



Abstract

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What is life at school like for pupils?

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The 1989 blueprint law marked a symbolic turning point in its determination to set the **pupil "at the centre of the education system"**. While this principle has been criticised by some as being demagogic and has been called into question by later policies, the place of the pupil within school has nevertheless changed over the last twenty years.

The pupil has become a subject endowed with rights, a "user", but also a character with a role, since **school expects him to ply his "trade" as a pupil and to be an "actor" responsible for his own schooling**. New educational methods tend to place the pupil in the situation of (re-)discovering knowledge for him/herself. Pupils' individual history, personality, point of view and what they say have all acquired a certain amount of recognition in the school arena. Schooling is no longer just about intellectual training but also about socialisation and the development of the pupil as a person. The French education system goes as far as to include pupils' "school life" as part of its remit, with the ambitious vocation of making educational all places, times and activities which are not strictly related to the mission of teaching.

At the same time, the pupil as such has also become a subject for observation by researchers. Monographs devoted to pupils have appeared, providing material for the sociology of "school experience". More and more studies questioning pupils' "feelings" about their school experience have been produced.

Within what framework is pupils' "school life" conceived and organised? What opportunities are made available for pupils to express themselves and to participate, and how do they get involved in the life of schools? **What motivates young people to go to school**, over and above the obligation to do so? **How do they perceive the place assigned to them and the way they are treated in schools?** What values do pupils assert in the school arena? What lessons about social life do pupils come up against – sometimes with a bump – in their relationship with school staff and with their peers?

Such are the questions that this issue attempts to shed light on, based on recent research work.

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