**Adelaide school of social history: childhood, family and education**

**Australia, 1976-2000**

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From the mid-1970s through the 1990s, a group of historians came together in Adelaide, South Australia, to research and write new social histories of education, childhood and youth. The central figure was Ian Davey, a historian at the University of Adelaide based in its Education Department from 1976 to 1994. Many of these Adelaide scholars, though not all, had their doctorates supervised by him. The Adelaide School were not the only revisionist historians working in educational history at the time. In Melbourne in particular, Bob Bessant, Jean Ely, Richard Teese, Marjorie Theobald and others were also writing new and challenging histories of education.

**Origins in North America**

Davey had left Melbourne in 1971 to study with Michael Katz at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE, University of Toronto). Katz was a key figure at this period in the revisionist historiography that sought to overturn the older tradition of American historical writing about schooling and education. This had typically showed little interest in the social history of schooling, and uncritically celebrated the rise of public schools. With Katz at OISE, historians such as Ian Davey and Alison Prentice researched histories of youth and schooling that focussed less on policy and administration and more on the populations whose lives were profoundly affected by them. Importantly, many of these scholars used statistical analyses of historical censuses and the records routinely generated by emerging public education bureaucracies, such as school attendance registers, to illuminate the lives of people who left few written documents. Davey participated in the Hamilton project, a study of youth, schooling, industrialisation and labour markets that Katz had initiated. Hamilton was a city in Ontario that was both small and large enough to encourage detailed social historical study.

**Hindmarsh study and emergence of the school**

Arriving at the University of Adelaide in 1976, Davey had in mind the possibility of a similar study. The area chosen was Hindmarsh, a working class area in the metropolitan area of Adelaide. It had a documented history of clashes between small, cheap, privately run schools patronised by local working people, and the newly established large public schools. The founders of the public school system were often highly critical of working class families, and the private schools they tended to support. Statistical analysis of enrolment, attendance and examination registers from the nineteenth century made it possible to examine actual patterns of attendance and school success and failure. In this kind of research, the Adelaide School was pioneering for Australian educational history. The historiography in Australia had until then shown limited interest in working class schooling and the conflicts that surrounded it. Early research from the Hindmarsh project was published in the *History of Education Review*.

The historians who were clearly identified with the Adelaide School included Pavla Cook/Miller, Alison Mackinnon, Malcolm/Melissa Vick, Kerry Wimshurst and Phil Cashen. Chris Beasley made an early and important contribution as gender became a significant theme in the work produced by the group. There was a second group of doctoral students in the 1990s supervised by Davey who continued to research themes redolent of the early work of the Adelaide School. They included Craig Campbell, Lynne Trethewey and Kay Whitehead.

Significant social histories that emerged from the group included books by Alison Mackinnon and Pavla Miller. Mackinnon wrote illuminating histories of girls’ secondary education, early female university graduates, and the remaking of personal lives given the emergence of women in the professions. Miller’s first book was a combative Marxist-feminist social history of state schooling in South Australia.

**Schooling, patriarchy and governance**

One of the most significant of the projects surviving the 1980s was the collaboration between Davey and Miller, making an argument about the rise of compulsory schooling, the histories of childhood and families, and the state’s development of patriarchal forms of governance as it managed its populations. The argument was plotted in Miller and Davey (1990). Miller was the sole author of the subsequent, and magisterial, *Transformations of patriarchy in the West, 1500-1900* (1998).

**Significance of the Adelaide school**

Much of the work of the School appears in journals of social and educational history. Many of the historians involved developed their histories with other collaborators. This was certainly true for Campbell’s social histories of government secondary schooling. Nevertheless, Campbell and Proctor’s *A History of Australian Schooling* (2014) demonstrates the continuing influence of the historiographical concerns of the Adelaide School into the twenty-first century.

The range of historical research arising from this Adelaide activity in revisionist social and educational history produced innovative work on a wide range of topics. At its heart was a concern to disrupt the Whiggish historiography that through to the 1970s, had concentrated on the arguable beneficial progressivism of institutions and their male leaderships, especially in schooling through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Adelaide School went a further step than parallel historiographies emerging in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, by insisting on the centrality of gender relations to the more usual arguments around social class.

Towards the end of the School’s most active period, Foucault became an influence as questions associated with governmentality made their appearance. The concerns of the Adelaide School were not reliant on his approach however as they tackled the origins of compulsory schooling, the technologies of managing populations through schooling, the significance of a changing gender order and gender relations in the social histories of childhood, youth, teachers, women, families—and schooling. While the Adelaide School historians were criticised by Foucauldians, Davey and Miller were friendly to some of the themes Foucault pursued. In fact, Miller’s book, with its concern about changing mentalities, was in part an attempt to synthesize Marxist, feminist and Foucauldian approaches.

The Adelaide School engaged in wide debates concerning the role of education, not only in social history generally but in relation to demographic and gender change. Its members addressed long running historical and social questions around patriarchy and governance, youth and sexuality and the management of populations. Its historians offered their ideas in forums other than educational ones, and entered debates, for example, on demography, that might not normally be seen as central to educational history. In this work, as well as the histories written, may be seen the continuing influence of the School. Many of its associated historians took up appointments in universities across Australia, and in their general influence and doctoral supervisions in turn influenced the research topics and writing of new scholars.

**Representative historical writing**

The following list of works represents a range of historical writing associated with the Adelaide School. It is not exhaustive. It also includes some of the seminal work by Katz and Katz and Davey before the beginnings in Adelaide. It is organised by date of publication.

Katz, M. 1968. *The irony of early school reform: Educational innovation in mid-nineteenth century Massachusetts,* Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press.

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Cook, P., Davey, I. & Vick, M. 1979. Capitalism and working class schooling in late nineteenth century South Australia. *ANZHES Journal,* 8, 36-48.

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Miller, P. 1984. Efficiency, stupidity and class conflict in South Australian schools, 1875-1900. *History of Education Quarterly,* 24, 393-410.

Wimshurst, K. 1984. Control and resistance: Reformatory school girls in late nineteenth century South Australia. *Journal of Social History,* 18, 273-287.

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Beasley, C. 1987. The patriarchy debate: Should we make use of the term “patriarchy” in historical analysis? *History of Education Review,* 16, 13-20.

Katz, M. 1987. *Reconstructing American education,* Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

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Miller, P. & Davey, I. 1988. The common denominator: Schooling the people. *In:* Burgmann, V. & Lee, J. (eds.) *Constructing a culture.* Melbourne: McPhee Gribble.

Vick, M. 1988. Class, gender and administration: The 1851 Education Act in South Australia. *History of Education Review,* 17, 27-42.

Miller, P. 1989. Historiography of compulsory schooling: What is the problem? *History of Education,* 18, 123-144.

Miller, P. & Davey, I. 1990. Family formation, schooling and the patriarchal state. *In:* Theobald, M. R. & Selleck, R. J. W. (eds.) *Family, school and state in Australian history.* Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Davey, I. E. & Wimshurst, K. 1992. Understanding irregular school attendance: Beyond the rural-urban dichotomy. *In:* Goodenow, R. K. & Marsden, W. E. (eds.) *The city and education in four nations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Miller, P. 1998. *Transformations of patriarchy in the west: 1500-1900,* Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

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**Glossary**

Patriarchy. Government of populations by patriarchs, or “fathers”. The argument is that following challenges to feudal, patriarchal, authority in states, churches, through to families, in the history of western societies, new social orders and relations were established. In some cases traditionally patriarchal institutions such as schools required strengthening. Women and the young were often argued to be specific targets of reformed patriarchal institutions.

Revisionism in educational history refers to the reinterpretation of and challenges to the standard narratives and analyses that celebrated uncritically the rise of universal public school systems, and the role of the ‘great men’ who invented and led them. In the process educational progressivism and reform was critically examined, especially with regard the effects of educational reform as experienced by working class families and other less powerful populations.

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