

Narrating lives International Conference

A. Panel presentation and audience

School and leisure? Images of past female childhood education as projected in (auto-)biographical English texts

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as everyone under 18, and childhood as “the time for children to be in school and at play.” (UNICEF 2005) This implies that at present schooling and childhood would be largely synonymous. However, if these definitions seem to constitute a universal ideal even today, it is probably most certain that they would not easily fit children in the past, let alone female children.

The aim of this panel round table is to explore different issues that compose the image of **past female childhoods** as described in real **(auto-)biographical English discourse**. More particularly, panellists will focus on the experience of education and schooling during the period **1750-1900**. Results will probably challenge or mitigate the idea that female *childhood may be universally defined by schooling and leisure*.

Topics such as the discursive representation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century female students, their teachers and colleague learners, sites of education, institutions, training centres, degrees, academic, practical and vocational skills, school years or the changing terminology of schooling and learning may be raised. Also, panellists may (and will) concentrate on student agency, self-initiated or guided learning, active or passive roles in female learning and teaching, emotions, desires and frustrations.

Considering the audience and their more general interests, it is to note that the panel will combine the cultural turn in Childhood Studies (Balagopalan 2023; Kehily 2015; Wynn 2015; etc.), the narrative or discursive turn in the humanities and the social sciences (Ambrosius 2004; Bluck and Habermas 2000; Herman, Jahn and Ryan 2005; Pavlenko 2007) and a **linguistic approach** to real language English texts focusing on historical female childhood and younger years. Both separately and combined these lines of investigation offer a wide spectrum of under researched topics. Among them:

1. The **linguistic** and cultural **construction** of British childhood; female childhood; past female childhoods; female childhood education.
2. New conflicts in the discussion of the 19th century separation between the **public and the private** spheres, as triggered by the opposition between biography and autobiography; fact and emotion; home and institutional education, among others.
3. Reassessment of **conventional beliefs about girl education** in the past and results obtained from real texts (Dowdall 2014; Scott 2010; Skelton, Francis, and Smulyan 2006; among others).

As for open questions to **engage** the audience, suffice it to mention a couple of them:

1. What is the female educational frame and concept **emerging from collective biographical discourse**? How many elements of education are mentioned in the biographical accounts? Agents, contents, sites, quality, duration, assessment, none?
2. To what extent has British female childhood and female childhood education **changed** according to life narratives?
3. Are there any visible differences in the biographical account of women’s lives before and after the Education Act 1870? Is education an **increasingly relevant topic in the retelling of female childhoods**?
4. What’s the difference between female education as **objectively described** and **subjectively experienced**? Between biographical and autobiographical accounts?
5. According to female life-accounts, to what extent were eighteenth- and nineteenth-century **women active agents in their educational** process?

6. What do **linguists** have to add to the analysis of biographical texts? Biography as a source for linguistic analysis.

References

- Ambrosius, Lloyd E. ed. 2004. *Writing biography: historians and their craft*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Balagopalan, Sarada, Wall, John and Wells, Karen. eds. 2023. *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Theories in Childhood Studies*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Bluck, Susan and Habermas, Tilmann. 2000. "The life story schema". *Motivation and emotion*, 24 (2): 121-147.
- Boos, Florence. S. 2016. "The Education Act of 1870: Before and After". *BRANCH: Britain, Representation, and Nineteenth-century History*. [Accessed April 24, 2024].
- Coleman, Julie. 2012. "Using dictionaries and thesauruses as evidence". In Nevalainen and Traugott 2012, 98-110.
- Dowdall, Daisy. 2014. "Educating for Femininity? Reform of Working- and Middle-Class Girls' Education in Victorian England" PhD diss., Wellesley College.
- Herman David, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan: Routledge, 2005 "Narrative Turn in the Humanities". In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, 377-382, New York: Routledge.
- Kehily, Mary Jane. 2015. *An Introduction to childhood studies*. UK: Open University Press.
- Nevalainen, Terttu and Traugott, Elizabeth Closs. eds. 2012. *The Oxford handbook of the history of English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pavlenko, Aneta. 2007. "Autobiographic narratives as data in applied linguistics". *Applied linguistics*, 28 (2): 163-188.
- Scott, Catherine Elizabeth Margaret. 2010. *The Education of Women in England 1650-1750: Changes in Ideas and Pedagogy*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne,
- Skelton, Christine, Francis, Becky, and Smulyan, Lisa. 2006. *The SAGE Handbook of Gender and Education*, UK: SAGE Publications
- Wyn, Johanna., and Cahill, Helen. eds. 2015. *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*. Singapore: Springer.

Keywords: *British female education; 18th and 19th centuries; (Cultural) Linguistics and biographical discourse; childhood studies; ODNB.*

B. INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

1. *Home education at the turn of the 19th century. An analysis of female childhood accounts in English biographical discourse.*
2. *To Be Educated or to Attend School: Agency in Female Childhood Education in Biographies from 1891 to 1900.*
3. *"Literate and intelligent"? The concept of illiteracy in biographical discourse between 1750-1900.*
4. *Visions of Late Modern Girls' Education in Women's (Auto)Biographies: The case of The Earnest Christian (1858)*

Individual abstracts and presenters' details are included in separate forms.