

# Children's "attitudes toward school": a brief survey of sociological studies in France

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CENTRE EUROPÉEN  
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## *The Seven Ages of Man 2*



Stained Glass by Rachel Mulligan

« then the whining  
school-boy, with his  
satchel  
And shining  
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creeping like snail  
Unwillingly to  
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Shakespeare,  
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# Introduction

- The question of children's well-being in school
- A historical and class-based question
- From declarations of happiness to ethnographies of school
- From "Are children happy at school?" to a sociology of "children's attitudes towards school"

# 1. Class-based attitudes towards school knowledge

## A) Bourdieu, Lahire and the school form

- Children from different social classes have different relationships towards school/scholastic knowledge.
- Children from different social classes have different relationships towards the “school form”.

**Children from different social classes have different relationships towards school/scholastic knowledge.**

- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J.-C. [1964] 1979. *The inheritors : french students and their relation to culture*. London: SAGE.
- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J.-C. [1977] 1990. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: SAGE.
- Lahire, B. 2008b. *La Raison scolaire. Ecole et pratiques d'écriture, entre savoir et pouvoir*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

**Children from different social classes have different relationships towards the “school form”.**

- Vincent, Guy 1980. *L'Ecole primaire française*, Lyon: PUL.
- Vincent, G., Lahire B., Thin Daniel 1994. “Sur l’histoire et la théorie de la forme scolaire.” pp. 11-48 in *L'Éducation prisonnière de la forme scolaire?*, ed. by G. Vincent. Lyon: PUL.
- Lahire, B. 2008a. “La forme scolaire dans tous ses états”. *Revue des sciences de l'éducation* 30(2): pp. 1 –30.



## The question of the interiorisation of school legitimacy as part of the attitudes towards school.

"The school succeeds all the more easily in convincing the underprivileged that they owe their academic and social destiny to defects in gifts or merits because, in terms of culture, absolute dispossession excludes the conscience of the dispossession" (Bourdieu, Passeron).

Duru-Bellat, Marie, et Élise Tenret. « L'emprise de la méritocratie scolaire : quelle légitimité ? », *Revue française de sociologie*, vol. vol. 50, no. 2, 2009, pp. 229-258.

## 1. Class-based attitudes towards school knowledge

**B) Charlot, Bautier, Rochex and ESCOL: relationship to knowledge as the crucial element of the relationship to school**

B. Charlot, E. Bautier, J.-Y. Rochex,  
*Ecole et savoir dans les banlieues... et ailleurs,*  
Armand Colin, 1992.



## 1. Class-based attitudes towards school knowledge

### C) Children and school

- Martine Court, *Sociologie des enfants*, La Découverte, 2017.

=> Depending on their social background, children experience a situation of « acculturation » which is more or less pronounced

1) from a cultural point of view, 2) from a linguistic point of view, and 3) from the point of view of the exercise of authority.

## 2. A close-up on some French sociological studies

What do they tell us about « children's attitudes towards school » ? .

## A. On “Maternelle” (3-6 years)

- Mathias Millet, Jean-Claude Croizet, *L'école des incapables ? La maternelle, un apprentissage de la domination*, Paris, La Dispute, coll. « L'enjeu scolaire », 2016.

Some children, in school situations, are given opportunities to discover the value of who they are and what they do, the value of the experiences they can share, the knowledge they mobilize and the attention they attract; other children have a completely different experience of the same school situations : not that of gratification or self-esteem, but that of disqualification.

## A. On “Maternelle” (3-6 years)

- Darmon, Muriel. « La socialisation, entre famille et école. Observation d'une classe de première année de maternelle », *Sociétés & Représentations*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2001, pp. 515-538.

Learning to distinguish or to connect school and home.

- The « PRIMSOC » study (Lahire et al.)  
35 children aged 5-6, 175 interviews (3 interviews per family)

## B. On “Ecole primaire” (6-11 years)

- Charlot B., Bautier E., Rochex J.-Y. , *Ecole et savoir dans les banlieues... et ailleurs*, Armand Colin, 1992.
- Lahire B., *Tableaux de Familles*.
- Van ZANTEN, Agnès *Choisir son école. Stratégies familiales et médiations locales*, Paris, PUF, 2009

=> Parents' attitudes towards school

## C. On “Collège” (11-14 years)

- Millet, Mathias, et Daniel Thin. *Ruptures scolaires. L'école à l'épreuve de la question sociale*. Presses Universitaires de France, 2012 [2005]  
Analysis of the learning difficulties of failing students, of their sense of devaluation, showing how it affects the relationship to the institution and teachers.
- The French rediscovery of Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (1977)  
A working-class « anti-school » subculture?  
What about its racialized dimensions today?



## C. On “Collège” (11-14 years)

- Henri-Panabiere Gaële, *Des “Héritiers” en échec scolaire*, La Dispute, coll. L’enjeu scolaire, 2010.

For a change, a reference on middle and upper class children, those who can be deemed « disinheritors »: the school failure of those whose parents belong to the middle and upper classes, and its correlation with their parents’ tense attitude towards school.

## D. On “Lycée” (15-18 years) and after

Dubet (François), *Les lycéens*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1991.

"Real" high school students, "New" high school students, “Future workers” (high school students in vocational schools).

## D. On “Lycée” (15-18 years) and after

Palheta, Ugo. *La domination scolaire. Sociologie de l'enseignement professionnel et de son public*. Paris : PUF, 2012.

Academic and social trajectories of vocational school students (high school students and apprentices)

=> variety of ways in which young people in the working classes and their families understand vocational education orientation.

## Conclusions :

1) Attitudes towards school are class –based (gender would also be very important to take into account) ;

— there is a relation between children’s and parents’ attitudes towards school ;

— the type of school (and its position in the institutional hierarchy) is also important to take into account.

## Conclusions :

2) What is potentially problematic with the question « Do you like school ? » ?

- the question itself (children's well-being as an historical and class-based question) ;
- the declaration of happiness ;
- the universalist « you » ;
- the verb « like » ;
- the word « school »

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