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# The Democratization of Education in France:

## Controversy over a Topical Issue

Marie DURU-BELLAT\*, Annick KIEFFER\*\*

*The last 100 years have seen an unbroken rise in the proportions attending school (between ages 14 and 25) in France—the median age for leaving the educational system is now over 20 years, compared with below 11 years in the mid-nineteenth century. Does this mean that the period has witnessed an uninterrupted “democratization of schooling”? Marie DURU-BELLAT and Annick KIEFFER focus here on two aspects of the changing pattern of educational attainment. First, their analysis considers three successive stages of selection—access to the first-year of collège, which is the start of the French secondary cycle, then access to the first year of lycée<sup>(1)</sup>, and lastly obtaining the baccalauréat. They show that while the numbers entering the secondary cycle have expanded greatly, the proportions of these pupils going on to higher levels have improved much less. Second, the authors stress the distinction between access to the different levels, which has increased for most social groups, and the pattern of inequalities between the groups, which show little change. The authors thus conclude for a “translation of inequalities”, by which they mean a shift to higher levels of the inequalities previously observed at the lower levels.*

The democratization of education could be considered a question on which in France there was nothing left to be said. Recent contributions to the debate are numerous and have come from historians (Prost, 1986) and economists (Euriat and Thélot, 1995; Goux and Maurin, 1997), as well as from specialists of educational science (Langouët, 1994; Duru-Bellat and Mingat, 1992; Merle, 1996). Yet it is hard not to be bewildered by the diversity of the methodologies employed and—arguably its corollary—the diversity of the conclusions reached. For particular periods and particular

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Translated by Godfrey I. Rogers.

<sup>(1)</sup> The “collège” in France corresponds to the first four years of secondary school, with the “lycée” covering the last three years (comparable to junior high school and high school in the US).

levels of education, Prost and Langouët (but also Euriat and Thélot) speak of democratization or “demographization”, whereas Goux and Maurin conclude on balance for a “uniform democratization”; Duru-Bellat and Mingat speak of a “democratization through openness”, while Merle (1996) contrasts models based on the concepts of lagged and differential development for different parts of the system. This is a point we return to later. From the foreign literature on the subject it is abundantly clear that results concerning trends in educational inequalities are conditioned by the methodologies employed, so it seemed important to reexamine this question<sup>(2)</sup> and explain the significance and shortcomings of the various indicators used, with an analysis drawing on the theoretical and practical contributions of foreign sociologists and incorporating the most up-to-date data available.

### **I. Understanding inequality—technical and conceptual differences between indicators**

Making precise comparisons, whether between time periods or between countries, implies that choices have been made about: 1) effective parameters to describe school careers, 2) and to characterize the social origins of individuals; 3) appropriate indicators to measure the changes taking place. In this article we focus on the question of indicators, though there are also problems associated with the first two points. These can be mentioned briefly here. Regarding definitions of types of school careers, the main difficulty with historical comparisons<sup>(3)</sup> is change over time in the relative value of qualifications and schooling. When analysing the social selectivity of school careers, any given educational level becomes meaningless once it is reached by an entire generation and social selection shifts to a higher level. In these conditions, as Merllié (1985) has pointed out, allowance must be made for the “changes in relative scarcities so as to avoid the traps of nominalism”. If a single classification is used, the selective role of lower-level qualifications for older generations may well be under-estimated, given the subsequent expansion of the school system. Many researchers have instead looked for *équivalents fonctionnels* (functional equivalents) so as to determine which qualifications can be treated as comparable from one period to another with respect to the structural changes that have taken place. For example, after consideration of the empirical evidence, a researcher examining a hundred-year period concludes that the *certificat d'études primaires* (CEP: primary-school leaving certificate) can be treated as an intermediate level qualification for the individuals born at the start of the period and as an elementary level

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<sup>(2)</sup> See M. Duru-Bellat and A. Kieffer (1999).

<sup>(3)</sup> Comparing countries means using the same classifications which are necessarily questionable (see Duru-Bellat, Kieffer and Fournier-Mearelli, 1997).

qualification for the more recent generations (Thélot, 1982), the “functional equivalent” being around the level of BEPC or CAP (vocational training qualifications). This approach in fact amounts to an analysis of the *relative* ranks at which individuals exit the education system, and comparison concerns these ranks (rather than the intrinsic content of the qualifications—we will return to this point later).

The problems associated with changes to categories are also encountered when attempting to characterize the social origins of individuals. The fact of coming from a social group, such as farmers, when it represents 25% of the population is not entirely comparable with coming from this group when it represents only 5% of the population. Here too, the relative importance of the group will usually be a key parameter in the analysis of inequalities<sup>(4)</sup>.

Behind these difficulties and apparently highly technical choices lies a particular conception of equality of opportunity and the democratization of education, which it is important to explain, since it has a particularly strong influence on all aspects of the construction of indicators.

To analyse the changing pattern of social inequalities in education is in effect to view students as competing for unequal qualifications (which in turn give access to unequal social positions), in a contest for which they are relatively better or worse equipped depending on their social origins. The context in which this contest occurs obviously varies over time, and a crucial characteristic in this respect is the structure of educational flows (as Boudon pointed out in 1973). If all members of a generation attain a particular level, the question of social inequality no longer arises, whereas if access to a level remains rare in the population as a whole the inequalities will be all the more conspicuous. Crude indicators of inequality such as proportional differences in access are thus unsuited for comparing two situations (historical or between countries) characterized by different distributions in the access to a particular education “resource”. This is because when two percentages are compared it is not possible to distinguish how much of the observed difference is caused, first, by the distribution of individuals between the educational levels (more accurately, the importance of the numbers at the level of schooling observed), second, by the strength of the association between social origins and access to this level. But as authors such as Mare (1981) have pointed out, these two phenomena are partly independent—an expansion of the educational system could bring about a “mechanical” reduction in inequalities, yet without modifying social inequalities at any of the levels being studied, except of course in the extreme case that access reached 100%. This could be an argument for adopting “indicators that are insensitive to the marginals”—

<sup>(4)</sup> One solution for overcoming these two problems, albeit open to question on sociological grounds, is to infer the categorization uniquely from the rank orderings (Duru-Bellat and Mingat, 1992). The qualifications are ranked according to the percentage of an age group obtaining them, just as the social groups are ranked according to the percentage they represent in the social hierarchy, which is treated as one-dimensional.

i.e. independent of access rates to a particular educational level, such as odds ratios. The latter express the chances for the members of a group A of reaching a particular educational level rather than not reaching it, relative to the chances for members of a group B of also reaching this level rather than not reaching it<sup>(5)</sup>.

This question has generated considerable discussion in France (cf. in particular Combessie, 1984; Grémy, 1984; Merllié, 1985; Vallet, 1988), but few empirical studies have sought to compare the various indicators. Those that have been done (Euriat and Thélot, 1995) have produced conflicting results depending on the indicators, some pointing to a reduction in inequality, others giving the opposite answer. This was the case for the proportion obtaining *the baccalauréat* (final high-school leaving diploma) among the cohorts starting *collège* (lower secondary school) in 1972 and in 1980. From this the researchers drew the rather cautious conclusion that the change was not clear enough to decide one way or the other. This may indeed be the case, but the fact is that these indicators are based on, and at the same time produce, "different definitions of equality" (Combessie, 1984).

Two fundamental conceptions of the actual notion of inequality of opportunity underpin indicators like differences in proportional access rates on the one hand, and odds ratios on the other. If education is considered desirable *per se*, the fact of it becoming accessible to more students represents an advance; equality — in the sense of an equality of result — will be greater, the more alike the school careers of young people from all social backgrounds, and thus the smaller the differences between their access rates to the various levels of the school system. In this perspective, the changes in the marginals are crucial, and priority is given to examining the differences between rates of access or rates of variation between periods. This, it seems, was for long the dominant perspective in France (Prost, Langouët), though more because of a strongly intuitive pre-conception than for any clear methodological reasons.

If, on the other hand, access to education is treated as a factor of social distinction — a particular level is judged not for its intrinsic value but for the higher or lower position it confers *vis-à-vis* the other competitors — attention will focus instead on the outcomes at each level of selection in the educational system. For this purpose the marginal distribution of schooling is irrelevant, and the inequalities that characterize the transitions between educational levels (however large or small the average transition rates) are usually identified using indicators of relative differences (of the odds ratio type). From this point of view, attention focuses on

<sup>(5)</sup> This indicator is widely used in the European literature. In France it has been used by Euriat and Thélot (1995) in particular. This coefficient varies from 0 to plus infinity and has a value of 1 in the case of statistical independence; it describes the relations independently of the marginals and takes into account that the proportions being worked with are necessarily situated between 0 and 100%; the results obtained are consistent with those from log linear analysis.

the inequalities inherent to the working of the system, particularly as observed in the pupil selection process.

This second approach is heavily represented in the sociology of social mobility (and very dominant in the foreign literature on the subject: cf. Shavit and Blossfield, 1993, for example). It is a micro-sociological approach, in which attention focuses on how individuals manage to obtain positions along distributions (of educational levels, of occupations) which themselves are not scrutinized. However, the extent of social inequality is related to the number of places available, and thus with the more "macro" factors that define the framework in which this contest takes place. A case can thus be made for undertaking a "mixed" analysis, to include changes in rates of access, while in a separate stage situating the inequalities observed at each level of the system in the broader general context where access to education is more or less unequally distributed (Hellevik, 1997).

## II. Democratization and expansion of schooling

Our source for studying the changing inequalities of opportunity in the French school system is the Education, qualification and career surveys (Formation, Qualification Professionnelle: FQP) carried out by INSEE in 1970, 1977, 1985 and 1993, plus specific analyses from the most recent panel study by the Education Ministry on the schooling of pupils who entered secondary school in 1989. With these data we can work on the cohorts born between 1919 and 1973 (and even up to 1978, thanks to the 1989 panel). The indicators used to characterize schooling were chosen to reflect the structural changes that have affected the educational system over the last fifty years, with the aim of identifying any possible "functional equivalents". For each birth cohort, and according to the social origin of the individuals, the indicators were as follows — access or not to *collège*, followed by a full schooling at lower secondary school level (up to final year of *collège*), entry to the long "second cycle" or *lycée*<sup>(6)</sup> (and to shorter "cycles" of technical and vocational training), obtaining the *baccalauréat* in any option and obtaining the "classical" general *baccalauréat*. These indicators were calculated both for the total population and just for the population that began *collège*, so as to measure the selection that operates in secondary education. In this way it is possible to identify the pupils who started at *collège* but who either did not complete their schooling there or did not go on to *lycée*, and who had thus been streamed at the end of the second or final years of *collège* towards a "short cycle" of technical education.

Social origins were described by the socio-occupational category and educational attainments of both parents. We also constructed a variable to

<sup>(6)</sup> For the definition of *lycée*, see footnote 1.

characterize the parental couple to assess whether, going beyond the models that evaluate separately the influence of each parent's occupation and educational attainment, the advantages and handicaps have a cumulative effect at the family level.

Access to the various educational levels has expanded greatly since the beginning of the twentieth century as a result of a series of institutional reforms. Of these, the most important were, first, the Berthouin reform of 1959 making entrance to *collège* universal (though it did not come into effect until 1967), second, the Haby reform of 1975 establishing the principle of the unified lower secondary school (*collège unique*) and planned for the abolition of selection at the end of the second year at *collège* (only gradually put into practice, in the second half of the 1980s). Figure 1 shows the strong expansion of schooling in the cohorts studied.

Access to all levels of the education system has increased significantly, but this increase is smaller the higher the level considered. The access rates calculated on the sub-population of pupils who have started *collège* (a sub-population that is less and less selected) give a very different picture. Figure 2 shows that among pupils who have begun secondary school there is overall stability in rates of access to the higher levels. Indeed, a fall in access is observed for the cohorts born between 1954 and 1970, which is barely compensated for by a recovery in the youngest cohorts.

In the period when *collège* intake expanded the most, the education system gives the appearance of having attempted to control the resulting flow by conserving and even accentuating the selection operated in secondary education. For it was at this time that streaming was developed at the end of the second year of *collège*, towards the new pre-vocational courses, and at the end of the fourth year, with the new vocational qualifications (BEP - *brevets d'études professionnelles*). A profound change has affected school careers. Among the cohorts born in the 1920s, just 30% of pupils entered *collège*, three-quarters of these received a complete schooling up to the final year of *collège*, just under half went into the first year of *lycée*, and roughly a quarter obtained the *baccalauréat* (which at this time existed only in the general academic option). In the more recent cohorts, practically all pupils enter *collège* and three-quarters reach the final year; the proportion is (again) half for entrance to first year of *lycée*, and a third obtain the *baccalauréat* (a quarter obtain a general *baccalauréat*). The similarity is striking — only access to *collège* has become universal in this period, while at all other levels the situation is by and large one of stability. The expansion of the system is thus essentially “driven” by the broadening of access to secondary education, even if a fall in selection at the higher levels is just beginning for the younger cohorts. We shall return to this point.

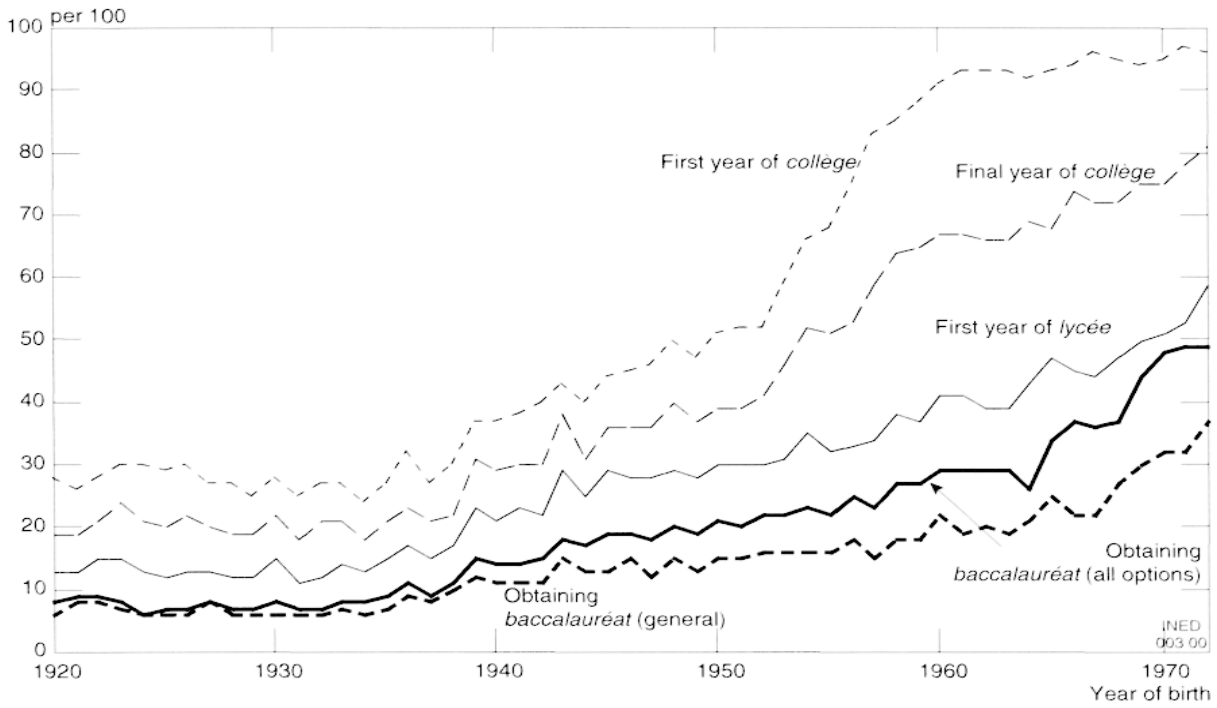


Figure 1.— Access rates to different levels of schooling by year of birth for whole population (%)

Source: FQP surveys 1970, 1977, 1985 and 1993.

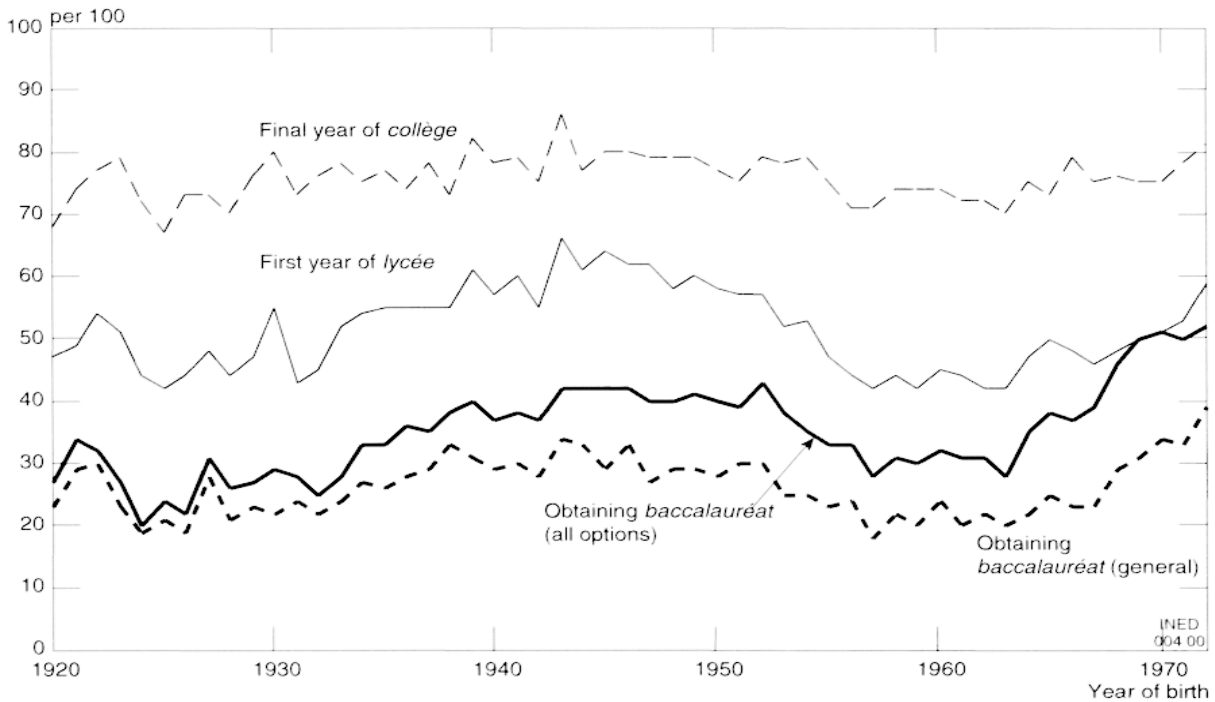


Figure 2.— Access rates to different levels of schooling by year of birth for population of *collège* entrants (%)

Source: FQP surveys 1970, 1977, 1985 and 1993.



***Very limited democratization at all levels,  
except entrance to secondary school***

This is the general context in which changing social inequalities in schooling are observed by examining the comparative chances for children of *cadres*<sup>(7)</sup> and manual workers at three key levels—entrance to *collège*, entrance to *lycée*, and obtaining the *baccalauréat*—measured by differences in access rates and odds ratios. Multivariate models are then estimated which include (in logistic regressions explaining the probabilities of continuing to a given level) a number of parameters pertaining to the social origins of the pupils, and distinguishing between the sexes.

Table 1 shows the access rates for the first years of *collège* and *lycée*, and the proportion obtaining the *baccalauréat* for the whole population and then for the sub-population entering *collège*. The democratization of entrance to *collège* is unambiguous, resulting simply and mechanically from the broadening of access. At the start of the period, the access rates to *collège* for children of *cadres* already exceed 80% (thus leading very quickly to the appearance of “ceiling” effects), while for the children of manual workers they are below 20%; at the end of the period, the proportions are 99% and 93% respectively. In this case the differences in the access rates and the odds ratios follow a convergent downward path. The situation at the other levels is less clear-cut. For *lycée* entrance, and measured in relation to the cohorts as a whole, the difference between access rates for the children of *cadres* and children of manual workers first rise and then fall back to their original level, while the odds ratios register a decline. A similar pattern is observed for the proportion obtaining the *baccalauréat*, with the differences in rates remaining higher than at the start of the period and with a fall in the odds ratios. These divergent trends in the indicators are a consequence of the very low access rates for children of working-class origins at the beginning of the period, when it was still exceptional for them to receive any secondary education at all. In both cases, however, some democratization of access can be said to have occurred.

Conflicting conclusions are obtained when examination of changing inequalities is limited to pupils who had entered *collège*. For *lycée* entrance, the differences in access rates and in odds ratios have on the whole increased; for obtaining the *baccalauréat*, the differences between the proportions of *bacheliers*<sup>(8)</sup> increased while the odds ratios were stable. Thus it is not possible to speak of a democratization of schooling when analysis concerns only pupils who entered *collège*—the children of manual workers have certainly benefited from the broadening of access, but it is they

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<sup>(7)</sup> The French term is used for convenience: this specifically French group, with no equivalent term in English, covers senior civil servants, senior managerial staff and higher intellectual professions. (On the French classification of occupations and socio-occupational categories, see *Population: An English Selection*, 1, 1989, 120-121.)

<sup>(8)</sup> “*Bachelier*” is the name given to a person who has passed the *baccalauréat*.

TABLE I.— ACCESS RATES TO DIFFERENT SCHOOLING LEVELS. AVERAGE RATES AND RATES FOR CHILDREN OF *CADRES* AND OF MANUAL WORKERS

	Birth cohorts						
	Pre-1929	1929-38	1939-48	1949-53	1954-58	1959-63	1964-73
<b>Entrance to lower secondary school</b>							
Average access rate (%)	26.7	24.1	36.9	46.7	75.4	91.6	96.1
Children of <i>cadres</i> (%)	83.9	83.0	86.5	89.2	96.5	97.3	99.0
Children of manual workers (%)	19.8	16.2	23.7	33.9	67.8	87.5	93.2
Difference between rates for children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers (percentage points)	64.2	66.8	62.8	55.3	28.7	9.8	5.8
Odds ratios of probabilities for children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers	21.1	25.3	20.6	16.1	13.1	5.1	7.2
<b>Access rates for population as a whole</b>							
<b>Entrance to lycée</b>							
Average access rate (%)	12.1	13.1	24.3	28.2	34.5	40.4	49.2
Children of <i>cadres</i> (%)	64.8	69.4	81.6	80.9	81.5	84.7	87.4
Children of manual workers (%)	5.4	5.9	11.4	14.9	19.0	23.2	28.0
Difference between rates for children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers (percentage points)	59.4	63.5	70.2	66.0	62.5	61.5	59.4
Odds ratios of probabilities for children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers	32.4	36.2	34.5	24.2	18.8	18.3	17.8
<b>Obtaining baccalauréat (all options)</b>							
Average rate of obtaining (%)	5.1	5.9	15.7	19.8	23.9	31.4	42.7
Children of <i>cadres</i> (%)	35.1	40.7	67.4	67.9	68.9	71.8	77.3
Children of manual workers (%)	1.2	1.9	6.2	8.8	11.2	17.2	24.3
Difference between rates for children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers (percentage points)	33.9	38.8	61.2	59.1	57.7	54.6	53.0
Odds ratios of probabilities for children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers	44.5	35.4	31.3	21.9	17.6	12.3	10.6
<b>Access of population of collège entrants</b>							
<b>Entrance to lycée</b>							
Average access rate (%)	45.3	54.5	65.8	60.5	45.7	42.7	51.2
Children of <i>cadres</i> (%)	77.2	83.6	90.8	88.2	84.4	84.7	88.2
Children of manual workers (%)	27.0	36.5	47.8	48.1	28.0	25.9	30.1
Difference between rates for children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers (percentage points)	50.2	47.1	43.0	40.1	56.4	58.8	58.1
Odds ratios of probabilities for children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers	9.2	8.9	10.8	8.1	13.9	15.8	17.4
<b>Obtaining baccalauréat (all options)</b>							
Average rate of obtaining (%)	27.7	33.5	42.6	42.5	31.7	33.2	44.4
Children of <i>cadres</i> (%)	41.8	49.0	70.2	69.9	71.4	71.8	78.1
Children of manual workers (%)	6.1	11.4	26.0	31.4	16.5	18.8	26.1
Difference between rates for children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers (percentage points)	35.7	37.6	44.2	38.5	54.9	53.0	52.0
Odds ratios of probabilities for children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers	11.1	7.5	6.7	5.1	12.6	11.0	10.1

*Source:* for each birth cohort we used the INSEE survey that was the closest: for the pre-1939 cohorts, the FQP 1970; cohorts born between 1939 and 1953, FQP 1977; cohorts born between 1954 and 1963, FQP 1985; and cohorts born after 1963, FQP 1993. For the *baccalauréat* level, rates for the 1959-1963 cohorts were calculated from the 1993 FQP survey, so as to have information on complete schooling (though for the pre-*baccalauréat* levels FQP 1985 was used since the survey sample was larger).

who have suffered most from the accompanying increase in selection at the end of the second and final years of *collège*. Conversely, while children from upper-class families have gradually lost their advantage in entry to secondary education, they still spend longer in the school system, and this advantage shows no sign of diminishing.

Beyond this broad outline of results, a more detailed examination is needed of changes over time in the specific effect of social origins on access to the different educational levels. Using data from the FQP surveys, analysis of the qualifications and socio-occupational categories of both parents enables a certain number of questions to be addressed. What is the hierarchy of the various social groups as regards school: has the gap narrowed between the intermediate occupations and the higher social categories, for example? Is parental educational attainment rather than socio-occupational category currently a better predictor of children's school careers? How do the "advantages" contributed by the mother and father interrelate? Let us look at how the logit models constructed for the various cohorts at these three individual levels allow these questions to be answered.

### *Access to lower secondary school*

The models confirm the greater equality in access to *collège* (lower secondary school) (Table 2). Although the model loses much of its explanatory power over the period, significant social inequalities nonetheless remain at the end of the period (when the overall access rate for *collège* is 91.6%), probably because of the highly specific nature of special needs teaching<sup>(9)</sup>, which now forms the second of the alternatives to starting at mainstream secondary school. Regarding the effect of father's socio-occupational category, a narrowing is observed in the differences between the children from "white collar" backgrounds. At the start of the period, when going on to secondary school was uncommon, the differences vis-à-vis the children of manual workers (taken as the reference) increased in a clear stepwise fashion from the children of clerical, sales or service workers to those of *cadres*. At the end of the period, however, the children of manual workers (and of farmers) stood out from all the rest for the probability of going on to secondary school or not (the latter case being the exception). Over the period the children of farmers have closed the gap with the children of manual workers, though they have been unable to take a significant advantage over them, as is observed at other levels.

Maternal socio-occupational category appears not to have a significant effect in the models. Mention must be made here of the difficulty inherent to the heterogeneity of the reference population — economically inactive women — which was chosen as reference because of its large size.

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<sup>(9)</sup> Special needs teaching for young people with mental or physical handicaps and learning difficulties cater for less than 3% of pupils in the secondary system.

TABLE 2. — CHANGE IN THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS AND SEX ON SECONDARY SCHOOL ENTRANCE (BINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL)

	Birth cohorts				
	Pre-1939	1939-48	1949-53	1954-58	1959-63
<b>Father's occupation</b>					
Farmer	- 0.37**	- 0.06	0.43**	0.47**	0.15
Artisan, shopkeeper, entrepreneur	0.71***	1.03***	0.69***	0.57***	0.89**
<i>Cadre</i> , higher intellect. prof.	1.93***	1.86***	1.98***	1.68***	0.73*
Intermediate occupation	1.25***	1.32***	1.23***	0.82***	0.90***
Clerical, sales or service staff	0.72***	0.70***	0.96***	0.50***	0.85**
Manual worker (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Mother's occupation</b>					
Farmer	- 2.05**	- 1.04*	0.08	- 0.42*	0.65
Artisan, shopkeeper, entrepreneur	0.42***	0.19	0.44**	0.41*	0.33
<i>Cadre</i> , higher intellect. prof.	- 0.11	0.23	1.50	0.90	0.30
Intermediate occupation	0.58*	0.45*	0.85*	0.09	0.46
Clerical, sales or service staff	0.07	0.17	0.44***	0.09	0.40*
Manual worker	- 0.07	- 0.08	- 0.17	- 0.07	0.26
Economically inactive (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Father's qualifications</b>					
None or CEP (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
CAP, BEP, BEPC	0.59***	0.54***	0.71***	0.80***	0.24
<i>Baccalauréat</i> or higher	1.54***	1.36***	0.97***	0.74***	0.85*
<b>Mother's qualifications</b>					
None or CEP (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
CAP, BEP, BEPC	0.95***	0.84***	0.77***	0.90***	0.50*
<i>Baccalauréat</i> or higher	1.62***	1.42***	1.75***	1.12***	1.25*
<b>Sex</b>					
Boys (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Girls	0.22**	0.21***	0.13*	0.39***	0.52***
G <sup>2</sup> (df. * 9)	1,300	1,978	1,142	597	177
Number	5,933	7,903	5,611	5,423	4,674
Average rate of access (%)	23.4	36.9	46.7	75.4	91.6
<p><i>Reading the table:</i> G<sup>2</sup> (log-likelihood) is used to estimate the model's explanatory power. The coefficient estimated for the individuals in the active category expresses the influence of this category, all things being equal, relative to the individuals in the reference category.  Difference of probability significant at 5% level (*), 1% (**) or 0.1% (***).  Source: FQP surveys 1977, 1985 and 1993.</p>					

This point is worth expanding upon, since it illustrates the limitations of multivariate modelling. In the pre-1939 cohorts, where economically inactive women<sup>(10)</sup> represent nearly 70% of the population of mothers, we find mothers both with qualifications (55% of women educated to at least *baccalauréat* are economically inactive) and without qualifications, with

<sup>(10)</sup> The mother's activity status and profession are asked for, as is the case for the father's, at the point when the survey member finishes his or her education.

the latter forming the large majority. In the most recent cohorts, because increased female labour market involvement has concerned mainly better-qualified women (among economically inactive women the proportion with at least the *baccalauréat* has fallen to 33%), the population of economically inactive women contains a larger proportion of less well-qualified women. Although this type of model purports to estimate the influence of a particular variable under “all things being equal” conditions, this estimation is unavoidably linked to the historical context in which some variables are in fact strongly correlated. For instance, it is harder for the category “*cadre*” to be significant for mothers than for fathers. This is because for fathers this category partly “absorbs” the effect of the higher level of education with which it is correlated, whereas for women the picture is somewhat confused by the heterogeneity of the economically inactive population.

The specific effect of parental educational attainment on access to secondary school has declined over the period. However, the fact of having a mother educated to at least *baccalauréat* level still has a relatively strong effect. Lastly, girls are found to have increased an advantage that was already present in the earlier cohorts, and which has recently grown appreciably larger (a development related to the preponderance of boys in specialized technical education).

### *Access to lycée*

The access rates to *lycée* for an entire generation have increased and stand at nearly 50% at the end of the period, though the models lose their explanatory power after the 1949-1953 birth cohorts (Table 3A). This does not reflect a decline in the effect of the socio-occupational category of the parents; however, an appreciable decline in the effect of parental educational attainment does seem to occur, the coefficients at the end of the period being well below those for the various occupations. Regarding the specific effect of the father’s socio-professional category, contrary to what was observed for the first year of secondary school, there is no homogenization of the intermediate occupations—the difference between the children of manual workers and others is reduced, but at the same time the hierarchies are stable, with the children of *cadres* retaining a clear advantage over all the rest. Moreover, the children of farmers, who started the period at a disadvantage compared with the children of manual workers, had acquired a significant advantage over them. Again there is an increase in the advantage associated with having a working mother, and over the period girls increase an advantage which was not significant at the start of the century.

It will be remembered that access to *lycée* is conditional both on entering lower secondary school and on successfully negotiating the selection processes<sup>(11)</sup> at the end of the second and fourth (final) years. The models presented above thus incorporate the democratization consequent

TABLE 3A. — CHANGE IN THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS AND SEX ON *LYCÉE* ENTRANCE FOR THE POPULATION AS A WHOLE (BINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL)

	Birth cohorts					
	Pre-1939	1939-48	1949-53	1954-58	1959-63	1964-73
<b>Father's occupation</b>						
Farmer	- 0.15	- 0.29*	0.77***	1.05***	0.18	0.37
Artisan, shopkeeper, entrepreneur	1.10***	1.12***	0.95***	0.98***	0.92***	0.81***
<i>Cadre</i> , higher intellect, prof.	2.20***	2.10***	2.08***	1.80***	1.93***	1.72***
Intermediate occupation	1.36***	1.35***	1.31***	0.99***	1.08***	0.88***
Clerical, sales or service staff	0.94***	0.84***	0.93***	0.82***	0.78***	0.73***
Manual worker (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Mother's occupation</b>						
Farmer	- 1.52	- 2.09*	- 0.08	- 0.39*	0.61**	0.30
Artisan, shopkeeper, entrepreneur	- 0.08	0.06	0.20	0.26	0.53**	0.60**
<i>Cadre</i> , higher intellect, prof.	0.28	- 0.16	0.60	1.04	0.88*	1.30***
Intermediate occupation	0.39	0.51**	0.36	0.60**	0.73***	0.84***
Clerical, sales or service staff	- 0.06	0.09	0.42***	0.05	0.37***	0.24**
Manual worker	- 0.34**	- 0.23	- 0.42*	- 0.07	0.10	- 0.21
Economically inactive (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Father's qualifications</b>						
None or CEP (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
CAP, BEP, BEPC	0.44**	0.38***	0.76***	0.58***	0.32**	0.31**
<i>Baccalauréat</i> or higher	1.67***	1.41***	1.15***	1.03***	1.05***	0.93***
<b>Mother's qualifications</b>						
None or CEP (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
CAP, BEP, BEPC	1.18***	0.80***	0.66***	0.92***	0.82***	0.48***
<i>Baccalauréat</i> or higher	1.88***	1.55***	1.69***	1.47***	1.41***	0.80***
<b>Sex</b>						
Boys (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Girls	- 0.09	0.03	0.26***	0.45***	0.79***	0.53***
G <sup>2</sup> (df, * 9)	1,364	2,205	1,397	1,333	1,219	1,048
Number	5,933	7,903	5,611	5,423	4,674	4,029
Average rate of access (%)	13.1	24.3	28.2	34.5	40.4	49.2
<i>Reading the table:</i> G <sup>2</sup> (log-likelihood) is used to estimate the model's explanatory power. The coefficient estimated for the individuals in the active category expresses the influence of this modality, all things being equal, relative to the individuals in the reference category. Difference of probability significant at 5% level (*), 1% (**), or 0.1% (***). <i>Source:</i> FQP surveys 1977, 1985 and 1993.						

on the broadening of access to the first year of lower secondary school. The models dealing only with the population that has started at *collège*, whose explanatory power increases from the 1954-1958 birth cohorts, show an accentuation of the inequalities associated with the father's socio-occupational category, although these seem to be declining for the

(1) The alternative to continuing in the mainstream options is a vocational or pre-vocational streaming to the CAP (at the end of the second year of *collège*) or to the BEP (at the end of *collège*).

TABLE 3B. – CHANGE IN THE INFLUENCE OF FAMILY CHARACTERISTICS AND SEX ON *LYCÉE* ENTRANCE FOR THE POPULATION IN FIRST YEAR OF *COLLÈGE* (BINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL)

	Birth cohorts					
	Pre-1939	1939-48	1949-53	1954-58	1959-63	1964-73
<b>Father's occupation</b>						
Farmer	- 0.01	0.63***	0.68***	1.00***	0.18	0.40
Artisan, shopkeeper, entrepreneur	0.75***	0.54***	0.71***	0.90***	0.85***	0.74***
<i>Cadre</i> , higher intellect. prof.	1.38***	1.48***	1.52***	1.56***	1.99***	1.71***
Intermediate occupation	0.54***	0.66***	0.80***	0.84***	1.02***	0.83***
Clerical, sales or service staff	0.50**	0.43***	0.47***	0.73***	0.71***	0.69***
Manual worker (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Mother's occupation</b>						
Farmer	1.16	- 1.65*	- 0.16	- 0.25	0.54**	0.26
Artisan, shopkeeper, entrepreneur	- 0.56***	- 0.08	- 0.03	0.18	0.51***	0.59***
<i>Cadre</i> , higher intellect. prof.	1.04	- 0.58	0.16	0.95	0.97*	1.22***
Intermediate occupation	- 0.06	0.47*	0.04	0.53**	0.73***	0.79***
Clerical, sales or service staff	- 0.15	- 0.03	0.25*	0.03	0.33***	0.18*
Manual worker	- 0.78***	- 0.17	- 0.39*	- 0.04	- 0.06	- 0.25
Economically inactive (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Father's qualifications</b>						
None or CEP (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
CAP, BEP, BEPC	0.02	0.03	0.51***	0.41***	0.33***	0.30***
<i>Baccalauréat</i> or higher	1.15***	1.04***	0.94***	0.96***	1.04***	0.90***
<b>Mother's qualifications</b>						
None or CEP (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
CAP, BEP, BEPC	0.89***	0.39***	0.37***	0.78***	0.81**	0.46***
<i>Baccalauréat</i> or higher	1.52***	1.21***	1.24***	1.40***	1.35***	0.80***
<b>Sex</b>						
Boys (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Girls	- 0.43***	- 0.24***	0.28***	0.37***	0.75***	0.52***
G <sup>2</sup> (df. * 9)	308	315	436	808	980	859
Number	1,910	3,787	3,395	4,278	4,295	3,865
Average rate of access (%)	54.5	65.8	60.5	45.7	42.7	51.2
<p><i>Reading the table:</i> G<sup>2</sup> (log-likelihood) is used to estimate the model's explanatory power. The coefficient estimated for the individuals in the active category expresses the influence of this category, all things being equal, relative to the individuals defined by the reference category.            Difference of probability significant at 5% level (*), 1% (**) or 0.1% (***).            Source: FQP surveys 1977, 1985 and 1993.</p>						

most recent cohorts (Table 3B): over this period, children whose fathers are manual workers have been increasingly out-distanced by those from white-collar backgrounds, meaning that among pupils in the first year of *collège*, the relative chances of going on to *lycée* have increased more for the intermediate and upper categories. At best there has been a relative improvement in the position of children of clerical, sales or service staff, compared to children of artisans-shopkeepers-entrepreneurs in particular,

and an improvement in the position of children whose fathers are farmers. The effect of mothers being economically active becomes more systematically significant and is also more distinct; specifically, children with mothers in upper-level and intermediate occupations stand out clearly from all the others. The influence of parental educational attainment is again declining, and although the coefficients are still significant at the end of the period, they are at a lower average level than those for the various socio-occupational categories. Finally, girls who this time began with a disadvantage at the start of the period now have an advantage (having longer school careers, once they are in secondary school), though this advantage is no longer increasing in the last group of cohorts.

As was indicated earlier, the growing advantage of girls and the accentuation of social inequalities result from the introduction of vocational and pre-vocational options to secondary education. Thus while the rates for the transition between the last year of *collège* and the first year of *lycée* over the whole of the period in question (Table 4) did indeed register a fall on average for the 1954 to 1963 cohorts — implying that orientation to technical options, notably the new BEP, was more frequent, since the proportion repeating years hardly changed over the period — this fall was entirely without effect on the children of *cadres* but was particularly marked for those of manual workers. From other sources we know that girls are less frequently directed towards these sorts of options. The selectivity of the orientation at this level is again seen to diminish in the most recent group of cohorts.

TABLE 4. — TRANSITION FROM FINAL-YEAR *COLLÈGE* TO FIRST-YEAR *LYCÉE*, BY SOCIO-OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY OF FATHER (%)

	Birth cohorts					
	Pre-1939	1939-48	1949-53	1954-58	1959-63	1964-73
<b>Total number</b>	67.6	76.7	73.2	61.1	59.1	65.3
of which						
<i>Cadre</i> , higher intellect, prof.	90.5	93.4	91.4	90.2	90.9	90.7
Intermediate occupation	67.5	81.6	77.3	69.7	71.8	73.4
Clerical, sales or service staff	59.3	75.4	63.1	60.9	56.6	64.3
Manual worker	51.4	59.9	63.8	43.9	41.3	46.6
Odds ratio of probabilities for children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers	9.0	9.5	6.0	11.8	14.2	11.2

*Source:* estimation based on FQP surveys 1977, 1985 and 1993.

### *Obtaining the baccalauréat*

Some remarks can be made finally about the models for obtaining the *baccalauréat* (all options) that for reasons of space are not reported here. The findings are in fact very similar to those for *lycée* entrance. Success in the *baccalauréat*, measured at the level of a whole generation, is somewhat less dependent on social origins, as is indicated by the decline in the



explanatory power of the models over the period. A remarkable degree of stability is nonetheless observed in the specific influence of the father's socio-occupational category (except for farmers), while the mother's participation in the labour market has a less clear role. The effect of educational attainment has fallen for both parents, albeit slightly less so in the case of the mother. Girls, who start out in a situation of equality, are again seen to increase their advantage.

If we consider the proportions passing the *baccalauréat* only in the population entering secondary school, social inequalities are observed to increase, from the 1954-1958 cohorts, with a rise in the effect of the father's socio-occupational category. At the end of the period, the children of *cadres* have retained a clear advantage over the children of fathers in intermediate occupations (just slightly behind the children of farmers), who themselves have a clear advantage over the children of fathers in the clerical-sales-service and artisan-shopkeeper-entrepreneur groups. The coefficients for the categories of "mother *cadre*" and "mother in intermediate occupation" become significant at the end of the period. On the other hand, as seen for *lycée* entrance, the specific influence of parental education is declining, and more so for the father's than for the mother's. Once again, finally, girls are seen to increase their advantage.

Comparable models (still for the population entering secondary school) have also been estimated to explain the probability of obtaining a general *baccalauréat* (rather than a technical *baccalauréat*, a distinction that applies only at the end of the period). These models show a slight accentuation of social inequalities in the most recent cohorts, notably for the influence of the educational level of the father and, above all, of the mother, suggesting that successfully "piloting" one's child into the most prestigious streams of the educational system — or at least avoiding the relatively low status streams such as the technical options — required some personal familiarity with the school system, indicated here by the level of parental education.

We also tested the combined effect of the characteristics of both parents, for socio-occupational category and educational level, in a number of models. From this it emerged that regardless of level, a child whose parents are both *cadres* enjoys an extra advantage compared with a child who has only one parent a *cadre* and whose other parent is either in a lower socio-occupational category or is economically inactive (usually the mother). Couples in which only one partner is economically active are closer to homogamous couples than to heterogamous couples, which is doubtless related to the heterogeneity of the category of economically inactive women mentioned earlier. Similarly, homogeneity in the educational attainment of parents strengthens the advantage enjoyed by their children. Each additional qualification of the parents represents an advantage, but there is near-equivalence between the couples where both partners have a CAP or BEPC (vocational qualifications), and those where one partner has

the *baccalauréat* while the other has only the CEP (*certificat d'études primaires* or primary-school leaving certificate). This brings to mind the "family education capital" thesis put forward by Girard in 1970, which states that the actual qualifications possessed by the two parents are less important than the total volume of education represented by these qualifications.

To review briefly the questions asked at the start of this section, we can say that no substantial re-ordering between the social groups is observed, except for the children of farmers, who have improved their relative position. This outcome can reasonably be attributed to the sociological changes that have affected this occupational category, namely a reduction in numbers and a compositional change in favour of the more affluent farmers. We also conclude that the effect of the level of parental education tends to decrease (when it is dissociated from occupation), with the mother's educational level apparently remaining slightly more important than that of the father. Finally, the idea of a cumulative effect to advantages remains entirely relevant.

### ***A translation of inequalities consequent on expanded access to secondary education***

The models reported above reveal the existence of what amounts to a "democratizing wave" initiated by the expansion of access to secondary school, but also the persistence over the same period of strong inequalities in school-career patterns, with signs of a decline in the last group of cohorts. The question thus arises of whether *lycée* entrance has become the "functional equivalent" of *collège* entrance for the earlier cohorts. In this respect it is instructive to compare the models constructed for each of the two levels, for the cohorts of the first half of the century (born between 1939 and 1948) and for the younger cohorts (born between 1954 and 1958). The structure of the coefficients is found to be very similar, except for those measuring the gender effect (girls born between 1954 and 1958 seem to have a greater advantage for *lycée* entrance than their predecessors had for *collège* entrance) and the fact of having a farmer as father (in this case too an advantage has emerged).

This comparison can be given a visual form by plotting on a diagram (adapted from Merllié, 1985) the proportion of entrants by father's socio-occupational category in the two models being considered. If the points lay along a slope of gradient 1 (shown as a broken line on Figure 3), this would indicate a perfect translation of the inequalities from one level to another, between the two groups of cohorts. In fact, the slope of the line is slightly below this value, signifying that access to *lycée* is at present slightly less inegalitarian than access to *collège* was in the past. The main beneficiaries are the children of farmers, while the children of intermediate occupations and manual workers have seen their situation deteriorate.

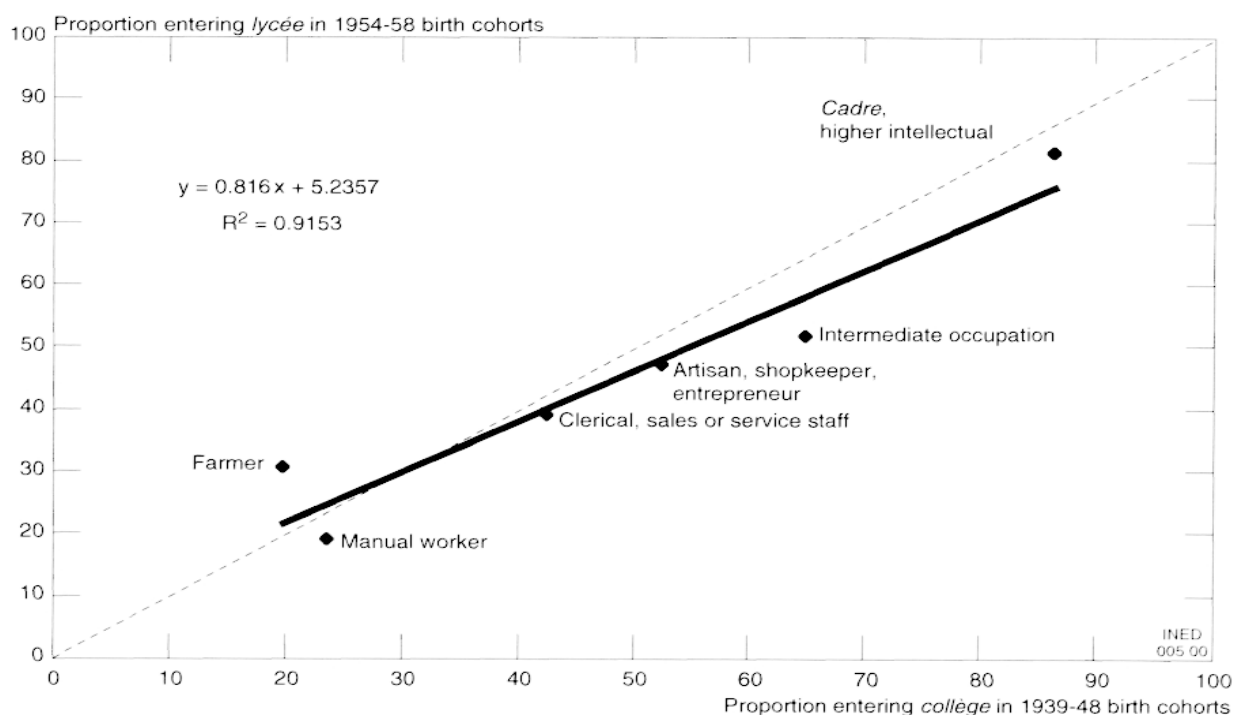


Figure 3.— Relationship between proportions entering *collège* in 1939-48 birth cohorts and proportions entering *lycée* in 1954-58 birth cohorts, by socio-occupational category of father (%)

Source: FQP surveys 1977 and 1985.

The question of changing patterns of inequalities and identification of “functional equivalents” can be further explored by examining the situation observed for even more recent cohorts, using the panel of pupils entering *collège* in 1989 (which involves mainly the 1978 birth cohort). Admittedly there is not full comparability between this and the previous data. On the other hand they can easily be set in perspective with the data from the panel surveys carried out in 1972-1973 and in 1980 (corresponding broadly to the 1961-1962 and 1969 cohorts). From this it emerges clearly that while the period between the first two panels is characterized by a high degree of stability in social inequalities, the same is not true for the period between the last two panels. This period, during which the abolition of selection at the end of the second year of *collège*—originally legislated for in 1975—was finally implemented, is marked by a generalization of schooling up to the last year of *collège*, which has an equalizing effect on *lycée* entrance (Table 5).

Although social inequalities at this level are still large at the end of the period, the difference in the proportions of *lycée* entrants between children of *cadres* and children of manual workers, and in the relevant odds ratios, has fallen between the two most recent panels. It is also known that the relative and recent democratization of *lycée* entrance is lar-

gely a consequence of the democratization of a full lower secondary school education, since the inequalities characteristic of the transition from the last year of *collège* to the first year of *lycée* have reduced to a much smaller extent. Concerning children of manual workers, a comparison of the panels of pupils who entered *collège* in 1980 and in 1989 shows that although the proportion entering the final year increased by 31 percentage points (from 58% to 89%), the gain was less than proportional for *lycée* entrance in both general and technical options, since the increase was of only 12 percentage points (from 30% to 42%). Just as the generalization of secondary school entry facilitated democratization at higher levels (particularly in the final year of *collège*, without any democratization of selection within the *collège*), so the democratization of *lycée* entrance appears to be largely a consequence of the broadening of access lower down the school system. Some democratization of access to the *baccalauréat* can be expected therefore, though we cannot say that it will affect all the options. Research by Merle (1996) points to a coexistence of two phenomena for both the *baccalauréat* and higher education: a catching up by the lower social categories—thanks to the expanded access—but at the same time a persistence of qualitative disparities in the type of options they take.

TABLE 5.— PROPORTION ENTERING *LYCÉE*, BY SOCIO-OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY OF FATHER

	First-year <i>collège</i> entrants in		
	1972	1980	1989
<b>Proportion entering lycée (%)</b>			
Farmer	34	41	58
Artisan, shopkeeper, entrepreneur	51	50	59
<i>Cadre</i> , higher intellect. prof.	85	87	90
Intermediate occupation	57	61	72
Clerical, sales or service staff	41	43	55
Manual worker	25	30	42
All	41	46	59
Number	37,437	18,419	20,996
Difference (in percentage points) between children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers	60.0	57.0	48.0
Ratio between proportions of children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers	3.4	2.8	2.1
Odds ratios for children of <i>cadres</i> and of manual workers	16.9	16.2	12.4
<i>Source:</i> French Education Ministry, panels of first-year <i>collège</i> entrants in 1972, 1980 and 1989.			

***Inequalities in the highest level of education completed,  
and changing aspects of social origin***

In this final section we examine the linear regression models that were estimated to explain the highest level of education completed. There are of course difficulties involved in analysing changing inequalities with this kind of model, which takes into account the effects of the expansion of the educational system. This means that “the relative stability of educational hierarchies may in fact correspond to an increase [in inequalities] at some points in the school career and to their reduction at other points” (Goux and Maurin, 1995)—but their use was unavoidable to make the international comparisons that we wished to conduct elsewhere.

To estimate these models we constructed a scale of seven levels of qualifications (no qualification, CEP, CAP, BEPC, BEP, *baccalauréat*, higher education qualification). The models (Table 6) show a fall in the percentage of variance explained by the variables for social origin and gender, indicating a falling trend in the inequalities associated with these characteristics. An examination of the coefficients shows the declining influence of parental qualifications, while the effect of the mother being economically active is increasing for the younger cohorts. In all these models the gender-related inequalities turn to the advantage of girls and increase over the period.

Although the decline in the specific influence of the parents’ educational level is thus confirmed, this is nonetheless a counter-intuitive result—*a priori* the diversification of the educational system could be expected to make parental educational capital even more valuable to children. This point thus requires more detailed examination. Does it indicate a real change in the mechanisms for familial transmission of educational capital, and if so how is this to be interpreted? Or is it simply an artefact caused either by the changes in interactions between socio-occupational category and educational attainment, or by the way in which these are categorized in the models?

Here we will merely give some examples of analyses conducted to elucidate and possibly substantiate this result (the reader wishing for fuller information should consult Duru-Bellat and Kieffer, 1999). First, we verified that the correlation between socio-occupational category and father’s level of education (0.45) was relatively stable during this period—consequently it is not the case that the effect of socio-occupational category increasingly “absorbs” the effect of educational attainment. As regards the influence of the classification categories, it may be asked whether the fact that in most of the models the classification for educational level is less detailed (with 3 categories) than that for socio-occupational category (6 categories) could account for its smaller influence. To find out, a further set of models was estimated using a different categorization (in which these two variables were represented by 3 categories). The re-

TABLE 6.— EXPLANATION OF HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION REACHED, BY BIRTH COHORT (LINEAR REGRESSION MODEL)

	Birth cohorts					
	Pre-1939	1939-48	1949-53	1954-58	1959-63	1964-73
<b>Father's occupation</b>						
Farmer	-0.38***	-0.15*	0.18*	0.95***	0.53***	0.59***
Artisan, shopkeeper, entrepreneur	0.54***	0.79***	0.67***	0.88***	0.81***	0.68***
<i>Cadre</i> , higher intellect, prof.	1.47***	1.61***	1.51***	1.44***	1.57***	1.30***
Intermediate occupation	1.08***	1.13***	1.06***	1.00***	1.15***	0.96***
Clerical, sales or service staff	0.38**	0.74***	0.58***	0.90***	0.84***	0.54***
Manual worker (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Mother's occupation</b>						
Farmer	-0.55**	-0.60**	-1.51***	-0.18	0.53**	0.42*
Artisan, shopkeeper, entrepreneur	0.13	0.11	0.28***	0.28*	0.42**	0.35*
<i>Cadre</i> , higher intellect, prof.	0.42	0.11	1.05***	0.64*	0.24	0.62***
Intermediate occupation	0.29*	0.37**	0.40*	0.60***	0.40**	0.42***
Clerical, sales or service staff	0.04	0.09	0.20*	0.09	0.27***	0.20**
Manual worker	-0.22**	-0.07	-0.03	-0.01	0.11	0.00
Economically inactive (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Father's qualifications</b>						
None or CEP (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
CAP, BEP, BEPC	0.64***	0.65***	0.28***	0.66***	0.33***	0.47***
<i>Baccalauréat</i> or higher	1.58***	1.19***	1.08***	1.07***	0.71***	0.53***
<b>Mother's qualifications</b>						
None or CEP (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
CAP, BEP, BEPC	1.15***	0.97***	0.94***	0.89***	0.71***	0.52***
<i>Baccalauréat</i> or higher	1.51***	1.34***	0.91***	1.02***	1.07***	0.76***
<b>Sex</b>						
Boys (reference)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Girls	-0.09*	-0.10*	0.14*	0.25***	0.48***	0.39***
R <sup>2</sup>	32.3%	29.3%	26.5%	25.4%	25.2%	20.3%

*Reading the table:* R<sup>2</sup> is the percentage of variance explained by the model, and thus provides an estimate of its explanatory power.  
The coefficient estimated for the individuals in the active category expresses the influence of this category, all things being equal, relative to the individuals in the reference category.  
Difference of probability significant at 5% level (\*), 1% (\*\*), or 0.1% (\*\*\*).  
Source: FQP surveys 1977, 1985 and 1993.

sults are unchanged. Hence if children's school careers appear to be more influenced by their father's socio-occupational category than by his educational level this is not because the former is measured in greater detail.

We also tried to establish whether the decreasing influence over time of the level of maternal education was related to the rise in female labour market participation, it being possible that the growing effect of maternal employment could partly "absorb" the effect of education. The regressions estimated on the sub-population of children of economically active mo-

thers show that this hypothesis can be rejected and that the decline in the effect of the mother's education is indeed real. These regressions also show (at least for this sub-population) that the mother's level of education has a greater effect than the father's. It might be thought that this result is an artefact of the small proportion of women who are economically active, such that the inclusion of occupation has a smaller negative effect on the coefficient for educational level of mothers than of fathers; but this would appear not to be the case.

Of the variables used to describe the child's social background, the predominant influence today is thus the father's socio-occupational category, followed by the educational levels of, first, the mother, then the father. The question remains open, however, because this order of importance could well be modified in the future as a result of further extension of female labour market participation. Although these effects are measured under "all things being equal" conditions, the respective role of the effects of educational level and socio-occupational category are nonetheless hard to assess, first because calculation of the coefficients is necessarily affected by the form of categorization used, second and more importantly, because attempting to dissociate these various characteristics is inevitably somewhat futile. Evaluating the effect of the father's occupation in isolation from the effect of his level of education or the characteristics of his partner is an abstract exercise that can easily become a sociological absurdity given the correlations that exist between these variables. Nevertheless, this approach remains of interest from an analytical point of view, and may be appropriate for some groups in which the interdependencies between these variables are weaker.

### III. Conclusions

Despite the many unresolved problems of measurement, a number of conclusions do emerge. Whether analysis is of average levels of schooling or of proportions entering the different levels of the school system, a degree of democratization has occurred, albeit on a more limited scale and at a more recent date the higher the educational level being considered. At the same time, however, the social inequalities that mark the transitions between levels, and therefore the course of school careers, are generally stable, although a reduction does seem to have begun among the most recent cohorts. If access to education is taken as the key criterion, the first type of result is essentially what matters, whereas for those who focus primarily on the outcomes for competing groups, the second type of result precludes speaking of genuine democratization. Instead, it has been described as a purely quantitative democratization or "demographization" (Prost, 1986) or as a "uniform democratization" (Goux and Maurin, 1997).

These terms have pejorative connotations, suggesting that some regard the more egalitarian distribution of education as negligible.

In this second perspective, it is education's instrumental dimension which, explicitly or implicitly, is being valued. If inequalities are indeed shifting to higher levels of the school system, and if the inequalities between groups at each of these selection points are maintained or renewed (signifying an absence of qualitative democratization), the result must be a race with no foreseeable end—if what matters is the position in a hierarchy of qualifications, and correlated with this a hierarchy of job opportunities, inequalities will persist as long as some groups are better than others at identifying which educational investments bring the highest returns. Several pieces of recent research have established that the value of an education, particularly in monetary terms, depends primarily on its position in the hierarchy of qualifications (Jarousse and Mingat, 1986), and also that expansion of access to any given level of the system is accompanied by the selective orientation of certain social groups towards certain options (what Merle refers to as “differential development”). Whatever the case, democratization thus appears as a utopia (Duru-Bellat and Merle, 1996). But the reference here is a democratization that is external—to the institutionalized education system—and is not free of conceptual ambiguities. Should “ability” alone, free of all social bias, determine school careers (despite what is known of the influence on them of non-meritocratic factors, such as the wishes of families); or should education alone determine access to social positions (and not, over and above the qualifications, the social origins of those who hold them); or should education be less decisive for the economic and social integration of individuals?

What is certain is that this headlong race has social and economic costs which, due to the inexorable trend to a devaluation of qualifications (cf. in particular Chauvel, 1998), must sooner or later be subject to analytical scrutiny. Moreover, ultimately we are probably dealing with a zero-sum situation. Forsé (1997), for instance, shows that the democratization of education seems largely offset by a devaluation of the qualifications awarded, and thus does not lead to greater social mobility<sup>(12)</sup>.

International comparisons (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993) usually produce similar conclusions—inequalities are not so much reduced as displaced, except in those countries (Sweden, Netherlands) where inequalities between social groups (notably economic inequalities) have in any case also been reduced, thereby lessening the social differentiation in the decisions of young people at the various points of selection and streaming. This emerges—albeit with the chicken-and-egg question largely unresolved—from analysis of logistic models that are designed to be as free as possible from the influence of the marginals (i.e. of the level of the

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<sup>(12)</sup> Admittedly, this notion of devaluation itself also needs to be examined critically. Areas of particular importance are the examination of job content and of the links between the expansion of education and changes in the actual structure of jobs (Forgeot, 1997; Müller, 1998).



access rates). Several researchers (notably Hellevik, 1997) have pointed out, however, that this approach tends to under-estimate the fact that expansion of education has largely contributed to a more egalitarian access to this resource, a development which has social consequences. Related to this, no attention is given to overall indicators of inequalities (such as the Gini coefficient), which alone can show the equalizing impact of the expansion, even if the relationship between social background and school careers is stable. Having said this, several recent comparative and single country studies (in particular Jonsson and Mills, 1993, for Great Britain; Erikson and Jonsson, 1996, for Sweden; Shavit and Westerbeek, 1998, for Italy; Brauns, 1998, for France), have sought to go beyond a general historical analysis of the relationship between social origins and school careers to focus instead on the changing relationships of particular social groups to education. This implies a renewed interest for the analysis of crude rates, producing more balanced judgements in terms of democratization (Müller, 1998).

These debates are bound to continue, given that they revolve around differing conceptions of equality (equality in the mechanisms for allocating individuals between educational levels, or equality in the overall distribution of education), but international comparisons can offer instructive insights into the processes associated with democratization. In particular, they show that expanding access to the educational system is not the only possible strategy for greater democracy and that it has unintended side-effects. The scale of social inequalities may be affected by education reforms that modify the framework within which the contest between groups occurs (number of places at particular levels, raising or lowering the age of the first selection, the introduction of *passerelles* or channels between options, the regulations governing transitions to levels). This suggests that these inequalities do not depend primarily on personal characteristics, which is the assumption French sociology of education has traditionally made (with the exception of Boudon as of 1973), but take place in an institutional context whose influence can only be appreciated by international comparisons, given that this context does not usually vary within any one country. This is true both for institutional characteristics of the educational system, such as the links between academic and vocational teaching, and for the framework which organizes relations between schooling and the labour market. Here we see the limitations of those sociological approaches with a “local” perspective—as has been the case in France—which put the emphasis in both theoretical constructions and empirical analysis on the factors that their intra-national variability reveals for a particular country. This is why French sociologists researching inequalities should be involved in international networks: there are potential benefits for methodology but also for theory.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

### The Education, qualification and career (Formation, Qualification Professionnelle) surveys

The FQP surveys are conducted by INSEE. This series of surveys examines labour market conditions, social and occupational mobility, and the role in this of education and training (during and after full-time schooling). The first survey was carried out in 1964, and subsequent ones in 1970, 1977, 1985 and 1993. The present study draws on the four most recent surveys.

With the exception of the 1993 survey, the FQP surveys were carried out on a sample of individuals stratified by nationality, type of activity, socio-occupational category and age group. The sampling rates range from 1/200 to 1/2500. Sampling is in two stages: first, dwellings are drawn from the master sample; then individuals are selected within these first-stage units. In the case of the 1993 survey, the sample was of households, stratified by region and by type of commune; the sample was reduced by half and the sampling rates were specified so that every individual aged 20 to 64 had an equal selection probability (1/1400).

The numbers in the surveys are as follows:

- FQP 1970: 37,843 responses
- FQP 1977: 39,103 responses
- FQP 1985: 39,200 responses
- FQP 1993: 39,200 responses
- FQP 1993: 18,300 responses in 14,255 households replying.

### The field

This encompassed all the individuals whose primary schooling was known, resulting in the exclusion of approximately 16% of foreign nationals. Most of those thus excluded were foreign born (approximately 70%). Not all foreign nationals are excluded by this method, but those who remained knew the French educational system well enough to give a detailed description of their schooling by reference to it when shown the French classifications. This method does present drawbacks, since the sample includes people who have not received all their schooling in France. However, we judged it preferable to the more commonly adopted approach of excluding all foreigners (and naturalized French), thereby overlooking those who have in fact attended French schools, especially since the very purpose of the research is to study social inequalities.

### The cohorts

The cohorts were derived from observation by age (in years) of their schooling at different educational levels. So as to minimize the effect of recall errors and have cohorts as complete as possible at each date, a "pseudo" panel was created using the various FQP surveys. This has the effect, however, of maximizing the bias due to questionnaire and coding scheme changes, particularly between the 1970 and 1977 FQP surveys, and the next two, in which the description of school careers was considerably improved, and the 1993 FQP which saw the addition of a calendar but the removal of some useful variables and a severe reduction in sample size.

The cohorts were selected from the survey closest to the end of the respondents' secondary education (the youngest are aged at least 25 at the time of the survey, and this limit was extended to age 30 whenever higher education was included). However, for the same cohort it was sometimes necessary to use information from different surveys. This was for reasons related, first, to variations in numbers between surveys (which affects the robustness of the results), and second, to the homogeneity over time of the indicators we elaborated. We proceeded as follows:

— for the descriptive tables in which few variables are combined, the chronologically closest surveys were used: FQP 1970 for the pre-1939 birth cohorts, FQP 1977 for the 1939-1948 and 1949-1953 birth cohorts, FQP 1985 for the cohorts born between 1954-1958 and 1959-1963, and, lastly, FQP 1993 for the 1964-1973 birth cohorts. The first birth cohorts are decennial, since they predate the major changes in the educational system, and so too is the most recent cohort because of the numbers involved. In this way cohorts of broadly comparable size are obtained;

— for the models, only the three most recent surveys were used, since the description of the educational system is similar (and actually identical for FQP 1977 and 1985);

— for the part dealing with higher education, decennial birth cohorts were constructed in order to have enough individuals: FQP 1977 was used for the pre-1949 birth cohorts, FQP 1985 for the cohorts born between 1949 and 1958 and FQP 1993 for the cohorts born between 1959 and 1969.

### Construction of the educational levels

We determined the key educational levels (known as *paliers*) for each period in relation to the system's internal and external selectivity. This was done by, first, defining the levels of schooling, then counting the population reaching such and such a level. It is then possible to construct dichotomous variables that compare the populations reaching and not reaching this level, or hierarchical variables, which compare the population reaching a particular selection point and that reaching the selection point immediately before (survival rate).

The first reference level is first-year *collège* entrance (sometimes second-year entrance for the oldest birth cohorts, since it used to be possible to start secondary education at this level immediately after the *classes de fin d'études* or final primary class). The subsequent levels are entry to the last year of *collège* which marks the completion of the first general educational "cycle", entry to *lycée* of whatever kind, entry to a short cycle of technical education, passing the *baccalauréat* in any option and, because it is more selective, passing the general *baccalauréat*, and lastly the qualification obtained in higher education. The FQP surveys contain indicators of school careers that we have combined to construct these levels.

### Continuous variables

The choices were based on the similarities between social groups or between qualifications as observed in the recent period. They do not therefore take account of changes that occurred in the period being studied.

— highest educational level:

A hierarchical classification of qualifications in 7 headings that we treated as a continuous variable by allocating a score of 1 to individuals with no qualification, 2 to those with the CEP, 3 to those with the CAP, 4 for having the BEPC, 5 for the

BEP, 6 for the *baccalauréat*, and 7 for a higher education qualification. This construction is modelled on the French educational system's formal hierarchy of qualifications and on the streaming it operates, rather than on the value of these qualifications in the labour market. This logic endorses the primacy of the mainstream academic curriculum. It is for this reason, for example, that the BEP, which can be obtained after a full education in *collège*, carries a significantly higher score than the CAP obtained in three years after a second year in *collège*.

— educational level of each parent:

A score of 3 is attributed to parents with the *baccalauréat* or more, 2 to parents with a CAP or BEPC, and 1 to parents who have a CEP or less.

— socio-occupational category of parents:

A score of 3 is attributed for *cadres* and intermediate occupations, 2 for artisans-shopkeepers-entrepreneurs, farmers and clerical-sales-service, and 1 for manual workers and the economically inactive. Non-respondents were excluded. For mothers, the economically inactive have been excluded from the regression models that include maternal occupation as a continuous variable.

### Family socio-economic status

FQP 1970 and FQP 1977 are coded using the CSP classification, while the subsequent surveys used the newly introduced PCS classification. We took only the first digit of the two classifications and ranked the occupations (at the second digit level) that have changed category according to the principles of the PCS classification. This procedure is extremely crude, but at the time of processing this data we did not have the FQP 1977 survey file recoded in PCS. A proportion of the discontinuities observed between the 1949-1953 and 1954-1958 birth cohorts is doubtless attributable to the classification changes;

Two types of indicator were used: the first concerns the socio-occupational category of each parent (based on the first digit of PCS); the second is an indicator of the social level of the family and combines the socio-occupational categories of each parent. It takes the following scores:

- 0 if both parents are economically inactive;
- 1 if both parents are *cadres* or in higher intellectual professions;
- 2 if one parent is a *cadre* or in a higher intellectual profession, and the other has an intermediate occupation or is an artisan, shopkeeper or entrepreneur;
- 3 if one parent is a *cadre* or in a higher intellectual profession, and the other a manual worker, clerical, sales or service staff, or a farmer;
- 4 if one parent is a *cadre* or in a higher intellectual profession, and the other is economically inactive;
- 5 if both parents are in intermediate occupations, or are artisans, shopkeepers or entrepreneurs;
- 6 if one parent is in an intermediate occupation, and the other is a manual worker, clerical, sales or service staff, or a farmer;
- 7 if one parent is in an intermediate occupation, and the other is economically inactive;
- 8 if both parents are manual workers, clerical, sales or service staff, or farmers;

— 9 if one parent is a manual worker, clerical, sales or service staff, or a farmer, and the other is economically inactive.

The educational level of the family was described by combining the qualifications of each parent according to a classification with three categories (up to and including CEP; CAP-BEP-BEPC; *baccalauréat* and higher). The indicator takes the score of:

- 1 if both parents have the CEP or less;
- 2 if one parent has a middle-level qualification (CAP, BEP, BEPC), the other has the CEP or less;
- 3 if both parents have a middle-level qualification;
- 4 if one parent has at least the *baccalauréat*, the other the CEP or less;
- 5 if one parent has at least the *baccalauréat*, the other a middle-level qualification;
- 6 if both parents have at least the *baccalauréat*.

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**DURU-BELLAT Marie, KIEFFER Annick.– The Democratization of Education in France: Controversy over a Topical Question**

The question of the democratization of education in France has been studied many times. It remains open, however, since the facts themselves are constantly changing and the methods used to examine the question vary widely, reflecting the different notions of equality of opportunity on which they are based. This article analyses the change in inequalities for the generations born from the start of the century up to the 1960s, using the FQP (training and vocational qualification) surveys and the most recent panel survey of first-year secondary school pupils of the Education Ministry. The results reveal a weakening of the link between social origins and access to the different levels of the education system, though this development is less marked the higher up the school system. Education as a "commodity" has become more widely distributed, but the social inequalities in competition for access to particular levels are stable and are tending to be concentrated at the levels which still confer social prestige or "distinction". Regarding the influence of family background, the effect of the parents' socio-occupational category appears to be increasing in relation to their educational level; in particular, the specific effect of having a mother in employment has become larger. These findings are compared with the most recent European level analyses.

**DURU-BELLAT Marie, KIEFFER Annick.– La démocratisation de l'enseignement en France : polémiques autour d'une question d'actualité**

La question de la démocratisation de l'enseignement en France a fait l'objet de nombreux travaux. Elle reste néanmoins ouverte, car les faits eux-mêmes sont en constante évolution et les méthodes mobilisées pour traiter cette question divergent largement, non sans rapport avec les différentes conceptions de l'égalité des chances qui les sous-tendent. Ce texte propose une analyse de l'évolution des inégalités pour les générations nées depuis le début du siècle jusqu'aux générations nées dans les années soixante-dix ; elle est fondée sur une exploitation des enquêtes FQP et du dernier panel d'élèves entrés en 6<sup>e</sup> du ministère de l'Éducation nationale. Les résultats font apparaître un affaiblissement de la relation entre origine sociale et accès aux différents niveaux du système éducatif, même si celui-ci est d'autant plus discret que l'on prend en compte des niveaux plus élevés de scolarisation : si le bien « éducation » est plus largement diffusé, les inégalités sociales dans la compétition pour l'accès à tel ou tel niveau s'avèrent stables, et tendent à se déplacer vers les niveaux qui restent dotés d'une valeur « distinctive ». Dans l'influence du milieu familial, l'effet propre de la catégorie socio-professionnelle des parents semble se renforcer par rapport à celui de leur niveau d'instruction ; en particulier, l'effet spécifique de l'exercice d'une profession par la mère s'est affirmé. Un rapprochement est esquissé entre ces résultats et les analyses les plus récentes conduites au niveau européen.

**DURU-BELLAT Marie, KIEFFER Annick.– La democratización de la enseñanza en Francia: polémicas sobre un tema de actualidad**

La democratización de la enseñanza en Francia ha sido objeto de numerosos estudios. Pero el tema sigue abierto, porque los hechos están en evolución constante y los métodos utilizados para tratar la cuestión divergen significativamente, al igual que las distintas concepciones de igualdad de oportunidades en los que se basan. Este artículo presenta un análisis de la evolución de las desigualdades en las generaciones nacidas entre principios de siglo y los años setenta. El análisis se basa en una explotación de las encuestas FQP (Formación, Cualificación Profesional) y de la última lista de alumnos de 6<sup>o</sup> del Ministerio francés de Educación Nacional. Los resultados muestran que la relación entre origen social y acceso a los diferentes niveles educativos pierde fuerza, aunque menos a niveles más elevados de escolarización: aunque el bien « educación » tiene más amplio alcance, las desigualdades sociales en la competición por llegar a un cierto nivel permanecen estables, y tienden a desplazarse hacia niveles que mantienen un valor « distintivo ». En cuanto a la influencia del medio familiar, el efecto específico de la categoría socio-profesional de los padres, y especialmente el efecto de la profesión de la madre, toma más importancia que el nivel de instrucción. El artículo establece una comparación entre estos resultados y los análisis más recientes realizados a nivel europeo.