manifest.

I shall briefly set into historical sequence some of the social features represented by the liberal school during the twentieth century. From the 1880s up to the 1920s, the South African industrial revolution took place under the dominance of accumulation of mining capital. Large sectors of the African population were drawn to the mines as migrant workers. Amongst whites, the process of proletarianisation involved the creation of the so-called ‘poor white’ problem, i.e. unemployed white unskilled labour. From the 1920s onwards large-scale proletarianisation of blacks began with the effects of the 1913 Land Act and the emergence

of manufacturing industry. The main urban centres became crowded with black proletarians seeking jobs. This created serious social problems. Educational historiography and debate, at this stage, were directly or indirectly responding to these social changes.

During the early period of the mining revolution, some criticism of the new policy of segregation was developed in terms of nineteenth century liberalism. It was expressed as a recognition of individuals on the basis of 'civilisation' rather than race. But such criticism, as already mentioned, did not go beyond the segregation framework and was mainly concerned with alleviation of the effects of this policy. Education of blacks was left in the hands of missionaries, even if the "missionaries could be somewhat irritating with their mildly assimilationist tendencies" [28].

Rapid social change during the 1920s and 1930s increased interest in the 'natives' and, in particular, the education of blacks. Basically, two main factors contributed to this new development: first, the emergence of an African urban proletariat and, secondly, the growth of mission-educated Africans who were beginning to emerge as an identifiable elite. On the one hand, it was considered necessary to formulate proposals for the education and integration of the African proletariat into the new economic order and new forms of life. On the other hand, the crucial mediating role which the emerging petty bourgeoisie could play in this political context was recognised. According to P. Rich, one of the key issues was to "instill in them some form of political accommodationism linked to alternative political outlets through the rural reserves" [29].

The liberal answer to these problems was to try to control the leisure-time of adults and youth through the promotion of different kinds of cultural and educational institutions. These were to act as channels of communication with the African elite in the process of their attempted political co-option. Thus the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR, 1929) and a number of social welfare institutions such as the Gamma Sigma Club, the Bantu Men's Social Centre (1924), the Helping Hand Club for Native Girls, the Joint Councils, the Bridgman Memorial Hospital and various newspapers became areas and means whereby the liberals tried to meet the problems of an African elite and effect a compromise between black aspirations and their own ameliorative goals [30].

At the same time, a new force came to reinforce liberal activities: the universities. M. Legassick argues that these attempted to develop social and educational research in order to overcome the problems of ignorance and maladministration in resolving "native problems" [31]. T. Couzens [32] provides the following picture:

In the universities, departments of Bantu Studies were formed. In 1918, the University of Cape Town appointed a Professor of Bantu Philology; and in 1921, A. Radcliffe-Brown became professor of Social Anthropology; in 1921, Rev. A. T. Bryant was appointed Research Fellow and Lecturer in Zulu History at the University of the Witwatersrand, and in 1923 C. M. Doke was made Senior Lecturer in Bantu Philology and Lecturer in Social Anthropology. In Pretoria, at the Transvaal University College, Dr Edgar Brookes taught similar courses. The University of the Witwatersrand started publishing its magazine *Bantu Studies* in 1921 with Rheinallt-Jones as editor. [33]

The most controversial problem, however, remained that of education of the African working class. Having accepted the principle that the Africans were capable of benefitting by education and schooling, liberals remained divided in their conceptions about what type of education would be appropriate for blacks. Many of their formulations were influenced by Loram's theory of the "native's mental apathy" and "mental arrested development", an approach he formulated in *The Education of the South African Native*, in 1917. According to

this theory, the 'native' might exhibit intelligence during his/her childhood, but his intellectual development was arrested at the adolescent stage [34]. This theory was supported by intelligence tests undertaken by Dr M. L. Fick which were published under the title, *The Educability of the South African Native*, in 1939. Many other tests were run by other institutions with the same purpose. In many cases they were used to justify the argument that the 'native' was not capable of education or, at best, could hardly benefit by it. This can be interpreted as a form of 'biological racism' in South African history.

Opposed to the school of 'primitive mentality' was Rheinallt-Jones, an influential figure within the SAIRR and related institutions. He attacked these conceptions as 'scientific pretensions of racism' [35]. Other social scientists and educationists like M. E. McKerron, historian of education at Rhodes University, supported these views. McKerron herself argued that theories of 'arrested development' could scarcely be regarded as scientific either in conception or in application [36]. She challenged those who argued that black criminality could be attributed to 'over-education' and maintained, instead, that it was due, precisely to its opposite: inadequate education [37]. Her main concern was rather different: "Our main problem today", she wrote, "is not to weigh the arguments for and against Native education, but to devise a system of education which will give scope for the highest development of the Native, and effect a happy co-ordination between European and Native life" [38].

E. H. Brookes took these debates further. Indeed, in his *Native Education in South Africa* (1930), he expressed views remarkably similar to those of present-day neo-Marxists in South African education:

Education is resisted because it would produce more claimants for the franchise, because it would reduce the available number of farm labourers, because it would upset the social structure of South Africa, because it would encourage miscegenation. [39]

In contrast to the dominant views of the time, Brookes believed that:

... the problem of Native education is, in essence, whatever it may seem, much more of a class problem than of a race problem; for the objections made to it are precisely the objections made to the education of the European masses during the last century. [40]

Despite the differences in viewpoint amongst the liberals, the main solution to 'native education' was in the provision of some form of 'adapted education' which, it was thought, would unite different races without sacrificing the individuality and social position of any one of them. Drawing its inspiration from American Tuskegeeism and the Phelps-Stokes Inquiry of the 1920s, 'adapted education' had as its main purpose the provision of skills suitable to rural life [41].

The doyen of liberalism in South African education, E. G. Malherbe, demonstrates a similar but different path of development. During the 1920s and 1930s Malherbe remained aloof from debates about schooling for blacks. His first volume of *Education in South Africa* (1925) seems to have been concerned with the promotion of South Africanism, conceived as including whites and excluding blacks. Later, through his work in the Carnegie Commission of Inquiry into Poor Whites and the South African Council for Educational and Social Research, of which he was the Director, his main commitment seems to have been national development and rationalisation of methods for scientific study of social problems. In the South African Council, predecessor of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), he played a key role in the formulation of national policy, and in particular educational and social policy. Thus when in the 1930s the flux of the black proletariat to the towns became a serious problem for the dominant classes, he was one of those who relied on social research

as the basis for the formulation of rational policy. Thus by 1930 his interest in white education made way for a concern with the study of black education:

... one [list of topics for research] which urgently needs investigation, namely the social effects of the urbanisation of our South African Natives. The work of the two commissions of 1883 and 1905 should be carried further with a view to assessing the degree of disintegration of Bantu life as a result of their increasing industrialisation and detribalisation. Social workers tell me that their family life is disintegrating to an amazing degree and that the incidence of illegitimate births amongst the natives is over 80 percent in some of the urban locations in the Transvaal. These children are growing up. The educative and disciplinary influences of the normal Native family are totally absent. The result is an appalling rise in criminality amongst Native juveniles in these cities. . . . [42]

As conditions changed during the 1960s, his views and priorities did too.

Meanwhile, the elections of 1948 culminated in the political victory of an alliance comprising white farmers, teachers, ministers and workers expressing an extreme right wing ideology. Thereafter, the strategy of the ruling class involved, on the one hand, the intensification of state intervention in order to control the circulation of labour through its redistribution and repulsion; on the other, a decisive challenge to the progressive liberal trends. Special legislation was promulgated (such as influx control, Bantu Authorities, and Group areas Acts) aimed at controlling the rapid and growing influx of proletarianised Africans into urban areas. At the educational level, state control was asserted over missionary schooling and black education was segregated through fragmentation of the education system and differentiation of curricula by the Bantu Education Act of 1953. Similar legislation was promulgated for 'coloured' and 'Indian' 'population groups' during the 1960s. How did the liberals react?

Amongst the black petty bourgeoisie there was a radicalisation of liberal attitudes, culminating in the banning of political organisations in 1960. As far as whites were concerned, liberalism suffered a strong defeat. Rich interprets the development of the Liberal Party after 1953 as "only a somewhat tardy and defensive reaction by liberals concerned with the political consequences of the government's exclusive nationalism" and as an attempt merely to revive the Cape-inherited franchise for the educated African minorities [43]. In 1968, however, the Liberal Party went under; its rhetoric was continued in the Progressive Party, which later became the Progressive Federal Party. Multi-ethnic political representation, the amelioration of apartheid in urban areas, the relaxation of influx control and the establishment of a black middle class remained the pillars of its strategy.

Educational strategies reflected similar directions. The traditional bastions of liberalism, the English-speaking universities of Cape Town and the Witwatersrand and the SAIRR reacted through reaffirmation of the principles of political liberalism. On the initiative of the SAIRR, a study was undertaken by E. H. Brookes & J. B. Macauley which resulted in the publication of the book, *Civil Liberty in South Africa* (1958)—an authentic 'liberal manifesto'. Here they protested against the violation of various 'freedoms', including that of education. Following the University Education Act of 1959, preventing the admission of black students to these 'Open Universities', they organised a Conference consisting mainly of senior members to prepare and publish a statement on the value of the open university. The conclusions were published as *The Open Universities in South Africa* (1957). It drew extensively on the American experience of integrated education.

The only books of note in the 1960s dealing with education, were those of Muriel Horrel, E. G. Malherbe and the Education Panel at the University of the Witwatersrand

(Wits). Horrel's concern, like that of the SAIRR, was mainly to document the effects of Bantu Education. She undertook the invaluable task of translating legislation into a series of books which have become standard source-material for students of Bantu Education. The Wits Education Panel, and the direction in which Malherbe was now to move, demonstrated a rather different and changing strand within liberalism in South Africa. The Wits Education Panel included the noted Wits educationist, Raymond Tunmer, who subsequently also produced a compilation of *Documents in South African Education* with Brian Rose, thus gradually beginning to open the field of education for academic and professional study.

The publication of the *Education Panel* heralded a new era in liberalism in South African education, the era of so-called 'economic liberalism'. It essentially argued that certain apartheid practices were 'archaisms' and ought to be removed. Bantu Education, it stressed, would lead to a dire skills shortage and steps had to be taken to prevent this from occurring. In addition, it favoured the promotion of a black leadership through education. The main thrust of this emerging economic liberalism was well pinpointed by E. G. Malherbe in his address to the 1966 National Congress of the Progressive Party. Here, with a high sense of humour, he compares the situation and conceptions of the 1930s with the present and future reality. He maintains the separate-but-equal strand in his thinking, but is much concerned with liberalisation of the education system. He argued that:

... the demands of the economy of South Africa are stronger than the colour bar with plenty of evidence out of the past to support and, indeed, to prove this view.
[44]

Thus, by the 1960s, new developments had produced a new Malherbe and a new school of thought in South African education. What are these developments?

Two main factors seem to have determined the emergence and rapid development of economic liberalism: (i) the unprecedented rise of the organic composition of capital during the 1960s and 1970s, followed by considerable changes in the structure and nature of the labour force; and (ii) the influence of human capital theory, associated with modernisation theory, which led to an emphasis on the economics of education. 'Manpower planning' was a central feature of thinking within this school. There is a large and rich literature on human capital theory; only its application to South African education will be dealt with in this paper [45].

Throughout the sixties, the South African economy experienced a massive economic expansion and deep qualitative changes in the form of capital accumulation. The rapid centralisation and concentration of capital, at the expense of high rates of exploitation of labour, was fuelled by large injections of foreign capital which made possible the transition from competitive to monopoly capital. The rise of the organic composition of capital led to two contradictory processes. On the one hand, it accelerated the process of expulsion of workers from the productive process; on the other, it expanded the need for suitably qualified skilled workers. This proceeded more rapidly than the supply of trained labour by the educational system.

The state tried to minimise the shortage of skilled labour by recruiting skilled white immigrants and by 'floating' the colour bar and allowing limited numbers of blacks into semi-skilled and skilled occupations [46]. As Malherbe stressed in 1966, it was assumed that "further economic growth was quite impossible without the constant shifting of boundaries between the work done by whites and the work done by non-whites" [47]. However, the limitations and price of recruitment of external manpower could not be maintained indefinitely. It had to be accompanied by the expansion of education. It was, in part, because of the increased recruitment of black students to secondary schools without any comparable

increase in expenditure on expansion and extension of facilities that led to the conditions of over-crowding, double-shift, etc., during the early 1970s, that students' frustration with the quality of schooling grew so dramatically [48]. Liberal educationists, amongst whom might be counted the reformist wing of the Botha government, which took over much of the 1960s' discourse in its de Lange report, have continued to express the view ever more stridently that lack of educational reform is having a damaging effect on economic growth, and that the resolution of South Africa's educational problems must involve paying greater attention to issues of manpower planning.

It has been this view that has been at the centre of the neo-Marxist critique of the liberal school. They argue that posing educational problems as questions of manpower planning produce technicist solutions, rather than the political and economic solutions that are required. They maintain that beneath this apolitical technicist formulation of the problem lies the assumption that the removal of the more backward features of apartheid would lead to the emergence of a liberal capitalist democracy. The implication, it is argued, is the promotion of educational reforms leading to notions of equality of opportunity but not equal education. Kallaway interprets this as a strategy "designed to change and modify social conditions that have become widely regarded as unjust and unacceptable" [49] and as serving to 'strengthen and perpetuate essential power relations (class relations)... if introduced on their own, without corresponding economic and political changes' [50]. In addition, drawing on the 'new sociology of education' and radical critiques of schooling in capitalist societies, it criticises the liberal school for treating educational development as a neutral and independent process. It is

presented as a process of 'natural' and 'unproblematic' growth... rather than as the outcome of a complex historical process in which each new development is contested by the interested parties... while conflicts over the form and content of educational policies are masked and struggles between various interested parties are hidden. The dominant tradition of educational research hides from view a whole history of the construction of schooling and encourages a belief in some simple history of educational progress, a history with no costs, no struggles, no ambiguities. [51]

A third criticism made is of its excessive concentration on the history of white schooling and empiricism.

Why has the reaction of this school to its predecessors been so intense? And what is the nature and value of its contribution to educational studies in South Africa?

The Radical/Neo-Marxist School

Different reasons can be advanced for the emergence of this school. Amongst these must be the heightened conflict in education, demonstrated by the growth of the black consciousness movement with its base primarily in schools and universities during the early 1970s, the uprisings of 1976 and the school boycotts of 1980. These developments generated the view that the priorities and questions which were popular amongst educationists and other academics during the sixties and seventies were irrelevant in the light of new developments. Their theoretical emphasis was, in addition, profoundly conditioned by both the neo-Marxist political economy tradition in Southern African studies and the repercussions of the influence of 'reproduction theory' in the sociology of education. The main sources of 'reproduction theory' in the mid-1970s were L. Althusser and S. Bowles & H. Gintis [52].

Neo-Marxist political economy became important in Southern African studies from the

early 1970s, but it is noteworthy that it did not penetrate into the educational field before 1980. Webster's claim, in 1977, that any analysis of the history of education should be located in the political economy of its time seems not to have produced any immediate echo [53]. Shortly thereafter, historians and sociologists of education were drawn into a revisionist debate against the economic reductionism and structuralism which dominated the early neo-Marxist studies in political economy of South Africa [54]. More important, however, was the debate about the uses and limitations of 'reproduction theory' in education. This debate was conducted in the pages of two journals, *Perspectives in Education* and *Africa perspective* between 1980 and 1982. In 1984, the major expression of this new mode of thinking was found in the publication of Peter Kallaway (Ed.) *Apartheid and Education*, which drew on a wide range of scholars, only a few of them based in South Africa; my concern in this appraisal is with the latter, as other contributors to the book revealed different theoretical and historical preoccupations. The next section will review this debate, and then examine the strengths and weaknesses of *Apartheid and Education*. One of the major contributors to this debate has been Bill Nasson, whose work for the Carnegie Commissions of Inquiry into Poverty in South Africa involved a significant evaluation of the debate. His is probably the only work which falls outside the journals and the book.

Althusser's *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* appeared as a study of major importance in the field of the social sciences. In summary, Althusser distinguishes in that article between (a) state power as control of the state and (b) the state apparatus as those instruments of the state which help to secure conditions necessary for capital accumulation. Within the state apparatus he distinguishes between the repressive state apparatus and the ideological state apparatus (ISA). The former includes the government, administration, courts, police and army, while the latter comprise all cultural and educational institutions such as schools, religion, the family, trade unions, etc. The repressive state apparatus functions largely by violence and the ideological state apparatus largely by ideology. Thus reproduction of the relationships of production is ensured through a dialectical interaction of the two state apparatuses. The outstanding feature of Althusser's theory is that it considers the school to occupy the dominant position within the ideological state apparatus [55].

Althusser's work evoked a considerable response in South Africa. One of the first reactions amongst South African scholars came in 1978 from L. Chisholm, who considers it in relation to South African history textbooks. She questions his conceptions in the light of student resistance in South Africa, arguing that he fails to provide an adequate theoretical base which can account for such resistance [56]. A stronger response was forthcoming from R. Levin in his article, *Black Education, Class Struggle and the Dynamics of Change in South Africa Since 1946* (1980). For him there is a distinct economism implicit in Althusser's formulations about the nature of the state, which is conceived of as homogeneous. Using B. Poulantzas' contribution that the dominant classes are not monolithic, but are organised at different points in time by different fractions which attain hegemony within the state, Levin argues that the functioning of education is correspondingly more complex than that suggested by Althusser. Furthermore, he argues that Althusser fails to elucidate the specific relationship which educational institutions have with the economic level of a social formation. He adopts the position of Hussein, who attributes to the labour market the crucial role of providing the link between education and the economy [57]. Despite these assertions, his empirical and theoretical work are inadequately integrated. Despite, for example, his criticisms of the functionalism of Althusser's argument, he provides an essentially functionalist understanding of the origins and purposes of Bantu Education.

S. Bowles & H. Gintis, in *Schooling in Capitalist America*, developed the Althusserian thesis, positing that the social relations of the school reproduce the social relations of

economic life. The book discusses the failure of educational reform in the USA to alter socio-economic and educational inequalities. It argues that the causes for the persistent failure of reform lie in the constraints that the capitalist economy imposes on the educational system. The arguments within this book came under strong attack from Fluxman, who argued that Bowles & Gintis fall into a double reductionism: on the one hand, a reductionism of structure (all social institutions are conceived of as possessing the same social structure, that of production) and, on the other, a reductionism of the class struggle (the struggles in education and the economy are reduced to the effects of simple contradiction between capital and labour). He concludes by formulating some of the conditions which a non-reductionist theory of schooling in a capitalist society would have to fulfill. Reasoning closely along the lines of Althusser and Poulantzas, he suggests that such an analysis would have to take into account the specificity of the structure of the educational apparatuses as well as the complex nature of the class struggle. Thus:

Since education is an ISA, it is subject to the effects of the struggle between classes, classes' fractions, social strata and categories which are constituted at the level of the economy, of politics in general, specifically the state, as well as being subject to the effects of struggles occurring at the level of the economy. Thus an adequate analysis of education would have to incorporate an investigation of the role the educational ISA in any specific social formation plays in the production of the ideology of the hegemonic fraction in the state. It would also have to allow the possibility that ideologies that contradict the hegemonic ideologies (either the ideologies of rival fractions of capital or fractions of working class) might develop and even become dominant within the educational ISA. Furthermore, it would have to take account of the other social fractions, social strata and categories which would have specific effects on the production of ideology in the educational ISA... the bureaucracy... intellectuals... and petty-bourgeoisie... [58]

This debate was continued by Shapiro in 'Education in a capitalist society: how ideology functions' (1981), again which applied a combination of the above analyses to the introduction of Bantu Education. In this article it is stressed that education cannot be understood apart from the social context within which it operates. Her main contribution to the debate is her attempt to theorise conflict in education. She does so by arguing that there is a contradiction between the function of education and the knowledge that is provided through it. This is a contradiction at the heart of any ideological state apparatus. It was followed by an attack from Chisholm and Sole whose main concern was the by now unproblematic acceptance of the "ahistorical and mechanistic accounts of education", paying "little heed to class struggle as a fundamental feature of class society" produced by the Althusser-Bowles & Gintis problematic. They urged, instead, concrete analyses of the way in which educational institutions in South Africa have mediated complex class and social struggles. They also called for recognition of the possibilities of "ideologies of the exploited" resulting in transformative practice [59].

This debate was also played out between Collins and Christie, again using Bantu Education to exemplify the usefulness of reproduction theory, and Frank Molteno in his work on the 1980 students' boycotts in Cape Town (1983). Molteno, in summing up the debate has argued that

... so long as the burden of selection/sorting/examination is placed on schooling in an unequal and class society, then 'reproduction' perspective must be taken into account... this does not mean that schooling has to do with nothing apart from the

role in social reproduction or that schooling plays whatever role it does in this regard because social reproduction requires it to. [60]

Nonetheless, he adds the important rider that reproduction theory “renders any notion of failure inconceivable” [61], since such failure “must imply the failure on the part of theories of reproduction too” [62].

In summary, it is clear that social conditions and resistance and reform in education in South Africa prompted considerable debate about the usefulness of reproduction theory. Applied to the specific context, its weaknesses became manifest. Thus, sociological theory of education was at once refined and developed through concrete analysis of a changing social context.

Apartheid and Education involved a somewhat different project. It attempted to demonstrate how Marxist political economy and historical materialism applied to the educational field could provide a better understanding of educational developments in South Africa than the earlier liberal approaches. The book is devoted to a critique of the liberal interpretation of education within apartheid, African responses to Bantu Education, and recent state strategies in education. It provides both an historical-philosophical and a contemporary analysis of South African education.

As a new ‘prescription’ *Apartheid and Education* was received with a certain degree of scepticism amongst many academics and students of education in South Africa. Criticisms were made about the structure, form and content of the book. Some criticised the racial composition of the contributors: all are white and nine out of 15 outside South Africa. Others, focussing their attention on the content, criticised the ‘urban’ focus of the book and the absence of any concrete direct ‘solutions’ to the problems in education. Unfortunately, in these first responses no criticisms were directed at the main issue of the book, namely its concern with redirection of approach in the study of education. This was taken for granted. The most detailed criticism was made by Enslin, who took issue with the characterisation of the dominant tradition in education in South Africa as liberal. Rather, she argues, the dominant tradition is a conservative one [63]. Here again, however, the criticisms do not touch the central direction of *Apartheid and Education*.

Before commenting on the conceptualisation of education presented by the book itself, it might be apposite to comment on some of the impressions mentioned above—concerning, for example, the racial composition of the authors. This objection was also raised after the publication of the *Oxford History of South Africa*. One could easily respond to these kinds of criticisms by arguing that social science is not a race property. In other words, there is no specific social science for each racial group. One can hardly argue that racial factors play an important role in determining the nature and character of the products of social research. Rather, social research is mainly determined and conditioned by the material social existence of the researcher. Thus, the fact of ‘whiteness’ of the contributors is a reflection of their social context; the results of their research are not, by extension, a result of their whiteness, but of their material circumstances, and the way in which they have responded to it. Briefly put, the exclusively racial composition of the authors does not negate the relevance of the book for both black and white researchers. But it does raise another problem: the minor participation of black academics in social research in South Africa. However, let us turn to the conception of the book as summarised in Kallaway’s introduction.

If the introduction was designed to outline the philosophy behind the production of selected articles, Kallaway failed to accomplish this task adequately. First, the introduction suggests reorientation of the approach to education in the light of political economy. But, one can ask, which political economy, and from which point of view? Secondly, Kallaway explains the appeal of the new approach in terms of the necessity to study education in its

social, economic and political context [64]. However, this form of analysis can be done in very different ways with very different aims. As Carr has indicated, the facts in history “are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean; and what the historian catches will depend partly on chance, but mainly on what part of the ocean he chooses to fish in and what tackle he chooses to use—these factors being determined, of course, by the kind of fish he wants to catch” [65]. This means that the particular mode of contextual analysis suggested by Kallaway remains unclear.

Most of the articles compiled in this book implicitly or explicitly declare that the alternative theory should be based in historical materialism. For these reasons, Kallaway’s introduction seems more like an additional article than an introduction to the general conception of the book.

There is another feature which negatively affects the book as a whole. And that is its extreme black-sided view. This has been justified by the fact that, to date, the history of education has been focussed on white education. A question arises as to whether the ideal response to an extreme ‘white-sidedness’ is necessarily ‘black-sidedness’. This would be irrespective of whether these questions were illuminated by the tools of political economy or not. The racial fragmentation of the education system does not imply that there is not a single and basic dynamic informing the whole. Hence, the general model provided by *Apartheid and Education* assumes the form of an ideological reaction which does not adequately reflect the potential of the new analytical tools: it fails to grasp the total dynamic of the system and the real dimension of the implications of education for blacks in the whole of society. Most of the articles reflect the limitation pointed to in this criticism.

One could argue that the concentration on ‘black education’ could be seen rather more dialectically, as a necessary phase in the redirection of the history of South African education. This might be acceptable only as a preliminary stage in any research on education. It does not have much plausibility as a form of conceptualising education in South Africa. That must be done in an interrelated way, as part of South African society as a whole, as has already been pointed out elsewhere [66].

The principle of a focus on black education is not in dispute. The problem lies in the tendency to isolate ‘black education’ in a tight compartment without addressing its relationship to the entire educational edifice. Methodologically, this is a problem of how to reconcile the fundamental with the secondary aspects in education to make the object of analysis more comprehensible.

Conclusion

From this general overview, it is clear that education in South Africa has become one of the most controversial fields in the social sciences in South Africa. At present almost all issues concerned with education seem to have fallen into a deep polemic. As has been demonstrated in this paper, theoretical debate can progress only with concrete analytical work. In this regard, educational research has been left far behind the other social sciences.

Nonetheless, the general direction taken during recent years has been encouraging. The tradition of liberal empiricism has been challenged, although it still dominates the most influential academic circles. War has been declared by the emergent historiography against economic reductionism and determinism, inherited from a variety of sources. The functionalism of many of the theorists associated with reproduction theory has been rejected. In all, the issues with which South African educationists are grappling are deeply problematic and complex, and will probably dominate educational debate for some time.

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The views formulated by *Education Panel* and by E.G. Malherbe were reiterated in the 1969 Conference on Bantu Education, convened by the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), involving, *inter alia*, E. G. Malherbe, M. Horrel, A. L. Behr and R. Tunmer. The factual background to the Conference was provided by the book *Bantu Education to 1968*, prepared by M. Horrel. The Conference raised some objections to the 'separate-but-equal' stand:

Although it is recognised that the immediate educational and social needs of the different groups of South African people may require . . . variations in educational control and administration in teaching techniques and in language medium, Conference re-affirms the thesis that education is ultimately *not* divisible. Conference therefore looks forward to the time when the administration of education will be on a regional basis, with responsibility for the education of all the people in an area being vested in one authority (The Report of the 1969 Conference on Bantu Education, SAIRR, 1969, p. 6).

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