Strike a pose! Continuity and change in school class photographs: Shifting representations of education and childhood through time

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ABSTRACT

Using a montage of school class photographs (1885–2015) from a small town in Wales, this article tracks continuity and change relating to how social constructions of 'education' and 'childhood' are visually represented through time. Drawing on the work of Goffman, compositional codes and conventions are examined, with particular focus on how people, identities and context are depicted, to demonstrate how concepts of ritual equilibrium (the 'norm') and ritual disequilibrium (subversion of the 'norm') shape particular processes of meaning-making. Analyses demonstrate that standard compositional codes and conventions were established early in the tradition of school class photography and are reiterative, often aligning strongly with the disciplinary mechanism of education. Gender and age emerge as powerful organising agents. Patterns in visual representation reveal how constructions of 'education' and 'childhood' are shaped by shifts and developments in socio-political thinking, and also reveal how developments in photographic technologies broaden the repertoire of visual storytelling techniques.

Keywords: School class photographs, representation, education, childhood, history, montage

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Introduction: School Class Photographs and the Construction of 'Education' and 'Childhood'

School class photographs are an inconspicuous yet consistent feature of childhood and the landscape of formal education, yet surprisingly little is made of their form or content. Mitchell & Weber (1998: 197) note that the perceived 'ordinariness' of such images means that they do not receive a great deal of attention. Yet, such images arguably have value as artefacts that generate and maintain a (historically evolving) narrative about society, the perceived purpose of education, and the social construction of childhood. They are 'cultural phenomena in and of themselves' (ibid.: 198).

School class photographs are orchestrated, by adults, through the utilisation of standard codes and conventions which generate an instantly recognisable representation of 'education' and 'childhood'. Sarkisova & Shevchenko (2010: 1) describe such images as 'static and organised… set and controlled', whilst Fletcher (in Fehily, Fletcher & Newton, 2000: 32) describes them as 'carefully posed and visibly contrived'. Mavor (1995, in Hoffman, 2006: 313) further suggests that annual 'school picture day' reflects 'the adult compulsion to photograph children' to visually document the process of growing-up. The 'performative' nature of photographic representation (Pace, 2002: 327) implies that children play their part in response to strike-a-pose instructions from adults who re/produce these visual representations.

Margolis & Fram (2007: 200) suggest that school photography functions to manufacture certain understandings about the construction of education, such as school being a disciplinary mechanism (cf. Foucault, 1977). Burke & Grosvenor (2007: 156) add that such images represent and reflect understandings of control, curriculum, pedagogic practice, and 'the design of educational spaces'. Mitchell & Weber (1998: 204) describe school class photographs as 'a conscious… form of narrativisation'. Each of these orchestrated narratives, in turn, functions as a form of reassurance that education is well-ordered and children are successfully 'socialised' within the system, providing a lens through which to decode behavioural practices and expectations (Goffman, 1976: 19-20). By extension, school class photographs establish a visual representation of our fundamental understandings of education and the life-phase of childhood and, as a consequence, generate a 'collective memory' (Margolis & Fram, 2007: 209). Drawing on Prout (2001), Margolis & Fram (2007: 209) note that (visual) representation 'is a central element through which meanings are constructed,

understood and shared'. So, considering the form and content of school class photographs is a worthwhile way to unlock some of these 'meanings'.

Arguably, school class photographs can be read as 'images of childhood' (cf. Holland, 2004: xiv), offering insights into evolving constructions and representations. Maynard & Thomas (2004: 2) note that 'childhood is not a naturally given phenomenon, but the result of social processes of discourse, definition and interaction'. Further, these processes are dynamic and subject to both construction *and* reconstruction (cf. James & Prout, 1997) in response to wider socio-cultural and political values and norms. Thus, any social construction of 'childhood' is context-specific, and subject to the society and the time in which it is located.

Various European conceptualisations of 'childhood' gradually emerged from as early as the 15th century (Aries, 1960), with accelerated (re)construction throughout the 19th century. During this era, 'childhood' was characterised by recurrent references to innocence, purity, the need for (adult) care and protection, and the importance of discipline (Hendrick, 1997b). In terms of visual culture, specifically, Holland (1992) maps a number of 'typologies' in relation to representations of childhood, including children as 'dependent' (on adults) and 'ignorant' (in need of education). More broadly, she identifies further categories based on factors such as 'academic discourse' (sociology of childhood), 'institutional imagery' (school photographs), and 'the past' (evolving narrative timelines) (Holland, 2008, in Messenger Davies, 2010: 106–7). Further, Frønes (in Qvortrup, 1994: 148 *ff.*) considers 'childhood' in terms of interlocking factors, including age-specificity and interinstitutional frameworks.

Arguably, historical paradigms remain intriguingly consistent and also account for an enduring point of tension in the social construction of 'childhood'. On the one hand, 17th-century philosophers like John Locke recognised children as individuals with unique experiences of childhood (Hendrick, 1997b). This perspective is mirrored in contemporary thinking about children's agency and voice (cf. James & Prout, 1997). On the other hand, the institutionalised version of 'childhood' found in official legislation (such as education acts), sketches the rigid expectations and collective experiences of a 'universal childhood' (cf. Corsaro, 2005), with rules and targets. Indeed, such structures create the 'schooled child'; a product of institutional separation (Hendrick, 1997b). 'Childhood' is simultaneously about freedom *and* control. Individual children are active in the construction of their own lives (Wall, 2019), and also passive recipients of an

age-specific 'packaged world' (Shipman, 1972: 28) that is tightly regulated (by adults). Prout (2006: 1) notes this contradiction by recognising that a child's agency and right to active participation in civic society is undermined by policies and practices that focus on 'control, regulation and surveillance'.

The cyclic and sometimes contradictory conceptualisations of 'childhood' through time, in response to social forces and trends, raise interesting questions. Being aware of the inherent tensions and shifts is important because it enables scholars to unpack and interpret assumptions about 'childhood' in ways that facilitate a sharper appreciation of how social constructions function (Kehily, 2004: 2). The current study is located within these broad paradigms, sketched along a timeline (1885–2015) to track continuity and change.

Visual research: The value of photographs

Image-based research is well-established in a number of academic disciplines, where photographs (and other static images) are utilised/analysed as text/artefact/data (Griffiths, 2005; Rose, 2001). Bolton, Pole & Mizen (2001: 516) advocate the use of photographs and the general value of visual sociology as an approach to sociological enquiry, whilst Pace (2002: 327) refers to photography as 'a technology of story-telling'. In the context of the sociology of education, Priem (in Grosvenor *et al.*, 2016: 20) locates photographs within the broader 'phenomenon of school culture' and the spectrum of 'social objects that create a meshwork of meaning(s)'. Indeed, Burke & Grosvenor (2007: 155) indicate the centrality of photography as a means to record education and childhood by noting that 'it is difficult to imagine schooling without the school photograph' and its ability to construct particular narratives.

Margolis (2004: 54) draws on the work of Solomon-Godeau (1991), who referred to the value of using photographs within socio-historical research because they are 'the product of distinct historical circumstances and milieus' and can therefore 'mediate our understanding of them'. Where school class photographs are concerned, such images are captured on a set date in a given year, and the child's active participation in that process is assumed; they become performers of their own versions of the 'schooled child' (cf. Holland, 1997). However, Margolis (2000: 2) also notes that school class photographs '(do) not withstand the tests of time', because their

stories are often forgotten. They appear less important than other types of photograph, because individual names/identities fade and the images gradually lose their resonance. Any readings of such images, as a consequence, run the risk of being wholly imagined and transformed by contemporary processes of meaning-making.

A perceived weakness of visual research methods relates to the potential 'openness' of that meaning-making process. Margolis (2000: 3) acknowledges this criticism by suggesting that photographic images, perceived as being 'little snippets of reality', can be read in numerous ways because of their 'free-floating signifiers'. The very concept of 'reality' is called into question, in light of Sekula's (1983, in Margolis, 2000: 3) warning that 'Photography constructs an imaginary world'. School class photographs are arguably an example of an adult-constructed imagined childhood, which may have some basis in reality but is undeniably staged within a particular set of representational codes and conventions. This echoes Mitchell & Weber's (1998, in Burke & Grosvenor, 2007: 157) argument that a 'constructed literacy' is in operation; one needs to be literate in the codes and conventions to appreciate the contextual stories that they tell.

Interestingly, though, scholars such as Sontag (1979) maintain that photographs carry a 'trace' of the real world, recording various aspects of society over time. Bolton, Pole & Mizen (2001: 516) argue that using photographic images and other visual materials can distinctively and powerfully complement more standard research methods that generate 'textual, verbal or observational data'. Indeed, photographs may reasonably be seen as a form of text, which can be subject to conventional textual analysis methods. So, whilst the use of photographs as visual data within socio-historical research is not without its difficulties and challenges (Burke & Grosvenor, 2007: 156), there *is* a well-established tradition of using them as part of a broader spectrum of archival material; they are legitimate 'primary source data' for historians and sociologists (Margolis, 2000: 20).

Method: Montage and coding processes

This article considers the narrativisation of 'childhood' (cf. Mitchell & Weber, 1998: 204) in a chronological sample of school class photographs from the same town, capturing four generations of the same family alongside additional archival materials, over the course of 130 years (1885-2015). The aim is to consider how school class photographs reflect shifts and

changes in evolving attitudes about education/school and children/childhood. Drawing on Burke & Grosvenor (2007: 155), 'montage and juxtaposition' was adopted as an approach, creating a timeline to facilitate the tracking and analysis of evolving codes and conventions. The process of assembling a montage of images is thought to facilitate the creation of 'new knowledge' and understanding (Burke & Grosvenor, 2007: 158), by 'seeing and making associations which otherwise would go unmade' (Peim, 2005, in Burke & Grosvenor, 2007: 157). Indeed, organising a sequence of images into a timeline can draw attention to both the continuities and changes associated with the (subtly shifting) constructions of 'childhood' in a given context.

In order to facilitate the development of a consistent coding process, Goffman's concept of ritual equilibrium was used as a starting point. Ritual equilibrium emerges from two interconnected frameworks proposed by Goffman (1967, in Kwang-Ki, 2002: 56). Firstly, he established the concept of 'ceremonial rules', which create 'a kind of orderliness' and 'guide to action' in a given context. Secondly, Goffman explained that 'ritual order' generates the 'orderliness', where participants perform the 'ceremonial rules' in their interactions; in essence, demonstrating their knowledge of the rules-of-the-game. Goffman views ritual equilibrium as 'a subtle balance' (ibid.: 58). Where ceremonial rules and ritual order are upheld, equilibrium is maintained; where these are challenged or subverted, disequilibrium occurs. I argue that ceremonial rules and ritual order equate with the codes and conventions embedded in the form and content of school class photographs.

A number of scholars have identified the codes and conventions that are re/used in school class photographs, including particular patterns associated with gender, such as placement within the frame, 'relative size' and 'function ranking' (Goffman, 1976); representations of order and obedience, relating to posture, gaze, dress, and facial expression (Margolis & Fram, 2007; Goffman, 1976); and use of the built environment and material artefacts to signal a specific context (ibid.). Together, these factors construct a particular identity for the schooled child, and because the codes and conventions are 'reiterative' (Pace, 2002: 329) they are instantly recognisable. As Goffman (1976: 10) notes, such consistent 'enactments function to reaffirm basic social arrangements and ultimate beliefs' which, in this case, can be applied to an exploration of how school class photographs are orchestrated and what their resultant narratives reveal about 'education' and 'childhood'.

The sample of photographs in this study, once assembled into a montage, was interrogated in terms of the codes and conventions that maintain ritual equilibrium, together with an awareness of any elements which may disrupt the 'norm' to cause ritual disequilibrium, thus drawing attention to the power of the standard codes and conventions and/or establishing new ones. In the case of this coding process, ritual equilibrium relates to the codes and conventions that typically construct 'childhood' in a school context, whilst ritual disequilibrium relates to any disruption, subversion or adjustment to those codes and conventions. The same factors were considered throughout the montage to ensure consistent points of focus, including:

- People: organisation within the frame; posture; gaze; clothing; facial expression
- Identities: individual and collective; gendered; age-related
- Context: time and place; built environment; material markers (artefacts)

Establishing context: Education in New Quay, Ceredigion

Schooling has a long history in and around the small town of New Quay in Ceredigion, west Wales. One of the earliest recorded schools in the area was run by church curate, Rev. John Pugh, from at least 1733 to 1763 (Passmore, 1996). This was followed by the introduction of Madame Bevan circulating schools (Llanina, 1739; Llanllwchaearn, 1745); non-permanent 'travelling' schools that placed an emphasis on learning to read the bible (Bryan, 2012: 69). Echoing broader 18th century patterns across Wales and England, education provision at this time was generally offered by local religious organisations, including chapels and churches. There was even scope for private enterprise, such as the Misses Barretts's School for Young Ladies, which operated until 1855 as a 'finishing school' (Bryan, 2012: 70). By the later 1800s, the nature of provision began to shift with increased state intervention. The school run by Tabernacle Chapel from 1851-1878, for example, ceased when New Quay Board School opened in 1878 (ibid.). The latter was part of the drive to expand education provision in response to the Elementary Education Act 1870 and the school-building initiatives that followed. The current primary school is still based on the Board School site, in the original building.

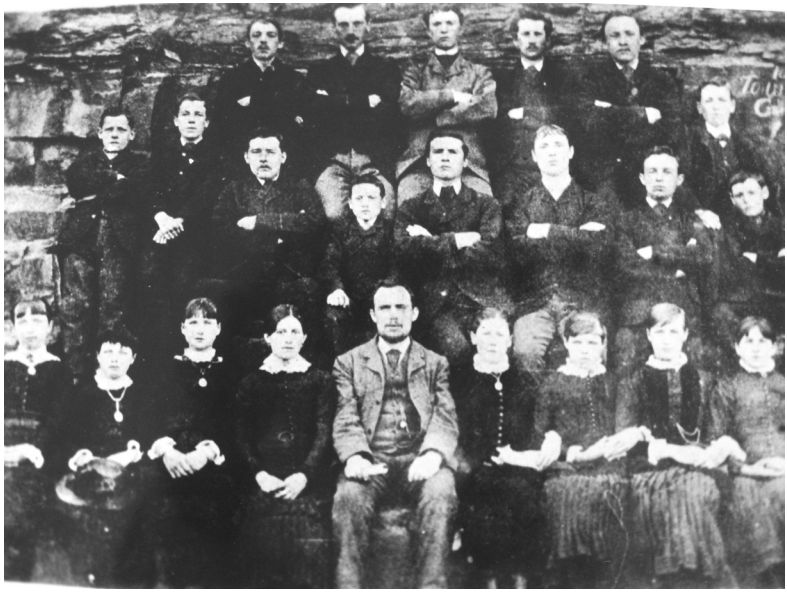
The collection of photographs, representing ten moments-in-time during a period of 130 years, attempts to represent the range of education provision within the town. It features three different school examples: Towyn Chapel Grammar School, New Quay Board (Primary) School, and Tutorial Preparatory School.

Mapping the Montage: Emergent patterns (1885-2015)

To provide a starting point for discussion and to illustrate the significance of chapel-run education provision in the town, Figure 1 captures Towyn Grammar School in 1885 (Box 2, Passmore Collection, Ceredigion Archives; Bryan, 2012: 71).

Bryan (2012: 74) describes Towyn Grammar School as being 'for older children', and it operated for about 20 years under the leadership of Headmaster, Charles J. Hughes, who is seated front-row centre in Figure 1. The chapel was opened in August 1861, followed by the

Figure 1: Ysgol Ramadeg Towyn Grammar School, 1885



establishment of the school in a small vestry. Hughes later served as the second Headmaster of Aberaeron Intermediate School from 1899-1917 (Ysgol Gyfyn Aberaeron, 1996), which remains the secondary (comprehensive) school to which New Quay children progress at age eleven.

The image is immediately recognisable as a school class photograph in terms of its tiered compositional organisation, 'to ensure that a likeness of all the faces will show' (Goffman, 1976: 16). Since the school was 'for older children', most of the individuals appear to be in their teens or twenties. The school population was predominantly male (boys n=14; girls n=8), and this was a whole-school rather than class-level photograph. An attendance fee was generally charged by education providers at this time (cf. Committee of Council on Education, 1847) which would have restricted access to those who could afford to pay.

The direct-to-camera gaze is a dominant code in school class photographs. The pupils have been deliberately orchestrated by the photographer, adopting different gendered postures within the frame. The males and females are organised into obvious groups, exhibiting characteristics that arguably illustrate Goffman's (1978: 32) theory of function ranking, which connects with relative power/status. All-but-two of the male pupils maintain uniform postures, with arms folded in a rigid and 'closed' manner, connoting confidence, independence, and detachment. In contrast, the female pupils are all seated, with those occupying the right of the frame linking arms in a soft, 'social' manner, connoting friendship and interdependence. According to Goffman's (1976: 28) theory of relative size, the females are shown as having lower status and less power than their male counterparts. General clothing codes and jewellery styles indicate the Victorian context.

The group is photographed against a large stone wall that forms part of the chapel; the name can be seen on a partly visible plaque in the top-right corner of the frame, anchoring the image to a specific location. The overall aesthetic of the photograph is somewhat 'severe', indicating two things. Firstly, during this era, camera technology involved long exposure times, with subjects required to hold a pose for the duration. As such, maintaining a smile would have been difficult to achieve, so the sitters in this image look frozen, serious, and homogenous as a direct result of 'technological processes' (Spike, 2012: 52). Secondly, according to the keeper of the chapel, the school had a 'whipper-in' who would literally whip pupils into class. School rules were strict at this time, resulting in severe punishments for those who defied behavioural expectations (Hendrick, 1997a).

Figure 2: New Quay Board School, Standard V, 1899

The orderly seriousness of attending the school is neatly captured in this image.

As noted above, New Quay Board School opened in 1878. Figure 2 represents one of the earliest available school class photographs in that setting (Bryan, 2012: 72).

In terms of the historical narrative, the Headmaster, Thomas Lloyd (standing on the right of the frame), provides a powerful point of (visual) continuity in the photographic images that document the early life of the school. Lloyd had previously been the Headmaster of the Tabernacle Chapel School (Bryan, 2012: 70) and was the Board School's first Headmaster, remaining in post for 35 years until 1913. A further point of continuity emerges from the built environment of the new school. The exterior stone walls provide a reiterative marker of place in innumerable school class photographs throughout the following decades.

From the late 1870s, camera technology evolved rapidly, reducing exposure time dramatically (Ford, 2004). These advancements enabled quicker image-capture, so greater spontaneity was possible in photography; subjects appear less frozen and individual characters emerge. The facial expressions of the children in Figure 2, for example, look more natural than those seen in Figure 1.

The composition of this image once again seems familiar, indicating that the codes and conventions of school class photographs had settled into a form of ritual equilibrium. Building a clear sense of age-related identity is stronger in this image, compared with Figure 1, because the photograph gathers together a group of 33 children of the same age (Standard V). The emergence of age-specific cohorts reflects reform within the broader education system. Since this image was captured nearly 30 years after the Elementary Education Act 1870, which made education compulsory for children aged ten and under, and eight years after the 1891 Education Act, which made it free for all (Gillard, 2021), the number of children in the Standard clearly indicates comprehensive uptake of education provision in the town.

The group comprises of 21 boys and 12 girls, together with two male teachers. This is a highly organised photograph and there is relative uniformity in terms of posture, neatly illustrating how 'standardisation bears down upon the individual' (Hoffman, 2006: 314). Standing figures have arms by their sides, whilst seated figures have hands in their laps and those on the ground sit cross-legged. The tiered structure arranges the children primarily by gender, with the back row exclusively occupied by boys (standing on a long bench), followed by a row of girls (standing on the ground), a row seated on a bench comprising of four girls and five boys, and finally a front row exclusively occupied by boys (seated on the ground). The teachers both stand with authority, flanking the group, with the Headmaster standing on a step. This may have been an aesthetic decision on the part of the photographer, to create a sense of balance/symmetry within the frame, but it also maintains the Headmaster's status and authority despite his being physically shorter than his colleague (cf. Goffman, 1976).

One of the boys in the front row, performing the 'executive role' so often reflected in function ranking (ibid.), has been given responsibility for holding a chalkboard that records details of the location, class, and date, making the context explicit. This detail is reiterative in many school class photographs in subsequent decades, and is historically invaluable in capturing information that may otherwise be lost with time. Two other boys in the front row are shown displaying their work-books, indicating that their efforts are worthy of being showcased with pride and captured for posterity. Such material markers serve to emphasise the fundamental learning imperative of education and record a 'visible element' of the system's function (cf. Margolis & Fram, 2007: 193).

The children are similarly dressed which creates a level of harmony and reflects the limited range of clothing available at that time. The girls

(mostly) wear white aprons (Margolis & Rowe, 2004: 208), arguably connoting the 'female domain' of the domestic sphere, whilst the boys wear smart woollen jackets, arguably connoting their future place within the 'male domain' of work. These codes reflect broader patterns of gender-role differentiation that emerged during the late 19th century with, for example, the expansion and bifurcation of the printed-book market (Seiter, 1995).

Figures 3 and 4 are grouped together, because the photographs were taken on the same day in 1903, capturing two different classes in the school.

Figure 3 (Box 13, Passmore Collection, Ceredigion Archives) captures a large group of 55 children (boys n=27; girls n=28). Indeed, the group is so large that the photographer had to compose a long-shot, making it less easy to observe small details but showing more of the setting. Given the infant age-range of these children, some sense of disorder in captured (such as finger-chewing, misdirected gaze, 'informal' facial expressions, and

Figure 3: Newquay (sic) Board School Infants, 1903

Figure 4: Newquay (sic) Board School Standard II, 1903

some blurred movement), making the image appear less uniform. This is further amplified by the somewhat random arrangement of boys and girls in the frame; they are not grouped together as in the previous examples. Thomas Lloyd, the Headmaster, stands to the right of the frame, and one female teacher appears on the left. This marks the first appearance of a female teacher in the montage. Teaching was regarded as a 'suitable' job for women at this the time; a socially constructed perception supported by the expansion of places for women in 'university colleges', where most trained as teachers (Lowe, 2002).

Figure 4 (Box 2, Passmore Collection, Ceredigion Archives) comprises a smaller group of 38 children (boys n=20; girls n=18). The more modest class size means that the photographer can adopt a medium- rather than long-shot. Whilst the same background and bench arrangements seen in Figure 3 are used, the composition is more tightly framed, providing greater clarity of detail. For the first time in this montage, the girls occupy a standing-position in the back row, affording them more social power than seen in the previous examples (Goffman, 1976:

28), although it is once again the responsibility of the boys to hold the information board.

The clothing codes in Figure 3 are quite varied but exhibit large collars, wool jackets, button boots, and two elaborate fur-trimmed hats. Clothing in Figure 4, in contrast, looks more uniform. The haze of white aprons is striking, with all-but-three of the girls wearing them. The boys are dressed much like those in Figure 2. Arguably, the children's clothing indicates that the school was quite affluent during this period, due to the seafaring successes of the town. Shipbuilding was a prominent industry between 1779 and 1882 (Jenkins, 1998), and the place continued to enjoy a reputation for producing master mariners well into the 1900s. Its global outlook was reflected in material artefacts.

By 1910, an additional dimension to the educational history of the town came with the opening of Tutorial School, a preparatory school to ready the most able children for university-level study. Echoing the town's global outlook, it specialised in 'teaching English to foreigners' (Bryan, 2012: 73).

Figure 5: New Quay Tutorial School, 1910

Bryan (ibid.) notes that Figure 5 was taken in 1910, representing the first year of the school's operation (cf. Box 2, Passmore Collection, Ceredigion Archives).

The photograph captures 56 individuals (males n=39; females n=17). The headmaster was D. Cletwrian Jones (ibid.), pictured in the centre of the photograph with bold moustache. His hands rest on the shoulders of the two men standing in front of him, indicating that they were probably his colleagues rather than his pupils. A very broad range of ages is hierarchically represented. A row of younger-looking boys sit cross-legged on the ground, but the overall group reflects the school's function as pre-university preparation. This may also explain the male-dominated composition of the image, since access to university at this time was largely a male concern (cf. Lowe, 2002). In the county, for example Aberystwyth University had opened in 1872 with an all-male intake of 26 students (Webster, 1995: 53). It did admit its first female student in 1884 (Aberystwyth University, www), but women's experiences of higher education were generally as limited as their professional prospects (Lowe, 2002).

Figure 6 maintains a focus on Tutorial School but was captured 19 years later, after the school had relocated to a new building (a corrugated iron shed). This photograph hangs on public display as part of the town's

Figure 6: New Quay Tutorial School, 1929

Heritage Centre exhibition (run by Ceredigion Museum) and represents the first-generation familial connection to the history of education in the town, in that my grandmother appears in it.

The male bias still persists in terms of the school population (males n=42; females n-13), and this photograph once again represents a significant age range. Many of the male pupils, in particular, look as though they are in their twenties. My grandmother was 18-years-old at the time. D. Cletwrian Jones (seated at the centre of the frame) was still the Headmaster and therefore a point of continuity.

This is the first example in the montage where the clothing aesthetic has shifted to something 'less Victorian', less uniform and more individualistic. Whilst exhibiting many of the typical codes and conventions of a group photograph, such as being tiered by height, this image also has 'energy'. Smiles and other examples of behavioural spontaneity are evident, where continued advances in camera technology enabled photographers to more authentically capture the personalities of their sitters. Many arms are linked together, again indicating friendships, connections, and a genuine sense of warmth within the school community. Arguably, this may also capture a sense of youthful optimism in the post-World War One era.

Figure 7 represents the second-generation familial connection to education provision in the town, featuring my mother at the age of 8-years-old.

Figure 7: New Quay Primary School, Standards II & III, 1956

By this time, the Board School had been renamed New Quay Primary School. Representing a shift in gender balance, the image features more girls (n=14) than boys (n=9), but also indicates a likely reduction in birth-rate and overall school population since 1903 (Figures 3 & 4). In this photograph, two Standards (classes) are captured, revealing that they were being taught together by the school's 'middle teacher', Mrs Eva Morrison (standing on the right). It is still common practice for multiple age-groups to be taught concurrently by a single teacher in small rural primary schools. The Headmaster, Mr Eifion Price, is also pictured (standing on the left).

Compositional codes and conventions are once again strong. Posture has clearly been orchestrated by the photographer, especially for the girls seated in the front row. The tiers are crisply symmetrical. Taking into account Goffman's theory of relative size, the highest point in the frame is occupied by a row of standing boys, whilst the majority of the girls sit passively and 'decoratively'. The clothing codes exhibit rich 1950s markers relating to knitwear design, zipped bomber jackets, and hairstyles.

This image features the same section of school wall seen in Figures 2 & 3, anchoring the location. By this point, the school yard had been surfaced in smooth concrete to provide a safer/neater play-space. This indicates a surge of investment in school environments immediately after World War Two (Gillard, 2018) and reflects the general improvements in society, connected with promoting better outcomes in children's health and well-being (Hendrick, 1997b). These initiatives hint at a sense of optimism, constructing children as 'the future' (cf. Darbyshire, 2019). They also indicate a shift towards greater child-centredness in institutional settings (cf. Plowden Report, 1967), where the broad range of children's developmental needs are gradually factored-in to the organisation of physical spaces.

Figure 8 once again moves forward by one generation, to capture the first photograph of my brother and I in the infants class. It is also the first colour photograph in the montage, providing further illustration of advances in camera technology.

On this occasion, three school years are represented, comprising 12 boys and 10 girls together with the classroom teacher, Miss Esther Evans. Arguably, the school population had reduced markedly by this time, with only three other children being in the same year/cohort as me. In this instance, my own memories of the day (cf. Hoffman, 2006) create an interpretive framework; I distinctly remember the photographer instructing the girls to put feet/knees together and clasp hands in laps. All standing children (mostly boys) were instructed to put hands behind backs. Clothing

Figure 8: New Quay Primary School, 1980

codes reflect the early-1980s era, with some consistencies (such as girls wearing knee-length white socks), enabling the image to be located in the montage despite the absence of obvious date-markers. A different backdrop-wall in the school playground is featured because, had the photograph been taken against the wall of the main school building (cf. Figures 2, 3, 4, & 7), the children would have been squinting into the sun.

The school playground had been 'fortified' by this point, with mesh fencing increasing the height of the enclosure. Such increased security worked in two ways. It prevented outsiders from entering the school premises, thus responding to a growing perception of 'stranger-danger' during this era (Best, 1990). Discourses around 'vulnerability', which began to take root in the 1960s, had evolved during the 1980s into anxieties about the erosion/loss of childhood and the need for greater protection (Hendrick, 1997b; Jenks, 1992). Enclosing school premises symbolised 'care-giving' and assurances of safety. Playground security also kept children (and their ball-games) contained, intensifying a sense of control and restricted freedoms within clear surveillance boundaries (cf. Foucault, 1977; Prout, 2006).

Commentators have noted that the relative freedoms associated with 'childhood' have become increasingly curtailed and characterised by adult supervision (O'Brien & Smith, 2002); such observable adjustments to play-spaces offer an indication of these underlying perceptual shifts.

Figure 9 represents my final year in the school and image composition maintains a strong sense of ritual equilibrium. The school's Headmaster, Seymour Evans, stands to the right of the frame. Much like the other headmasters in the sample, he represents a point of visual continuity over many years, with a career spanning from 1960-61 until his retirement in 1988. The backdrop of this photograph returns to the familiar wall of the school building, and gendered patterns persist with seated girls (n=7) and standing boys (n=12).

By this time, further modifications had been made to the playground with the addition of painted football-pitch lines, 'marking out' the play-space to create distinct zones; another process of orchestration by adults. This created a shift in terms of how the children self-organised their play, where the 'top' of the yard became dominated by football-playing boys, thus preventing the space from being used freely by all children. Pawlowski

Figure 9: New Quay Primary School, 1986

et al. (2015) note that such arrangements reflect and may even amplify gender stereotypes, whilst exacerbating power hierarchies within school populations. Fundamentally, it signals a particular shaping of 'childhood' that potentially echoes the disciplinary mechanism of the broader education experience.

The year in which this photograph was taken also marked a shift in the management of one aspect of the disciplinary mechanism, with the banning of corporal punishment in UK schools (on the 22nd July 1986) in response to broader Human Rights agendas (Ghandhi, 1984). During the previous year, pre-empting the imminent change in the law, the Headmaster had ceremonially destroyed his cane in front of the whole school, snapping it in half across his knee; a powerfully vivid, lasting memory. It also signals further shifts in (adult) perceptions of 'childhood', discourses relating to children's rights, and a reconfiguring of boundaries and power-relations.

Up to this point, Figures 1-9 reflect particular clothing codes that enable sociologists to place the images roughly within a given timeframe/era. Figure 10, however, represents a visual departure by introducing a school

Figure 10: New Quay Primary School, 1989

uniform for the first time. The 'sea of red' is striking when compared with the previous examples, and creates a sense of homogeneity and collective identity.

Margolis (2000: 16) discusses the function of school uniforms, connecting them to both 'the schooling experience' and accompanying 'photographic images', noting that 'uniforms submerge individuality' and promote the mainstream imperative of 'conformity'. In the absence of disciplinary mechanisms such as corporal punishment, one could argue that the uniform symbolises the lesser status of the child within the institutional hierarchy of education, and reminds the observer that 'standardisation [still] bears down upon the individual' (Hoffman, 2006: 314). The banning of the cane in 1986 followed by the introduction of a uniform in 1989 offers a neat illustration of the tension between (childhood) freedom and (adult) control.

Removing the threat of physical punishment signals an acknowledgement of children's rights, but coincides with discourses about the 'disappearance of childhood' (Postman, 1982) which create anxieties about maintaining social order. Friedrich & Shanks (2021: 2) describe uniforms as 'a key disciplinary technique' (cf. Foucault, 1977) which functions to uphold the hierarchical functioning of power in schools and to 'homogenise (and) divide' (ibid.). Classic tropes emerge in the justifications for school uniforms, including the need for 'safety and security… discipline and moral values' (ibid.: 3), and they serve as a visual reminder of rules, context, and one's relative status.

The location used in Figure 10 creates a very different aesthetic to that seen in previous examples, with the whole school (boys n=29; girls n=29) being photographed in the canteen due to inclement weather. However, key codes and conventions are once again reiterative. The photograph also features six members of staff, including my mother (maintaining familial continuity).

Having so far captured 104 years of schooling within the montage, there is ample evidence of continuity within the composition of school class photographs to create a strong sense of ritual equilibrium. The coding structure relating to people, identities and context is reiterative and well-maintained, with only minimal departure from convention. Taking one further generational step forward within the family, however, brings disruption to the established aesthetic and arguably generates a sense of ritual disequilibrium.

Figure 11, of the school's reception class (boys n=17; girls n=10), captures my nephew's first year in education and indicates an increase in the

Figure 11: New Quay Primary School, 2015

number of registered children. For the first time in the montage, and reflecting changes in the way that schools are staffed, there are three teaching assistants (TAs) in addition to one classroom teacher. Whereas previous examples captured relatively large classes run by single teachers, this is no longer the norm. Employing additional support reflects two key shifts. Firstly, with the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act in 1995, superseded by the Equality Act 2010, schools are required to make 'reasonable adjustments' to support children with additional learning needs. This often involves TAs being appointed to work with individual children. Secondly, the additional support responds to the more 'active' nature of the contemporary (early years) curriculum, such as the introduction of the Foundation Phase in Wales in 2010, where learning is play-based and experiential and numerous activities run simultaneously, requiring a level of adult supervision.

Figure 11 does not exhibit obvious gender patterns in terms of how the children have been arranged within the frame, potentially hinting at (aspirations of) equality. Aside from the front row of boys, the children are

mixed together in random groupings. The back two rows take an every-other approach, whilst the boys and girls in the third row are arranged in pairs (some standing, some seated). A tiered structure is in evidence, to an extent, although the right-hand side of the frame is less rigid. The 'free-style' form adopted by the children is novel. Arguably, this varied depiction of posture and facial expression represents a visual celebration of children's individuality and agency, although these expressions are also likely to be performative in nature, in response to instructions from the (adult) photographer (cf. Pace, 2002), and thus maintain a feel of contrived convention.

Tempest Photography, one of the main providers of school photographic services in the UK, describes this style of photograph as 'relaxed and allow(ing) personalities to shine through'. The composition of the shot stands in contrast to the previous examples because the children appear to be less 'institutionalised'; rather than encouraging uniformity, obedience and discipline, the image connotes verve. It is interesting to note, however, that the physical connectedness and friendships evident in the children's poses (e.g. arms around shoulders) and their lively, spontaneous facial expressions, echo the energy seen in Figure 6 (from 1929).

This photograph is also striking for its stark white background, described by Tempest Photography as 'simple and modern'. It is a marker of 21st century digital photographic technology, which allows for easy image editing. The overall result is arguably somewhat incongruous. The girl standing in the far right of the frame, for example, appears to be floating in mid-air because there is no discernible floor beneath her feet. Further, the children are no longer 'locatable' within a specific school space or moment in time. The only contextual clue is the school logo embroidered on some of the children's uniforms.

The apparent break in compositional codes and conventions that have characterised school class photographs for over 130 years arguably generates a sense of ritual disequilibrium, by making the school experience look less orderly and controlled (undermining the disciplinary mechanism) and by removing the subjects from an obvious physical location (erasing the children's place in the physical world). Other examples of this new-style photography push the 'playful' concept further with vista compositions that include props symbolising knowledge and/or reflecting curriculum content (e.g. science paraphernalia), or making reference to the wider commercial world (e.g. toys or party accessories). The intention is to capture 'fun times' (Tempest Photography) and somehow represent the essence of 'childhood' (cf. Olson & Rampaul, 2013).

Concluding remarks

Returning to the coding structure ('People', 'Identities' and 'Context') it is possible to identify patterns reflecting both continuity and change, which will be summarised below.

Standard codes and conventions relating to the overall organisation of school class photographs were established early within photographic traditions, such as the arrangement of people in a tiered composition (Goffman, 1976: 16). The consistent postures and placement of limbs seen in the majority of the images in this sample suggest a sense of compliance and community, aligned with the disciplinary mechanism of education (cf. Foucault, 1977). This arguably evolves into something more performative and autonomous, emphasising the individual whilst still managing to maintain a sense of collective coherence. Clothing and hairstyle codes connect individuals to each other and particular historical contexts. Even before the introduction of school uniforms, there was a sense of continuity, with clothes/accessories creating strong visual patterns.

Arguably, there is continuity around how compositional codes and conventions depict gender in that they appear to adhere to stereotyped constructs, especially in terms of Goffman's (1976) concepts of 'relative size' and 'function ranking'. This suggests an enduring social attitude relating to perceived status and power, which may be compounded by the organisation of the education system. Gender differentiation is most obviously represented by the positioning of people, with repeated patterns relating to posture. Arguably, the emergent hierarchy is amplified by the age of the child; younger children and girls are typically positioned 'lower-down' and shown as having less power.

Age also indicates broader developments in and access to education. The earlier photographs in the sample feature much older children and a mix of age ranges, with fewer attendees, because schooling tended to happen in one place and was not necessarily universally available. With improvements to access and increases in participation rates, age began to function as another organisational mechanism, amplifying the consistent visual representation of cohorts/classes.

Buildings anchor children in a 'schooled' setting, providing context and reflecting interesting shifts in the organisation and utilisation of that space (especially in relation to play). The built environment is an important marker in the sample, with photographs taken against the backdrop of a large stone wall or a distinctive façade. This creates continuity from

year-to-year and generation-to-generation, fostering a sense of locatedness and making it relatively easy to 'place' the children. Arguably, this site-specificity has eroded with the introduction of stark white backgrounds; children are un-locatable in their own school context and appear to float in nothingness. The backdrop is anonymous and the intergenerational link to place is broken, yet the context-free whiteout of contemporary images still manages to maintain a sense of 'timeless' and 'universal' childhood.

Decades of continuity/ritual equilibrium, upheld throughout the 20th century with the reiterative use of established and recognisable codes and conventions (cf. Pace, 2002), remained relatively constant until the 2000s. Ritual disequilibrium (i.e. subversion of the 'norm') and, by association, the establishment of new or adjusted codes and conventions, has arguably been a phenomenon of the last twenty years. Indeed, the concept of ritual (dis)equilibrium may hinge on what is *technically* possible (cf. Spike, 2012), as much as on socially constructed understandings of education and childhood. Newer technologies afford innovative, flexible approaches to visual representation, facilitating a broader repertoire of storytelling techniques about 'childhood' in general and 'the schooled child' in particular. These processes become lasting records of 'reality' within a long-established narrative timeline. Importantly, though, ritual disequilibrium is only fleeting. Once new forms of representation become familiar, ritual equilibrium is restored; new schematic features are added to the repertoire and become 'standard' with repeated use.

What becomes clear, when offering 'readings' of school class photographs, is that they begin to reveal stories of people and place, and how each are shaped by social shifts, changes and developments over time. A distinct narrative emerges that is both unique (tied to a given location and the place it occupies in history) and universal (a story of education and childhood). By reviewing a montage of class photographs capturing 130 years of schooling in one place, various ideological standpoints regarding the social construction of both 'education' and 'childhood' are revealed. Emergent continuities and processes of change echo Holland's (1992: 15) argument that, in terms of visual representation at least, 'Children are for all time, forever new but always the same'.

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