**Editorial: Sight, Sound and Text in the History of Education**

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This special issue arose from a joint conference of the History of Education Society, UK and the Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society, held in Malvern in Worcestershire, England in 2016. The conference drew together media and educational historians, as well as archivists and museum professionals, to examine both methodological issues and a range of examples of sensory and textual histories. The three-day event, as well as being enriching for its international character, proved that though much work has already been done in this area, there is so much more to consider and exploit when it comes to the study of the ‘new’ sonic and visual sources and their intertextual relationship with the documentary.

Despite a gradually accumulating body of work on sound and the acoustic in the history of education,[[1]](#footnote-1) priority is more often than not still given to the documentary as source. This neglect of the sensorium, in this case the auditory as an historical source, underlines how hearing as an aspect of human and social life is too often ignored in the everyday, and perhaps as a consequence the historical. Yet sounds, random and ordered, are part of every contemporary culture, in education the composed and performed sounds of music in music lessons and related practices in schools, the technology-generated sounds of radio, television and the digital, even the voices of children and teachers – are but some of the examples of the sonic culture of school life. As Goodman has highlighted, such memories of the acoustic are often inflected with the visual and the tactile, and with the affective lead to a particular construction of memory and history.[[2]](#footnote-2) The senses work together to create powerful and memorable affect for individuals, and we can access this affective history via a sonic and sensory history. Modern technologies permit access to acoustic sources in unprecedented ways, and the documentary often describes how the sonic was enacted and experienced. Moreover, the richness of sources of the auditory offer access to a more fully embodied educational experience of the past. Sonic sources demonstrate how sounds were used directly and indirectly to shape and discipline children’s characters as well as their cognition and learning.

As a recent special issue of the journal *Paedagogica Historica* attests, the last two decades have witnessed a growing literature concerning the use of the visual, and the development of a range of methodological approaches and new ‘ways of seeing’ in the history of education.[[3]](#footnote-3) This trend is reflected in the contributions to this special issue, and several of the papers included here challenge us to extend our readings further to counter disciplinary silences that yet remain. As Ian Grosvenor notes in his contribution, research in the history of education has been subject to a number of disciplinary shifts incorporating visual, sensory, material and spatial approaches. Grosvenor combines these approaches to address a continuing silence in the history of education, that is black and minority educational experiences. Marking twentieth anniversary of his own *Assimilating Identities,* Grosvenor demonstrates how extending our research agendas to incorporate informal sites of learning (in this case a television series and museum exhibitions) and attending to the everyday can enable new ways of perceiving previously marginalised experiences, potentially disrupting dominant narratives.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Similarly Catherine Manathunga, Mark Selkrig and Alison Baker turn to an installation to render visible the everyday experiences of academic life and work, thereby interrupting dominant gendered narratives of university history. Drawing on a Foucauldian genealogical perspective, and recognising that how we look and see art is dependent on our own biographies and situated positions, they used their installation *Academic postcards: then and now* to foreground academic voices, and provide a critical feminist critique of sexism in the academy.

The articles by Grosvenor and Manathunga (et al) engage with questions of the representation and re-imagining of experience through cultural production. Catherine Woyshner’s contribution continues this theme in her study of how white female teachers in the American South and Midwest in the 1930s attempted to render the segregated ‘other’ visible through sight and sound. In an interesting and innovative, but ultimately limited experiment, white pupils were presented with the opportunity to engage with African American experiences through black history and culture, complemented by visits to schools and colleges. Drawing on bell hooks, Woyshner illustrates how black teachers and students resisted and subverted this white gaze which, although well-meaning in intent, was restricted by the pupils’ inability to see beyond stereotypical understandings and reflections of their own experiences and contexts.

Josephine May’s contribution explores how the televisual representation of past experience can disrupt gendered narratives and reflect political concerns in the present. In her study of the Australian television series *Marion*,May utilises the concept of ‘hyper-linear’ history to argue that the narrating of the eponymous female teacher’s experiences of teaching and leadership during the Second World War reflected not only the gendered educational experiences of the period but was also constructed to disrupt the gender relations of its moment of production in the 1970s. Sian Vaughan explores the concept of ‘sonic mining’ in the context of an exhibition commemorating the centenary of the First World War, specifically the Birmingham School of Art. Vaughan asks the pertinent question, ‘can historians mine the archives for the sound of educational experiences past?’ Rather more controversially, she explores how Justin Wiggan’s installation representing the wartime life of the School utilises sound to recreate the past for visitors, sometimes in rather oblique and anachronistic ways, deliberately evoking a particular mood. Vaughan raises some intriguing methodological, even ethical, questions implied by Wiggan’s work, amongst which are whether sounds of the past can be recovered and then accurately recreated in the spaces in which they were originally enacted. In what ways can sonic recovery be legitimately used to disrupt historical understanding, emotionally challenging the listener? What does an historical understanding of the human brain mean, and how does this relate to a growing interest in embodiment and the senses in history? Suzanne Manning’s contribution examines the use of illustrations as sources for historical analysis with reference to government policy documents on early childhood education in New Zealand. The nature of the images selected, who by and for what purpose, and their meaning in the context of discourses about policy are all explored. Manning’s article reveals the political nature of image selection, in this instance when particular notions of the children’s play is intended to heightened or diminished. Manning focuses specifically upon representation of ‘blocks’ as a conduit for both play and learning, acting as a representational bridge between accepted early-childhood and school settings, making the text palatable to readers from different educational philosophies. The interplay between visual and the materials is brought out strongly in this. ‘Discourse’ she concludes ‘is more than words’, enfolding the visual and illustrative.

1. E.g.  Catherine Burke & Ian Grosvenor (2011) The Hearing School: an exploration

of sound and listening in the modern school, *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, 47:3, 323-340. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Joyce Goodman (2017) Thinking Through Sonorities in the History of Schooling *International Journal for the Historiography of Education* 7(2), pp.277-288. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Inés Dussel and Karin Priem, “The visual in histories of education: a reappraisal,” *Paedagogica Historica* 53, no. 6 (2017): 641-649; Berger. See also for example Ian Grosvenor, Martin Lawn, and Kate Rousmaniere, eds., *Silences and Images: The Social History of the Classroom.* (New York: Peter Lang Inc., 1999); *Paedagogica Historica* special issue, 36, no. 1 (2000); *History of Education* special issue “Ways of seeing Education and Schooling: Emerging Historiographies,” 30, no. 2 (2001); U. Mietzner, K. Myers, and N. Peim, eds., *Visual History: Images of Education.* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005); *History of Education* special issue 36, no.2 (2007)*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ian Grosvenor, *Assimilating Identities: Racism and Educational Policy in post 1945 Britain* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1997) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)