

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

Country Report: France

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December 2008

The EPASI project is a programme of analysis of educational programmes in fourteen European countries, designed to address various forms of social inequality. The project analysis was conducted in the period 2007 – 2009. This report is part of the overall project, details of which are at <http://www.epasi.eu>.

The analysis is intended to be used within the overall framework of the EPASI programme.

The project has been funded with support from the European Commission. Each report within the overall project is the responsibility of the named authors.

The EPASI project was conducted by the following institutions:

- The Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University (UK) (Coordinator)
- Katholieke Hogeschool Zuid-West-Vlaanderen (Belgium)
- Univerzita Hradec Králové (Czech Republic)
- Montpellier III - Université Paul Valéry (France)
- Panepistimio Patron ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΠΑΤΡΩΝ (Greece)
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Education Policies to Tackle Social Disadvantage: France Country Report

In France, the Republican Model rests on equality between all citizens. That is why in French Education it was impossible to detect inequalities: the school of the Republic is aimed at creating equality among all students. But the 1970s revealed the development of social inequalities in France (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970).

1. The French Education System

In France, instruction is compulsory from age 6 to age 16, and participation is actively encouraged in the early years (from 2 to 5, in “*école maternelle*” and post-16 (in “*lycée*” or “*lycée professionnel*” and higher education). Publicly funded education is available for the compulsory years of schooling, with over 80 percent of pupils in France attending publicly funded state schools. 19 percent of pupils are in private schools that are partly funded by the State (teachers salaries). One percent are in totally private schools.

The French system is named “*democratic*”. There is no selection before the age of sixteen. But pupils attend three types of school, “*école maternelle, école élémentaire, collège*”.

One of the more enduring principles of education in France has been the principle of secularity. All children have to be instructed from age 6 to age 16, whatever their nationality, their religion and whether they are documented or not. In addition, there is a constitutional law that forbids asking about religion or politics or ethnicity.

In France, from 1802 (Napoleon) and 1882 (Jules Ferry), educational administration has been centralised: there is only one Minister of National Education. In 1985 and 2002, some aspects have been exercised by schools and local authorities in terms of material means but not for the specific policies: there is always a national curriculum and submission to the State.

In the 1980's, there was an increase of pupils attending “*college*” that unsettled teachers and principals because they could not teach to that new public who came from disadvantaged background and in the 1990's, it was the same thing in “*lycée*”. Thus, some measures were taken to address that situation by focusing on the individual student whatever his difficulties (Cf. 1989, *Law of orientation on school*, art. 1: *Education is the first National priority. Public service of Education is meant and organised depending on pupils and students. It contributes to the equality of opportunities*).

Educational provision is funded by the State for all the staff. Local authorities deal with buildings and material furniture. The consequences of these financial policies in addressing educational inequalities is that schools and local authorities are encouraged to provide financial aid to help out disadvantaged pupils.

A recent study (Langouët 2006) compared results in French secondary schools to those of 27 rich industrialised countries using data from the 2000 and 2003 rounds of the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), the international survey sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In terms of school results France is in the middle ranks, but below Finland, Korea and Japan. On the one hand, France is quite happy to be in the upper middle of the scale but on the other hand France must look up to Finland's achievement.

2. Which Groups are seen as Disadvantaged?

2.1. French school facing social inequalities

The betrayal of the elites who collaborated with the Germans during the Second World War occupation determined a policy to found a new education system with the mission to give the lower classes some cultural and social capital (Bourdieu and Passeron 1964, 1970). The aim was all social classes could attend the “*lycée*” from the 1970s onwards. The former found it more difficult to adapt, which was a failure of the educational policy in France during the fourth quarter of the century.

We must mention that there are two decisive steps in this evolution:

In 1975, “*collège unique*” meaning that all entrants were accepted whatever their results from age eleven or twelve and attended the same school. Entry selection disappeared within two or three years.

In 1981, François Mitterrand, the French President, created EPA (Educational Priority Areas) to set up a new educational policy in the suburbs where the “*collège unique*” was met with difficulties. That policy was inspired by the US “*affirmative action*” to address school difficulties by raising the social and cultural level. It was the first discriminative policy in France, which is unconstitutional because of the principle of equality. That policy was picked up by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2005, which triggered high controversy. In addition, the reduction of pupils in class (25 down to 23 average) is criticized (Piketty 2004) because no visible benefits have been observed by researchers.

Global evaluations show that there is a discrepancy between the expected results and the actual results. Bénabou, Kramarz and Prost (2003, 2004) established that the financial provision to every area is inefficient. What is more, the policies that were carried out did not reach their goal. But Duru-Bellat (2005) criticized the gross assessment that is based on stereotypes.

In France, we can observe that there is a correlation between social classes and achievement but it is very hard to find out if it is a consequence of school policy or of the urban segregation. In some cases, local policies have functioned and reached their goals.

2.2. French schools and gender inequalities

Equality between girls and boys constitutes a French national legal obligation for the French national ministry of Education and a fundamental objective. Nevertheless, the gender issue and disadvantages in France was included in a larger policy of equality. Regarding education matters, several approaches remained within the inherited framework and work on the principle of fair inequalities (Rawls). But then, a wave of criticism revealed the shortcomings of this model and has promoted equity rather than equality.

Educational disadvantages, gender issues and a global policy of democratisation and equality in education

The objective of equality in education was consubstantial with the republican project of the Welfare state. It has known several formulations and experienced several crises. Indeed, in the wake of the Second World War, international organisations supported a model of democratisation based on the implementation of comprehensive schools and prolonged schooling. The first wave of criticism started when sociologists revealed the shortcomings of this model. The most radical ones denounced the formal character of the promise of equality. Others questioned the possibility for working-class families to access this very model. The decisions made in the 1980s tried to answer criticism first through the development of compensatory policies based on the principle of *fair*

inequalities (Rawls). In traditionally centralised countries like France, interest was also expressed for local policymaking – school autonomy, territorial policies especially Education Priority Areas, etc.

More generally, educational policies were included in a global project – the aim of urban policies was to consider health, housing, training, leisure, employment together and to coordinate the work of the different organisations. In this framework, regarding gender and education matters, *coeducation* was one of the policies. It defended the concept of a school system which would lead to equality and complementarity between the sexes and which, on a larger scale, would be part of a movement toward social emancipation. Schools and high schools became coeducational schools in the 1970s (law July 11, 1975). But coeducation (*mixité scolaire*) and its outcomes did not achieve equality between boys and girls. Still, too many disparities remained between boys' and girls' trajectories. Therefore, the view changed toward equality of chances.

Substitution of equality of outcomes for equality of opportunities

Equality between girls and boys was one of the first dimensions of equality of chances that schools had to guaranty among pupils. Several approaches remained for a while within the inherited framework and work on the principle of fair inequalities. Then equity was a substitute for the ideal of equality. This notion is an attempted compromise between the project of equality and consideration for various situations (different social categories, genders, health, cultural backgrounds, etc.). Basically equity does not aim to give the same thing to everybody but provide each with what s/he needs.

Such an ambition required a permanent effort of all institutions and at all levels of the system of education. It can be distinguished by several steps:

- 1984-1989 period: bi-lateral agreement with the ministry of Education and ministry of Females Rights.
- 1989-2006 period: reinforcement of the inter-ministerial agreement of this policy with an active institutional partnerships combining several ministers' departments and the ministry of Education: Labour, Justice, Agriculture, Culture, Social Cohesion, Higher Education.

In this context, an Inter-ministerial Agreement in February 25th, 2000 was voted to reinforce the promotion of equality between boys and girls, females and males in the educational system (renewed in June 2006). It aims at improving educational and vocational guidance, promoting mutual respect between boys and girls, to reinforce the different tools to promote equality as trainings for the stakeholders involved in the implementation of such programmes'. Following the EU framework, equality, integration, and mainstreaming approaches were adopted.

Then, the last Inter-ministerial Agreement in June 2006 (*Convention pour l'égalité entre les filles et les garçons, les femmes et les homes, dans le système éducatif, signed June 29th, 2006*) promoting equality between females and males in the educational system has been set up for the period 2006-2011. It follows the EU programmes on equal opportunities and what has been done in the previous agreement between 2000 and 2006 which gathered together the different initiatives of the different ministries and takes into account the last progress of the Chart for Equality between women and men (*Chartes de l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes*) written by the ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Solidarity in 2004. It confirms the necessity to develop a global approach in education, for instance in the context of guidance and education to citizenship, combining the effort of the different ministries quoted above.

Its main characteristics:

- Partnerships between 8 ministries
- Priority objectives: a global approach in education

- Focus: orientation, guidance and education in equality between sexes

Its main focuses:

1. Improving educational and vocational guidance for equal access and opportunity for girls and boys
2. Promoting an education founded on the mutual respect of both sexes
3. Reinforcing the tools of promotion of equality and training of the actors

Its implementation: a national framework for a regional and local implementation

The implementation of this Convention is ensured by a national committee of inter-ministerial members. The national committee rest upon an inter-ministerial group composed of regional delegates in charge of schools and high schools missions (*chargé de missions académiques*) in equality between girls and boys, of regional delegates in charge of universities (*chargés de mission universitaires*) and the network of equality (*réseau parité*) in public research organisations' of the ministry of Education, Higher education and Research and the network of Females Rights and Equality (regional and county delegates), and those of the ministry of Agriculture, of Labour, Justice, Equipment and Culture. The inter-ministerial groups are invited to decline the present convention on a local level in order to formalise relations between the partners, to give priority objectives with regard to local situation and to undertake a regular assessment of those actions. A national assessment of this new convention and of the action of every Ministry as well as a balance sheet of inter-ministerial activity will be established at the mid-course, ie before the end of year 2008.

Favoured supports of education

The common basis of knowledge and competences set up by the law of orientation and programme for the future of the School of April, 2005 (decree July 11th, 2006) identifies precisely the respect for the other sex and the refusal of stereotypes among social and civic competences which every pupil must acquire and develop in the course of his obligatory schooling. Each school has to mention this concern in their intern rules.

Beyond actions of sensitisation which can be set up, a certain number of supports can help at implementing this policy:

- civic education;
- prevention of sexist or stereotypical behaviour and sexual violence
- actions of sensitisation and training of the Committee of education in health and in citizenship (CESC)
- sexuality education.

Legal framework

CODE OF EDUCATION

Law n° 2005-380 April 23rd 2005 art. 5, art. 6 Journal Officiel April 24th 2005

“Schools, secondary schools, secondary schools (...) contribute to favour coeducation and equality between men and women, notably in orientation. They assure a training to develop pupils knowledge and respect for the rights of the person as well as understanding of the concrete situations which undermine it ". This article 121-1 of the Code of education is based on the article 5 of the law of orientation and programme for the future of the School of April 23rd, 2005

"Les écoles, les collèges, les lycées (...) contribuent à favoriser la mixité et l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes, notamment en matière d'orientation. Ils assurent une formation à la connaissance et au respect des droits de la personne ainsi qu'à la compréhension des situations concrètes qui y portent atteinte".

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS

Those cases studies are developed in an Excel file.

FOCUS 1. Improving educational and vocational guidance for equal access and opportunity for girls and boys

Title of the action: [La mixité au fil des pages](#) FR265

Region: Caen

FOCUS 2 Promoting an education founded on the mutual respect of both sexes

Title of the action: [Le rôle et la place du père dans la famille actuelle et à l'école](#) FR263

Region: Nancy Metz

FOCUS 3 Reinforcing the tools of promotion of equality and training of the actors

Title of the action [Les femmes et les hommes au rectorat : un début d'approche intégrée de l'égalité](#) FR264

Region: Clermont Ferrand

2.3. French schools and ethnicity

We have to separate in our text two populations that are helped by the same organisation, Gypsies and Newcomers Schooling State Services (["Centre Académique pour la Scolarisation des Nouveaux Arrivants et des enfants du Voyage-CASNAV"](#): <http://pedagogie.ac-montpellier.fr/casnav/> for Montpellier, FR262). The newcomers are in France for economic reasons and will be studied after Gypsy/Roma pupils.

Gypsy/Roma pupils are travellers or settled people. There is research about them and in the Pyrénées-Orientales (a southern county) less than 5 percent achieved their first exam for fifteen years pupils (*"brevet des collèges"*) compared to 80 percent of the school population. It is often alleged that this is due to their *'opposition'* to school work: children have only to play in their own and old culture. They have a unique and strong identity and they cannot fit in. *"They only go to school so that they get subsidies"* said people but CASNAV researchers (Decroix and Giraudeau 1998, *VEI*, n°115, <http://www.cndp.fr/revueVEI/decroix115.htm> consulted 19 November 2007) think about finding a way to integrate into school whether they are travellers or a settled population:

To speak about gypsies' attitude toward school is non productive since it is exclusive and it does not solve the problem.

What can an unseasoned observer see? Little attendance that may explain or result in opposition to learning? Some individual or group violence whenever a pupil seems to be victim of bullying or injustice. Likewise school is reproached or blamed for not being sensitive to Gypsy children's lot. This description must not be dismissed by decision takers if they want teachers' cooperation.

They attend elementary school, on the whole, but they give up school altogether around the age of 14 and they are just a handful of pupils passing the baccalaureate, which is a problem for them as it is not yet accepted by their community (because of individualism that remains in some communities).

Albeit the effort to understand the issues of schooling in the community, decision takers have failed (Liégeois 2007). Should decision takers encourage the development of schools for gypsies only or non segregation schools?

Migrants' children that have arrived recently in France are not such an issue that cannot be solved. They were dealt with like other people. Due to their lack of French language, they needed a special treatment to bridge the gap with other students' knowledge and to place them in the same classes.

Two devices were implemented to help them. First, there were foreign teachers practicing the native language and the culture of these newcomers (*“enseignants de langue et culture d’origine”*: [ELCO FR250](#)): it has been organised since 1983. It enables the integration of the minorities coming from Mediterranean area (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, and ex-Yugoslavia). These teachers are paid by these countries and there is some suspicion about expanding ideological or religious ideas. More than 90 percent of these pupils live in Muslim families and the problem is that they are taught by Muslim teachers in State schools. The second measures are about learning French as an additional language to learn in school.

Newcomers are enrolled in ordinary classes in primary school and there is a two years’ difference maximum in the same class. They also attend a French language course in a learning group on a daily basis according to their needs (*“classe d’initiation” CLIN*). The aim is to shorten this stay in these special classes so that they integrate the mainstream class¹.

After welcoming these children, tests are carried out to individualise each child’s needs according to his background. Then they are sorted out and directed to some schools where they will find their problems addressed thanks to the school team, the different classes and corresponding learning. It was analysed by Cousquer (2001: 212-213). It operates a network of competent people and schools to welcome the migratory flow still coming in significant numbers from Northern Africa especially.

2.4. French schools and disability

In France, a new law (11 February 2005) introduced a complete change in the former system that gave special schooling for *“retarded children aged from 6 to 13”*. They were placed in *“classes de perfectionnement”* and in special schools. Today, they are entitled by law to attend classes with the other pupils. Because of their special needs, they have someone at their disposal in class who can help them learn (*“auxiliaire de vie scolaire”* AVS).

The previous situation maintaining disabled children apart has been seen as discriminatory and now we tend to help them adapt and be included in the mainstream system (Étienne, Parkinson and Verkest 2005). If the families cannot enrol their children in the school they want, they turn to local commissions in charge of primary or secondary schools who will try to find a solution in specialised education, which does not suit the families nor the local politicians who want the children to be included in the families’ choice of school and to benefit from some individual schooling within the class, the whole thing being part of the school project together with the class project under the control of the teacher (<http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid207/la-scolarisation-des-eleves-handicapes.html> consulted 18 November 2007) :

At all levels of teaching, individual schooling is a priority whether it is full time or part time, there must be a specific project of inclusion that would compensate the disability and would meet the needs for schooling of each disabled child.

That law that outlaws discrimination against disabled children (see project FR259: [Integrating pupils with special needs](#)) creates some new problems for the community and for the children as well: the cost of new materials and buildings and the staff is not trained to cope with specific needs. Gardou (2004:49) wonders about these new issues that have not been addressed yet:

This attitude is unreasonable because affects overcome reason in terms of costs and efficiency. This policy is influenced by guilt and its consequences. The situation is paradoxical: how can we match the person’s skills, the personality and the background to the social environment? How to treat handicap like any other distinctive feature within our society?

To sum up, there are two steps: the first one is to adapt the school for special needs and the second is to move towards inclusion. Some difficulties stem from the lack of training of the staff, the high

¹ Bulletin Officiel de l’Éducation nationale. n°10 du 25 avril 2002.

cost of learning materials and the environment (lift, computers). The first evaluations are not easy to do even for researchers because the 110,000 pupils are scattered in all the schools.

2.5. French schools and linguistic minorities

In France, a linguistic minority is defined as a group or a community that is historically settled on a geographical territory. They speak another language different from French (see projects FR257: [Let us compare our languages](#) and FR258: [EVLANG](#)). Contrary to other countries, the French constitution admits only one official language²: French³. Although France signed the International Pact relative to civil and political rights, the government opposed some restriction towards article 27 in the name of the Republican unity and universalism that are irrelevant with minorities' acceptance, which implies that the French State does not officially recognise linguistic minorities. In France, there are only regional languages and no other national language exists apart from French. It is clearly established in the French Constitution of 1958 (art. 2) that linguistic minorities are not given collective rights. The Constitution Introduction ensures that "*all citizens are equal in front of the law and assumes that the people of France is composed of all its citizens without differences of origin, race or religion*" (7 May 1999 French Foreign Office).

Contrary to other countries, we should not speak of linguistic minorities but of regional languages. In 1999, Bernard Cerquiglini, head of "*Institut national de la langue française*", listed 24 regional languages in the French home country. In fact, this attitude depends on the will of the authorities to integrate the former provinces like *Languedoc* or *Northern Cataluña* thanks to the French language as a school language.

In spite of being practiced in some areas, medias and in private schools, regional languages are more and more assimilated by French. Some people denounce "*French monolingualistic culture*" and underline the contradiction between Republican decentralisation and French linguistic policy. Some twenty years ago, there was a reflection about "*affirmative action*" so as to repair the destruction of local languages (Occitan, Corsican, Basque, Northern Catalan⁴). Other people claim that these languages are disruptive and dangerous for the State: Danièle Sallenave, in her article "*Move away, those who break unity!*", criticizes "*the folklore that emerges from these regional 'languages' and 'cultures' that have lost their souls and look back into their glorious past*"⁵.

Still, a recent decree (2001-733 30 July 2001) creates a local Assembly⁶ that will oversee the status and the promotion of the regional languages and cultures through schooling and a wide range of activities. This Assembly controls the policy for teaching bilingually but two official texts organising a complete bilingual course in school were cancelled in 2002 by the State Council⁷.

A long time before that period, it is reminded that in France the school of the Republic was the place where all children would learn French as a unique tool to bring unity into the State. There was a time when regional languages spoken at home, called "*patois*", were not allowed in class⁸. Since the Deixonne law (11 January 1951), there has been an opportunity to use that regional language at school at all levels, even at the university. In addition, there is an examination course for the baccalaureate. In 1982, Minister Alain Savary produced a new text that recognised regional

² Cf. Sénat, compte-rendu intégral des débats de la séance du 16 février 2005, <http://www.senat.fr/s200502/s20050216/s20050216002.html>

³ Article 2 de la Constitution : "La langue de la République est le français"

⁴ M.Taibon, "Pour les droits des minorités en France", intervention à l'ONU, 4-4-2001, sur le site www.gfbv.it

⁵ Danièle Sallenave, "Partez, briseurs d'unité!", *Le Monde*, 3 juillet 1999, in Pujol, J-P (2004). *Sottisier à propos des minorités ethniques. Le petit florilège chauvin*. Éd. Lacour- Rediviva.

⁶ Cf. <http://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/2001/33/encarta.htm>

⁷ Décision du 28 octobre 2002 ; http://conseil-etat.fr/ce/jurispd/index_ac_ld0239.shtml

⁸ MTozzi, *Apprendre et vivre sa langue*, Syros, 1984.

particularities in linguistic teaching⁹. Currently, 335,000 pupils¹⁰ would attend a course in regional language especially in primary school (*Monde* published 20 July 1999). But there is a problem with a drastic shortage of regional language teachers that overshadows the future of teaching these languages.

The teaching is carried out in private schools that are financed by the State: Diwan for Britons, Ikastola for Basques, Bressola for Northern Catalans, ABCM Zweisprachigkeit for Alsacians, Calandreta for Occitans.

2.6. French schools and religious minorities

In France, the question about religion and education is very difficult to develop. We can only underline some specificities in this report. There is a historical backdrop we must take into account. From the French revolution, the State has been responsible of public, secular and free instruction. It was reinforced by the 1905 law that separated Roman Catholic Church from the State. Religion was in the personal area and in private life but not in political and educative areas¹¹. However, the State must not interfere in people's religion. Tension has always been sharp between Roman Catholic School defenders and State school supporters. "*Today, everyone watches everyone. Roman Catholic school and State school supporters, are not at war anymore, it is armed peace*"¹² (Nordmann, *Report on teaching freedom in France* 2007).

In France, dealing with religion as a subject poses some difficulties in the *curriculum*. In his report about *L'enseignement du fait religieux dans l'Ecole laïque* (2002), Régis Debray writes: "*We have to change and pass from an incompetent secularism (religion is not a school subject) to an intelligent secularism (we have to understand what religion is)*" FR255: [Religious facts teaching](#), FR256: [Islams teaching](#). Other people are fundamentalists who give priority to secularism. It's a typical French issue: the presence of religion within State school (Charpentier and Baubérot 1998).

On the other hand, secularism is questioned by the "*Islamic scarf*" that triggered some conflicts in schools. Only civil servants have to abide the law forbidding this outfit but not pupils. Now, the law (3 March 2004) asserts that obvious signs of religion are not tolerated. We can notice that no new conflicts have occurred over the last four years.

It is important to examine the situation of Roman Catholic Education in France. Constitutionally, freedom of teaching is a principle and the Debré Law (1959) offers a wide range of systems to the families. The State oversees the quality of teaching and the freedom of conscience. There are also some schools that are completely non-confessional and privately funded (Montessori, Steiner and other schools).

Private schools are divided into three: all-private schools, "*voluntary aided schools*" and "*voluntary maintained schools*". The second means that the Church owns the land and the buildings that they maintain; the State employs the teaching staff. The third is similar except that Inspectors make sure they follow the *curriculum*, these schools are mainly secondary. All these private schools have their "*own character*", which allows religious signs for people and buildings. There would be a population of five million Muslim inhabitants in France and only two all-private Muslim schools (Averroès in Lille and Al Kindi near Lyon). It must be noted that France does not have a network of

⁹ Sur une approche chronologique des dispositifs de cette période cf. MTozzi, *Apprendre et vivre sa langue*, Syros 1984

¹⁰ Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication Rapport au Parlement sur l'emploi de la langue française, 2003

¹¹ Jean Volff, *Le droit des cultes*, Dalloz, 2005

¹² Caroline Brizard, "Pédagogie, résultats, effectifs... Ecole : le match public/privé", *Le nouvel Observateur*, n°2151, semaine du 26-01-2006

“*faith schools*”. Why? Because of the separation between State and Religion (Falloux law 1850) it is not allowed to provide land and building to “*faith schools*”.

In France, at any one time 20 percent of pupils attend private schools (Jewish, French Protestant Church and Roman Catholic Schools, the latter are the most important and they also welcome many Muslim pupils). Over their school career, however, 50 percent of all French pupils attend a private school at some point, which gives disadvantaged children equal opportunity (Langouët and Léger 1991). Religion is not a priority to attend these schools but rather a means for a second chance in case of failure whatever its origin (socio-economic, religious, ethnic, linguistic difficulties). Paradoxically, the French secondary school system is basically restricted to the “*republican elitism*” illustrated by “*Grandes Écoles*” that creates inequality. But thanks to private schools some disadvantaged children achieve their *curriculum* and these schools contribute to redressing inequalities.

3. The Construction of a Policy Response

In France, since the 1980s the question of inequalities has been tackled with “*affirmative action*”. All financial provisions must be given to schools in disadvantaged areas and to Education Action Zones. Some evaluations show that this policy is being questioned. 25 percent of the population is targeted, which seems to be too big a number. A new policy has emerged consisting of two aspects, first giving additional resources for the most disadvantaged schools (“*Collèges Ambition Réussite*”), second admission in special courses preparing the entrance to “*Grandes Écoles*” for eligible gifted and talented pupils from disadvantaged areas (see project FR253: [Why not me?](#)). The aim is to allow the best pupils and students to become part of the political, economic and social elite of the country.

Even if there are a proportion of teachers drawn from minority ethnic groups, it is still disproportionately low and some minorities are not represented in the professional labour force: gypsies for example. It is impossible to have figures as religious, ethnic and philosophical statistics are prohibited in France.

Some other issues are not addressed: although male and female teachers are recruited on an equal basis, there are a low number of male teachers mainly in primary schools (15 percent male) and in secondary schools (30 percent with a higher number in Science). Similarly, there are few disabled teachers even if all exams are opened to them with specific aids (time and assistants).

All this may impact on educational disadvantage.

Historical Overview: Education and Policy Initiatives Addressing Inequalities in the French Context

3.1. The “collège unique”

This secondary modern school was created for pupils aged 11 to 15 (4,000,000). The aim is to redress inequalities so that academically pupils would mix with others in the same schools and to put an end to selective entrance to secondary schools. Some children (100,000) with intellectual deficiency belong to specific classes (Specialised Education Classes: SES and SEGPA) that are in the same building. We have to mention that the latter come from socio-economic disadvantaged background. Very few of these children belong to middle class. If it is the case, they mostly go to private schools.

The evaluation of this policy can be seen two ways; on the one hand, 63 percent of the pupils passed the final exam compared to 35 percent in 1975 and 1 percent in 1900 but on the other hand there are about 11 percent left behind, which means they have no qualification whatsoever.

Website: www.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/dossiers/college-unique/index.shtml

A historical point of view: www.lemonde.fr/web/article/0,1-0@2-3224,36-952434@51-946005,0.htm

An association of school Principals: <http://education.devenir.free.fr/colluniqu.htm>

3.2. The “Education Action Zones” or “Zones d’Education Prioritaire (ZEP)”

This programme was set up in 1981 to tackle low achievement and social exclusion to redress inequality by providing additional resources in delimited disadvantaged areas located in the suburbs and in the countryside. It combines primary, secondary and high schools. It is underpinned on a common project defined and led by a specific team including teachers, principals, inspectors, associations and political bodies. There are 6,500 schools (85 percent primary and 15 percent secondary).

This policy is a success on the whole: the gap has not been widened among pupils whereas it has been increased outside school in terms of economic and social inequalities. Some believe that the financial resources should be more targeted. Some think that new actions have to be undertaken: to know how to read is a priority and it depends on wanting to read (see FR252: [Reading with parents](#)). Some do want pupils to be with other children in the same class for five years (see FR254: [Unique urban class](#)).

Ministerial website: www.educationprioritaire.education.fr/

Research on Education Action Zones: www.cas.inrp.fr/

Association website: www.association-ozp.net/

3.3. Local Education Contract or “Contrats Educatifs Locaux (CEL)”

To be more effective a contract has been set up between local authorities and parents, teachers, associations, etc. in order to carry out an educational project which meets local needs defining precise objectives and outcomes in view of redressing inequalities. This is a local attempt to address a local problem out of centralised education policies.

Governmental website: www.education.gouv.fr/cel/default.htm

Local website: www.pel-brest.net/

3.4. Specific Aids for Pupils with Special Needs Networks or “Réseaux d’Aides Spécialisées aux élèves en Difficulté (RASED)”

These governmental networks (see FR260: [RASED](#)) were founded in 1990, Circular n° 90-082 du 9 avril 1990. They provide specific aid to pupils with special needs in ordinary classes with teachers’ help. They have specific training for disadvantaged pupils and work together with education psychologists and also specialists in individual education.

Evaluations are difficult as each network works on its own basis and does not communicate its results. Still it must be admitted that the efficiency when they operate in class is better than when they work with pupils drawn out from the class.

Non-official website about RASED: <http://daniel.calin.free.fr/rased.html>

RASED questioning view: http://www.cahiers-pedagogiques.com/article.php3?id_article=1239

3.5. “Group Work Research” or “Travaux Personnels Encadrés (TPE)”

In 1997, that innovation in implementing research methods for High School pupils was a kind of revolution in French curriculum: the project operates from a defined theme selected on a list combining different subjects. The pupils have to conduct research and present the results to a jury who evaluates the performance. This mark is accountable for the final exam. These group projects are tutored by two or three teachers. The aim is to make the pupils more active and autonomous in order to redress inequalities by working together on the same project.

The outcome is positive in terms of individual enrichment, self-esteem, shared values with peers and good assessment. Unfortunately, the project initially was repeated twice in two years and now it is only developed on a half year basis.

Ministerial website: <http://www.eduscol.education.fr/lycee/tpe/ee/tpe/>

Parisian website about TPE: <http://tpe.scola.ac-paris.fr/>

One TPE about pollution: <http://membres.lycos.fr/tpepollution/>

3.6. “Personalised Programmes for achievement” or “Programmes Personnalisés de Réussite Éducative (PPRE)”

In the French system, “*repetition*” is a too well-known word and situation. If a pupil fails, the solution is to make him repeat. Some researchers (la Garanderie and Catlan 1988) have set up methods targeted at the individual difficulties, the sooner the better. Today, the teacher has to provide an individual contract (see FR261: [PPRE](#)) to sort out the child’s difficulties. It must be signed by the family and the school. This programme requires specific training in terms of diagnosis, organisation, tools and evaluation.

So far, it has been too soon to draw conclusions about this innovation.

Ministerial website: www.eduscol.education.fr/D0072/PPRE_experimentation.htm

Montpellier website: www.crdp-montpellier.fr/ppre/

One document (143 pages) devoted to PPRE: http://www.cahiers-pedagogiques.com/article.php3?id_article=2846

3.7. “Last chance classes” or “Les Classes-Relais”

This system is meant to anticipate pupils’ dropping out and being sent to prison (see FR160: [Go-between systems](#)). These pupils must be protected from themselves, their family and the environment. As they are young delinquents, they will be taken from their schools for a determined period of time so that they will receive schooling and education with teachers specialised in this field and together with judiciary staff.

78 percent of these offenders go back to the ordinary system. The main objective is to restore their self esteem and sense of community, which is the key to achievement and should stop them from falling into solid delinquency.

Ministerial website: <http://eduscol.education.fr/D0049/CXJACC01.htm>

Ministerial website: www.eduscol.education.fr/D0049/Enseigner_Apprendre_en_Classe_Relais.pdf

A project in Montpellier: <http://crdp-montpellier.fr/ressources/agora/D026005A.HTM>

4. Conclusions

This report is written about a country's policy that wants equality among citizens since that word appears second in its motto. We must admit that this act of faith is an obstacle to find inequalities first and to tackle them afterwards.

It is all the more difficult to spot the inequalities as the Declaration of the Human Rights and Citizens claims "*all men are free and equal by law*". That is why it is not allowed to sort out the population according to ethnic origins, religious beliefs and linguistic differences because French is the "*language of the Republic*". Such a stance has started to evolve when the European construction pinpointed that it was a source of discrimination. For example, Gypsies are neither really integrated nor included and they are hardly considered as citizens. In addition, the gender gap was invisible and it has taken some time to start to bridge it. Although since the 1970s, the educational policy wavers: either the individual comes first before the community creating the "*Republican elitism*" or differentiation and "*affirmative action*". Additional resources should be given to those who have less. Some other people argue that resources should be given according to specific needs.

Indeed, inequalities must be addressed but there are two antagonistic ways: the first one is based on the myth of "*equality of opportunities*", every child is on the starting-blocks assuming that each is on an equal footing (see projects FR159: [Education for orientation](#), FR251: [Sponsoring in Languedoc](#)). Social differences (linguistic, religious, physical, cultural) are not taken into account since each individual embodies the universal human condition. The second is more about each individual being dealt with. It is quite evident that school suffers from this breach of its principle of foundation (Dubet 2002). Educational policies have always wavered between denying elitism and giving up differentiation. In France, the State opposes any particularity. Can school break free from that axiom? In France, there are two main obstacles: first to search for differences is to accept them as inequalities; second using compensation is contradictory to the constitutional principle of equality among all citizens and pupils in school. How can school handle equality if it cannot interfere on inequality factors?

In France, the fight to challenge inequalities has been quite recent dating back to 1975 and the outcomes of these policies can be read two ways. On the one hand, there are about 10 percent of the population who do not have any qualification or diploma. Some minorities, like gypsies or disabled people, do have rights but educational policies have not met their needs so far. On the other hand, the level of instruction has doubled for the French population for the last thirty years.

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Appendix: Project Summaries

Theme	Project	subsidiary themes
Minority ethnic groups	Teaching First Country Language and Culture (ELCO: Enseignement des Langues et Cultures d'Origine) FR250	L R
	Sponsoring in Languedoc-Roussillon – PAIO Frontignan-La Peyrade FR251	S E
	Initiation programme for pupils who are newly-arrived in France [French Case Study 1]	L S
Socio-economic	Go-between systems or classes FR160	
	Priority Education Zones (ZEP) and Priority Education Networks (REP) [French Case Study 2]	
	Reading with parents FR252	L
	Why not me in class which prepares students for the Grandes Écoles entrance exams? FR253	
	Unique Urban Class FR254	
Religious Minorities	Personal support by AFEV FR158	L
	Education for orientation FR159	
	Religious facts teaching FR255	
Linguistic Minorities	Islams teaching in Creteil FR256	
	Let us compare our languages FR257	
Disabilities	Bilingual schools in a French Region [French Case Study 3]	
	EVLANG FR258	S
	Integrating pupils with special needs in preschool FR259	
Indigenous Minorities	RASED (Network to help children with special needs) FR260	
	Handiscol Project: Inclusion for pupils with special needs [French Case Study 4]	
	The PPRE (Individual School Success Programme) FR261	
Gender	CASNAV (Centre for Newcomers in France and Travellers) FR262	L
	The Father in the Family and at school FR263	S
	Females and Males at the Rectorat: an integrated approach of equality FR264	
	La mixité au fil des pages FR265	L
Key: E ethnic minorities; C social class; R religious minorities; linguistic minorities; D disability; I indigenous minorities; G gender		L

Appendix 2: Project overview

Project	target age range					target theme(s)						
	pre-school	primary	secondary	higher	working life	minority ethnic	Socio-economic	religious minority	linguistic minorities	disability	indigenous minorities	gender
Teaching First Country Language and Culture (ELCO: Enseignement des Langues et Cultures d'Origine) FR250		✓	✓			✓✓		✓	✓			
Sponsoring in Languedoc-Roussillon – PAIO Frontignan-La Peyrade FR251			✓		✓	✓✓	✓				✓	
Initiation programme for pupils who are newly-arrived in France [French Case Study ①]		✓	✓			✓✓	✓		✓			
Go-between systems or classes FR160			✓			✓	✓✓		✓			
Priority Education Zones (ZEP) and Priority Education Networks (REP) [French Case Study ②]	✓	✓	✓				✓✓					
Reading with parents FR252	✓	✓					✓✓		✓			
Why not me in class which prepares students for the Grandes Écoles entrance exams? FR253			✓	✓			✓✓					
Unique Urban Class FR254		✓					✓✓					
Personal support by AFEV FR158		✓	✓	✓				✓✓	✓			
Education for orientation FR159			✓					✓✓				
Religious facts teaching FR255			✓					✓✓				
Islams teaching in Creteil FR256		✓	✓						✓✓			
Let us compare our languages FR257		✓	✓						✓✓			
Bilingual schools in a French Region [French Case Study ③]		✓	✓						✓✓			

[EVLANG](#) FR258

✓

✓✓

[Integrating pupils with special needs in preschool](#) FR259

✓

✓✓

[RASED \(Network to help children with special needs\)](#) FR260

✓

✓✓

[Handiscol Project: Inclusion for pupils with special needs](#) [French Case Study ④]

✓

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✓

✓✓

[The PPRE \(Individual School Success Programme\)](#) FR261

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✓

✓✓

[CASNAV \(Centre for Newcomers in France and Travellers\)](#) FR262

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[The Father in the Family and at school](#) FR263

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[Females and Males at the Rectorat: an integrated approach of equality](#) FR264

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[La mixité au fil des pages](#) FR265

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✓✓Indicates main theme addressed,
✓Indicates additional themes also addressed