What constitutes a ‘normal’ child? Throughout the nineteenth century, public health and paediatrics played leading roles in the image and perception of children. By the twentieth century, psychology had moved to the forefront, transforming our thinking and understanding. André Turmel investigates these transformations both from the perspective of the scientific observation of children (public hygiene, paediatrics, psychology and education) and from a public-policy standpoint (child welfare, health policy, education and compulsory schooling). Using detailed historical accounts from Britain, the USA and France, Turmel studies how historical sequential development and statistical reasoning have led to a concept of what constitutes a ‘normal’ child and resulted in a form of standardization by which we monitor children. He shows how Western society has become a child-centred culture and asks whether we continue to base parenting and teaching on a view of children that is no longer appropriate.

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A Historical Sociology of Childhood

Developmental thinking, categorization and graphic visualization

ANDRÉ TURMEL
Département de Sociologie
Université Laval
This book is dedicated to my children, Antoine and Aude, and to my grandchildren, Naïmé, Emma, Clémentine and Éli
First we nursed our babies; then science told us not to. 
Now it tells us we were right in the first place. 
Or were we wrong then but would be right now? 

Mary McCarthy, The Group, 1954: 228
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