

Labouring and Learning in Nineteenth-Century Canada: Children in the Changing Process of Family Reproduction

Chad Gaffield

I. Introduction

From the beginning of time, children have played productive roles in the human pursuit of survival and security. Children have always worked. And from the beginning of time, the experience of growing-up has involved the process of education. Children have always been learners. Along with these continuities, however, dramatic changes characterize these basic components in the history of childhood. The purpose, substance, and form of work and education have varied greatly over time and space; their definition and relative importance have never been constant. Rather, these childhood experiences have both reflected and influenced even the most subtle historical changes.

While many aspects of the continuities and discontinuities in the history of children are not yet well-understood, research in the past two decades has considerably enhanced our knowledge of growing-up as an historical process.¹ This research has undermined many assumptions about the changing nature of childhood especially those dealing with labouring and learning.

One key finding concerns the extent to which differences in gender, family, and community have been associated with substantial differences in the lives of children. Historians now argue that many supposedly general statements about children are often based, in fact, on evidence referring to a specific group of youngsters in a particular time and place. Most problematic have been the biases resulting from the extrapolation of evidence on boys to all children and on more secure economic groups to all of the population. Indeed, the familiar

¹ For an introduction to questions of theory and method in recent research, see H.J. Graff, "Remaking Growing Up: Nineteenth-Century America" (1991) 24:47 *Histoire sociale/Social History* 35.

images from the history of children are often those of materially-advantaged boys. As the following discussion suggests, the current challenge is to comprehend both the regularities and specificities of growing-up in different contexts.

II. Qualifying the Producer-to-Pupil Interpretation

The work of scholars who have focused on education and economic change has been quite important in the case of the nineteenth century children. Their studies have led to the conclusion that the significance of work and the significance of learning were inversely correlated during this century. In very stylized terms, children became less and less identified as producers, and more and more identified as pupils. However, as the following discussion suggests, recent research has discovered an enormous complexity which qualifies considerably this stylized description. While children did come to play a far smaller economic role and did increasingly attend the new school systems, these aggregate trends included substantial variation throughout the 1800s.

The evidence of a producer-to-pupil transformation emerged from studies undertaken in the 1970s which showed that, at the start of the early nineteenth century, almost all children contributed from an early age to the economic activity of their families. These children were certainly learning a great deal but very few ever participated in formal schooling. In the predominantly rural economy of the time, production was domestically-centred and labour-intensive. For most families, survival depended upon collective endeavour, and young children shared significantly in the seemingly endless chores of daily life. On farms, for example, children were vital participants according to age and gender in land clearing, planting, and harvesting. Most children learned as either formal or informal apprentices in which they acquired skills while working along side of an adult. In the early nineteenth century, schooling was a minority experience limited to the youngsters of families sufficiently affluent not only to leave untapped the productive potential of children but also to afford the tuition, instructional materials, and other expenses of classroom education.²

During the course of the nineteenth-century, complex forces converged to redefine the place of children in the world of work. In a general sense, studies have suggested that this place became increasingly marginal in the face of a changing economic structure which brought new modes of production and distribution. Trends involving processes such as mechanization, the separation of home and work in the growing villages and cities, and the maturing of agricultural settlements contributed to a new view of productive labour as being less appropriate for children. In turn, community leaders increasingly promoted formal education in the form of government-sponsored school systems. By the end of the century, the vast majority of children between the ages of seven and twelve in Canada were enrolled in school; in most cases, growing-up now meant experience as pupils in a classroom more than as productive workers.

The stylized description of a producer-to-pupil transformation during the nineteenth century is useful in attempting to come to grips with the making of contemporary society. In the 1990s, the general trends of the previous century appear all the more evident. While both work and learning are still very much at the heart of growing-up, children spend a larger and larger proportion of time in formal educational settings. At the same time, they are increasingly associated with the image of a pampered dependency characterized by activities of consumption rather than production. In this sense, an analysis of the origins of modern childhood might well be based on the inverse correlation over time of work and learning.

It is in this context that an understanding of recent research findings is important; these findings point to tremendously complex processes that defy straightforward analysis. In the case of research on the history of education, scholars have worked with two main preoccupations. The first has involved the elites who were the official builders of the new school systems. Historians have debated the motivations of these elites beginning with studies published in the early 1970s which attacked the long standing view that mass schooling resulted from humanitarian, democratic, and libertarian impulses. Instead, some researchers argued that the new school systems were designed for social control. Faced with the changing world of machines, clocks, and proletarianization, elites promoted schools to prepare the emerging generation to take their proper place in urban industrial society. Subsequent work on those whom scholars named "school promoters," focused more on their moral and political

² J. Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada 1869-1924* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980); J. Parr, ed., *Childhood and Family in Canadian History* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982).

motivations with considerable emphasis on the impact of new forms of government which increasingly relied on individuals to respect official norms of behaviour. In this view, schools were designed to produce a "modern" mentality appropriate to the maintenance of order within changed political structures. The common theme of this research on elite motivations concerns the importance of "top-down" agency; mass schooling resulted from the desires and actions of those in official power.

The second preoccupation within studies of the origins of school systems has concerned the actual thoughts and behaviour of the children and families focused upon by the school promoters. In the older interpretation of elite humanitarianism, the students in the school systems were simply viewed as the beneficiaries of this impulse; it was assumed that they were generally grateful for this new opportunity, and that any opposition to it was simply the result of profound ignorance. Along with the later social control interpretation, scholars tended to characterize the majority of children as more the victims than the beneficiaries of the school systems which moulded and structured society to maintain elites in their privileged positions. Students were thus the somewhat unwitting objects of a system which was designed to ensure their passive acceptance of and participation in a fundamentally unjust world.

However, socio-historical research has now uncovered a wide variety of attitudes and actions with respect to the changing situations of children. Rather than a single explanation for the origins of mass schooling, historians have moved toward a more multi-causal approach in which the establishment of school systems is considered the result of a convergence of quite distinct and sometimes contradictory forces. Similarly, the changing patterns of children's work cannot be easily explained in terms of single causes. It is now clear that both economic and educational change must be analyzed in terms of their diverse origins and differential meaning for children from different backgrounds. This analysis must respect the infinitely diverse contingencies of individual experience while seeking to understand those fundamental processes which transcended the uniqueness of specific children.

III. Children, Families, and Communities

Three levels of analysis are particularly relevant for the history of children: individual, family, and community. At the individual level, age and gender were key determinants of childhood experience. The respective roles of work and learning in the process of growing-up varied greatly for boys and girls of different ages. General statements about children are thus often very misleading, or simply inaccurate. Rather, growing-up was a gendered and age stratified process throughout the nineteenth century. In a similar way, families have also been crucial in determining the experience of children who, with some exceptions, grew up with siblings and parents. The objective conditions and cultural values of different families defined the extent to which children laboured and studied. This relationship ranged from material factors such as the domestic need for participation in the family economy to attitudinal variables including, for example, religious views on the importance of literacy. Thus, children of the same age and gender did not all work and learn to the same extent; indeed, their experiences were very diverse in reflection of their different family contexts.

At the community level, the type of local economy determined the possible ways in which children could be productive. The physical features of size, strength, and agility as well as psychological and intellectual properties took on meaning as valuable or inappropriate to the labour process according to the structure of economic activity. Similarly, local conditions influenced the pace and character of school building. The importance of community educational leaders, the effectiveness of school promotion, and the quality of roads, for example, were some of the many factors which determined the level of educational opportunity in a given area. The result was that a complex mix of material and cultural forces produced considerable variation in the extent to which children laboured and studied.

Faced with the need to come to grips with the different determinants of childhood experience, historians have developed the concept of life course in which the specifics of individual identity are situated within the context of family and community. The essential premise of this approach is that individuals must be understood in terms of their relationships to other family members and to the larger society. Whether or not a particular child went to school, for example, must be studied not only in terms of the child's own age and gender or other

Dimensions of Childhood

factors such as father's occupation but also in terms of the child's place in his or her surrounding demographic and social constellation. Thus, the ages and experiences of all other family members are assumed to impinge directly upon any one child. The observable behaviours of children cannot be compared without first situating them within the relevant contexts of family and community.³

While scholars have found that the life course approach is well-suited to studying the variation inevitably found in studies of labouring and learning, this approach does not address the fundamental questions of motivation. What objectives underlay the decisions associated with work and education? What priorities engendered the various patterns of producers and pupils? Ultimately, such questions are ontological; they probe to the heart of human existence. The challenge for historians of children is to develop a way to address them which can accommodate both the distinctions of time and place, and the links between generations and across space. What general processes underpinned the changing structures within which children lived their lives in the nineteenth century?

IV. The Process of Family Reproduction

In an attempt to address this question, recent research has focused on the process of family reproduction.⁴ The key characteristic of this process is its future orientation; decisions are always made in the context of long term objectives which involve both material and biological reproduction. Studies indicate that the basic material ambition of nineteenth families was the achievement of economic stability and security, and the maintenance of this achievement from one generation to the next. The ways in which families defined stability and security was not always the same, of course, and a great

³ G.H. Elder, "Families and Lives: Some Developments in Life-Course Studies" in T. Hareven and A. Plakans, eds., *Family History at the Crossroads* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

⁴ A more detailed discussion is offered in C. Gaffield, "Children, Schooling, and Family Reproduction in Nineteenth-Century Ontario" (1991) 72:2 *Can. Hist. Rev.* 157.

Labouring and Learning

deal more research needs to be undertaken to understand the specific ambitions of material reproduction.⁵

At this point, the available evidence from nineteenth century Canada seems consistent with the argument that a core feature of economic ambition was the pursuit of "competency." Defined as a "degree of comfortable independence," competency was pursued in the pre-industrial period by way of property ownership which was seen to provide the most stable economic foundation for family life. Over time, however, the acquisition of a "skill or capacity (sufficient to survive in an industrializing world)" began to be seen as the best way to achieve economic competency. This transition which has been documented in the case of the pre-industrial United States appears to have had great significance for the experience of children as workers and as learners.⁶

Why was economic competency an important goal of family reproduction? This question certainly does not have a straightforward answer. One major issue with direct implications for children concerns the natural anxiety of parents about their own dependency in the late stages of life. The nineteenth-century evidence suggests that parents went to great lengths in attempts to ensure that at least one of their grown children would continue living with them or would establish a family in close proximity. When considerable land was still available, these attempts included support for sons to take up adjoining land; in later decades when there was less room to establish households in the same area, parents would sell the family farm and relocate to less developed regions which offered more room for the emerging generation.⁷

Throughout the century, therefore, a priority in material reproduction was the maintenance of family ties in keeping with the need of parents for care in their final dependent years. Parents hoped to engender children who were both able and willing to look after them

⁵ The most exhaustive research has been undertaken on the Saguenay region of Quebec; see, e.g., G. Bouchard, "Sur la reproduction familiale en milieu rural: systemes ouverts et systemes clos" (1987) 28:2-3 *Recherches sociographiques*.

⁶ D. Vickers, "Competency and Competition: Economic Culture in Early America" (1990) 47:1 *William and Mary Quarterly* 28.

⁷ Recent work includes S. Dépatie, "La transmission du patrimoine dans les terroirs en expansion: un exemple canadien au XVIIIe siècle" (1990) 44:2 *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 171.

in their dependent years. In this sense, the process of family reproduction required a judgement as to how to best promote the achievement of economic competency by grown children while also ensuring family solidarity. Not surprisingly given the different positions of individual family members and the difficulty of this judgment, scholars have found that families should not be viewed as single, cohesive decision-making units. Rather, research has shown that any aspect of the process of family reproduction had the potential for considerable conflict. The most well-developed topic of study involves the patriarchal foundation of families in which formal authority was shared very unequally by men and women.⁸ The implications of this inequality between parents for the work and educational patterns of children deserve further research. Did mothers and fathers have different perspectives on the employment of their children? Did they differ over the question of school attendance?

One way to probe these questions in terms of the changing material dimensions of family reproduction involves the study of inheritance. Once considered as simply the way in which property was passed from the dead to those still living, scholars have now found that inheritance in the nineteenth century was a protracted process often stretching over many decades.⁹ With average age of marriage in the early-to-mid-twenties, older children would be ready to form their own families before the death or even dependency stage of their parents.¹⁰ As a result, many middle-aged parents began passing property on to their children usually in order to help them establish their own households in the same area. This transmission characteristically included protection for parents in the form of mortgages between parent and child or other strategies to ensure that parents would not be subsequently neglected in a time of need.

The prolonged nature of the inheritance process may have qualified somewhat the consequences for women of the fact that most property

was formally owned by men.¹¹ While wills are primarily male expressions, the earlier stages of inheritance may have resulted from discussions between spouses. The extent of consultation and influence between parents concerning the transmission of property to children cannot readily be documented, however, and historians have learned to be cautious in analyzing "family" decisions. Clearly, families cannot be viewed as operating by consensus, or as little democracies; the formal patriarchal structures provided the framework for exercising power in the household.¹² Scholars have yet to research adequately the extent to which women could, despite this framework, exert influence concerning transmission between generations.¹³

The question of women's role has become particularly important since recent research suggests that a concern for education may have been a significant component of the changing inheritance strategies of the nineteenth century. While studies of wills have heretofore focused on mentions of land or money, the records also include instructions about education. These instructions were usually expressed in terms of a desire to ensure the schooling of surviving children. Specific support was sometimes allocated for such education; in other cases, the sending of children to school was made a condition for the inheritance of property. At the start of the century, mentions of education only rarely appear in the wills examined thus far, and they are limited to inheritance within relatively advantaged families. Over time, however, specific instructions for the provision of education seem to have become more commonplace; by the later nineteenth century, a greater proportion of wills include a concern for the schooling of children.

But why did an increasing number of families come to see the formal education of children as an essential element in their own process of reproduction? Why does schooling appear to have become an important part of inheritance for a greater and greater number of families during the course of the nineteenth century? The hypothesis which currently seems most consistent with the evidence concerns the possibility that

⁸ C. Backhouse, *Petticoats and Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1991).

⁹ D. Gagan, "The Indivisibility of Land: A Microanalysis of the System of Inheritance in Nineteenth Century Ontario" (1976) 36 *J. Econ. Hist.* 126; B. Elliott, *Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A New Approach* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988).

¹⁰ E.M.T. Gee, "Marriage in Nineteenth-Century Canada" (1982) 19 *Can. Rev. Soc. & Anthro.*

¹¹ C. Backhouse, "Married Women's Property Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada" (1988) 6 *Law & Hist. Rev.* 211.

¹² C. Backhouse, "Pure Patriarchy: Nineteenth-Century Canadian Marriage" (1986) 31 *McGill L.J.* 264.

¹³ A general discussion is offered in "Family Strategy: a Dialogue," a special section in (1987) 20 *Hist. Methods* 113.

Dimensions of Childhood

the provision of schooling came to rival the transmission of property as the central way in which parents attempted to contribute to the attainment of economic competency by their children. In this perspective, support for school attendance came to play a role similar to the giving of a dowry to daughters or the allocation of land to older sons wanting to establish their own families. The opportunity costs (as well as the actual costs) of sending children to class were increasingly calculated in terms of inheritance. As with the transmission of property, part of the parental calculation involved their own self-interest; by going to school, it was hoped that the children would be subsequently willing and able ("competent") to care for dependent parents.¹⁴

V. The Transformation of Rural Society in the Context of Urbanization

The starting point for understanding the external dynamics associated with this changing character of family reproduction involves the fact that the vast majority of the population lived in rural areas throughout the nineteenth century. This point is worth emphasizing in that, until recently, researchers have tended to focus on the impact of industrialization on urban children.¹⁵ While such work has been valuable, no more than one quarter of children grew up in cities even as late as 1880 in Ontario. The meaning of industrialization for children must be studied in rural as well as urban areas. In other words, scholars must examine the evolution of rural areas in the context of an urbanizing and industrializing society.¹⁶

In order to understand the changing context for the children and families of rural society, researchers have focused on the question of

¹⁴ For a related discussion, see V. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

¹⁵ M.B. Katz, M.J. Doucet, & M.J. Stern, *The Social Organisation of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982).

¹⁶ D. Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); M. Griffin Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986); C. Gaffield, "Social Structure and the Urbanization Process: Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Research" in G. Stalter & A.F.J. Artibise, eds., *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban and Social History* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1984).

land availability. This question is important in that the acquisition of farms was a central objective in the pursuit of family reproduction for much of the population at least until after mid-century. Land was seen as the most secure foundation for the establishment of family economies characteristically composed of parents and children. In the decades before substantial settlement, parents were often able to help their grown children take up land in the adjoining area. This process reflected as well as reinforced familial attachment; parents and children depended on each other for material support. However, the spread of settlement eventually reached the limits of arable land, and it became increasingly difficult for parents to help establish their children in the same area. The date at which the arable land had been all taken up varied from region to region across Canada according to the timing and pace of settlement. In the most heavily populated areas of central Canada, land became less and less available after the 1850s.¹⁷

Along with the spread of settlement, rural society was transformed by the increasing presence of agrarian capitalism. The growth and development of the market economy, and the associated processes of mechanization and agricultural change (especially the rise of the dairy industry) altered considerably the character of family economies.¹⁸ Researchers have not yet examined these alterations in sufficient detail, but the evidence thus far studied suggests that the changing character of rural society engendered an increased appreciation for formal education. This appreciation was based, at least in part, on two beliefs. First, schooling came to be seen as increasingly useful in agricultural operations; the growing importance of account books for farmers would be one example.¹⁹ Second, many parents recognized that, as a result of the changing rural society, at least some of their

¹⁷ The richest historiography now available concerns Québec; see J. Goy & J.-P. Wallot, eds., *Évolution et éclatement du monde rurale* (Montreal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1986); and G. Bouchard & J. Goy, eds., *Famille, économie et société rurale en contexte d'urbanisation (17e-20e siècle)* (Chicoutimi, Qué: SOREP, 1990).

¹⁸ In addition to previously cited work, see the example discussed by R.W. Widdis, "Belleville and Environs: Continuity, Change and the Integration of Town and Country During the 19th Century" (1991) 19:3 *Urban Hist. Rev.* 181.

¹⁹ For a related discussion, see W.C. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England 1780-1885* (Nashville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 1989).

children would probably have to seek economic competency in non-agricultural pursuits. This recognition came to be connected to support for schooling in that parents hoped that education would contribute to their children becoming "competent" in settings other than farms.

While most families were agriculturally based in the nineteenth century, the increasing minority of families involved in various commercial and manufacturing activities were also forced to come to grips with the transformation of rural society. The positions of wage-labourers, artisans, merchants, and those in other occupational groups were all altered by the development of capitalism.²⁰ Only preliminary research has been done on the children of these groups, and a whole host of questions remain to be explored about the resulting revisions to the process of family reproduction. In the case of artisans, for example, the possible link between the decline of apprenticeship as a formal arrangement, and the rise of mass schooling has yet to be examined in a systematic way. Nonetheless, evidence on school enrolment suggests that a belief in the value of classroom education became increasingly widespread throughout the social structure. Opposition to the official project of school systems focused on the form and content of these systems rather than on the worth of education itself.²¹ The actual role of schooling within the reproductive activities of specific families varied greatly but, at an aggregate level, this role increased significantly over the course of the nineteenth century.

In addition to differences related to the economic activities of various families within a given area, scholars are now also emphasizing the significant distinctions among Canada's many regions. For example, growing-up on a farm in Peel County, Ontario in the mid-nineteenth century was not at all the same as living with an agricultural family near Chicoutimi, Quebec at the same time. The sons in Peel County were characteristically attending school at least for several months a year between the ages of seven and twelve, and would be later facing rising land prices as they contemplated forming their own household. While many responded by moving with their families to less settled

regions (such as Manitoba), others, the vast majority of whom considered themselves literate, entered non-agricultural occupations. Their counterparts in the Saguenay had most likely never attended school, and could not sign their own name. However, continued land availability facilitated the establishment of new families in quite close proximity to their kin and based, at least in part, on farming. This example illustrates the need to undertake individual and family-level analyses in order to appreciate fully the extent to which the process of growing up has been a social construction.²²

VI. Men and Women, Boys and Girls

But what were the implications of the fact that fathers and mothers faced very different situations in their later years? How did this fact affect the work and educational patterns of their children? Specifically, mothers appear to have been much more dependent on support by their grown children during the last stages of life as a result of two possibilities, one linked to the consequences of patriarchal structures, the other linked to sex-specific mortality rates. The first possibility was the desertion of the husband which may have become a greater and greater concern for wives as a result of proletarianization. In a land-based family economy, desertion may have been quite unattractive for husbands who would have been reluctant to abandon the bases of their livelihoods. At the same time, wives deserted in this context were at least left with the family's means of production.

However, in a wage-labour economy, husbands were in a more favourable economic position to desert since the cost of their departure would be much less for themselves, and since they could more easily find a new source of income elsewhere. In turn, deserted wives might be left with no property at all, and no immediate way to make a living for themselves. And even without desertion, wives might well have to fend for themselves with the help of their children as a result of a

²⁰ A major contribution to this field of research is the project of S. Courville, J.-C. Robert, & N. Séguin discussed in "Population et espace rural au Bas-Canada: l'exemple de l'axe laurentien dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle" (1990) 44:2 *Revue d'histoire de l'amérique française* 243.

²¹ B. Curtis, *Building the Educational State: Canada West, 1836-1871* (London, Ont: Falmer Press & Athlouse Press, 1988).

²² C. Gaffield & G. Bouchard, "Literacy, Schooling and Family Reproduction in Rural Ontario and Quebec" (1989) 1:2 *Hist. Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 201; also see, e.g., P. McCann, "Class, Gender and Religion in Newfoundland Education, 1836-1901" *supra* 179.

Dimensions of Childhood

husband's death.²³ Differential mortality rates meant that widows were more common than widowers; men had a better chance than women that their spouses would be able to care for them in their later years.²⁴

The different positions of men and women thus provide evidence to argue that mothers may have become particularly supportive of formal schooling for their children. This support may have been linked not only to the hope that education would facilitate the attainment of economic competency but also to the character of school systems as they developed during the mid-nineteenth century. Schools were, in fact, designed according to the "metaphor of the family."²⁵ Over time, women became the vast majority of teachers, and both the structure and content of classrooms reflected an attachment to family life. The result was that schools reinforced the importance of family solidarity. All the messages of the new school systems worked against the idea that parents could be abandoned in later life. In contrast, children learned both implicitly and explicitly to be prepared as grown-ups to care for their parents. Mothers may have most appreciated this lesson.

VII. Conclusion

By viewing inheritance as a long-term process and by analyzing the changing relative importance of property and education as elements within family reproduction, the continuing diversity but changing regularities of children's experiences becomes more understandable. The extent to which specific children worked (and the kind of work undertaken) and received formal education (and the content of this education) can be connected directly to the relevant contexts of individual, family, and community.

²³ Studies of the Canadian context are needed as a comparative perspective for work such as L. Wilson Wacziarg, "A Man of Business: The Widow of Means in Southeastern Pennsylvania, 1750-1850" (1987) 44:1 William and Mary Quarterly.

²⁴ B. Bradbury, "The Fragmented Family: Family Strategies in the Face of Death, Illness and Poverty, Montreal, 1860-1885" in Parr, *Childhood and Family*, *supra*, note 2.

²⁵ A. Prentice, "Education and the Metaphor of the Family: The Upper Canadian Example" in M.B. Katz & P. Mattingly, eds., *Education and Social Change: Themes from Ontario's Past* (New York: New York University Press, 1975).

In striving to attain economic competency and then to reproduce themselves materially and biologically, families adopted an array of means including decisions about the work and education of children. These decisions were taken as part of the plethora of choices about everyday life. The character and range of each family's decision-making ability was far from uniform with some families having many more options than others. The resulting patterns of learning and labouring were products of these differences.

The analysis of family reproduction stresses the importance of understanding the internal dynamics of families in explaining the changing nature of growing-up. The question of how these dynamics were connected to the larger external forces has now moved to the top of the research agenda. What forces determined the spectrum within which decisions were made for particular children? In this sense, an understanding of both the changing character of family reproduction and the origins of school systems and, for example, child labour legislation is necessary for scholars of childhood. While all families were forced to operate within the limits of their situations, most families did have at least some options in pursuing material and biological reproduction. And the selection of these options with all the associated conflict and contradiction, adjustment and accommodation, eventually contributed to new social forms of growing up which often differed substantially from anyone's expectations.