The modernization of the educational system in France: the New Public Management between the affirmation of the State and the decentralized government

A modernização do sistema educacional na França: a Nova Gestão Pública entre a afirmação do Estado e o governo descentralizado
La modernización del sistema educativo en Francia: la Nueva Gestión Pública entre la afirmación del Estado y el gobierno descentralizado

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Resumo: O texto examina o processo de modernização do Sistema Educacional na França, buscando compreender a afirmação do Estado e o governo descentralizado no contexto de discussão da Nova Gestão Pública. Examinam-se os legados, narrativas e políticas de modernização, bem como os paradoxos da nova administração pública francesa na educação. Questiona-se se a Nova Gestão Pública foi, de fato, implementada no sistema educacional francês. Afirma-se que, na educação, apenas a responsabilidade administrativa e financeira adentrou nas instituições sem ter acarretado muitas consequências no trabalho dos professores. Os principais professores e fiscais estão desenvolvendo avaliações e auditorias, e assinando contratos, mas a estrutura burocrática predomina. Entende-se, todavia, que vem sendo buscada uma terceira via entre o Estado e o mercado, especialmente no tocante à descentralização, com ênfase nas responsabilidades locais mais compartilhadas e na possível mudança do estatuto dos funcionários públicos.

Palavras-chave: modernização; sistema educacional francês; descentralização.

Abstract: This text examines the process of modernization of the Educational System in France. It aims to understand the affirmation of the State and the decentralized government in the context of the discussion of the New Public Management. It examines the legacies, narratives, and policies of modernization, as well as the paradoxes of the new French public administration in education. It is questioned if the New Public Management was, in fact, implemented in the French educational system. It is stated that, in education, only administrative and financial responsibility entered the institutions without making many consequences on the work of teachers. The main teachers and supervisors are signing contracts and developing evaluations and audits, but the bureaucratic structure still prevails. It is understood, however, that a third way, between the State and the market, is being sought, especially regarding decentralization, with the emphasis on the most shared local responsibilities and the possible changes in the status of civil servants.

Keyword: New Public Management; educational system in France; decentralized government.

Resumen: El texto examina el proceso de modernización del Sistema Educativo en Francia, buscando comprender la afirmación del Estado y el gobierno descentralizado en el contexto de discusión de la Nueva Gestión Pública. Se examinan los legados, narrativas y políticas de modernización, así como las paradojas de la nueva administración pública francesa en la educación. Se cuestiona si la Nueva Gestión Pública fue, de hecho, implementada en el sistema educativo francés. Se afirma que, en la educación, solo la responsabilidad administrativa y financiera adentró en las instituciones sin haber llevado a muchas consecuencias en el trabajo de los profesores. Los principales profesores y fiscales están desarrollando evaluaciones y auditorías, y firmando contratos, pero la estructura burocrática predomina. Se entiende, todavía, que está siendo buscada una tercera vía entre el Estado y el mercado, especialmente en lo que se refiere a la descentralización, con énfasis en las responsabilidades locales más compartidas y en el posible cambio del estatuto de los funcionarios públicos.

Palabras clave: modernización; sistema educativo francés; descentralización.

INTRODUCTION

The French education administration is proud of its traditions dating back to the Enlightenment and stabilized by the Napoleonic Empire. A lot of educational plans were published during the second part of the 18th century affirming the following principle: education is the affair of the State; it does not concern families, communities and even less so religious congregations. This led to a great mistrust at the local level which was reinforced by State planning in the 1960s. The latter defined a school catchment area for the registration of pupils according to the location of their home. The same Statist concern inspired the definition of a curriculum focusing on academic disciplines and access to universalism. This French republican tradition is held by key professional bodies such as the *Inspection Générale* or embodied in the *Agrégation* (a special selection-based exam to become high-ranking teacher in French secondary education). It has also penetrated the culture of the teaching profession and the trade-unions' countervailing power. All school modernization projects had to adjust and adapt to this framework: it is the case for French comprehensive schools but also for the implementation of New Public Management.

The education system is also largely public. A private system, Catholic in its great majority, enrolls about 17% of schoolchildren. Since the separation of the Church and the State (1905), this private education was no longer subsidised. However, at the beginning of the 5th Republic political regime, the Debré Act established a compromise (1959): a private and contracted education is subsidised but it has to respect State regulations by teaching the same curriculum, by being inspected and in giving the same training for teachers.

From the mid-70s to the 1980s, French comprehensive school system (*college unique*) was implemented by both right-wing and left-wing governments. This policy was a promise of democratization for many educators and parents but it did not fulfil their expectations and hopes (Derouet 1992). It led to a crisis of trust in the school system while some intellectuals from both the Left and the Right denounced the “false democratization” in secondary education which led, for some of them, to the “defeat of reflection”. It was also challenged by claims for the recognition of ethnic and religious differences affirmed during the last years of the 20th century (Honneth 2000, Fraser 2013). The mistrust of the French republican tradition towards communities and multiculturalism remains an obstacle in intellectually grasping the issue. In a period in which the European Union is putting stock on the social inclusion of minorities, some parts of French society are tempted by a move back to more traditional definitions of the Republic and secularism. These legacies will be described in the first part of this chapter.

The pessimistic climate regarding the failure of the comprehensive school system facilitated the introduction of some recommendations related to accountability from international organizations (*Éducation et Sociétés*-29 2012). However, the Left and the Right mainly remain hostile to market ideas in education. They also have doubts about management and managerialism. Traditionally, the Left is attached to the civil service and mistrusts entrepreneurial and managerial discourses. However, there is another Left which is promoting some new ideas about governance, decentralization, local democracy and less State intervention. But it has not lead to French policy-makers converting to liberalism and free market policies: some of them are only reacting against the bureaucratic State and claims for more efficiency and quality. Overall, the French education system has included some principles of New Public Management in its bureaucratic tradition (Bezès 2009).

All these issues refer to different values and intertwined national and international political agendas. It is therefore difficult to characterize legacies and changes from the last fifty years. However, it is possible to provide the following analysis regarding the introduction of New Public Management into the French administration: a period of relative openness from the beginning of 1980s. It was marked by the general law on decentralization, voted in 1981, and by a new definition of justice imported from British examples (Derouet et Derouet-Besson 2008). This movement is at the root of the Education Priority Areas and school autonomy policies. The first Lisbon conference (2000) amplified the movement by instigating France to take into account the key European recommendations. The first measure linked to this new direction was the Institutional Act related to

Finance Laws (Loi Organique relative aux Lois de Finances (LOLF), unanimously voted by Parliament in 2001, and which proposed a new organization of public services based on accountability. A second proposed direction is a basic skills framework which replaced the structuration of curriculum in disciplines (2005 Act). This conception is far from the French tradition and its real impact among practitioners can be questioned, but now basis skills are now part of the professional and political culture. Comparatively, the past few years have given the impression of a closure of national identity. The traditional conception of the Republic is threatened and the governing socialist party has returned to its fundamental principles: public service, centralization, secularism (Lawn & Normand 2014).

In France, there is no regulation by the market, no business, and no high-stake accountability system. Data are provided by the ministry of education to compare student outcomes but they are used to measure inequality of opportunities and not the performance of teachers and students. The idea of performance is mediated through a bureaucratic apparatus linked to the reform of the State beyond education. The words of “Management” and “managers” (Clarke & Newman 1997) do not fit the representation of executives who consider mainly they are civil servants respecting and applying regulations from the State. The LOLF proposes a general restructuring of public services but it has more impacted on accountancy procedures than on actors and schools. LOLF indicators are guiding the action of principals and inspectors but they have no influence on the conditions of teaching and learning which leave a great professional autonomy for teachers. A soft accountability is however emerging through the changing missions of the bodies of inspection who develop more audit and self-evaluation procedures but it remains on an experimental and non-statutory basis. The French education system is entered in a post-bureaucratic regime and has implemented its first standards in curriculum, literacy and numeracy. But the idea that schools could make difference is limited to issues about the school climate considered as a mean to fight against violence, drop-outs and social exclusion. There are no proposals about linking curriculum, assessment and performance. The French public management is a mix of modernization and conservative values inherited from the legacy of the Republic school system: neutrality of the State, equality of opportunity, common citizenship. It maintains its tradition of centralized standardization and it is blind to the recognition of differences and local particularities. It gives a powerful influence to professional bodies and trade unions at the summit of the State while New Public Management reform remains a top-down and loosely process. Even the reform of decentralization and the development of national assessments began in the 1980-90s has been

slown down during the last decade. The NPM in France is characterized by a set of paradoxes which are explained throughout this chapter. It is a singular case in the European landscape of NPM reforms and it must be considered as so. It is also necessary to explain some legacies and narratives which characterize this particular situation.

I. LEGACIES, NARRATIVES AND POLICIES OF MODERNIZATION

The last decades saw an intensive legislative activity. The 1975 School Modernization Act created the comprehensive school system (*collège unique*). The notion of a “school development plan” was enshrined by the 1989 Act which remains the backbone of the new education system’s regulation. This act is an umbrella law which fixes the key principles but gives certain autonomy at the local level. However this type of compromise, inspired by progressive education and “*placing the pupil at the centre of the education system*”, has not really been understood and has even been refused by the great majority of the educative community for whom the transmission of knowledge, teaching and not learning, has to be the main concern of the school system. In the end, society at large was not only disappointed by the poor performances of the comprehensive schools in the reducing inequalities, it was also worried about the effect of extensive schooling: the school system had not brought about the social advancement that was expected. But there has also been disillusionment regarding were the achievement of pupils. The first publications of international surveys were not reassuring for the pessimistic. The republican link between school and society was broken.

Beyond these uncertainties of French society, the Lisbon Conference (2000) introduced some elements which were implemented into the objectives of the 2005 Act. The Right introduced a basic skills framework inspired by the European key competencies framework and defined by the European Commission for Lifelong Learning. When the Left came to power in 2012, it promulgated an Act for the Re-foundation of the School System. This title expresses the feeling of a loss of direction in French society regarding its education and the will to return to the neo-Kantian tradition of the Republican school’s founders in the beginning of the 1880s. The secularist passion, which had faded with the decline of the Catholic Church, has regained power in the face of Islamic fundamentalism (*Éducation et Sociétés*-33 2014).

This legislative activity was supported by the creation of policy tools in charge of its implementation (Normand & Derouet 2016).

THE DECENTRALISATION AND THE AUTONOMY OF SCHOOLS

The attempt to decentralize followed a reflection after the 1968 movement about the possibility of schools becoming a school management unit while the centralized school system, with its million civil servants, was often compared to the Red Army. During the beginning of 1970s, a significant number of measures were experimented with but the 1975 Act ended this shift and France returned to the tradition of State planning. France put into place the comprehensive school system later than other OECD countries. The notion of school autonomy, which had been conceptualized from a pedagogical perspective, then took a managerial meaning. This new idea of a school development plan was introduced in 1982 as an experiment during the reform of junior schools. In 1984, a decree in the general Decentralization Act gave every secondary school the status of Public Local School with the possibility for the Board to define its school development plan. The Left added a social objective: adapting teaching methods to pupils' needs in order to prevent school inequalities. However, a certain managerial vision remains and it was inspired by the ideas of the sociologist Michel Crozier. The title from one of his books summarizes his thoughts: "Modern State, Earnest State"(1986).

While the notion of a school development plan was extended through the entire education system, the 1989 Act became the pillar of the new regulations. It proposed to establish a series of individual and moral contracts between the pupil, the school and his/her family without renouncing the concept of the school catchment area. However, the law introduced some possibilities of limited and framed school choice for families which did not accept the school-based project. It was recognition of the rights of families without moving towards a market-based system. Another limitation of this autonomy was the "untouchable" national curriculum. Autonomy was therefore quickly limited to a local and narrow management with no flexible means to achieve national objectives.

The 2005 Act attempted to revive the principle of school autonomy via a cautious liberal conception. The main measure was the creation of a "pedagogical board": the trade unions refused to allow issues on teaching to be discussed at the administrative board level as a lot of board members have no competency in this field. But the pedagogical board, which only includes teachers, could manage the national curriculum and local teaching conditions. However, its implementation has been long and difficult and has resulted in disappointing effects. The 2005 Act also took on board the recommendations of international organisations regarding the diversification of the school curriculum as a means to promote effectiveness

and equity. Article 34 of the Act scheduled some possibilities for innovation by allowing schools to have more freedom outside of national regulations. This measure could help some schools create a specific identity but their choice and school development plans, with the notable exception of a few of them, were not really new or creative. According to the same logic, in 2007, the Minister announced more flexibility in the school catchment area policy and its abolition was scheduled in 2010. After a lot of heated debate, certain changes were made to this announcement. Local authorities, which are mostly against school choice, did not implement these instructions and it has continued to limit the possibilities of those families wishing to work outside of its scope. The Left, back in power, overturned the policy and has reinforced the catchment area policy.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ASSESSMENT

The period is characterized by the implementation of an assessment system. It is the result of a long history. During the 1970s, the former system of administrative statistics evolved towards new missions and objectives developing an assessment system. In 1986, this administrative service became a ministerial directorate: the Directorate of Assessment and Forward Planning (*Direction de l'Évaluation, de la Prospective et de la Performance* (DEPP)). Its successive heads have shared the same thoughts about in-depth large-scale surveys and the culture of the State's statistics. The DEPP had important responsibilities. It reassures those who fear that school autonomy would lead to a loss of control in the steering of the education system; the law enabled the assessment system to prevent "some possible drifts". In response to society's concerns about the quality of learning, the DEPP also had the responsibility of implementing regular assessments of pupils' skills at different key-stages of the education system. All these missions were embedded in a certain conception of the education policy: the aim was to design tools for the State via indicators built from a national perspective which would take into account the diversity of local practices (Derouet & Normand 2010).

On behalf of its forecasting mission, the DEPP tendered several calls for educational research. The first one, in the late 1980s, regarded the return on investment in education and subtly introduced the principles of French accountability. The return on investment was not only measured through performance but through the reduction of inequalities of opportunity. The second mission concerned the educational investment of families. This call was in the slipstream of the emergence of a movement of school consumers and new choices for private schools. The latter highlighted the reality and importance

of school violence. All the research findings from the selected projects were presented in DEPP reports disseminated and summarized by the press and media. After this prosperous period, the DEPP's missions were revised and reduced at the end of the 1990s: it had gained too much influence in comparison to other directorates and even the Minister himself or herself, and had to reintegrate into the rank and file. The debate was shifting: was it normal that assessment was led by a Ministry which designed and implemented education policies? Diverse reflections were inspired by Scandinavian examples where evaluative institutions are placed under the watch of Parliament. French policymakers are not entirely familiar with this concept. Even the word "agency" is considered by them to be too liberal and they prefer "high councils" which maintain a strong dependency on the State. A National Council for the Assessment of the School System (Conseil National d'Évaluation du Système Scolaire (CNESCO) was created in 2014. An academic was appointed President of the Council by the Minister, but all the resources are provided by the Ministry's departments. Moreover, this new council has not abolished the previous ones: the DEPP remains active and the Inspectorate is still in charge of assessing teachers and schools.

This situation can be considered as emblematic. The principles of New Public Management have been affirmed and this is not purely rhetorical. It has given place to an important legislative and regulative activity: France has progressively adopted European recommendations. But according to a strange mix, these principles have been included in the French administrative mindset which has reformulates the key issues. This is why some political scientists name this evolution "path dependency" or "hybridization of policies" in a national context. This process limits or even neutralizes the impact of international recommendations from the OECD and the European Commission. From this perspective, it is possible to illustrate the paradoxes of this modernization and to examine how New Public Management has been implemented in different areas, with some examples of policy borrowing from other countries and international organizations (Charlier, Croché & Leclercq 2012).

II. BEYOND LEGACIES AND REFORMISM: THE PARADOXES OF FRENCH NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

If planning, through the action of the Planning Committee, was considered for long time as a lever to reconcile the objectives of equality of opportunity with economic development, the economic crisis and the failure of comprehensive schools forced the Educative State into a change of policy. At the beginning of the 80s, as described in the first part of this chapter, guidance

remained a major concern for policymakers but assessment appeared as a new tool of governance for the education system. This explains the development of the first national assessments and the creation of the Directorate of Assessment and Forward Planning at the Ministry of National Education.

After the devolution acts, the French New Public Management (NPM) has corresponded to a education modernization project but, contrary to other countries, it has strongly resisted the market and privatization (Pollitt, 1990, Pollitt & Bouckaert 2004). As described in the first part of this chapter, the republican legacy is an initial explanation: the Republican school system was always eager to push back private interests while education was being progressively unified as a public service. So NPM reform is a compromise between tradition and modernization, and one which raises numerous paradoxes while, in the past decade, French education policy has become increasingly permeable to the effects of globalization and Europeanization (Hood 1991; Hood & Peters, 2004).

ASSESSMENT DEALING WITH A BUREAUCRATIC LOGIC

The creation of the Directorate of Assessment and Forward Planning or DEPP (Direction de l'Évaluation et de la Prospective) is a good example of this kind of French compromise. While it was inspired by the School Effectiveness Unit created at the UK Department of Education, it was first conceived as a planning instrument to forecast student enrolments after the socialist Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement had announced the target of “80% of a same generation to achieve the baccalaureate in 2000”. But this was also the result of an international expertise which France was involved, along with the USA and the OECD, in designing international indicators education. If the assessment logic has progressively penetrated the French education system, it was not to assess its quality and effectiveness, at least at the beginning. National assessments, as indicators for schools, were tools designed to measure the inequality of student outcomes and were presented as a mean to reduce these inequalities and to democratize access to education. The objectives of the Ministry was not to promote school choice and the market but to fight against the raw rankings published by the press which impeded a fair assessment of the social characteristics and merit of each school. Today, tests are still formative and not summative: they serve teachers in improving their teaching practices but they are not used for selecting students.

It was only during the 1990s that assessment began to be thought of as a tool for measuring the education system's effectiveness and quality. In the meantime a new paradigm was emerging. Claude Thélot, who played an important role as the Head of the DEPP, was the driver of this transformation (Thélot 1993).

Assessment espoused the principles of New Public Management (Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness) while a High Council for the Assessment of Education (Haut Conseil de l'Évaluation de l'École) was created. It quickly became a think tank for experts and policymakers. This High Council published reports which claimed to align the French assessment system with the international surveys led by the OECD, particularly the PISA survey (Henry et alii, 2001). The High Council has also promoted the idea of a basic skills framework after a widespread national enquiry entitled "the Great Debate on Schools" based on data and questions prepared by the DEPP with the support of a consultancy firm. France was later joined by the European Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks to participate in building the indicators of the Open Method of Coordination. The PISA survey has progressively become a benchmark for policymakers, and Finland an example of a successful reform in education.

In France, education is a public service and a State administration (Derouet, 2000). It is therefore directly subjected to reforms enacted by the State. As we have seen, assessment has become a major component in the action of the State via the promulgation of the Institutional Act related to Finance Laws in 2001 (Loi d'Organisation des Lois de Finance or LOLF). This Act institutionalized new regulations for public expenditure through national programs and objectives which have to be assessed. Therefore, each administration and department of the State has to be accountable. But accountability in education remains very administrative and financial and, even if it includes pupil exams' results in its indicators, it does not put any pressure on schools regarding performance contrary to England (Mahony & Hextall, 2000; Gleeson & Husbands, 2001). Indeed, no system of information or digital assessment tool has been developed to make teachers more accountable. The LOLF remained very bureaucratic and has mainly served to justify the decision-making process for the reduction of budgets and cost-cutting processes with raw instruments even from a managerial point of view. In education, management does not share the same values as managers: they more often use the word "monitoring" to avoid a managerial vocabulary they often qualify as "neoliberal". A lot of them do not make clear distinctions between "control" and "evaluation" even if audit practices in schools are currently being developed by the inspection bodies (Power 1997).

A LIMITED DECENTRALIZATION IN TERMS OF TRANSFER OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Decentralization is limited in its extent. Certainly, the first acts of decentralization delegated important powers to local authorities in building schools, renovation and equipment. The latter used these new responsibilities to receive significant investment and some prestigious operations for electoral purposes. The aim was to prove that local authorities can do a better job in a context of reduced investment from the State. But, in education, decentralization was stopped in the beginning of the 1980s. It was only in 1995 that a new act transferred the responsibilities of the youth vocational training from State to Regional Authorities. However, this decentralization was partial: the State continues to manage vocational schools and apprenticeships even if the regions are in charge of regulating the provision of vocational training via five-year plans.

Education remains narrowly statist and centralized. The State is in charge of defining the curriculum and the volume of teaching hours, the selection, recruitment and careers of teachers and other staff, initial and further training, controlling and inspecting schools, the guidance and professional inclusion of schoolchildren, the diplomas, certifications and recognition of qualifications. If devolution was implemented into the education system, by giving more autonomy to chancellors (*recteurs*), they remain very dependent on the decisions taken by the Ministry of Education. In the regions, relations between the State and local authorities can be tense due to conflicts regarding the sharing of jurisdiction or ideological opposition. Indeed, the primary and secondary education sectors are loosely coupled from a cultural and institutional perspective, and this does not facilitate cooperation and shared governance. Objective-based contracts define relations between the State and Local Authorities, but also between Local Education Authorities (Rectorats) and schools. Some networks of schools are emerging in particular to overcome the big divide between the primary and the secondary education sectors and to develop cooperation around the implementation of the basic skills framework (see below).

A source of heated debate is the transfer of civil servants to local authorities. It has been carried out for technical and maintenance staff in schools. Some similar attempts were made for the school guidance councillors. But this failed due to large-scale protests by the professional body of School Guidance Councillors and Psychologists (Conseils d'Orientation Psychologues) which was ideologically opposed to a concept of counselling defended by the local authorities via a strong cooperation with regional businesses and services involved in the assessment of skills or professional integration. Counselling also has powerful

influence within the Ministry of Education and acts as a kind of internal lobbyist. Experts and policymakers are currently thinking of the creation of a regional public counselling service but nothing concrete has been yet proposed by the ministry.

THE RETENTION OF A CULTURAL TRADITION DESPITE A BASIC SKILLS POLICY

The Basic Skills and Knowledge Framework (*Socle Commun de Connaissances et de Compétences*) is the masterpiece of the 2005 School Act voted under the ministry of François Fillon. It gave rise to a whole of set of narratives (we could even say storytelling) which described it as the legacy of successive education plans from the foundation of the Republican School System. But, this framework is a translation, as we have seen, with some minor changes, of the European key competencies framework designed in 2004 by the European Commission while France has been involved for several years in the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy. It only resumed, after more than two decades, the basic skills travelling policy implemented in the USA and in the UK in the beginning of the 1980s (Ozga & Jones 2006). However, the French Basic Skills Framework is completely disconnected from issues of assessment and learning. It has led a curriculum war in France through ideological and strongly mediatized battles (Shor 1986). In terms of curriculum, modernizers are opposed to traditionalists. The former want to adapt the teaching of school disciplines to student needs and claim a stronger link between contents to be transmit by teachers and skills to be acquired by pupils. The latter wish to maintain a high level of contents requirement and criticize an instrumental conception of curriculum which distorts the culture transmitted to pupils. That is why the current socialist government has added “common culture” to the “basic skills and knowledge” framework to satisfy the claims of the main teachers’ trade union. However, this divide goes beyond the traditional opposition between the Left and the Right.

From this perspective, the action of the State is torn between several contradictory requirements. It wants the basic skills framework to be a tool of pedagogical diversification to support the individualized counselling and achievement of pupils. But at the same time, it remains attached to an objective of equal teaching conditions for all pupils, and it defends a standardized conception of the curriculum. In addition to this paradox between standardization and diversification, there is a strong tension between assessment and curriculum (*Revue Française de Pédagogie* 2011).

Each teacher is considered autonomous in his/her classroom and on behalf of his/her “pedagogical freedom” is recognized and reaffirmed in the Code of Education. At the same time, as civil servants, they have to apply official instructions enacted by the Ministry for the implementation of the curriculum (Normand 2012). However, they have a discretionary power to assess students generally through marking. The lack of link between curriculum and assessments stops teachers from taking into account the issue of student skills while they do not feel concerned by student learning but only by teaching content. It explains why the High Council of Curriculum (Conseil Supérieur des Programmes has had to adapt the curriculum to the Basic Skills Framework, and recently proposed to implement an assessment without marks, to graduate students in accordance with their levels of learning difficulties, as has already been done in other European countries. But, up to now, the High Council’s recommendations have not had much impact on policymaking.

SCHOOL CHOICE WITHOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARKET

The ideology of the market served the policy of deregulation of catchment areas. The Right, under the Sarkozy government, sought to raise the issue of school choice while the Left was strongly opposed defending a social mix in schools. However, contrary to England, this deregulation was linked to a certain number of requirements which limited its extent (Ball 2008). Firstly, there was the issue of limited places in the best schools. Secondly, the selection and enrolment of pupils had to respect strict criteria (siblings, scholarship, special needs, etc...) which restricted the number of cases examined via bureaucratic regulations which restricted the voice of parents and their mobilisation. Head teachers, along with some local managers, were also reluctant to implement this policy. However, as has been observed elsewhere, the result was an increase in social segregation with the challenge of schools losing their best students, and this policy did not compensate the dominance of middle-class and upper families in the school choice strategies. It did not succeed either in developing a market for schools and strengthening competition between schools, as it is the case in the UK (Tomlinson 2005, Walford 2006). This policy was abandoned by the Left when it came to power in 2012.

Simultaneously, the very strong attachment to the equality of opportunities has led to the conception and implementation of some systems mixing school choice with principles of meritocratic selection against deprived pupils. That is why some higher education institutions, following the example of Sciences-Po

Paris, have developed mentoring procedures in schools with difficulties, while preparatory classes to higher education institutions have opened their doors to deserving pupils on behalf of positive discrimination. As some sociological research findings demonstrate, this action has allowed higher education institutions to display a policy of openness to silence criticism of their excessive elitism while maintaining a strong selection in their entrance examinations. The other system invented by the Right was the Internats d'Excellence boarding schools copying the US Charter Schools. These schools for deprived students propose better support in teaching and learning while they isolate pupils from their family and social context to offer better studying conditions. However, management appears extremely heterogeneous from one school to another depending on the involvement of local authorities, the mobilisation of teaching teams, the recruitment procedures, the degree of autonomy of the pedagogical structure, etc. These schools have contributed to claims of imaginary meritocracy whilst serve as propaganda tools in the media to promote a positive discrimination with limited effects in the end.

THE FAILURES OF THE CONSERVATIVE REFORMISM OF THE LEFT

Since the socialists came to power in 2012, this policy of diversification and school choice was stopped as they claimed the will to reduce inequality of opportunities and to strengthen the school-mix. School autonomy, which the Right wanted to promote by giving more responsibility to Head Teachers was also stopped while a legitimistic conception has given power back to the General Inspection Body. Vincent Peillon, the Minister of National Education, brought together all the high-level managers of districts in Paris and told them that “management” and “governance” did not belong in his vocabulary. Instead, a rhetoric on a new foundation of the school system was disseminated while the principles of the Republican School System were reaffirmed particularly through the implementation of the teaching of “secular morality” in schools. In fact, the minister has a background[‡] in philosophy and he has remained very attached to Republican values and principles and has been inspired by the founders of the Republican School System (Kahn 2015). Sticking to its republican values, this left-wing government is promoting the Basic Skills Framework as a mean of democratisation and reduction of inequalities of opportunities.

The Commission for the New Foundation of the School System, created by the Minister to implement a new Act, despite its numerous working groups and its media coverage, has not lead to a substantial reform. The idea to focus the

efforts of the education system on the primary education sector has only taken on board some recommendations of international organizations. The development of a national plan for digital technologies corresponds to similar aims without profoundly engaging the Ministry while the equipment is mainly depended on local authorities. Furthermore, the reaction of local authorities explains the failure of the reform of school timetables while it was presented as a key program of the Act. Succumbing to the lobbying of physicians close to the Academy of Sciences, the Minister decided to implement a national plan for the restructuring of timetables in primary schools after it was accepted by the trade-unions. Once the reform had been announced, it did not take long for the trade unions to disavow the Minister while teachers, local authorities and parents expressed their dissatisfaction to a badly-prepared, poorly-negotiated and under-funded reform. It was the same for the reform of graduate schools in education (ESPE : Écoles supérieures du Professorat de l'Éducation) and of the initial training of teachers. It was very quickly embedded in a bureaucratic maelstrom and a resurgence of conflicts of interest. Meanwhile, the Minister attempted to put the reform of the teaching profession on the political agenda, he did not have the time to implement it and his followers did not give him enough backing. They preferred to focus their action on restructuring the national curriculum according to the basic skills framework and to try to promote the school mix by transforming school provision, particularly by diminishing some elitist options like German, Latin or some bilingual courses which has led to a lot of protests from disciplinary-based interest groups and trade unions.

CONCLUSION

A lack of restructuring of the teaching profession, a limited autonomy for schools, school choice on the margins, a school market with restricted consequences, a managerial ideology with significant opposition, an unsuccessful decentralization: in these conditions, it is difficult to say that New Public Management has been implemented in the French education system. It contrasts strongly with the health sector where performance management, quality procedures, flexibility and mobility, contracts and agencies have created a new configuration of public service in hospitals. In education, only administrative and financial accountability has penetrated institutions in the long-term without having had much consequence on the work of teachers. Head Teachers and inspectors are developing assessment and audits, entering into contracts, but the bureaucratic structure predominates. However, current reflections among experts and policymakers, from both Left and Right, lead us to think that they are

searching for a kind of Third Way between the State and the market (Normand 2016). A third step in decentralization, following the creation of new regional entities, leading to a restructuring of how local responsibilities are shared could be the main objective of the next reform in education. Another issue is related to the reform of the status of civil servants which could have consequences on the National Education public service. However, the confrontation between the Left and the Right regarding this project remains very decisive, and the trade unions are ready to fiercely defend their rights.

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