

New Perspectives for Learning - Briefing Paper 63

Regulation and Inequalities in European education systems

This is an Interim Briefing Paper of the project that started in October 2001

Context of the Research

Education systems across Europe are changing in the way they are being regulated and how and who takes responsibility for their management. Equality of opportunity has continued to remain an important aspect of educational policy, however, changes in the way education systems operate could have an impact on inequality issues.

This research compares the development of public regulation of secondary education systems in five European countries and analyses how these developments affect local processes such as the creation of hierarchies, inequality and school segregation. It identifies regulatory modes for the variable and complex means by which public authorities orientate and co-ordinate action in a sector of society like state regulation, market mechanisms, communities, organisational hierarchy and networks.

The countries analysed are England, Belgium (French-Speaking Community), France, Hungary and Portugal.

Initial Conclusions

These initial conclusions are mainly based on the comparison of five national education systems.

1. From the political perspective: -
 - A crisis of some sort tends to push a State to reduce financial resources and to implement changes that adapt schools more to the requirements of the economy. Yet, at the same time there is an increased emphasis on reducing social exclusion.
 - There is also a tendency towards decentralisation of school management as well as more of a focus towards Europe.
2. Concerning regulation modes, it has been observed in most countries analysed that there is: -

- A reduction of the role of the central State in the direct provision of educational services.
- An increasing trend for schools having to become more accountable in terms of results.
- A weakening of the use of regulation strategies based on procedures that control the means of carrying out an activity. But, there is an increased use of regulation strategies based on achievement of results through assessment.
- A reinforcement of new modes of control through the emergence of the State taking on an evaluation role.

3. Concerning inequalities it has been observed: -

- A convergence of thinking on education systems and policies aiming to reduce inequalities. This has resulted in a greater focus on targeted measures aimed at creating more equality.
- There has been an evolution in education policies from a prevalence of political measures aiming for “equality of opportunities” using measures aiming for equal treatment through to a prevalence of political measures aiming at “equality of assets” that are achieved by differentiation of treatment.
- In several countries autonomy of the schools is favoured. This is resulting in a differentiation of the teaching practices as well as institution’s having greater freedom to choose diverse methodology to address the individual needs of students.
- Institutional solutions to combat inequalities or the phenomena of exclusion are numerous and diversified from one country to another.
- Institutional solutions or models adopted by one country tend to diffuse into other countries. Currently a “mosaic” of the different policy measures exists across Europe.
- However, different public authorities have shown an ability to answer in a differentiated and even in an opposite way to similar situation according to the local characteristics of the situation.
- This is also resulting in “hybridisation phenomenon” with the coexistence of diverse, but sometimes contradictory institutional solutions. For example, the coexistence of a priority zone of education, but consisting of very selective courses, implying an underlying elitist logic.

4. Although still a very tentative conclusion, initial analysis seems to suggest that there isn't any direct link between the level inequality in the different countries and the degree of centralisation of education systems. Further analysis is still being conducted.

Initial Recommendations

1. The local context needs to be carefully considered before a specific solution is adopted, as it has been observed that adopted solutions from other countries, do not necessarily have the same effect.

Further Information

The full title of the project is: "Changes in regulation modes and social production of inequalities in education systems: a European comparison". The final report is due in September 2004.

The project web site at <http://www.girsef.ucl.ac.be/europeanproject.htm>

Partner Details

Accessible from the web-site: -

"Analyse des cadres institutionnels et autonomie des acteurs locaux : évolution des modes de régulation institutionnalisée dans les systèmes éducatifs étudiés. Rapports nationaux", Mars 2002

"Système éducatifs, mode de régulation et d'évaluation scolaire et politiques de lutte contre les inégalités en Angleterre, Belgique, France, Hongrie et au Portugal, synthèses des études de cas nationaux", Septembre 2002

"Iniquité scolaire: du/(des) concept(s) aux mesures. Premier essai à partir de PISA. Et examen des corrélations de ces indicateurs avec les mesures de ségrégation de publics et les indices d'autonomie des établissements", Mai 2003.

Key Publications

Already published: -

Demailly, L., "L'évaluation, nouvel enjeu, nouvel outil" in *Nouveaux regards. Education, recherche, culture*, n°16 FSU, Paris, 2002.

Draelants, H., "L'impact des structures et de l'organisation d'un système scolaire sur la production d'inégalités en son sein", *Esprit critique – Revue électronique de sociologie*, vol. 4, n° 5, 2002, consulté sur Internet : <http://www.espritcritique.org>

Dutercq, Y., van Zanten A. (dir.), "Evaluation et régulation des systèmes d'enseignement", *Education et sociétés*, n°8, 2002.

van Zanten, A., "Education : grandes tendances" in *L'Etat de la France*, Paris, La Découverte, 2002.

van Zanten, A., "Educational change and new cleavages between head teachers, teachers and parents: Global and local perspectives on the French case", *Journal of Education Policy*, vol. 17, n° 3, 2002.

van Zanten A., "La "reflexividad" social y sus efectos sobre la investigación cualitativa de las realidades educativas", in Zago N., Pinto de Carvalho M., Texeira Vilela R. (dir.), *Itinerarios de pesquisa : abordagens qualitativas em sociologia da educação*, Rio de Janeiro, DP&A editora, 2002.

Maroy, C., "L'enseignement secondaire et ses enseignants", De Boeck, Université Collection Pédagogies en développement, Bruxelles, 2002

Maroy, C., "Quelle autonomie professionnelle des enseignants ? » *Revue Internationale d'Education Sèvres*, 30, juin 2002, 41-50

Maroy, C., "Nouvelles régulations et professions de l'éducation", *Education et Sociétés*, n° 6/2000/2, Bruxelles, De Boeck Université, 2002.

Publications in preparation: -

Maroy, C, Draelants, H., Dupriez, V, *Les principes fondamentaux du système scolaire*, Dossier du CRISP, due for publication in September 2003.

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Centre national de la recherche scientifique, (IFRESI), Lille, France

Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, Hungary

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