'*I hate you, you hate me*' :
Children's Fortunes and Misfortunes During the Recess and the Key Role of Adults

4th Seminar of the chair "Childhood, well-being, Parenting":
"Child well-being, School and Parental mediation"

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1

INTRODUCTION (1)

I hate you, you hate me / let's get together and kill barney / with tanks of water and acid he will drown / barney escapes but he falls down

I hate you, you hate me / let's get together and kill barney / with a great big knife on his head / barney's bloody cuz he's dead. »

(« I hate you, you hate me », Children's Parody of *Barney and Friends*' song « I love you, you love me »)

"I hate Pam, she's fat, she's ugly, and besides she's eating her boogers all the time, that's right, huh, I promise you. My friends and I, we try to avoid her all the day long"

(Clarence, 8 yo, middle-class)

"Tom and his friends are my worst enemies in the whole world. They do not stop mocking me and calling me names. They say I'm stupid and I have cooties, and that I'll contaminate them if I play with them. They are really mean to me!"

(Klay, 7 yo, working-class)

INTRODUCTION (2)

- **Children's well-being has become an important area of interest in research**, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world (Ben Arye et al., 2014 ;

- Scholars has tried to measure:

  - Children's Objective and Subjective well-being (Axford et al., 2014 ; Bradshaw et al., 2009, 2011 ; Gees et al., 2010)

  - With a particular focus on mental and physical health indicators or wealth indicators (Ben Aried, 2001 ; 2009)

  - From adults' and children's point of view (separately or not)

  - By using quantitative data and interviews with children, as well as parents or educators (Thomas et al. 2016 and his presentation yesterday).

INTRODUCTION (3)

- As interesting as these research are, they **have contributed to make the definition of well-being complex and polysemous**.

- **To avoid these biases**, some anthropologists and ethnologists (Mathews, Izquierdo, 2010 ; Weizner, 2010) have proposed to **apprehend children's well-being by conducting an ethnography of children's daily life at home and at school**.

- According to them, **by analyzing children's well-being in their daily environment, we can grasp *in practice* what make children happy and unhappy, how does this happen, under what circumstances**.

4

AIMS OF THE COMMUNICATION (1)

- **The presentation aims at thinking children's well-being "in a negative way",** i.e. by precisely describing the situations that make boys and girls unhappy or sad, and by emphasizing the social conditions of possibility of these situations.

- *By focusing on* the social/sociological determinants of *children's malaise, we can get an idea of the factors that promote happiness*, since these two emotions are relational.

- Indeed, most of scholar define and capture well-being from indicators *measuring the absence of (physical and mental) disorders or socioeconomic deprivation* (Ben Arieh, 2006 ; Thomas, 2009 ; Unicef, 2007).

AIMS OF THE COMMUNICATION (2)

- From an ethnography of the daily life of children at school, I will try to underline:

  - *(1)* ***What exactly make boys and girls cry and uncomfortable during playtime***, and sometimes lead them to fight with each other;

  - ***(2) The key role of peers and adults*** in these difficult situations

6

METHODOLOGY

- **To do this, I will use <u>qualitative data</u> :**

    - ***<u>collected on another occasion</u>*** (during my dissertation)

    - ***<u>for another purpose</u>***, namely a research about the construction of love and friendship among children from 6 to 11 years old.

- **This communication is based on two different types of materials :**

    - *<u>A one-year participant observation</u>* in a Parisian school ;

    - *<u>Semi-directive interviews</u>* conducted among school children.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF PLAYGROUND AND PLAYTIME

- I performed a **one-year participant observation in a parisian school** between 2014 and 2015
- The school was **located in a socially mixted neighborhood (in process of gentrification)**
- I spent around **1000 hours with girls and boys** in class, *but also on the playground and during extra-scholar activities.*
- I **was seen by children either as** :
  - **a « specialist of love »** (especially among girls) : I corrected love letters, I gave them some advices about friendship and love whenever they ask
  - **Or a « big friend »** (mainly among boys), i.e. someone who is not a child, but not an adult either. I played with them during playtime, I did not reprimand them. They could used swear words and insult one another in front of me.

INTERVIEWS WITH CHILDREN

- I conducted **20 interviews with children** at the end of the participant observation : *10 with boys and 10 with girls*.

- They **took place in the children's home**, and more precisely in their bedroom, well away from their parents or siblings.

- **Children were between 6 and 11 years old**, but the sample was mainly composed by 6-9 years old.

- In average, **the interviews lasted around 105 minutes** (with a lot of variance between girls and boys, as well as according to children's age).

WHAT MAKE CHILDREN SAD OR CRY AT SCHOOL ?

- According to my observations and to the children themselves, there are **two main reasons to be sad or to cry at school during playtime** :

    - **(a) Losing one's friends or having no one to play with ;**
    - **(b) Losing face in front of adults and peers (which is partly linked to losing one's friends);**

10

WHY LOSING FRIENDS IS A BIG PROBLEM FOR CHILDREN ? (1)

- The main reason is **because friendship is an important part of children's definition of… children and childhood**.

- Regardless of their age and their social background, *girls and boys portray a child as someone who plays*.

- *But to be able to play, you need someone who plays with you, so you need a friend*. Without a friend, it is difficult to fulfill the role of child, to be "a real child".

- Playing (with someone) is *at the heart of the 'full-time occupation of being a child'* That's why friends are so important in children's life. (Chamboredon, Prévot, 1973).

11

WHY LOSING FRIENDS IS A BIG PROBLEM FOR CHILDREN ? (2)

"That's suck to be without friend because you do nothing while everybody do a lot of things next to you. They play at pretending to fight or make war. They play football, and you, you are all alone and you get bored. That's really suck!"

(Alex, 7 yo, lower middle-class)

"It is very important for us to have friends, otherwise we are always and always all alone. I think when you're a kid, the most important thing in the world is to have fun with your friends."

(Léa, 11 yo, upper-class)

"If you are not playing with your buddies, what do you do? Nothing. You're just bored (Tu fais que t'ennuyer). We (as a child) should have buddies all the time and play with them all day long. That's our thing"

(Chris, 9 yo, working-class)

HOW CHILDREN LOSE THEIR FRIENDS? (1)

- In most cases, **this happens**:

  - *When children fight about a game or the rules of the ga*me. Usually, this loss is temporary. They become friend again at the next playtime or after the adults have settled the dispute.

  - *When they do stupid things (according to educators*). By being reprimanded by adults, they can lose their good reputation . Adult have the power to do and undo children's value and reputation in the eyes of their peer (Diter, 2015 ; 2019).

  - *When they start to have cooties* (Corsaro, 2004 ; Hirschfeld, 2002 ; Samuelson, 1980 ; Thorne, 1993). All the children of the school run away from them. They tried to avoid them all the day so as not to be contamined.

13

HOW CHILDREN LOSE THEIR FRIENDS? (2)

"*I hate Pam, she's fat, she's ugly, and besides she's eating her boogers all the time, that's right, huh, I promise you. My friends and I, we try to avoid her all the day long*"

(Clarence, 8 yo, middle-class)

"*Tom and his friends are my worst enemies in the whole world. They do not stop mocking me and calling me names. They say I'm stupid and I have cooties, and that I'll contaminate them if I play with them. They are really mean to me!*"

(Klay, 7 yo, working-class)

14

HOW CHILDREN LOSE THEIR FRIENDS? (3)

- ***Who are the children who have cooties*** and are avoided ?

  - Working-Class Children
  - Black children
  - Girls

- This game participate to segregate the children and to product and reproduce the gender ordrer (Thorne), the social order (Lignier, Pagis, 2018) and the racial order

- As Mary Douglas demontrasted:

« *Dirt is never a unique isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements*". (Douglas, 1966)

Thank you for your attention!