



PALGRAVE STUDIES ON NORBERT ELIAS

# International Comparisons in Learning and Education Eliasian Perspectives

---

*Edited by*  
Norman Gabriel

**OPEN ACCESS**

palgrave  
macmillan

# Palgrave Studies on Norbert Elias

## Series Editor

Tatiana Savoia Landini  
Universidade Federal de Sao Paulo  
Sao Paulo, Brazil

## Editorial Board Members

Marta Bucholc  
Kate Hamburger Kolleg, Recht als Kultur  
University of Bonn  
Bonn, Germany

Florence Delmotte  
Université Saint-Louis - Bruxelles  
Brussels, Belgium

Fernando Ampudia de Haro  
Lisbon University Institute  
Lisbon, Portugal

Bernard Lahire  
École Normale Supérieure de Lyon  
Lyon, France

Stephen Mennell  
Department of Sociology  
University College Dublin  
Dublin 4, Ireland

John Pratt  
Institute of Criminology  
Victoria University of Wellington  
Wellington, New Zealand

Philip Walsh  
Department of Sociology  
York University  
Toronto, ON, Canada

Norman Gabriel  
Plymouth Institute of Education  
Plymouth University  
Plymouth, Devon, UK

Jurandir Malerba  
Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul  
Porto Alegre, Brazil

Jason Hughes  
Department of Sociology  
University of Leicester  
Leicester, UK

Gina Zabłudovsky Kuper  
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences  
National Autonomous University of Mexico  
Mexico City, Mexico

Despite growing, widespread appreciation for Norbert Elias's theoretical approach—often called figurational or processual sociology—there exist only a few, specialized publications on Eliasian social theory, and as of yet, no academic book series.

Palgrave Studies on Norbert Elias will therefore fill a significant gap in the market, appealing to figurationalists across disciplines: Elias's social theory is used not only in Sociology, but also Sports, Psychoanalysis/Psychology and Social Psychology, Education, Criminology, International Relations, History, Humanities (Arts, Music, and Cultural Studies), Political Science, and Public Health. Respecting the multi-disciplinary Eliasian tradition, the series is open to receiving contributions from academics outside of Sociology departments, so long as the research is grounded on Elias's approach. Publications, which shall range from Palgrave Pivots to edited collections, can be expected to explore sports, habits and manners, criminology, violence, group relations, music and musicians, theory and methods, civilizing and decivilizing processes, involvement and detachment in social sciences, formation of the modern state, power relations, and the many dozens of other topics to which Eliasian theory has been applied.

Norman Gabriel  
Editor

# International Comparisons in Learning and Education

Eliasian Perspectives

palgrave  
macmillan

*Editor*

Norman Gabriel  
Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies  
University of Essex  
Essex, UK



ISSN 2662-3102

ISSN 2662-3110 (electronic)

Palgrave Studies on Norbert Elias

ISBN 978-3-031-60957-2

ISBN 978-3-031-60958-9 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-60958-9>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2024. This book is an open access publication.

**Open Access** This book is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this book are included in the book's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the book's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

If disposing of this product, please recycle the paper.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to specially thank Tatiana Landini for her initial encouragement and support in helping me to develop a proposal for the Palgrave Studies on Norbert Elias and to my bestest friend Lars Bo Kaspersen for his continual support, ever-present advice and good humour. And to my academic home at the University of Essex which provided me with much-needed research leave to edit the chapters.

Thank you, Gina, Joseph and Jacob, as we grow up we learn together. Mum and Dad, Tessa and Henry Gabriel, you are always with me along each step.

# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
	Norman Gabriel	
<b>Part I</b>	<b>Early Years, Education and Schooling</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Sociology of Early Childhood: Why We Need Child Psychoanalysis</b>	<b>11</b>
	Norman Gabriel	
<b>3</b>	<b>Early Childhood Education in Brazil: Interdependent Relationships Between Young children and Adults</b>	<b>35</b>
	Magda Sarat, Eliana Maria Ferreira, and Claudemir Dantes	
<b>4</b>	<b>Bringing Norbert Elias to School: Education and the Civilising Process</b>	<b>53</b>
	Laura Gilliam and Eva Gulløv	
<b>5</b>	<b>Banal Nationalism for Babies: The Early Transmission of National Habitus to Children in the Family</b>	<b>81</b>
	Florence Delmotte and Sophie Duchesne	



<b>Part II Informalising Processes and Social Inequalities</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>6 Changes in Play and Playgrounds Within Recent Informalising and Reformalising Cycles of Parent-Child Relationships (1950–2020)</b>	<b>109</b>
Raúl Sánchez-García	
<b>7 Young People’s Use of School-Based Banter</b>	<b>131</b>
Mark Mierzwinski and Philippa Velija	
<b>8 Childhood Figurations and Processes of Social Inequality in Brazil</b>	<b>155</b>
Tony Honorato and Magda Sarat	
<b>Part III Inter-generational Processes: New Forms of Interdependencies</b>	<b>177</b>
<b>9 Down Mom! The Development of Unacknowledged Shame, Child Centering, and Gender Relations in Germany</b>	<b>179</b>
Désirée Waterstradt	
<b>10 The Contribution of Norbert Elias’s Theoretical-Empirical Framework to the Sociology of Childhood: Some Tensions and Research Experiences</b>	<b>201</b>
Valéria Milena Röhrich Ferreira	
<b>11 Upper Secondary School as an Innovative Health Laboratory: A Process Study About Exercise, Sport and Democracy in a Youth Culture</b>	<b>221</b>
Stine Frydendal and Lone Friis Thing	
<b>12 Back to the Future: Education, Education, and Education</b>	<b>247</b>
Lars Bo Kaspersen and Norman Gabriel	
<b>Index</b>	<b>267</b>

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

**Claudemir Dantes** is a teacher in Early Childhood Education at the Municipal Education Network of Dourados, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. He is a member of the Research Group, Education and Civilising Processes, at Universidade Federal de Campina Grande and coordinator of the Study and Research Group on Early Childhood Education in Dourados. A researcher of early childhood education his research themes include power relations between teachers and children, pedagogical practices, and families and daycare centres. He has published with Magda Sarat, ‘The Relational Power of Family Institutions and Early Childhood Education: Eliasian Approaches’, Chapter 11, in A. F. B. Vieira and M. A. de Freitas Junior (eds.) *Norbert Elias in Debate: Uses and Research Possibilities in Brazil* (Camara Brasileira, 2020); and with N. R. Xavier and M. Sarat, ‘Ethnic-Racial Relations: Notes and Reflections on Pedagogical Practice in Early Education’, Chapter 8 in W. C. S. Nozu and G. de Souza Preussler (eds) *Education, Human Rights and Inclusion* (Íthala, 2019).

**Florence Delmotte** is Professor of Political Science at the University of Louvain in Brussels and a permanent researcher at the Belgian Scientific Research Fund (FNRS). She works on the political relevance of Norbert Elias and historical sociology to think about European integration and questions of legitimacy and identity at national and post-national levels. In 2021 with Barbara Górnicka she edited *Norbert Elias in Troubled Times: Figurational Approaches to the Problems of the Twenty-First Century*, Palgrave Studies on Norbert Elias.

**Sophie Duchesne** is research director of the Centre national de la recherche Scientifique (CNRS) and head of the Emile Durkheim Centre at the Sciences Po in Bordeaux. She is also co-editor of the *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology*. As a political scientist, she works on political socialisation and politicisation, as well as on questions of citizenship and nationalism. She introduced and edited the French translation of Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism* (1995) (Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 2019). Since 2020, she has directed the project *Enquête sur la transmission précoce des appartenances au sein de la famille* (ETPAF), a survey on the early transmission of belonging within the family.

**Eliana Maria Ferreira** works as a professor at the State University of Mato Grosso do Sul and as a pedagogical coordinator at SEMED, the Education Department of the municipality of Dourados, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. She is a member of the Research Group Education and Civilising Processes and the Group for Studies and Research in Early Childhood Education of Dourados. A researcher in the field of childhood, her publications in journals include Eliana M. Ferreira and Cindy Romualdo Souza Gomes (2021), 'Children's Turn and Voice: Protagonism in the Dynamics of Pedagogical Practices, Perspectives in Dialogue': *Review of Education and Society*, 8, 17: 286–301. She has co-written with Ariele Furtado dos Santos and Célia Regina Costa de Sousa (2023), 'Playful Activities: Games and Play in the 1st Year of Elementary School—The Teachers' Eyes', *Ensin@ UFMS Magazine*, 4: 204–219; and with Claudemir Dantes da Silva and Clovis Irala (2020), 'Your Vacancy Is for a Janitor, Right?—The Place of Men in Teaching Early Childhood Education: Challenges and Tensions', *Zera-a-Seis*, 22: 833–851.

**Valéria Milena Röhrich Ferreira** is Professor of the Postgraduate Programme in Education and the Education Sector (DEPLAE) at the Federal University of Paraná, Brazil. Her research themes and interests include Norbert Elias, children, young people and the city; management and pedagogical coordination of schools; school culture; school times and spaces. She has published the book: *Childhood and City: The Construction of a Boring Curriculum in Curitiba in the 1990s and Early 2000s* (Appris, 2021).

**Stine Frydendal** is a senior consultant at The Danish Evaluation Institute, or EVA, where she conducts analysis and evaluations of the Danish educational system. She has previously been employed as an

assistant professor at the University of Copenhagen at the Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports, where she has conducted research in the area of sports sociology, focusing on sport and exercise culture among children and youth in educational settings.

**Norman Gabriel** is Senior Lecturer in Childhood Studies in the Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies at the University of Essex, where he is Director of the Centre for Childhood Studies. He has written one of the first books in childhood studies, *The Sociology of Early Childhood—Critical Perspectives* (Sage, 2017), to explore children's lives from a relational sociological perspective and co-edited a *Sociological Review* Monograph with Stephen Mennell, *Norbert Elias and Figurational Research: Processual Thinking in Sociology* (Blackwell, 2011). With Lars Bo Kaspersen, he recently co-authored 'Warfare, Survival Units, National Habitus and Nationalism: Norbert Elias's Contribution to Political Sociology' in *The Anthem Companion to Norbert Elias*, edited by Alex Law and Stephen Mennell. His research interests are in relational and process sociology, child psychoanalysis and the sociology of childhood.

**Laura Gilliam** is an anthropologist and Associate Professor of Educational Anthropology at the Danish School of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark. Her work includes research on ethnic minority children and schooling, masculinity, class and school strategies, Muslim identities and school secularities. With Eva Gulløv, she is the author of *Children of the Welfare State: Civilizing Practices in Schools, Childcare and Families* (Pluto, 2017). With Christa Markom, she is the co-editor of *Difference and Sameness in Schools. Perspectives from the European Anthropology of Education* (Berghahn, 2024).

**Eva Gulløv** is Professor of Educational Anthropology at the Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus, Denmark. She holds a PhD in Social Anthropology and has written extensively on childhood research. Her work includes theoretical and methodological reflections on the position of children in contemporary society, as well as numerous analyses of children's everyday lives, mainly in Denmark. Among her books is: L. Gilliam and E. Gulløv, *Children of the Welfare State: Civilising Practices in Schools, Childcare and Families* (Pluto, 2017).

**Tony Honorato** is currently a professor in the Department of Education at the State University of Londrina (UEL), Brazil, working in the

Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes in Education. He is the leader of the Civilizing Processes Research Group (GPROC), a member of the Teaching and Research Laboratory in the History of Education (LEPHE) and a researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development of Brazil (CNPq). His research themes include education in civilising processes, history of educational institutions and practices, history of teacher training and history of municipal actions in education and body education. He is the author of *Norbert Elias: Education, Politics and Social Processes* (EDUFES, 2022) and *Tiempos de cambio: diálogos desde Norbert Elias* (UBA-Argentina, 2022).

**Lars Bo Kaspersen** is a professor at Copenhagen Business School. He has published widely on sociological theory and political sociology and is the author of, among other publications, *Anthony Giddens: An Introduction to a Social Theorist* (Blackwell, 2000), *Denmark in the World* (Hans Reitzels, 2012), *Does War Make States*, co-edited with Jeppe Strandsbjerg (Cambridge University Press, 2017), and *War, Survival Units and Citizenship* (Routledge, 2020). With Norman Gabriel he recently co-authored 'Warfare, Survival Units, National Habitus and Nationalism: Norbert Elias's Contribution to Political Sociology' in *The Anthem Companion to Norbert Elias*, edited by Alex Law and Stephen Mennell. His research areas are state formation processes in Europe, the transformation of the welfare state, sociology of war, civil society (including the idea of associative democracy) and sociological theory, in particular relational theory.

**Mark Mierzwinski** is Senior Lecturer in the Sociology of Sport at York St John University. His research focuses on social relations, power imbalances and identity management within sporting environments. Mark's current work applies a figurational sociological approach to language and discrimination in Secondary School Physical Education classes, specifically examining banter and bullying and the interplay between both behaviours. Mark is co-founder and director of the research group, Tackling Welfare in Sport Together. With Philippa Velija (2020) he has published 'Bullying in Male Physical Education: A Figurational Sociological Analysis', *Sport in Society*, 23(10): 1630–1644, and recently Green, M. J., Mierzwinski, M. F. and Haines Lyon, C. (2024), 'Conceptualising and Navigating Bullying in English Secondary Schools: A Figurational Analysis

of Power Imbalances in Physical Education’, *Sport, Education and Society*, 1–13.

**Raúl Sánchez-García** is a professor at the Department of Social Sciences at Polytechnic University of Madrid (INEF-UPM). He is the secretary of the Sociology of Sports committee of the Spanish Federation of Sociology (FES). His main areas of research are the following: sport and social theory (including debates with cognitive sciences), martial arts/combat sports and violence, ethnographic studies of sports subcultures and children's games in urban environments. He has published numerous articles in national and international magazines and collaborated in various chapters of books on sociological topics. He co-edited with Dale Spencer *Fighting Scholars: Habitus and Ethnographies of Martial Arts and Combat Sports* (Anthem Press, 2013) and with Jan Haut, Paddy Dolan and Dieter Reicher, *Excitement Processes: Norbert Elias's Unpublished Works on Sports, Leisure, Body, Culture* (Springer, 2018). He published the book *The Historical Sociology of Japanese Martial Arts* (Routledge, 2019), which was awarded the 2020 Norbert Elias Book Prize.

**Magda Sarat** is a full professor at the Faculty of Education at the Federal University of Grande Dourados and a researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development of Brazil (CNPq). As a researcher, she works primarily with the theoretical framework developed by Norbert Elias, using oral history as a research methodology. She is the leader of the Research Group Education and the Civilising Process and a member of the Brazilian Society for the History of Education and the National Association for Research and Postgraduate Studies in Education. Her publications in journals and books include *Readings by Norbert Elias: Education, Civilising Process and Borders* (UEM, 2014); *Education and Civilization: Perspectives from the Work of Norbert Elias* (UFGD, 2016); *Times of Change—Dialogues from Norbert Elias* (UBA, 2021); *Norbert Elias: Education, Politics and Social Processes* (UFES, 2022), and *Reflections from Norbert Elias, A Tribute to Johan Goudsblom* (UFAM, 2023).

**Lone Friis Thing** is a professor who specialises in promoting health and prevention in the context of sport and physical activity. Her work focuses on heart disease and lifestyle changes in the elderly, and she champions innovative cultural strategies for organisational change within the Danish Upper Secondary School system. Presently, Lone Thing serves as the Head of the Department of Sport and Social Sciences at the Norwegian

School of Sport Science (NIH) in Oslo. She has published several textbooks for teaching sports sociology in both Denmark and Norway and has also written various chapters in international books on sports and society, amongst others ‘Sports, Nationalism and the Body: Gymnastic Culture and National Identity in Denmark’, *The Business and Culture of Sports: Society, Politics, Economy, Environment: Sociocultural Perspectives*. Eds: Maguire, J., Falcous, M. and Liston, K. (Framingham Hill, 2019).

**Philippa Velija** is Professor of Sociology at the University of Roehampton and Deputy Dean in the School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Philippa’s research provides a critical sociological analysis of inequality and power in sports and leisure settings, particularly applying a figurational sociological approach to gender relations in sports. More recently, Philippa has explored the relationship between misogyny, gender and power in the curriculum and HE settings. She is leading the implementation of bystander workshops, evaluating school-based interventions on violence against women and girls and working with local charities and councils on challenging gender-based violence. Philippa is co-author with Dominic Malcolm of *Figurational Research in Sport, Leisure and Health* (Routledge, 2019).

**Désirée Waterstradt** is an interdisciplinary parenthood researcher and management consultant for strategic communication. Her main research interest is on parenthood. She has published the book *Process Sociology of Parenthood. Nation-Building, Figurative Ideals and Generative Power Architecture in Germany* (M and V, 2015). Her publications include ‘Western (Business) Family Models in Historical Change: A Process-Sociological Sketch’, in Heiko Kleve and Tobias Koellner (eds.), *Sociology of the Business Family. Foundations, Recent Developments, and Future Perspectives* (Springer, 2023) and ‘Parenthood as a Blind Spot. Challenges on the Way to Critical Parenthood Research’, *Soziologische Revue* 41(3): 400–418.

## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 9.1	Fractures and transformational changes as discontinuities in the modern German nation-building process (Waterstradt, 2015, p. 444)	183
Fig. 9.2	Polarization of gender characters in German-language encyclopedias of the eighteenth century (Hausen, 2012, p. 164f)	189
Fig. 11.1	Timeline of the intervention process	229



## LIST OF IMAGES

- Image 8.1 Pink and Blue—The Cahen d’Anvers Girls, 1881. Pierre-Auguste Renoir (Limoges, France, 1841—Cagnes-sur-Mer, France, 1919). Oil on canvas, 119 × 75.5 cm. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). [Gift of the people of São Paulo, 1952, MASP.00099, Photo: João Musa] 158
- Image 8.2 Untitled, from the Series *Brasília Teimosa*, 2005. Bárbara Wagner (Brasília, Brazil, 1980–present). Digital photograph, digital print on cotton paper, 59.5 × 42 cm. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). [Gift of Pirelli, 2009. MASP.02678] 159
- Image 8.3 Fascination, 1909. Pedro Peres (Lisbon, Portugal, 1850—Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1923). Oil on wood, 31.2 × 35.7. Collection of Pinacoteca de São Paulo. [Gift of Suzana Camará Moreira, 2005] 160
- Image 8.4 Dead Child, 1944. (Source: Candido Portinari (Brodowski, Brazil, 1903—Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1962). Oil on canvas, 182 × 190 cm. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). [Gift of Assis Chateaubriand, 1948, MASP.00326, Photo: Pedro Campos/ Elizabeth Kajiya/ Marcia Rizzuto—IFUSP]) 162
- Image 8.5 The happy family. (Source: <https://jacquesmiranda.wordpress.com/2012/06/27/adote-um-infeliz/>. Accessed on: September 8, 2021) 163

- Image 8.6 Forest zone (Alagoas), 1993. (Source: Paula Simas (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1959–). Printing on silver gelatin paper, 23.8 × 30.3 cm. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). [Gift of Pirelli, 1998, Photo: MASP]) 166
- Image 8.7 Family scene by José Ferraz de Almeida Júnior, 1891. (Source: José Ferraz de Almeida Júnior (Itu, Brazil, 1850—Piracicaba, Brazil, 1899). Oil on canvas, 182 × 190 cm. Collection of Pinacoteca de São Paulo. [Gift of Vera Hermanny de Oliveira Coutinho, 1981]) 167
- Image 8.8 Kayapó School, Djetuktire Village, 1991. (Source: Milton Guran (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1948 –). Printing on silver gelatin paper, 23.8 × 30.3 cm. Collection of Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). [Gift of Pirelli, 1993, MASP.01827, Photo: MASP]) 171



## CHAPTER 1

---

# Introduction

*Norman Gabriel*

This book is an international investigation of the different processes of learning and education in contemporary societies, drawing on theoretical and applied studies that examine the national habitus of Brazil, France, Germany, Denmark and England. It has two main goals: firstly, to discuss Norbert Elias's processual contribution to contemporary childhood and educational practices that affect the lives of young and older children and secondly, to raise questions on how debates about learning processes can enrich our understanding of Elias's contribution to process sociology. Although Norbert Elias did not explicitly address educational practices or the role of education in society, he was deeply interested in the development of the social learning processes of children and adults. For Elias, sociologists need to develop an approach that is relational and processual, investigating long-term historical processes of learning, which are dynamic and structured in different societies. He also argues that these processes need to be illuminated by comparative sociological enquiries into different societies. However, to conduct comparative research, a 'radical

---

N. Gabriel (✉)

Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex,  
Essex, UK

e-mail: [n.r.gabriel@essex.ac.uk](mailto:n.r.gabriel@essex.ac.uk)

© The Author(s) 2024

N. Gabriel (ed.), *International Comparisons in Learning and Education*, Palgrave Studies on Norbert Elias,

[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-60958-9\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-60958-9_1)

reorientation of familiar habits of thought' was necessary, one that identified the universal features of human society:

One may investigate how particular human societies differ from one another. One may also investigate how all human societies resemble one another. Strictly speaking, these two research efforts are inseparable. ... For it to become anything, an empirically based conception of the *similarities* between all possible societies is essential, to provide a frame of reference within which particular investigations may be carried out. (Elias, 2012, p. 99)

In the book, each of the authors applies Elias's relational perspective to understand and explain learning processes in childhood and education, focusing on some of the long-term individual civilising processes that younger and older children undergo as they prepare for adulthood in complex societies. The historical development of processes of civilisation has had a dual impact on childhood: first, the distance between childhood and adulthood gradually increases as the requirements of societal membership become more demanding, so that childhood requires more time and effort in socialisation and education prior to the achievement of adult status through entry to the workforce. Second, adults' investment of time, skill, effort and emotions in young children also increases, making them both more 'precious' and demanding at the same time. The under-utilised potential of Elias's concept of learning processes can illuminate an integral aspect of this civilising process by explaining how children grow up through their own self-regulation to become civilised within society. Learning is both a cognitive and affective process, one that is fraught with a great deal of emotional anxieties that gradually require more and more self-control.

We explore in different chapters how these processes of learning relate to emerging and dynamic forms of figurations that children form with parents, teachers and friends. Each of these figurations is multi-layered and embedded within a range of institutions, referring to a large number of related aspects such as early childhood education and upbringing, the 'socialisation' of 'norms' and values', formal schooling, play, youth and the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another. In the first part of the book, we follow the movement of children as they navigate the different layers of social habitus in early year's institutions such as pre-schools, schools and the wider development of national habitus. In Chap. 2, Norman Gabriel sets the overall context for understanding the

early years of childhood and processes of learning by focusing on the dynamic ‘unconscious’ and ambivalent aspects of early socialisation. He argues that academics within childhood studies need to move beyond the established social constructionist approach that places an undue degree of emphasis on children’s active construction of their own worlds. More specifically, his main contention is that sociologists of childhood could greatly benefit from an engagement with some of the key psychoanalytic concepts of child development used by Anna Freud, Donald Winnicott and Wilhelm Reich. These concepts help to explain the interwoven and hidden layers of each individual child’s ‘civilising’ armour or learnt habitus that underpin their self-steering conduct in processes of civilisation.

In Chap. 3 Magda Sarat, Eliana Maria Ferreira and Claudemir Dantes draw on their empirical research to explore the education of children in early year’s institutions in Brazil, focusing on public day care centres and preschools that serve children between 6 months and 5 years old. They investigate the interweaving of a specific figuration of teachers, young children and parents who are intimately linked together, tied to each other in dynamic mutual interdependencies. They suggest that the balance of power has now tilted more towards educational institutions in early childhood who have the legitimacy of determining the rules, routines and practices over children and their parents. One of their important findings is that early childhood education should be seen as a space where figurations between adults and young children are framed around specific pedagogic practices that favour the formal education of day care centres over families.

Chapter 4 by Laura Gilliam and Eva Gulløv offers an important alternative to traditional explanations of the ‘socialising’ role of schools (see, for example, Ball, 2012), exploring how an Eliasian approach can enhance our understanding of the schooling of children in contemporary societies. In an innovative way, they compare school classes to the courtly intrigues of social prestige displayed in figurations in Elias’s explanation of court society (Elias, 2006), arguing that the habitus of children is shaped by the intensity of attention children need to have in navigating social relations and hierarchies in schools. However, the habitus of children is not only influenced by intensive negotiations of relationships with other children and teachers, but the complex ways in which each child is enmeshed in long chains of interdependence with parents, policy makers and the state. Schools thus become one of the main places for habitus formation and bringing up the next generation, legitimating their right to intervene and

correct children's behaviour in struggles over what counts as 'civilised' conduct.

Florence Delmotte and Sophie Duchesne continue this important theme of generational habitus in Chap. 5 by examining the early transmission of feelings of national belonging or 'nationalism' to children. In a novel way, they explore how Norbert Elias and Michael Billig's approach to national habitus and banal nationalism can be used together to explain generational processes of reproduction that French parents use to transmit forms of 'we' identity to their children. In their research project, designed to explore the intimate relation between collective discourses on belonging to the nation, they conducted a series of thirty interviews with parents of five and six-year-olds. By closely interpreting the words used by parents in their silences, hesitations and ambivalences, Delmotte and Duchesne demonstrate that parents are unaware of the strong feelings of superiority that tip the scale from feelings about a love of one's own nation to those that convey superiority over others.

In the second part of the book, we consider applications of informalising processes to children's lives and the persistence of social inequalities. Although informalising trends and their relation to long-term civilising processes are well known in Eliasian circles (see Wouters & Dunning, 2019), Chaps. 6 and 7 provide some of the first examples of using this sociological concept to understand the historical context for the development of children's play and changes in peer and teacher relations in the classroom. In Chap. 6, Raúl Sánchez García analyses the development of children's play and playgrounds in the second half of the twentieth century in Western countries, focusing on the shifting informalising/formalising trends of parent-child relationships. He identifies three different phases in the main features of children's play and changes to the design and implementation of playgrounds. The first informalisation phase of the 1960s–1970s featured a prevalence of more autonomy, free play and adventure where the design of playgrounds expressed values of 'freedom' and 'nature'. During the second phase, a long reformation period in the 1980–1990s led to an important transformation in the free/supervised play dynamic within the parent-child relationship. It tilted towards more control and 'risk averse' attitudes in parents and a standardisation of playgrounds. The last phase, an informalising trend that gained momentum since the mid-2000s, has led to a more moderate approach in the design of 'integrated playgrounds' in which autonomous, risky play and nature become key components.

Chapter 7 by Mark Mierzwinski and Philippa Velija explores a relatively neglected research area in education and childhood studies, how young people are socialised into using banter through formal schooling processes. While both males and females utilise banter, it tends to be a more prevalent form of communication among males and within male peer groups. Using empirical evidence from a male PE department, they apply an Eliasian analysis to understand the emergence of banter as an important form of communication in peer and teacher relations within an English secondary school. They argue that with the development of informalising processes, banter has become more complex due to the increasing sensitivities around people's need to use 'appropriate' language and communication styles that are based on greater levels of mutual identification and respect. Although this trend may be indicative of broader informalisation processes, they suggest that male banter could well be an unintended outcome of long-term equalising trends in gender relations, especially within certain male preserves such as sport.

In the last chapter on informalising processes, Tony Honorato and Magda Sarat discuss in Chap. 8 how some of the changing historical figurations in childhood in Brazil can help to explain some of the shifts in balances of power between adults and children. They focus on three figurations formed and shared by children with other children, young people and adults in processual and relational interdependencies, family, school and the world of work, drawing on paintings and photographs that were shown in an Art Exhibition on the History of Childhood that took place at the São Paulo Museum of Art in Brazil in 2016. They argue that these representations tend to 'naturalise' a popular understanding of a pure, naive and apolitical childhood, concealing and legitimising the production of class, gender and ethnic inequalities.

In the last part of the book, we explore some new forms of interdependencies that have emerged in different institutions and national forms of habitus, discussing the tensions and power relations in inter-generation relations. In Chap. 9 Désirée Waterstradt argues that child centring in Germany has been shaped by the development of a national habitus framed by changing dynamics of power in gender relations. Waterstradt suggests that the concept of the 'master emotion' of shame can help us to understand how a specific version of child-centeredness is intimately connected with the formation of shame spirals in oneself, in others and in networks of relationships. By exploring the infant fantasies of adult men who elevate childhood to an ideal state of paradise to which they long to return, she

uncovers the tabooing of shame. The long-term consequences for contemporary child centring is an unrealistic image of the mother that leads to hostility and forms of discrimination directed at mothers ('momism') and caring fathers.

Chapter 10 by Valéria Milena Röhrich Ferreira discusses how some of the methodological dilemmas in the sociology of childhood first raised by Prout (2011) can be overcome by using an Eliasian relational framework. With a group of researchers, Ferreira explored the influence of the spatial dimension of neighbourhood and city spaces on children's networks of interdependencies in Brazil. She argues that Elias's theoretical-empirical approach is more fruitful than Prout's sociological understanding of childhood because it investigates the multidimensional tensions and power relations involved in complex figurations, one that is more able to be 'relatively detached' to analyse the intense personal and group involvement of those involved. Therefore, there is no 'agency' of children that does not also include the dynamic tensions, possibilities and limits of the spatial figurations in which they find themselves.

In Chap. 11, Stine Frydendal and Lone Friis Thing discuss the research process of a democratic health promotion project in a Danish upper secondary school whose aim was to enable students to change the power-ratio between teachers and students. In their empirical study that combined participatory research methods with Elias's figurational sociology, they discuss the potential of action research to promote change in the sports and health culture of a school by constructing a teaching course based on democratic values. They used Elias's concepts of 'I-We' and 'they' identities and established-outsider groups to explain the changing balance of power that emerged amongst the students in sport classes. One important unintended consequence of their intervention was the development of tensions between some of the groups of students themselves—those wanting to belong to an active sports culture still felt the need to be part of an established youth culture that valued partying and alcohol.

In Chap. 12, the last chapter of the book, Lars Bo Kaspersen and Norman Gabriel address some of the institutional problems that now face universities in contemporary higher education. They highlight how neo-liberalism and a new form of 'survival unit'—the 'competition state'—have been the main driving force behind the development of new educational policies in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War. Inspired by Norbert Elias's key concept of a 'survival unit', they explain these changes as a shift in the balance of power between groups of survival units



in a global figuration of states. They draw on sources that are usually neglected in the debate about reforms in higher education, observing how transformational processes in the Department of Sociology at the University of Leicester in the postwar years (1950–1975) led to a very successful department that became well known for producing knowledge and highly qualified teachers and researchers. To develop a new reinvigorated system of university education, Kaspersen and Gabriel point to some of the institutional policies that can be learnt from this department: they emphasise its governance, especially the hiring and promotions policies that promoted temporary and permanent staff with non-sociological backgrounds, and the strong interdependence between teaching and research.

## REFERENCES

- Ball, S. (2012). *Foucault and education: Disciplines and knowledge*. Routledge.
- Elias, N. (2006). *The Court Society*. The collected works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 2. UCD Press.
- Elias, N. (2012). *What is sociology?* The collected works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 5. UCD Press.
- Prout, A. (2011). Taking a step away from modernity: Reconsidering the new sociology of childhood. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 1(1), 4–14.
- Wouters, C., & Dunning, M. (2019). *Civilisation and informalisation*. Palgrave Macmillan.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



PART I

---

Early Years, Education and Schooling



## CHAPTER 2

---

# Sociology of Early Childhood: Why We Need Child Psychoanalysis

*Norman Gabriel*

### INTRODUCTION

Childhood studies is now a well-established multi-disciplinary area that investigates contemporary problems that children face in their lives. However, in the last few years, researchers have continually questioned the feasibility of interdisciplinarity within this area, given that to date most disciplines have worked separately in exploring children's lives, bringing together disciplinary perspectives alongside each other rather than in a fully integrated manner (Thorne, 2007). In this chapter I will argue that the sociology of childhood could greatly benefit from an engagement with some of the major concepts of psychoanalysis which have largely been ignored by sociologists of childhood, apart from the idea of the child within or 'inner child' (see Gittins, 1998). Rustin and Armstrong (2019) have suggested that with the notable exception of the work of Norbert

---

N. Gabriel (✉)

Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex,  
Essex, UK

e-mail: [n.r.gabriel@essex.ac.uk](mailto:n.r.gabriel@essex.ac.uk)

© The Author(s) 2024

N. Gabriel (ed.), *International Comparisons in Learning and  
Education*, Palgrave Studies on Norbert Elias,

[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-60958-9\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-60958-9_2)

Elias, British sociology's early quantitative and empiricist bias prevented psychoanalysis from taking root in the discipline as it developed in the UK. Although psychoanalysis had some degree of influence on cultural studies and feminism in the 1970s–1990s, British sociologists have never fully assimilated its ideas into the mainstream of their sociological perspectives. Kilminster (2023, p. 10) forcefully argues that what has been 'conspicuously lacking in contemporary social theory' is a 'systematic understanding of the *unconscious*', one that can be used to investigate 'the empirical structure of the *relations between* individuals'.

When the *Sociology of Early Childhood* was first published (Gabriel, 2017), I wrote that there was still a great deal of 'resistance' in recognising the important contribution of psychoanalytical approaches to early childhood, partly because adults (academics and early years professionals) find it extremely difficult to overcome barriers of shame and embarrassment, especially when discussing the sexuality of young children. In one of the seminal books that helped to establish the 'new' sociology of childhood James, Jenks and Prout (1998, p. 10) state in their introduction that psychoanalysis begins 'from a view of childhood outside of or uninformed by the social context within which the child resides'. Later they claim:

It has done little to broaden our understanding of children. Freudian theory positions the child as no more than a state of unfinished business or becoming. Within this model, childhood is once again dispossessed of intentionality and agency. (James et al., 1998, pp. 20–21)

Such a simplistic critique of psychoanalysis reintroduces unhelpful philosophical dichotomies between 'action and structure' and 'being and becoming' and is a good illustration of academic specialists reproducing disciplinary boundaries between subject areas (Roseneil, 2019). Kilminster (2023, pp. 156–157) has pointed to the limitations of the social action perspective that underpins this type of sociological inquiry where the psychic structure is methodologically excluded, arguing that 'this stipulation becomes more firmly established in sociology than we always realise'. Sociologists working within the mainstream Anglo-American tradition (Parsons and Shils onwards, culminating in Giddens) have focused on people's capacity for rational adaptive action that makes it difficult to adopt a more layered model of psychic functioning, one that includes 'an understanding of the role played in society by socially controlled and regulated instincts and drives' (Kilminster, 2023, pp. 156; 192)