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Brasilia 03-04/05/2010

« Secondary » Education issue, from the case of France

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Considerations based on the case of France

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« Secondary » Education issue, from the case of France

- 1. A GREAT PARADOX : An apparently very relevant curricular structure but a great and collective capacity of self delusion...;
- 2. CREATING A 9 YEARS BASIC EDUCATION : Why has “junior secondary” (“collège”) become a problem? Shall we make a success of the block of compulsory Education
- 3. HOW TO IMPROVE THE FLUIDITY TOWARDS HIGHER EDUCATION : Dilemmas at the Higher secondary/ Higher Education border
- 4. INVENTING A NEW GOVERNANCE IN A CENTRALIZED SYSTEM : A centralized system that has to invent individual schools and to regulate more than to prescribe and control

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1.A GREAT PARADOX : An apparently very relevant curricular structure :

- The first part of secondary Education (collège) opened to all (11-15 years) and common to all (since 1975);
- Senior secondary proposing various channels to students according to their choice, their capacities, their likings,
 - divided into three main streams : “general” (36%), “technological” (22%) and “vocational” (40%);
 - Permitting all an access to the “baccalauréat” (= access to Higher Education).
- A diversified Higher Education (bac+2, +3, +5, +8)

This design seems very inclusive and giving an equal dignity to all studies

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1.A GREAT PARADOX : An apparently very relevant curricular structure :

- Well designed vocational studies and qualifications, in close link with the professionals;
- A very interesting system of streams and sub streams at the level of Higher Secondary, that gives students both choice and a “menu” rather balanced in terms of a dietetic education (e.g. philosophy or history compulsory for all)
- A rather performing system of national examinations (e.g. the various baccalauréats).

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1. A GREAT PARADOX : ...but a great and collective capacity of self-delusion , as the reality is much more worrying:

- A system that is “one of the best in the world ...” but for half the students! (what we learned from PISA);
- 20% of students leave the system each year without any qualification (i.e. high unemployment rate);
- A system that cannot reach its goals anymore (e.g. a Law in 1989 had set the goal to lead 80% of each class of age up to the level of a baccalauréat before 2000 : actually the rate levels of at 69%. From there a problem of not having enough people qualified at Higher Education level

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2. CREATING A 9 YEARS BASIC EDUCATION : Why has “junior secondary” (“collège”) become a problem?

- 2.1. A curricular structure that has only apparently changed since its doors opened (1975):
 - a harmful (although historically meaningful) separation still prevails between Primary Education : apparently “one” educational system, but in reality two cultures that do not mix nor exchange;
 - a reluctance of “Secondary” to accept a real curricular aggiornamento : “Junior secondary” for all has been created in 1975 from a formal point of view, but **it has never been finished**, as the curriculum still remains that of the elitist school it was before 1975.

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2.CREATING A 9 YEARS BASIC EDUCATION : Why has “junior secondary” (“collège”) become a problem?

- 2.2. A definition of knowledge that remains:
 - idealistic (Condorcet’s ideas : knowledge is supposed to help people to be citizens),
 - formal : an old tradition inherited from the Jesuits;
 - too implicit : expected learning outcomes are not clear
 - school-centred : school teaches society! So school knowledge cannot be contested.

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- 2.3. A way of assessing students that creates underperformance:
 - The highest repeating rates in OECD (38% of students at 15 have repeated at least once against 12% for OECD);
 - A religion of average marks, that were meaningful in the former days, but that today are nothing but a discouraging ritual;
 - A reluctance to introduce a competence approach;
 - As a “by default” solution underperforming students are too often sent to vocational lycées (40%), creating a shortage of “general” students and of a breeding ground for Higher Education

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2. CREATING A 9 YEARS BASIC EDUCATION Making a success of the block of compulsory education

- 3.1. For the first time since the end of XIXth century, expected learning outcomes have been set by the Parliament in 2005 : the “common core of knowledge and competences to be reached by all students at the end of compulsory Education”;
- 3.2. That means that as to knowledge something new has to be invented : this 9 years compulsory school is not some extended Primary school;
- 3.3. The introduction of the concept of “competence” will introduce a new way of assessing students; more positive, less incriminating, more informative about each student’s real achievement;
- 3.4. Thus defined Compulsory education will stop to lead “by default” to all studies other than “general”.

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3. HOW TO IMPROVE THE FLUIDITY TOWARDS HIGHER EDUCATION?

Dilemmas at the Higher secondary/ Higher Education border:

- An irrelevant partition between High Sec and Higher Education : a strong ignorance between lycée culture and the first years of Higher Education : many students fail;
- The partition of French Higher Education between universities (opened to all who passed any baccalauréat) and the very selective “grandes écoles” (more vocational, leading to the best jobs and symbolic situations);
- The partition of lycées between three main streams (general, technological and vocational) and more numerous sub-streams, supposed to give equal opportunities to all is **upstream perverted by the partition of Higher Education itself**

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3. HOW TO IMPROVE THE FLUIDITY TOWARDS HIGHER EDUCATION Dilemmas at the Higher secondary/ Higher Education border:

- At the same time:
 - Lycée lacks time (three years only);
 - There is a *de facto* continuity of these six years (16-22) that must progressively lead the students to a specialisation and vocational orientation;
 - The various streams and sub streams of the current lycée are too numerous and too diversified : one should like to better know what are the common expectations whatever the studies are; for instance “vocational lycée” is somehow too vocationalised (not enough bridges);
 - It should be necessary to build coherent curricula starting from the expected outcomes at the “licence” (three years after baccalauréat) level and to see the retroactions from these expected to the lycée.

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4. INVENTING A NEW GOVERNANCE IN A CENTRALIZED SYSTEM : How a centralized system can invent individual schools and regulate more than prescribe and control:

- A central State that would just set the goals and evaluate the various subsystems from the criteria of efficiency as well as of equity; i.e. inventing a new type of government of Education
- Individual schools that would become more autonomous and evaluated (mixed with self evaluation); i.e. stop prescribing and continuously controlling what people do.
- A greater attention paid to school territories : gardening rather than constituting ghettos. A big social issue : The French do not want to their children to mix together anymore...!

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CONCLUSION : 2 major challenges:

- How to drastically reduce the number of students who before 18 leave the system without any qualification? (slide n°5°)
- How to produce more numerous Higher Education qualifications?

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TOGETHER BY :

- Creating a block of 9 years of Compulsory Education is probably one answer;
- Elaborating a more inclusive block of the 6 following years;
- Hunting down in curricula and assessment methods all that keeps school both exclusive and producing shortage of qualifications