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978-0-521-70563-9 - A Historical Sociology of Childhood: Developmental Thinking,
Categorization and Graphic Visualization

Andre Turmel

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A Historical Sociology of Childhood

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.

ANDRÉ TURMEL is a Professor in the Department of Sociology at Université Laval.

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Département de Sociologie

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*This book is dedicated to my children, Antoine and
Aude, and to my grandchildren, Naïmé, Emma,
Clémentine and Éli*

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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

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
Introduction	1
1 Children in the collective	16
1.1 Sociology’s children	17
1.2 Unfolding the black box	27
1.3 The social: unity and heterogeneity	38
1.4 Translation, mediation and circulation	45
1.5 Childhood, measurement and standardization	58
2 Graphs, charts and tabulations: the textual inscription of children	66
2.1 Inscription and embodiment	67
2.2 The statement	77
2.3 Observing and recording	84
2.4 The scientific forms of child observation	97
3 Social technologies: regulation and resistance	115
3.1 Technology and visualization	116
3.2 The charts	123
3.3 Record forms	142
3.4 Well-child conference and periodic MD exams for healthy children	154
3.5 Intelligence testing	161
3.6 Child-guidance clinic	173

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

viii	<i>Contents</i>
4	The normal child: translation and circulation 182
4.1	The social forms of normalcy 183
4.2	Normal as average 197
4.3	Normal as healthy 217
4.4	Normal as acceptable 235
5	Developmental thinking as a cognitive form 248
5.1	The rise of developmental thinking 250
5.2	The pattern of sequential developmental 265
5.3	The critique of developmental thinking 279
5.4	Development as a cognitive form and beyond 288
	Conclusion 303
	<i>Appendix</i> 314
	<i>Bibliography</i> 315
	<i>Index</i> 339

Illustrations

Figures

1	Paediatrist in the community. Reprinted from Bradley, F.S., <i>Archives of Pediatrics</i> XXXII (02), 1915.	page 48
2	The child from five to ten. Reprinted with permission from the Gesell Institute of Human Development.	71
3	Child relation map. Reprinted with permission from the Gesell Institute of Human Development.	119
4	Posture standards. Reprinted from Veeder, B., <i>Preventive Pediatrics</i> (1926). Appleton-Century.	140
5	The average mental age. Reprinted from O'Shea, M. V., <i>The Child: His Nature and His Needs</i> (1924). Valparaiso, Ind.: The Children Foundation.	169
6	Distribution of mental ability in children. Reprinted from Kugelmass, I. N., <i>Growing Superior Children</i> (1935). Appleton-Century.	170
7	Growth: proportions. Reprinted from Veeder, B., <i>Preventive Pediatrics</i> (1926). Appleton-Century.	209
8	Spiral of development. Reprinted with permission from the Gesell Institute of Human Development.	262
9	Stages of development. Reprinted with permission from the Gesell Institute of Human Development.	287

Forms

1	Home weighing record. Reprinted from Veeder, B., <i>Preventive Pediatrics</i> (1926). Appleton-Century.	104
2	Standard card for babies. Reprinted with the permission of the American Medical Association. All Rights reserved.	150
3	Mental development. Reprinted with the permission of the American Medical Association. All Rights reserved.	151

x	<i>Illustrations</i>
4	Development record. Reprinted from Veeder, B., <i>Preventive Pediatrics</i> (1926). Appleton-Century. 153
5	Procedures – well-baby conference. Reprinted from <i>The Journal of Pediatrics</i> , 2 (5), Washburn, R. W. and Putnam, M. C. ‘A Study of Child Care in the First Two Years of Life’, pp 517–536, Copyright 1933, with permission from Elsevier. 160
6	Mental development. Reprinted from Veeder, B., <i>Preventive Pediatrics</i> (1926). Appleton-Century. 230
7	Terman’s General Information Form. © Lewis Terman Papers, Stanford University Archives. 269
8	Terman Test 2. © Lewis Terman Papers, Stanford University Archives. 270

Charts

1	Weight for baby’s first year. Reprinted from Veeder, B., <i>Preventive Pediatrics</i> (1926). Appleton-Century. 129
2	Hours of work and sleep. Reprinted from Jennings, C., <i>Archives of Pediatrics</i> XXII (7), 1905. 137
3	Binet–Simon three to seven years of age. Reprinted from the Annual Report for 1911 of the Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education (1912). 215
4	Binet–Simon eight to fifteen years of age. Reprinted from the Annual Report for 1911 of the Chief Medical Officer of the Board of Education (1912). 216
5	Sleep – average young child. Reprinted from a document of the USA Children’s Bureau (1929). 222
6	Sequence of stages. Reprinted with permission from the Gesell Institute of Human Development. 234

Tables

1	Weekly schedules. Reprinted from O. M. Schloss (Ed), <i>Transactions of the American Pediatric Society</i> , 1920, with permission from the American Pediatric Society. 139
2	Child guidance problems. Reprinted from <i>White House Conference on Child Health and Protection</i> . W.H.C., ‘Body Mechanics: Education and Practice’. Report of the Subcommittee on Orthopaedics and Body Mechanics. 175

<i>Illustrations</i>	xi
3 Relation of sex to specific problems. Reprinted from <i>The Journal of Pediatrics</i> , 7 (4), Preston, M. “Child Guidance in Out-Patient Pediatrics,” pp 452–464, Copyright 1935, with permission from Elsevier.	177
4 Height–weight–age table. Reprinted from <i>American Journal of Diseases of Children</i> , 38 (4), p. 758, © 1929 American Medical Association. All Rights reserved.	206
5 Stage theories. From Cavanagh, John C. ‘Early Developmental Theories: A Brief Review of Attempts to Organise Developmental Data prior to 1925’ in <i>JHBS</i> , (17), 1981, p. 38–47. Reprinted with permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.	268
6 Maturity traits. Reprinted with permission from the Gesell Institute of Human Development.	275
7 History of child development. Reprinted from Anderson, J., ‘Child Development : An Historical Perspective’ in <i>Child Development</i> 27 (2) with permission from Blackwell Publishing.	314

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