

Balances between civilising processes and offensives: Adult-child relations in Irish primary schools from the mid-nineteenth century

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Abstract: *This paper examines arguments about balances between civilising processes and offensives using the history of Irish primary-level education as an empirical case. Drawing largely on teaching manuals and primary school curricula from the mid-nineteenth century up to the end of the twentieth century, this paper traces the changing conceptual and social distance between childhood and adulthood in Ireland. If we focus too much on civilising offensives rather than processes, we lose much of the explanatory power of figurational sociology. Transformations become depicted as the outcomes of intentional plans, rather than compromises or unintended consequences of dependencies between people. In Ireland, children became increasingly enmeshed in both unplanned civilising processes and deliberate civilising offensives framed by pedagogues and experts. However, these recurring attempts at civilising young children occurred in broader, ordered, but largely unintentional social processes developing over generations. While both ‘children’ and ‘adults’ were initially addressed in quite similar terms, their identities and subjectivities gradually diverged, such that the division between these social categories became clearer. This has been a non-linear set of processes primarily due to the successive escalation and partial resolution of social conflicts in different forms.*

Keywords: *Civilising processes and offensives; figurations; childhood; Ireland; social change*

Introduction

The title of this paper is not meant to convey an opposition, as civilising offensives remain part of broader civilising processes. I argue that figurational sociology needs to maintain its emphasis on ordered, or structured, blind social processes, unplanned by anybody in particular, and the unintentional outcome of many intentions formed in unintended social conditions, if it is to maintain its distinctiveness as a theoretical perspective across the social sciences.

In this paper I examine the literature on civilising offensives, and then seek to apply or reinterpret this concept in light of some developments in primary school education in Ireland from the mid-nineteenth century up to the end of the twentieth century. In the following section I examine the development of the concept of civilising offensives following a figurational perspective, to some extent at least. Then a brief overview of the changing figurational context of Ireland is presented, with a view to explaining the implementation of civilising offensives aimed initially at children and adults alike, but increasingly concentrated on children as the civilising of adults became ‘taken-for-granted’ to a greater extent. However, the emotional tone and harshness of this civilising offensive becomes more circumspect and careful as the status of the child rises in relation to that of the adult, though adults remain in more powerful positions within the overall figuration. Due to individualising and informalising processes the child is seen as

possessing a unique personality that teachers should be careful not to modify. Teachers are less expected to build relatively uniform characters oriented towards the fulfilment of known standards of conduct, than to nurture the release of a unique self and potential from each child. In other words, the nature and tone of civilising offensives change over time, and the task of figurational sociology is to explain such change, rather than focus largely on the effects of each offensive in narrow, time- and space-limited contexts.

The concept of civilising offensives

Various uses of the term civilising offensives revolve around powerful elites, often at the level of the state, implementing social programmes aimed at the working classes and other 'outsider' groups in an attempt to change their conduct in the direction of more established standards of conduct (see Kalb 1994; Kruithof 1995; Mitzman 1987; Powell 2013; Van Ginkel 1996). The aims concern moral improvement, and the building of self-control or self-restraint, within these target populations. Most relevantly for this paper is the work of Kruithof (1995), who argues that civilising offensives in the Dutch Republic from the nineteenth century aimed at ameliorating conditions of poverty and low public spirit, and building a stronger national identity. Part of the solution involved the development of a national primary school system, which religious institutions eventually controlled by the turn of the twentieth century. This parallels social developments in Ireland, where a national primary school system was instituted in 1830 and again the various Christian churches vied for control. The dependence of the state (which was the state of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland at that point) on religious groups for education provision reflected their pre-existing involvement in private systems of education and charitable institutions aimed at 'the poor' and their ownership of property as space for schools.

Mitzman (1987: 664) equates civilising offensives with the work of 'the socializing agencies which transmit social values', including a strong work ethic through programmes of education targeting the working classes. Mitzman also argues that rising groups with knowledge of popular culture and its less civilised mentalities were often ambivalent and even resentful towards attempts by established elites to impose civilising offensives on the rest of the population. However, Elias (2012a) had already noted that the likelihood of cultural trickle-down effects very much depended on the prevailing power balances between elite and rising groups at particular points in history.

Where individual social mobility prevails, then anxious accommodation to the elite civilised culture is likely (Elias 2012a: 473–4). But where entire classes rise in power due to the relatively sudden increased dependence of elite groups on such classes, as in the case of industrialisation followed by unionisation and political participation in governmental processes and structures, then the cultural codes and standards of the rising groups are not abandoned (Elias, 2012a: 475). It is likely according to Elias that a mingling of elite and popular codes will result. The key point here, of course, is that this outcome is not exactly planned by either side, so the civilising offensives as the plans of particular elite groups are always subject to the dynamics of the total figuration, and the structure of power relations produced by changing interdependencies, comprising the sources and targets of such plans. And the figuration is likely to include other interested parties beyond the ostensible target of civilising offensives; using Elias's (2012b) game models we can easily see how coalitions may be formed to resist or steer the intentions of even the most powerful actor in the figuration. Indeed, as detailed below in relation to the civilising offensives in Irish education in the nineteenth century, other groups apart from the source of such offensives can become more antagonistic towards each other thereby thwarting the intentions of the central state.

Or, as Kalb (1994) argues, using the historical example of Dutch shoemakers, coalitions across social classes may form to impose civilising offensives on class fractions within the coalition. This is an example of Powell's (2013) recent call for research on civilising offensives to pay closer attention to both civilising intermediaries and, following Van Ginkel (1996), offensives emanating from members within groups seeking more civilised conduct for such groups as a whole. Van Ginkel argues that the transformation of a Dutch maritime town in the late nineteenth century from a relatively homogenous, law-abiding community to a place of relative social unrest was driven in large part by inward migration from surrounding regions of people attracted to the promise of jobs and fortunes derived from the expanding oyster farming businesses. The gradual return to relative peace and adherence to more civilised social standards occurred through the intertwined processes of civilising offensives (ideological means), disciplining offensives (threats of punishment), and social integration of the newcomers into community networks. Of these three, van Ginkel sees civilising offensives as the least important, on the basis that only the already converted were receptive to them. However, gossip within the increasingly integrated community did function to encourage adherence to standards (van Ginkel 1996: 235), so in this respect represented a form of civilising offensive from within, though what is perhaps missing from van Ginkel's analysis is an examination of the dynamics of group formation and expansion, and associated we-identities alongside these processes. In the course of migrant incorporation into existing, through growing, networks, it is difficult to isolate the spaces that permit labels such as 'within' when social boundaries become porous. External civilising offensives aimed at outsiders become internal just as such outsiders become incorporated. Verrips (1987) also contends that civilising offensives occur in we-they social relations, so that internal we-group offensives are often a form of group differentiation. Notwithstanding Kalb's economic determinism and his inaccurate charge of teleology and uni-directionalism against Elias, he shows how shifting class alliances and cleavages in the Netherlands in the early twentieth century provided the conditions for implementing civilising offensives.

Verrips (1987: 3-4) writes that at first glance it appears that Elias's theory does not imply a civilising offensive due to his focus on the distinction between classes. In other words elite groups were keen to maintain their distance and thus had no interest in inculcating the working classes with civilised codes. Verrips contends that offensives can be interpreted in terms of Elias's theory. In fact Elias does refer to similar processes encapsulated by the concept of offensives in his discussion of individual civilising processes (relations between adults and children) and colonisation processes (meaning both between classes and between coloniser and colonised nations):

But since in our society every human being is exposed from the first moment of life to the influence and the moulding intervention of civilised grown-ups, they must indeed pass through a process of civilisation to reach the standard attained by their society in the course of its history, but not through each particular phase of the social civilising process (Elias 2012a: 5fn).

Yet it is not only the land that is needed, but the people; these must be integrated, whether as workers or consumers, into the web of the hegemonic, upper-class country, with its highly developed differentiation of functions. This in turn requires both a certain raising of living standards and the cultivation of self-control or super-ego functions in the subject peoples on the Western models; it demands a 'civilisation' of the colonised. Just as it was not possible in the West itself, from a certain stage of interdependence onwards, to rule people solely by force and physical threats, so it also became necessary, in maintaining an empire that went beyond mere plantation-land and plantation-labour, to rule people in part through themselves, through the moulding of their super-egos (Elias 2012a: 474).

So the reference to ‘cultivation’, ‘moulding’ and ‘intervention’ implies deliberate attempts to bring out civilising conduct in others, due to the increasing interdependence between groups. In the case of the relations between adults and children these interdependencies can take multiple forms, but include the very status of good parenthood itself – the capacity to control and steer the conduct of one’s children (see Elias 2008; 2012a: 414–17). Failure to achieve this risks loss of status and reputation amongst one’s adult peers. The degree to which parents seek to inculcate social standards of conduct often depends upon the diversity of those standards and the degree of identification and emulation with the perceived sources of particular standards. For example, outsider groups may resist standards seen as imposed by established groups, or even recognise the inculcation of such standards as futile given prevailing chances of social mobility. Of course, as Elias noted, this dependence on others to learn modes of self-regulation becomes an extra layer of interdependency. Elias was completely aware of what we call civilising offensives, but he simply emphasised the unplanned but ordered structure of social change as this represented, through the conceptual model of figurations, theoretical innovation. That some groups throughout history have attempted to impose their plans on others, through force or ideology, is rather obvious. The tendency for such plans to produce structured, unintended outcomes (like the monopoly mechanism) produces a vision of social change less subject to either inexplicable accidents of history or the guiding hands of great men.

Van Krieken (1999) argues that barbaric civilising offensives can be perpetrated by self-identifying civilised groups in the name of civilisation. He argues that Elias assumes that civilising offensives are bound to succeed, but this is not an interpretation I share. At a very basic level, Elias notes the recurrence of the same rules of conduct in etiquette texts over many years, indicating that the injunctions of pedagogues and manners experts often fell on deaf ears. But, as van Krieken states, it is important to recognise that civilisation itself often entails violence, and that, following Burkitt (1996), the central tenets of the civilising process do not always move in tandem in the same direction. In this respect Burkitt emphasises the ambivalence of civilisation, though he acknowledges that Elias also notes this ambivalence. Burkitt relies on Bauman’s analysis of the Holocaust to show that lengthening chains of interdependencies occurred alongside declining mutual identification within Germany during the 1930s. However, the evidence cited for increasing interdependencies concerns the violence perpetrated on Jews through bureaucratic mechanisms (thereby placing violence ‘behind the scenes’). This is a rather narrow view of Elias’s arguments, which highlight the overall structure of the figuration in terms of multiple mutual dependencies between people, not the functional specialisation required for the fulfilment of a specific action. Nevertheless, the concept of interdependencies is often treated within figurational sociology in a positive sense (as more people depend on each other, the scope of mutual identification increases), even though Elias (2012b) acknowledges that interdependencies can be antagonistic.

Van Krieken cites the example of violent campaigns against Aboriginal people in Australia, arguing that so-called civilised groups can and do react with aggression towards those failing to meet the standards of Western civilisation. It should also be noted that Elias recognised that a central aspect of civilising processes – state pacification and the monopoly of the means of physical violence – entails much violence to achieve such pacification and monopolisation. The elimination contests between noble houses inherent in the monopoly mechanism clearly entail acts of aggression. The courtisation of warriors occurs towards the latter phase of state pacification, where mutual observation under the ostensible control of the central ruler diminishes the need for continued and escalating violence. These processes and social arrangements remain fragile so violence does not completely disappear, but cultures of aggression and displays of physical force gradually give way to cultures of civility through advancing thresholds of shame and repugnance towards physical aggression.

As Elias reiterates many times, children are an obvious social group that routinely miss these standards of civilised conduct. Adults with a tenuous, incomplete, fragile, or otherwise imperfect grasp of self-restraint and mannerly conduct may react aggressively towards children. Elias (2012a: 164) alludes to this in terms of the difficult emotional relations between parents and children and ‘the aggressive and threatening severity’ often used to maintain moral standards. This form of civilising offensive is of course largely counterproductive. A central tenet of civilising processes is the social constraint towards self-restraint, and the development of a more even, controlled emotional habitus, or ‘second nature’ as Elias (2012a: 136–7) describes it – learning that has become so embodied as to be largely automatic. As Wouters (2007) notes, the fear induced by violence is not conducive to the development of second nature, and especially not ‘third nature’. Children in such circumstances learn to fear their aggressors, but not their conscience to the same extent. Without social surveillance, the conscience weakens. And, as Wouters also notes, occasional freedom from social surveillance and control is necessary for the development of a more even, self-controlled habitus.

Another aspect of civilising processes is the growth of mutual identification, but civilising and colonising projects can revolve around building a more one-sided emotional identification, encouraging outsider groups to identify with ruling elites for the purpose of social order. Status differentiation between coloniser and colonised groups can prohibit *mutual* emotional identification in that the coloniser group sees the colonised group as less powerful, or even less civilised as a form of justification for the colonising process. This lack of mutual identification can lead to limited perceived legitimacy (from the perspective of the colonised group), which inhibits the internalisation of so-called civilised codes of conduct as they are associated with ruling groups (see Dolan & Connolly 2014). This is especially the case as the colonised group advances and the ruling group declines in their power ratio.

I will now very briefly outline aspects of these civilising offensives and processes in the context of children’s education in Ireland from the nineteenth century in a figurational context.

Irish figurational context

Though this paper empirically examines civilising processes and offensives (as part of such processes) from the mid-nineteenth century, the figurational dynamics relevant to such offensives of course begin well before this. As Elias (2006: 249) states, there is little point in searching for origins, but it is enough to highlight the changing power relations between various groups across Ireland and Britain. As Irish education (and indeed educational practices throughout much of world history) has been heavily controlled and shaped by competing religious institutions, the relative decline and subsequent gradual rise of the Catholic Church over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is central to understanding civilising processes and offensives.

Catholicism in Ireland had declined considerably by the end of the seventeenth century with the failure of the Jacobite challenge. Catholics lost many rights with the imposition of the penal laws, and most pertinently in the context of education was the right to teach (McManus 2004: 15). Restrictions on land purchase and inheritance, in a highly agrarian social structure, also increased social distance and status between Catholic and Protestant groups. The prohibition on Catholic education forced educational practices and institutions ‘behind the scenes’. Illegal education in the form of ‘hedge’ schools grew over the course of the eighteenth century. This was related to a civilising offensive aimed at both religious conversion and childhood socialisation through the preferred state religion. But quite clearly such an offensive had unintended consequences in the development of alternative forms of socialisation in school settings behind the surveillance and control of official state-favoured institutions. Though Catholic Emancipation occurred in

1829 relations between Catholics and Protestants had by then assumed an established-outsider figurational dynamic (see Elias & Scotson 2008). Religious institutions were given the function of national education by the state (by this stage, the state being the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland), as these had both prior experience in education, the affiliation and support of their respective communities, as well as infrastructure in terms of buildings that could serve as schools, in the context of prevailing standards for accommodating children.

This established new forms of dependency between religious groups and the central state, and rivalries and tensions (another form of dependency) between those religious groups. The social function of socialising children was recognised as a powerful one, and groups vied for control over the religious and educational inculcation of current and potential members. State concerns over education were related to the assumed disloyal nature of informal, 'hedge' schools led by Catholic schoolmasters (McManus 2004). In part, one of the unintended consequences of the repressive anti-Catholic legislation of the eighteenth century was the increased dependence of the lower classes on teachers who were less dependent on the state, and potentially less loyal to the state. Fears that Catholic teachers were encouraging rebellious attitudes among young minds encouraged the introduction of a more formal national system ostensibly under the control of state functionaries. This new system was intended to be non-denominational in character in order to foster mutual identification between the antagonistic religious groups in Ireland, and also to develop feelings of loyalty towards the British state.

However, given the increasing interdependencies between Irish and British groups, particularly in economic terms through the commercialisation of Irish agriculture and the continued industrialisation of Britain (Dolan 2009b), growing middle-class Catholic groups financially supported the organisational expansion and infrastructural development of the Catholic Church in Ireland (Larkin 1984). Ironically, the dependence of the British state strengthened the position of the Catholic Church, given the large Catholic affiliation of the Irish population, and religious hierarchy eventually refused to implement the state plans for non-denominational education. This is yet another example of a civilising offensive failing to reach its target, and in fact contributing to countervailing tendencies in terms of building Catholic confidence and encouraging greater national distinction on a lower level of mutual identification – Ireland rather than the United Kingdom (the scope of emotional identification with the United Kingdom from the Irish perspective had been partial and uneven in any event).

The fear of evil and building character

In the early phase of the national primary education system in Ireland the civilising offensive was directed not only at the socialisation of young children, but also at teachers themselves. Teachers would be:

trained to good habits [...] identified with the State, and therefore anxious to promote a spirit of obedience to lawful authority, we are confident that they would prove a body of the utmost value and importance in promoting civilisation and peace (Commissioners of National Education in Ireland 1836: 5).

Teachers were to be both targets and intermediaries of civilising offensives. This indicates the perceived status differences between elite groups closely connected to the centres of the United Kingdom figuration, and those lower groups at the peripheries. Teaching manuals of this period reveal the desired codes of conduct among

adults and children, and the relative lack of distinction between these social categories suggests an earlier stage of civilising processes. Examples of prescriptions for children include the following:

[The playground is] the best place for discovering the dispositions, developing the character, and forming the habits of children (Sullivan 1843: 6).

As the passions and affections of our nature furnish the first impulses to action, it is important that we address ourselves to the task of moulding and directing them at the age at which they are most yielding and susceptible (Young 1860: 9).

In that young bosom are often stirring passions as strong as our own, desires not less violent, a volition not less supreme (Healy 1889: 19).

[...] although the bones and features [of a child] cannot be moved, yet the expression and shading off may be modified almost at will. That you and others engaged in Irish National Schools are very fortunate as to material whereon to display your skill (Healy 1889: 48).

Teachers were encouraged to build the character of children according to developing codes of conduct more established among educated elites. The civilising offensive aimed at children was not so different from their advice to teachers. For children and teacher alike the prescriptions and proscriptions of these manuals stressed cleanliness (Sullivan, 1843). Much like the etiquette manuals examined by Elias, these pedagogical texts repeated the same requirements over successive editions in the initial decades after the foundation of the national system.

Adult and child responsibilities within the school overlapped, such that slightly older children engaged in teaching duties. The teachers 'are expected to observe themselves, and to impress upon the minds of their pupils, the great rule of REGULARITY and ORDER' (Sullivan 1843: 4–5). Like the children, teachers were patronised reflecting their lowly status.

School inspectors' reports also emphasised the civilising mission inherent in the educational process. Though an inspector acknowledged the Irish language as a source of national pride, its replacement by English would hasten 'an improved civilization and higher social condition in the South and West of Ireland' (Commissioners of National Education in Ireland 1851: 5). Ideally teachers were to be trained in residence to allow for regular observation and surveillance:

The formation of character and of good habits, the regulation of manners and of dress, the cultivation of kindly and honourable feelings, and the influence of religious motives are largely promoted by constant residence under the eye of persons of superior culture and piety (Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education 1870: 136).

The divergence of adults and children and emotional control

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the divergence in expected social and emotional standards of conduct between teachers and pupils became clearer. This partly reflects the effects of previous civilising offensives over decades, but only within the context of greater social interdependencies and increased social complexity brought on by commercialisation discussed earlier in this paper, and also by the nascent

professionalisation of teachers. The Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) was established in 1868 (Ó Buachalla 1988: 28), and sought to improve the status of teachers and their security of tenure. INTO essentially became a labour union to advance and protect the rights of primary school teachers. This organisation was also formed through dynamic figurations comprising other competing and hostile organisations, such as Irish Protestant National Teachers Union (formed in 1899), and the Catholic Clerical Managers' Association (formed in 1903) (Ó Buachalla 1988: 28). At various times in various regions of Ireland, members of INTO were banned from employment by the Catholic managers of schools (usually local clergy). Efforts at securing employment rights met with stern rebukes by the Catholic hierarchy. For example, a pastoral letter by the bishops declared such attempts by INTO as 'this anticlerical and almost secularist movement' (quoted in Ó Buachalla 1988: 43). The bishops warned that unless INTO 'takes up and maintains unequivocally a correct and becoming attitude towards the bishops and priests of the church', members should leave INTO 'as no longer in harmony with the principles of faith or with their duties as members of the Catholic church'. This indicates the shifting power relations between employers and employees, which overall swung in the direction of teachers due to increasing state significance placed on education, and the developing professionalisation and academic advancement of teachers within that context. A lengthy strike by teachers in 1946 due to pay cuts received support from parents, which strengthened the power position of INTO (Ó Buachalla 1988: 95), and INTO secured the agreement of the Irish state to institute a university degree for primary school teachers in 1973 (Coolahan 1989: 35). Following protestations from INTO in 1978 (withdrawal from school boards of management) the number of patron's (usually local clergy) nominees were reduced on boards in 1980 (Coolahan 1981: 175), also indicating a shift in power relations over a long time period, though this was subject to counter movements.

Though teaching manuals continued to stress emotional self-control, teachers were also advised not to change character for superiors (Healy 1889), suggesting a relative class equalisation and distaste for displays of both inferiority and superiority (see Wouters 1998; 2007). Similarly, Joyce argued that children should be allowed 'a certain degree of cheerful freedom – a moderate indulgence in that joyous fun and glee they so much love' (1894: 67). Too much discipline '**defeats its own purposes**; for children governed in this way are orderly only in presence of the teacher, and come at last to hate the school because it is associated in their minds with perpetual restraint and fear' (Healy 1894: 67, original emphasis). This concern for the child's capacity for self-control encapsulates the social constraint towards self-restraint, a central aspect of civilising processes. But teachers are increasingly recognised, and expected to see themselves, as very different from the objects of their care. Their civilised conduct was seen as part of second nature, such that they were encouraged to identify and facilitate the acquisition of similar second natures in children. Joyce asked teachers to set children 'in the process of discovery or self-learning, by encouragement, by questioning, by illustration, and by sympathy. He should teach the child how to think, and should lead him to love work for the love of knowledge and for the pleasure of overcoming difficulties' (Joyce 1894: 85). The difference between adults and children became clearer as emotional self-control on the part of teachers was gradually assumed.

The rules for teachers in 1914 forbade teachers from keeping public houses (selling alcohol), and conveyed the importance of receiving visitors courteously (The Commissioners of National Education in Ireland 1914: iii, vi). Corporal punishment was still discouraged, and now only the principal teacher could administer it, and only after at least ten minutes had elapsed since the offence. A light cane could be used but the 'boxing of children's ears, the pulling of their hair, and similar ill-treatment, are absolutely forbidden, and will be visited with severe penalties' (The Commissioners of National Education in Ireland 1914: xxi). This placed extra emotional demands on teachers (to depend on another to punish a child that challenged one's authority) and encouraged the cooling of emotions before responding to acts considered to be transgressions. The code continued in the direction of valuing emotional control *as an ideal*. The fact that these instructions persisted through various editions of school rules over time suggests that their practical implementation was less than

successful. Indeed Maguire and Ó Cinnéide (2005) argue that children were physically chastised, despite proscriptions, until 1982 when corporal punishment was formally abolished.

Given that Ireland had been part of the United Kingdom between 1801 and 1922, primary school curricula and rules avoided references to nationalist Irish history. Since then, overt displays of national pride appeared in texts, and the tone reflected the fact that partial independence had been achieved not through parliamentary persuasion on the part of established politicians of the upper classes but military struggle led by rising lower middle-class groups, often well-educated for the period, with broad participation from other rising groups, relative to the power chances of previous generations, such as small farmers and urban working classes. Consequently there emerged an ambivalence towards violence that was only gradually suppressed, and even then only partially and unevenly, with the growing monopolisation of violence by the Irish state.

Partial political 'independence' for the Irish state also saw the return of older conceptions of the child as passive objects to be moulded according to narrower prescriptions and proscriptions of cultural nationalism (Devine 1999: 18). A Jesuit Professor of Education during the 1920s, Timothy Corcoran, advised conferences on the new 'free state' curriculum and he followed the doctrine of original sin assuming children were evil by nature (Walsh 2005). As the restoration of the Irish language was given utmost priority, children effectively became the targets of a 'nationalising offensive' which was partly decivilising in terms of both the harshness of this process and the emphasis on a narrowing scope of emotional identification.

However, this narrow identification proved unsustainable given escalating emigration, and particularly to the former coloniser nation, so that politicians reluctantly sought new dependencies on a wider, international level (Dolan, forthcoming). This greater social interdependence and complexity encouraged heightened individualisation and anxiety concerning the appropriate social interventions in the life of the 'unique' child.

Releasing the unique personality of each child

While the emphasis on child uniqueness became most pronounced from the 1960s, there are signs of a shift in understanding, and therefore shaping, childhood subjectivity from the late 1940s. The *Revised Programme for Infants* stated:

The aim of the Infant School is to provide the atmosphere and background in which the child's whole personality may develop naturally and easily [...] every effort should be made to create within the school the normal activities and experiences of the child's world (Department of Education 1948: 5).

Here there is a pronounced emphasis on the difference between an adult's and child's perspective; theirs is seen as a specific world that should be recreated within the school. This programme was intended for teachers of very young children though, between four and six years of age. From the early 1960s, 'Military events should be kept in proper perspective and treated as subordinate in importance to religious, social, industrial, literary and artistic achievements' (Department of Education 1962: 2), indicating a growing concern to suppress emotions of national pride based mainly on militarism, violent struggle and defiance. The 1965 rules still stressed religious instruction and the main duty of the teacher continued to be 'the moulding to perfect form of his pupils' character' (Department of Education 1965: 38). Teachers were also expected to 'promote both by precept and example, cleanliness, neatness and decency' (1965: 71). The recurrence of these rules up to the mid-1960s may in part reflect lingering doubts about all teachers to exercise these 'virtues' and also

partly that rules tend to be reproduced until they appear ridiculous to their framers. This could have coincided with younger civil servants taking over the rule-framing function from retired colleagues who simply persisted with the same instructions rather than questioning their validity. So there's likely to be a certain lag between actual change in social standards, conduct, ideals and norms, and the rule contained in these prescriptive texts. From a figurational perspective, these successive editions are being interpreted as evidence of social, cultural and behavioural change rather than merely a prelude to such change, though of course new rules can produce change if new social conditions are conducive to such change.

The clearest evidence of change comes in the form of a booklet for parents in 1969, *All Our Children*, the title of which reflects the growing concern for children as a special group which should not be differentiated in terms of class or gender:

A new programme has been devised for our national schools. Its purpose is, first, to help your child to live a full life *as a child* (Department of Education 1969: 8, original emphasis).

Increasing social interdependencies between social classes in Ireland since nascent industrialisation in the 1930s, and in particular since the growing economic and political dependencies on foreign entrepreneurs, tourists, politicians, and others since the late 1950s, gradually made the classes less unequal. The intensifying and differentiating interdependencies within the Irish state facilitated less emotive and threatening industrial relations between employers and unions, which in turn encouraged greater investment, functional specialisation and economic expansion (see Dolan 2009b). There was also a stronger future orientation envisaged for the socialisation of children: 'Our children must be prepared for a world of change' (Department of Education 1969: 2). Part of this change included the flexibility and reflexivity required to move between different jobs and careers across one's working life, and the rebalance towards more leisure time (an outcome that did not come to pass). Within this future-orientation, a combination of planned elements within unplanned social processes, a clearer distinction was made between the lives of parents and the lives of children that would prepare them for a changing world, which meant new sets of social relationships across the life course. In this current and anticipated context, some adults could no longer be certain of the efficacy and permanence of codes of conduct, values and traditional sources of authority upholding such codes and values.

With the questioning of established rules, norms, values and procedures, and the power relations generating and sustaining them, the adult emotional responses to children's insolence (a challenge to authority and established norms) also become more muted and detached. As adults become more oriented towards the future (anticipating and preparing for it) rather than the past, present or some imagined unchanging eternal culture, children are increasingly seen as investments in as yet uncertain and unknown worlds. As part of these social processes in Ireland, people conceived of themselves more individually than before (see Dolan 2009a). Over the long term, the relative decline in class and religious conflict in particular (though again with variations depending on the position within the figuration) meant group norms and ideals were subject to more personal interpretation, rather than rigidly enforced or evaded altogether. The concern for the unique child is in part a projection of this new individualised ethos by adults on young children. Childhood as a social institution altered its form and purpose, and adults had increasingly to be very careful not to deflect the potential and individuality of each child from his or her personal path, as shown in the publication *Enhancing Self-Esteem*:

Equality of opportunity [...] is concerned with the overall development of self, enabling each individual to reach his/her full potential in all areas of life (Irish National Teachers Organisation

1995: 3).

As children grow older, significant others such as teachers or friends will act as mirrors to tell them who they are (Irish National Teachers Organisation 1995: 17).

While children still lived in a competitive world in the late twentieth century, this fact was increasingly hidden from immediate view; each child was to compare him or herself against his or her former performances (Irish National Teachers Organisation 1995: 36). Children were to place less emphasis on their surrounding social compass and more on their own 'internal' one.

The 1999 curriculum 'celebrates the uniqueness of the child, as it is expressed in each child's personality, intelligence and potential for development' (Department of Education and Science 1999: 6). The curriculum also stressed 'that children live in and are a part of society', that they should be equipped 'to share in the benefits of the society in which they live and to contribute effectively to that society's sustenance and evolution', and it sought 'to balance individual and social development' (1999: 6). There is a balance here (analogous to Elias's (1991) we-I balance) between nurturing the child as a unique individual and preparing him or her for 'the changing nature of knowledge and society' (1999: 6). The former nostalgia of the late 1960s for an unchanging cultural landscape is no longer a significant concern. The condescending tone of early pedagogic civilising offensives aimed at adults and children alike has disappeared, due to both the more equal relationship between adults and children, the individualisation process which develops the value of privacy, and the fact that adult 'decency and cleanliness' can safely be left to the personal initiative of individual teachers, and pupil 'decency and cleanliness' can be left to the parents.

Conclusion

The Irish Catholic population were generally considered by the established groups in the then United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (since the Union of 1801) to require improvement in habits and especially to become more loyal to the British crown and government. They were targets of sustained civilising offensives, as part of broader civilising processes such as lengthening and intensifying interdependencies, functional specialisation and social integration. The establishment of the national primary education system in 1831 can in part be seen as an upper- and middle-class campaign to civilise the poor and recalcitrant Irish. Though Elias stresses the unplanned nature of civilising processes, he does also acknowledge more intentional aspects of these processes, such as the governing attempts of colonisers against the colonised, and implicitly in relations between parents and children. It is in this specific social relationship after all that the changing social standards of conduct must be inculcated in young human beings. The nonlinearity of Irish civilising processes is partly due to these very established-outsider relations.

The violent means of national self-determination (primarily during the second decade of the twentieth century) gave a new valorisation to the armed struggle and hard strength. It was also of course a period of state deformation and reformation on a more limited scale. Social opportunities were few, and one's life course was largely determined by inherited position. In that social context, social norms and values appeared permanent and unshakeable. Deference to professional and religious authority re-emerged strongly from the 1920s, and only increasing industrialisation, gradually at first from the 1930s and then rapidly from the late 1950s through new government policies of seeking foreign investment and tourism, intensified social interdependencies at an international level. The life-courses of children were no longer so predictable, and the increasing dependency on foreign industrialists also increased dependency on an adaptable labour force. Education would have to be flexible. Without any state intention, increasing functional specialisation and

future-orientation placed doubts on following established norms and so the fears of breaking them receded to some extent. The need for greater emotional control in the context of the denser figuration, as well as the relative class equalisation, finally allowed the greater concern for the individuality of each child to be nurtured for his or her sake and not just for others. The felt need to intervene very carefully in the life and personality of each child also potentially makes socialisation a much more difficult and time-consuming process (see Elias 2008).

Though civilising offensives are prevalent, especially in more unequal social relations, their explanatory potential in terms of either the development of the habitus, changes in emotional and cultural codes, and social change more broadly, is rather too direct and narrow. They are best considered as part of more all-encompassing civilising processes that consider changing interdependencies across a range of human activities (see Van Ginkel 1996; Powell 2013).

We need to specify the types of civilising offensives, and also those that are more and less likely to succeed given fluid figural contexts. While civilising campaigns and projects can be aggressive in demanding others follow the standards of elite or established groups, these attempts can be counterproductive in the technical sense that an even emotional habitus is not produced. Also, targets of such offensives can resist them, or use them as opportunities to advance their social position against rival groups. This occurs in the Irish context as Catholic and Protestant religious hierarchies vied for control of moral monopolies, eventually creating greater social distance between these groups and a loss of mutual identification. The civilising offensives directed at teachers partly led to the unionisation and professionalisation of this function, and the rise of expertise about children as an instrument of power against central authorities. Also, the expansion of education meant the functional expertise of teachers was no longer uncritically accepted, especially by middle-class parents who questioned the continued use of corporal punishment.

The type of civilising offensive that stresses leading by example can implicitly suggest that there exists a hierarchy of moral conduct corresponding to a social hierarchy. This deference to authority and social superiority implies taking a position of social inferiority, which becomes increasingly taboo under relative class equalisation and informalisation processes (Wouters 2007). Because civilising offensives are more like techniques or intervention programmes there is a danger of a focus on them leading to a 'retreat into the present' (Elias 2009), unless a corresponding light on long-term changes in techniques and targets of techniques is also shown.

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Biography

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