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978-0-521-87977-4 - 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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A Historical Sociology of Childhood

Developmental thinking, categorization
and graphic visualization

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Université Laval*



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521705639

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First published 2008

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Turmel, André, 1945–

A historical sociology of childhood : developmental thinking, categorization,
and graphic visualization / André Turmel.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-87977-4 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-70563-9 (pbk.)

1. Children–History. 2. Child development–History. I. Title.

HQ767.9:T85 2008

305.23109182'1–dc22

2008015651

ISBN 978-0-521-87977-4 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-70563-9 paperback

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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

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to many colleagues in the childhood studies field for their contributions to our debates and talks in several conferences over many years. In this respect, I thank the members of the Childhood Research Network of the European Sociological Association and the members of the groupe de recherche ‘Sociologie de l’enfance’ of the Association Internationale des Sociologues de Langue Française. I am obliged to all researchers involved in the exchange of views over earlier versions of Chapters 4 and 5 in the different meetings of the above-mentioned groups as well as some other research groups.

I am especially indebted to Nicole Ramognino, a wonderful sociologist at the Université de Provence, for our long-standing collaboration of more than thirty years.

I owe special thanks to Nigel Gearing in London; to Philippe Desaulniers, Étienne Girard, Emilie Lapierre, Mélina Bouffard, Jocelyne Martel and Étienne Rivard from the CIEQ in Québec City; and to Matthias Schwerdt and Monika Sommerer from the Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte in Berlin.