



## Lettre d'information n° 14 – January 2006

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### School segregation and elite education

Research and studies on the education of the elite have been the subject of a few publications in recent years; in contrast, many works on segregation and inequality in schools have been published since the late 1990s. The surveys upon which these are based are in many cases still relevant today.

This summary, by picking up on the main themes established a few years ago, aims to review the latest developments in this field – some still in progress – both in France and abroad.

Any attempt to compare methods of educating the elite (individuals at the top of the social pyramid) in different countries encounters problems of discrimination and exclusion. To a greater or lesser extent, the (re)production of elites starts at an early stage of schooling, depending on the country. It may be diffuse, but it is reflected in parents' school choices and the study paths proposed by some and/or desired by others.

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### Avoidance strategies and choice of school

The democratisation of society has, since the late 19th century, forced the renewal of the elite (those at the top of the social pyramid) to be based on the principle of merit and reward rather than inherited privileges. [Brigitte Darchy-Koechlin and Agnès van Zanten](#) (*Revue Internationale d'Éducation – Sèvres* [RIES], Sept. 2005) evoke a model of educational meritocracy, based on tests, exams and open competitions.

The limits of this meritocracy lie in the links between social class and educational success, and between social class and access to coveted social positions. These limits exist because of co-option processes, parental school selection strategies and the difficulty in respecting a social mix within education systems.

Studies that have shown these limits and the way goalposts are shifted have led to the implementation of various measures along the lines of positive discrimination. Some people interpret these measures as an effort to reduce social bias; others see them as a new form of "social enclosure".

The French model, which favours cultural elites, has today been crushed under the weight of market mechanisms, which favour economic elites (private-sector executives). By similar economic logic, parents try to influence their children's destinies by means of school grades (resorting to private tuition) and are less and less willing to submit to the logic of the school.

In a 2001 publication, *Le dressage des élites: de la maternelle aux grandes écoles, un parcours pour initiés* ("Grooming the elites: from nursery school to *Grande École*, a journey for the initiated"), Marie-Laure de Léotard considers the different strategies parents use to influence their children's school careers, from nursery school, where children are expected to be virtually able to read by the time they enter Year 2 (age 6), right through to (the carefully selected) *lycée* (upper secondary school) where pupils are prepared for entry to the top universities. Accounts presented in the book highlight a certain number of criteria that lead very early on to divisions in schools between a predetermined elite and educationally excluded pupils.

Agnès van Zanten highlights similar concerns in her book, also published in 2001, entitled *L'école de la périphérie* ("Education on the outskirts"), which considers social order and spatial issues, combining parental strategies with strategies of proximity – strategies also examined by François Dubet (*Journée d'études "Ségrégation urbaine, ségrégation scolaire"* ("Urban segregation, educational segregation" workshop), 1999) and Eric Maurin (*Le ghetto français : enquête sur le séparatisme social* ("The French ghetto: a report on social separatism"), 2004): the middle classes move out, to the detriment of the poorest ("the immigrants").

There is another discriminatory aspect for the families that remain in "difficult" neighbourhoods: they see the local school as the only solution, partly for economic reasons (the children can come home for lunch) and partly because of a lack of awareness of other possibilities.

### Secondary schools: all a marketing ploy?

This information shortfall takes on greater significance when children reach secondary-school age. It is often at this level that the best-informed families implement an avoidance strategy.

**Parents are not the only ones to employ strategies when it comes to secondary school admissions: the schools themselves do, too.** Agnès van Zanten sees this as a response to external pressures. Faced with declining pupil numbers (and the negative effects this has on the operation of schools in terms of classes, the number of teachers, timetable hours

available and non-teaching staff numbers), less popular schools will try to take advantage of measures – and funds – that are aimed at enhancing the range of courses on offer; however, these measures (bilingual classes, European streams) work towards retaining the pupils who need the least help and thus, in effect, constitute setted classes. Apart from the supposed lower quality of teaching, the other reason cited for the defection of certain pupils is a lack of security, which has led head teachers to adopt additional disciplinary and security measures.

In 2004, the magazine *Éducation et Société* produced an in-depth dossier on the middle classes and their renewed regeneration. By examining the themes of social mix, the perceptions and expectations of the middle classes, and middle-class attitudes towards schooling, the authors provided an insight into the state of affairs in France, Germany and Argentina. The article by Jean-Christophe François and Frank Poupeau, [l'évitement scolaire et les classes moyennes à Paris](#) ("Educational avoidance and the middle classes in Paris"), seeks to analyse the social factors governing avoidance practices in state secondary-school admissions in Paris. The statistical modelling proposed by the authors shows a change in the composition of the social groups with the most cultural capital (teachers, executive civil servants, artistic professions, etc.) counterbalanced by geographical factors (property prices).

**Avoidance strategies are not the preserve of the cultural elite or the middle classes.** In their latest book, [L'apartheid scolaire: Enquête sur la ségrégation scolaire dans les collèges](#) ("Educational apartheid: a report on educational segregation in lower secondary schools") (2005), Georges Felouzis, Françoise Liot and Joëlle Perroton use a study in the Bordeaux education authority area (covering the Aquitaine region) to show the "massification" of avoidance strategies. This results in *segregated* schools with high concentrations of foreign pupils, pupils of foreign origin and pupils from very deprived backgrounds. The authors take into consideration the opinions of parents who justify their approach as a quest for social justice and suggest that, in order to counter this seemingly inescapable trend, a better regulated process should be introduced.

At the upper secondary level, there is often rivalry between *lycées*, largely fuelled by the media and its obsession with league tables. At *lycée* entry level, avoidance is perhaps even more widespread than at *collège* (lower secondary) level. Here, too, it is a matter of choosing an "elitist" option or finding a small apartment to rent in the *lycée's* catchment area. According to a memorandum issued by the French Ministry of Education; entitled [Une approche de la sélectivité et de l'attractivité des lycées généraux et technologiques à l'entrée en seconde](#) ("Selectivity and attractiveness of general and technical lycées on entry into Year 11") (Dec. 2005), a quarter of lycées have pupils on roll in Year 11 (ages 15-16; first year of lycée) whose social background is different from that of the pupils of the local collèges. This may arise from selection of pupils upon entry to *lycée* or as a result of parental strategy.

**Avoidance strategies at secondary level also lead to competition between the state and independent sectors.** The independent sector can be used as a means of recovering a pupil's school career, as a way to avoid a school with a poor reputation, or as a bargaining chip to obtain special dispensation to send one's child to a different (state) school (by threatening to leave the public sector). Although Philippe Meirieu describes competition between the public and private sectors as "deadly" in his book *Nous mettrons nos enfants à l'école publique...* ("We're sending our children to state school...") (2005), he condemns neither sector. He does, however, express a wish for more democracy, more accountability and greater involvement in schools by parents and others.

**Parental avoidance strategies are not just a French phenomenon.** Marc Demeuse and Bernard Delvaux contributed to a *Céreq* (Centre for Studies and Research into Qualifications) conference in May 2004 on "Pupil mobility in the education system in French-speaking Belgium" (*La Mobilité des élèves dans le système éducatif belge francophone*), where they examined changes of school, in accordance with pupils' individual characteristics, from nursery school through to secondary level.

Among the many works by American researchers that touch upon the phenomena of avoidance and parental school choice, we would like to highlight the August 2005 issue of the *American Journal of Education*, the main theme of which was [Private education vs public education](#), for its comprehensive analysis of the problems of this situation: choice of school, institutions' desire for equity and competition between schools.

### Preparatory classes and *Grandes Écoles*: a distinctly French couple

In their report to the *Commissariat Général au Plan* (French government planning office), [Efficience de l'enseignement supérieur dans la production des élites : Le cas des classes préparatoires scientifiques aux grandes écoles](#) ("Efficiency of higher education in producing elites: the case of scientific preparatory classes for *Grandes Écoles*") (Oct. 2004), Noël Adangnikou and Jean-Jacques Paul, before analysing the efficiency of preparatory classes ("*prépa*" or CPGEs) for entry to the *Grandes Écoles* (France's top higher education institutions), first outline the nature of these classes. Traditionally, "*prépa*" enjoys an image as training for the elite and is the classic route to winning a place at one of France's prestigious *Grandes Écoles*. **These classes can be considered a true "socialisation matrix" that, to some extent, forces pupils to develop certain modes of behaviour.** In the body of this report, and in these [appendices](#), the effects on CPGE students' future careers are compared with those of "normal" university students.

In 2003, a conference entitled *Démocratie, classes préparatoires et grandes écoles* ("Democracy, Preparatory Classes and *Grandes Écoles*") was held, organised by CPGE teachers and the Conference of *Grandes Écoles*. In the introduction to the [conference proceedings](#), the organisers explained their aims, namely to examine how more classes, as well as diversification and changes in CPGE streams, prospects and students, have all modified the reality of preparatory classes and the image of preparatory classes. The data gathered at this conference confirms that the CPGE system affects only a small percentage of students, and that, as with the public perception of scientific *baccalauréat* classes, it is socially differentiated. Many students come from the higher social classes and/or have parents who are teachers, while other categories are underrepresented – the working and lower middle classes in particular – especially in Paris. A study of individual students' school careers shows a "creaming-off" of the best throughout. Alain Cadix, President of the Conference of *Grandes Écoles*, underlines the premise behind this, from primary level onwards, and highlights the important lower secondary stage.

Furthermore, a [memorandum from the French Ministry of Education](#), issued in September 2005, shows (supported by statistics and graphs) the **correlation between CPGE streams, success or failure in CPGEs, and social background**. Another [memorandum](#) on the future careers of students in higher education shows that material or financial difficulties are almost twice as high for university students as for CPGE students.

The selection of students – first for entry into CPGEs, and then for entry (via open competition) into the *Grandes Écoles* – further reinforces the elitist nature of preparatory classes and the *Grandes Écoles*. This is highlighted in Manuel Valls' report to the French National Assembly in November 2005 regarding the [draft law aiming to encourage social diversity in the composition of preparatory classes for Grandes Écoles and other selective establishments](#).

### Higher education for the elite

This developing hierarchy in education, which underpins all the problems highlighted above, was the subject of a number of articles and works published in autumn 2005, under a variety of headings: Factory for the Best; Factory of the Elite; Training the Elite.

In her book *L'Inflation Scolaire* ("Educational Inflation") (2006), Marie Duru-Bellat returns to the idea of a meritocracy. Her thoughts on the "qualifications race" – pre-emptive action in an attempt to counter unemployment – and class background lead her to comment on the futility of this race. Considering that the facts show qualifications do not save all graduates from unemployment and do not generate higher earnings, but inequalities, she suggests breaking the *Grande École* /university dichotomy and proposes a common base for the start of higher education that gradually opens up to professional life by means of (for example) a system of sandwich courses.

Education systems are also faced with another form of elitism. As Agnès van Zanten and Brigitte Darchy-Koechlin point out in an article in *Le Monde de l'Éducation*, entitled *Parentocratie et marché contre méritocratie* ("Parentocracy and market forces versus meritocracy") (Sept. 2005), **meritocracy is called into question by "parentocracy"** (the growing number of parental strategies used to "play the system" to ensure that their children obtain the best places) and by the increasing uniformity of university courses, which implies an internationalisation of elite education networks and, therefore, of the education market.

However, a comparative analysis of education systems shows that national idiosyncrasies exist with regard to elite education. Although certain education systems look to the international market out of necessity – owing to a lack of higher education structures – others control this internationalisation and offer "second market"-type training, as Monique de Saint-Martin highlights in her article *Méritocratie et cooptation: la formation des élites en France* ("Meritocracy and co-option: educating the elite in France") ([RIES, 2005](#)). The social categories that benefit from this system of educating the elite also differ according to the countries concerned. And, again, we see a shift from cultural capitalism to economic capitalism, with the recruitment of elites depending on the (financial) ability to gain access to international programmes of excellence.

### Japanese elites

Educating the elite is a central problem in the Japanese education system; as Jean-François Sabouret comments (in *Les élites anciennes et nouvelles au Japon* ("Old and new elites in Japan"), [RIES](#)): "elitism is the driving force of Japanese society". Few of Japan's universities (5% of its 709 institutions) lead to high-level jobs. Selection for these coveted places is by means of open competitions that rely essentially on memorised knowledge and which are much more accessible to those who have been best prepared, either in private secondary schools or by specialised companies, and thus to those who have the necessary means. Furthermore, although three quarters of universities are private institutions, it is the state universities that are the most prestigious. Their graduates are sought after by companies and so tuition fees increase. We are observing the paradox of a society that is seeking to become more meritocratic, but which is confronted on the one hand by a perpetuated ancestral hierarchy and, on the other, a growing commodification of skills.

### The influence of social groups

Elitism in the United States does not feature prominently in secondary education: Americans favour competition between pupils and leave selection to a later stage. It is thus at university entry level that strategies come into play. According to Romain Huret (in *Le recrutement des élites aux États-Unis au XXe siècle* ("Recruiting the elite in 20th century America"), [RIES](#)), the middle classes who were able to benefit from upward social mobility in the Sixties wish to reproduce this opportunity (for their offspring). It is in this way that a first strategy has been developed, the legacy preference, a form of positive discrimination in favour of children whose parents went to the same university. According to the author, this mode of co-option is rivalled – or aggravated – by another form of elitism, exercised this time by private companies, who are heavily involved in university research budgets and thus have an interest in ensuring excellent teaching standards and scientific results (to maintain the university's good reputation) and high-quality facilities, so long as they are provided with a well-trained, profitable elite.

In France and the United States, work produced in the last three or four years stigmatises the middle classes for their role in perpetuating school segregation. This is also the case in Portugal, as Maria Manuel Vieira shows in her article, *Vers une logique de certification scolaire? La formation des héritiers au Portugal* ("Towards a logic of school certification? Educating the heirs of Portugal") ([RIES](#)), in which she tries to put in perspective the limits of educating the heirs to Lisbon's upper classes in the face of a new educational order reinvigorated by the middle classes.

The weight of political elites is another form of influence. This model still applies in former Eastern-bloc countries, which have moved from educating working-class students in devotion to power to a massification of education that now demands tuition fees from students. This is the case in Hungary, as Ivan Bajomi explains in *La formation des élites dans la Hongrie d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* ("Educating the elite in the Hungary of today and yesterday"), [RIES, 2005](#).

### The weight of history and colonialism on the education of elites in the Maghreb and African countries

Through the work of Pierre Vermeren, we are able to learn about the reproduction and education of elites in the countries of the Maghreb. This historian sees a similarity between the reproduction of social structures in these countries and social processes in France in the 19th century. Furthermore, the "heirs" are dependent on the French and American education systems, and also play a role in the phenomenon of competition in education (*La formation des élites par l'enseignement supérieur moderne au Maroc et en Tunisie au XXe siècle* ("Training the elite through modern higher education in Morocco and Tunisia in the 20th century"), *Correspondances*, No. 63, Dec. 2000, reprinted in [RIES, 2005](#)).

The same questions are being asked about the future of African universities faced with the internationalisation of elite education. Here too, colonialism has left its mark, as Noble Akam and Roland Ducasse suggest in their paper, *Quelle université pour l'Afrique ?* ("Which university for Africa?") (MSHA, 2004).

The effect of this internationalisation of education in some developing countries is the growth of externalised education. In an article published in June 2005 in *Le Monde diplomatique*, Yves Dezalay and Bryant Garth expose "[the connivance of internationalised elites](#)" ([Connivence des élites internationalisées](#)). Although this article deals principally with recruitment to NGOs, it explains some of the elitist practices of the major American universities and large industrial groups who, as Noble Akam and Roland Ducasse (op. cit.) suggest, prevent the development of national higher education systems.

#### □ To complement these analyses:

At a worldwide level, a report by the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation describes the emergence of new forms of transnational post-secondary education, and presents the latest statistics, case studies and guidance reports. It analyses the development of this form of teaching in North America, Europe and the Asia – Pacific region. ([Internationalisation and Trade in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges](#), Sept. 2004).

For reference, an analysis of opinions on higher education can be found in a dossier published by the INRP's VST unit, entitled [L'enseignement supérieur sous le regard des chercheurs](#) ("Higher education under the microscope of researchers") (Olivier Rey, Feb. 2005).

### Study path choices: another factor in elitism

When reading studies on educational segregation, one sees that there is often a parallel between the vocabulary of education systems and that of human systems. For example, the "reproduction" of elites is associated with certain forms of "determinism": pupils are determined by their (social) background. They adapt or are encouraged to "adapt to their background", as much by what they learn as by the study paths they are offered.

It is possible to measure the impact of the social composition of the secondary school attended on pupils' higher education choices. A pupil educated in a well-regarded school is 1.6 times more likely to enter preparatory classes than a pupil with the same grades and from the same social background, but who is educated in a poorly regarded school.

These are the findings of Nadia Nakhili, published in an article for *Éducation et formation* in October 2005 ([Impact du contexte scolaire dans l'élaboration des choix d'études supérieures des élèves de terminale](#) ("The impact of school background on the higher education choices of Year 13 pupils")). In 2003, this same magazine published a summary of works published by the DEP (Evaluation and Forecasting Directorate of the French Ministry of Education), including an article with the significant title: [Les processus d'orientation sont-ils équitables et efficaces ?](#) ("Are study-path guidance processes fair and effective?"). This study examines study-path choices made at the end of Years 10 and 11 and upon entry into higher education. In addition to these criteria, the study takes into account sex and local education authority (LEA) area.

With regard to this last criterion, it is interesting to note that, at the end of Year 10, many more pupils in the Paris LEA opt for general and technical *baccalauréat* courses than the national average (+20%), whereas the opposite is true in Lille LEA (covering the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region), for example, where slightly more pupils than average opt for professional or vocational programmes. These access statistics were cross-referenced with parental socio-professional categories, since certain school districts are also areas of high unemployment.

In France, pupils make study-path choices at different levels; the report by Maryse Hénoque and André Legrand for the *Haut Conseil de l'Évaluation de l'École* (French High Council for School Evaluation), entitled [L'évaluation de l'orientation à la fin du collège et au lycée : Rêves et réalités de l'orientation](#) ("Evaluation of study-path choices in secondary education: Dreams and realities of study-path choices") (March 2004), along with the [Avis du Haut Conseil](#) (High Council Statement) that accompanied it, concentrates on the **need to evaluate not only the quality and suitability of resources implemented for study-path guidance, but also the practices of all those involved in study-path choices** "We often consider study-path guidance services and psychological guidance counsellors as being solely responsible, whereas in reality they have little influence – unlike teachers and heads, who finalise decisions during class report sessions, and parents and pupils themselves".

The report comments that parents of *lycée* pupils are poorly informed and that pupils in scientific *baccalauréat* classes are often guided towards preparatory classes.

The influence of these report sessions is also found in the French Community in Belgium. Study-path choices go hand in hand with pupil selection, often from the start of secondary education, where class report sessions produce study-path recommendations (*L'Orientation scolaire en Communauté française de Belgique*, "Study-path choices in schools in Belgium's French Community", M. Demeuse, D. Lafontaine, RIES, April 2005).

There are a few works that examine study-path choices and guidance throughout the world. In general, there are often tensions between individual choices and national economic constraints. This is the case in Laos or Burkina Faso, where study-path options are regulated at every level and, in Laos, based on school performance. The April 2005 issue of the RIES also describes the situation in Morocco, Taiwan, Brazil, England and France.

However these analyses should perhaps be moderated in light of work by Jean-Paul Caille, also from the DEP, who has published an article entitled [Les projets d'avenir des enfants d'immigrés](#) ("The future for children of immigrants") (Insee Première, Sept. 2005), which shows that these pupils are more ambitious than previously thought. Are these pupils among those who repeat school years several times and then go on to be very well qualified later on, as described by Bertrand Bergier and Ginette Francequin in their book [La revanche scolaire](#) ("Educational Revenge") (Nov. 2005)?

### The notion of education markets

One of the effects of the massification of education is the development of education markets, even within the state sector.

Schools' scope for strategising is, in theory, constrained by catchment area boundaries and sectoring; and yet these regulations at national level seem to break down when it comes to local arrangements. For Agnès van Zanten (op. cit.), it is a symptom of the commodification of schools, an increasingly common trend despite some efforts to raise moral standards.

In a working document by the National Bureau of Economic Research, entitled [Choice and Competition in Local Education Markets](#) (Nov. 2005), Patrick Bayer and Robert McMillan demonstrate a positive correlation between competition and productivity that is all the greater because of the strength of this competition. Jean-François Belisle, Germain Belzile and Robert Gagné, from HEC Montreal, have published a study, [La concurrence entre les écoles : un bilan des expériences étrangères](#) ("Competition between schools: a study of experiences abroad") (Oct. 2005), that shows the same correlation. They illustrate this through case studies in Sweden and the United States, and draw parallels with the situation in Canada. Their analysis does not just examine competition between public establishments, but also competition between state schools and private schools.

### The case of the United States: an econometric analysis

We have seen that, in the United States, competition between pupils is strongly encouraged prior to higher education; after this point, highly selective university admissions practices come into play. The effects of this competition can be seen in the multitude of **different offers that are competing on the education market**, particularly between alternative schools (*charter schools* and *magnet schools*) and other public-sector establishments.

The aim of charter schools – the first of which opened in Minnesota in 1992 – was to offer a more diversified curriculum than traditional schools, in order to help pupils with special educational needs. Subject to parental choice, their accountability lies in satisfying consumer demand and satisfaction. Linked by the charter that enabled their creation, they are expected to meet profitability objectives. The movement was salvaged by private companies, some of which are floated on the Stock Exchange ([Les "charter schools" aux États-Unis : un phénomène qui prend de l'ampleur](#) ("Charter schools in the USA: a fast-growing phenomenon"), IIEP Newsletter, March 2001). They subscribe to market forces and have lost sight of their initial vocation, contrary to the intentions set out in the document published in October 2004 by the US Department of Education, [A guide to education and no child left behind](#) (p. 17) and expressed by the [National Alliance for Public Charter Schools](#).

There are a number of reports that show the positive influence of competition from charter schools on state-school performance, such as John Bohte's article, published in 2004 in *Policy Journal Studies*, entitled [Examining the Impact of Charter Schools on Performance in Traditional Public Schools](#), in which the author studies the situation in Texas, the state with the largest number of charter schools. The conclusion: the strong positive effect on state-school performance is due to the strong competition that exists.

To find elements for comparison, we must consult the 2003 report of the National Assessment of Educational Progress regarding [America's charter schools](#). There seem to be no measurable differences in the teaching of reading, but lower results in mathematics, though these results need to be weighted according to the groups compared (in terms of social or ethnic background).

Furthermore, Denis Meuret, in an article from *Diversité: Ville-École-Intégration* entitled *Les charter schools et les écoles publiques : alternative, aiguillon ou menace ?* ("Charter schools and state schools: alternative, stimulus or threat?") (March 2005), re-examines this report and notes that the evaluation criteria used (raw data that was not correlated with pupils' starting ability levels, for example) produced mixed and somewhat debatable results. The relativity of these results is also highlighted by Caroline M. Hoxby, in an article for the Swedish Economic Policy Review entitled [School choice and school competition: Evidence from the United States](#) (2003).

Another type of school that is competing with "classic" state schools in the US is the *magnet school*. These public establishments were created with a view to reducing racial segregation, which had increased because of parental avoidance strategies, by offering an attractive curriculum in schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Magnet schools can be found at different teaching levels, from primary right through to higher education. As with charter schools, albeit to a slightly lesser extent, results regarding the effectiveness of such establishments have been mixed: do these schools help disadvantaged families trapped in inner-city areas, or do they serve only to increase segregation on financial grounds?

In his article [School Choice, Magnet Schools, and the Liberation Model: An Empirical Study](#) (Dec. 2004), Douglas A. Archbald uses quite an extensive nationwide study as the basis for his attempt to answer this question. School-selection policies, intended to create greater racial and social diversity, can only be effective if they are backed up by regulation.

The American education system seems focused on liberal solutions that favour parental choice; research into the effectiveness of specialised schools, however, does not seem to have been a priority. The author concludes his article by insisting that "the research community must keep the spotlight on, and do a better job of measuring, the distributional effects of school choice".

### Market regulation

Educating the elite, in a context of commodification, contributes to maintaining – even reinforcing – segregation in schools. How can this process be regulated? **Certain studies published recently put the emphasis on interdependence between schools and the need to regulate these interdependencies.**

Bernard Delvaux's presentation, given at the *Cerisis* (Interdisciplinary Centre for Solidarity and Social Innovation) conference, [Quelle régulation des interdépendances entre écoles pour réduire les inégalités et les ségrégations scolaires ?](#) ("How to regulate interdependencies between schools in order to reduce inequality and educational segregation") (May 2004), provides a useful analysis of possible models for regulation, ranging from control through central standards to collective responsibility for all parties acting in a given school district. Bernard Delvaux also shows that appropriate structuring of intermediate authorities allows can lead to an equalisation of schools' results and therefore fewer "side effects" (competition between schools due to parental choice, pupil exclusions, support for pupils with special educational needs, etc.). He lists a certain number of tools, actions and resources that should be implemented to complement these measures. These may be coercive (regulation according to standards that schools are obliged to adopt), monitored by a regulatory authority or left to the choice of the

schools concerned (in this case, the authorities' role would be simply to inform or encourage). In Bernard Delvaux's view, **it is essential that measures apply to whole school districts.**

In a similar vein, Denis Laforge – in an article published in the *Revue française de pédagogie*, (Ce que la ségrégation scolaire doit à l'administration de l'Éducation nationale ("The extent to which educational segregation is due to the Ministry of Education"), Sept. 2004) – questions the role of government in the processes that lead to segregation. We have seen how the dual phenomena of elite education and segregation in schools are fuelled by competition between schools due to parental choice. Yet the "market offer", optional classes, sectoring, special dispensations and streams are all measures available to local education authorities.

The case study led by Denis Laforge into the evolution of city-centre *lycées* (generally the better regarded *lycées*) shows that the administration seeks, above all, to respond to the demands of parents, which has the effect of reproducing or aggravating existing social disparities in urban contexts. This logic is taken to the extreme, since even significant reductions in pupil numbers in city centres has not led to a reduction in school capacity in these areas.

We can add to this French analysis an article that compares situations in France, England and the United States. In this article, [La régulation de l'éducation en France et dans les pays anglo-saxons : une comparaison](#) ("Regulation of education in France and the Anglo-Saxon countries: a comparison") (Jan. 2004), published in the *Revue Suisse des sciences de l'éducation*, Denis Meuret presents a comparison of the way education is regulated in these three countries since schools there were granted greater autonomy. In his view, the UK and the USA base their regulation on results, whereas in France regulation is based on incentives to implement relevant pedagogical measures. In his comparison of these two models, he does not deem one to be better than the other, but instead shows the potential effectiveness of using both models together.

The recent conference on [Local Education Policies](#) ("[Les politiques locales d'éducation](#)"), held in Poitiers on 7-8 June 2005, was an opportunity to take stock of decentralisation policies and their impact on reducing inequality.

Agnès van Zanten, Dominique Glasman, Yves Detercq and Nathalie Mons analysed the role of decentralised authorities, the involvement of local players and the effects of decentralisation on education systems throughout the world. Agnès van Zanten focused on the composite nature of the advantages and disadvantages of decentralisation, with results depending on the precise modes of decentralisation implemented: "brutal changes imposed without prior consultation or compromise do not generally make for positive changes".

Nathalie Mons has edited many works on the theme of differentiation in education policies. In her thesis, [De l'école unifiée aux écoles plurielles: évaluation internationale des politiques de différenciation et de diversification de l'offre éducative](#) ("From unified teaching to plural teaching: international evaluation of policies aiming to differentiate and diversify the educational offer"), defended at the end of 2004, she notes that, in many developed and emerging countries, the last two decades have been marked by large-scale education reforms based on a few favoured themes: decentralisation, differentiation of curriculum choices and paths, and free choice of school. Taken together with the PISA 2000 evaluation, her econometric analysis shows that the effects of these reforms do not have a one-to-one relationship with institutional characteristics in the countries studied. For Nathalie Mons, the policies evaluated "have, depending on the country, enabled the development of variable institutional plans, which have been met with different reactions; this combination, in turn, produces divergent effects on the performance of education systems".

## Educational segregation and social segregation

As François Dubet highlighted in his contribution to the workshop *Ségrégation urbaine, ségrégation scolaire* ("Urban segregation, educational segregation") held on 11 January 1999, segregation is quite a complicated theme, associated with notions of inequality, exclusion and marginalisation.

In fact, segregation is an effect of multiple behaviours that do not intend, at the outset, to cause segregation. Educational segregation is concomitant with urban segregation. In François Dubet's view, educational segregation can even accentuate urban segregation, as it can create "colonial" relations between schools and local residents, with, on the one hand, the local inhabitants and, on the other, the "colonists" (social workers, teachers, etc.), who do not live in the neighbourhood. There is a breakdown in understanding between these two worlds that share the same territory only temporarily.

Éric Maurin uses the term "ghettoisation" to describe this phenomenon in his book, published in October 2004, *Le ghetto français : enquête sur le séparatisme social* ("The French ghetto: a report on social separatism"). Indeed, for many years now, we have observed the phenomenon of territorial separatism, where the upper middle classes move away from the lower middle classes, and the working classes move away from the unemployed immigrant population.

### Differences in social mix

In December 2005, the DEP (Evaluation and Forecasting Directorate) of the French Ministry of Education issued a memorandum, [Ségrégation ou mixité : la répartition des élèves dans les collèges et les lycées](#) ("[Segregation or social mix: the distribution of pupils in secondary schools](#)"). Using exam results from pupils at the end of Year 10 (i.e. age 15, when they sit the national *Brevet* examinations), the DEP compiled geographical distribution tables for lower and upper secondary pupils by LEA. These show that, **depending on the LEA, there is – to a greater or lesser degree – a lack of homogeneity in pupils' ability levels.** The disparities between schools at lower secondary level are greatest in the Lille, Paris and Versailles LEA areas. Isabelle Maetz, who produced the document, sees in these differences the combined effects of historical, geographical and sociological backgrounds on the one hand, and, on the other, factors specific to the education system, such as the local impact of the private sector or policies regarding sectoring or the curriculum on offer.

In a report entitled [La mixité sociale à l'école et au collège](#) ("[Social mix in primary and lower secondary schools](#)") (March 2002), Jean Hébrard asks whether sectoring is an effective tool against segregation and the effects of competition between the private and public sectors. He advocates a return to true heterogeneity, with incentives for parents and satisfactory working conditions for teachers.

## Education systems and segregation

In a dossier published in the *Cahiers de recherche en éducation et formation* in December 2004, Vincent Dupriez and Xavier Dumay set out to produce a methodical analysis of performance evaluations. Their study, [Effet établissement : effet de processus et/ou effet de composition](#) ("The school effect: caused by processes or social composition?") aims to analyse the contextual aspects of schools by examining their social composition. This quantitative analysis (calculation of inter-establishment variances) is complemented by another work from their dossier, published a few months earlier, entitled [L'égalité dans les systèmes scolaires : effet école ou effet société](#) ("Equality in education systems: an effect of school or society?") (Oct. 2004), which takes a more sociological approach. This study also has the advantage of providing a European comparison, and complements the PISA data in this particular field. Dupriez and Dumay compare "integrated" education systems, which have a long common core (this type of system prevails in Scandinavian countries) with "differentiated" systems, where different streams are established early on (Germany, Austria, Netherlands). Comparing pupils' socio-economic backgrounds and examining the dispersion of test results between the ages of 10 and 15, it would appear that systems where study-path choices are made later reduce inequalities.

Regarding school mix and the effect of schools, we would refer the reader to the dossier produced by Marie Duru-Bellat, Magali Danner, Séverine Le Bastard-Landrier and Céline Piquée, entitled [Les effets de la composition scolaire et sociale du public d'élèves sur leur réussite et leurs attitudes : évaluation externe et explorations qualitatives](#) ("The effects of school composition and social composition on pupils' achievement and attitudes: external evaluation and qualitative investigations") (January 2004), in particular, the first two chapters – which concern research into the "school mix" effect, and the contribution of IPES (indicators for secondary school management) data – and the accompanying tables (pp. 5 – 43). On the same subject, Marie Duru-Bellat has produced a study for the Thélot commission on the future of schools in France, entitled [Quel est l'impact des politiques éducatives : les apports de la recherche](#) ("The impact of education policy: the contribution research has made") (Apr. 2004), which presents a summary of similar works.

The research team from the *Institut de Recherche sur l'Éducation* (Institute for Research in Education, or IREDU) based their analyses of inequality in schools on the results of the PISA survey concerning the skills of pupils at age 15.

However, certain researchers are not altogether convinced of the relevance of the PISA data in analysing these inequalities. In the [preparatory text](#) for the conference *Différences d'efficacité et d'équité des systèmes éducatifs : apport des enquêtes PISA et PISA+* ("Differences in effectiveness and equality between education systems: the contribution of the PISA and PISA+ surveys"), written by Marie Duru-Bellat and Bruno Suchaut, the following limitations are cited (among others): the choice of age range as a criterion, rather than teaching level (in countries where pupils may be held back a year, some pupils aged 15 will be in a different year group, thus preventing accurate inter-country comparisons); the use of test-result analysis (it is not possible to measure pupils' acquired skills with zero margin of error); differences in system effectiveness resulting jointly or cumulatively from curricula, educational structures, the teacher – pupil relationship and pupils' different learning experiences (at home and elsewhere).

Following his work on the project entitled [Construire des indicateurs internationaux d'équité des systèmes éducatifs : un ensemble d'indicateurs](#) ("Constructing international indicators for education-system equity: a set of indicators") (Jul. 2003), which aimed to define notions of equity and equality and back up these notions with indicators that are relevant in a comparative framework, Denis Meuret gave, during the conference on ["The evaluation of education and training policies" \(L'évaluation des politiques d'éducation et de formation\)](#) (Sept. 2005), some explanations concerning the difficulties of setting up an education "government" based on equality indicators: while not all players have been prepared to "govern by indicators", their use has proved easier in the United States, where educational objectives are defined and fixed in terms of competencies. Other contributions made at this [conference](#) support this view.

For a rapid summary, you may wish to refer to the IREDU memorandum written by Marie Duru-Bellat, Nathalie Mons and Bruno Suchaut, entitled [Inégalités sociales entre élèves et organisation des systèmes éducatifs : quelques enseignements de l'enquête PISA](#) ("Social inequality among pupils and the structure of education systems: some lessons from the PISA survey") (2004). Acquired skills of pupils and inequality levels vary noticeably, depending on the country and the effect of political action. In the authors' opinion, there is a correlation between the overall structure of education systems and the extent to which they are equitable: any limitations on schooling, any separation of pupils, any ability groups or separate streams (within the context of compulsory schooling) and any segregation phenomena in schools tend to increase the social inequality in pupils' performance, and yet produces no tangible improvements in average attainment levels, or even the attainment levels of the "most able".

Another basis for analysing the equity of education systems is the annual report produced by the OECD, entitled [Education at a Glance 2005](#), which features, among other things, a comparison of results in state and private schools, as well as data regarding policies and practices employed in secondary education to differentiate between pupils, and the impact that these have on results.

To conclude on the theme of educational segregation, you may wish to refer to the report written for the PIREF (Incentive Programme on Research into Education and Training) entitled [Les effets de l'éducation](#) ("The effects of education") (Jan. 2004), in which Christian Baudelot, François Leclercq, et al., produced a summary of the effects of education from a political, social, economic and sociological point of view. From chapters 8 and 9, concerning the effect of hierarchies in education, we can draw the following conclusions: **school determines individuals' position in the social hierarchy, while also contributing to raising aspiration levels and highlighting the contrasting effects of social equality and inequality.**

Finally, Marie Duru-Bellat has published many works on education policy, school structures and inequality in schools. In the preface of her report for UNESCO ([Inégalités sociales à l'école et politiques éducatives](#) ("Social inequality at school and educational policies"), 2003), François Orivel summarises the sentiments of many researchers in saying that, worldwide, inequality in education is no longer an issue of access to education – at least at primary level – but, instead, an issue of inequalities in terms of achievement. Some of these are quantitative: pupils from modest backgrounds are gradually excluded as they reach higher levels of education, as they do not satisfy the required standards; others are qualitative in nature: these pupils are guided towards curriculum paths regarded as inferior. Despite the small number of works available that allow a comprehensive comparative analysis of this subject, it seems nonetheless that it is much harder for education policy to reduce the qualitative aspects of inequality than the quantitative aspects.

For Marie Duru-Bellat, equal opportunities in school is just one dimension of social justice. It only makes sense to pursue this end if everyone makes an effort to move towards a less unequal society (with fewer inequalities between families, between desired social positions, between available jobs, etc.). "We cannot absolve school from all responsibility; however, its job would be made easier if children arrived there less unequal" (*L'inflation scolaire* (Educational Inflation), 2006)

You can also consult the list of bibliographical references used for this letter in our collaborative bibliographical database (select theme: inequality in schools).

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