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THE PISA EFFECT ON EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN FINLAND AND IN FRANCE

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INTRODUCTION

Contextualised questioning:

Since the beginning of the 2000s, in the wake of De Ketele's works (2011), new words have spread in the educational world: globalisation, output, efficacy, efficiency, standards, performances, competences, competitiveness, rankings, accountability, culture of evaluation, management... which resulted in the multiplication of educational external evaluations in most countries. International surveys about the efficacy of educational systems, such as PISA, have become a reference to legitimate all kinds of decisions and reforms. The ensuing interpretation by the media and public opinion favours country rankings and positive or negative statements concerning the educational policy of those countries. The purpose of those surveys as well as the methods they use seem of a minor importance as ranking has become a priority.

As a result of globalisation, the paradigm of comparative education is currently shifting. Van Daele (1993, 16) defines comparative education as « *studying phenomena and educational facts interacting with the social, political, economic and cultural context, comparing their similarities and differences in two or several regions, countries, continents or at the world level, so as to better understand the specificity of each phenomenon within its own system and to produce some valid or desired generalisations, the final aim being to improve education* ». This is a horizontal method as it similarly compares two or three countries.

The current paradigm is rather vertically based as it studies the impact of what is global at a local level. This is the reason why the concept coined by Robertson (1995) named « glocalisation », as it unites global and local, has become key to understand the relation between those movements, showing how they refer to the same phenomenon, and especially with the emergence of international surveys and their subsequent educational standards. Dimitrova (2005) also mentions the dialectics of globalisation as a permanent « game » between local and global. Therefore, the pressures on the educational systems do meet but without necessarily leading to converging solutions, despite the adequation between the political patterns and the ensuing reforms.

Research questions arising from this text:

- What are the impacts of the PISA results on the national educational reforms in Finland (rated as a high ranking country in Europe) and in France (rated below the average in the OECD)?
- What is the influence of global over local?
- Are reactions towards PISA connected to the ranking process or to the Top Down or Bottom Up processes? The Top Down process is descending, it is a centred-based approach of educational policies, illustrated by France. The Bottom Up process is ascending, it is a decentralised approach of educational policies, illustrated by Finland.

Specificity of the comparison between the two countries: Finland and France

The choice of the countries can also be explained as follows: thanks to her belonging to an Erasmus + programme, Brigitte Landrier-Gu ret has developed a professional network in Finland. Elisabeth Regnault, Lucie Copeaux and Romain-Bernard Mignot are French specialists.

The use of the « Globalisation » concept (Robertson, 1995), uniting global and local levels influencing one another through not only the PISA survey on national reforms but also on teachers' perceptions. Such a comparison refers to both a vertical and a horizontal process as they will be submitted to a simultaneous comparison.

One country will be studied according to one educational pattern, as five educational patterns coexist in Europe. Finland refers to the Nordic pattern, France to the Latin pattern. They differ in structure and in pedagogy. Will these two patterns be reflected in the questionnaires and interviews?

Bulle (2010) has developed a typology: by crossing the structure and the pedagogy, she comes up with five educational patterns in the developed world:

- The Nordic pattern: Denmark, **Finland**, Iceland, Norway, Sweden. With a non-differentiated structure, a unified school system, the same subjects taught in junior high schools, no separation between primary schools and junior high schools, academic orientation at 16 - progress and building oriented - centred on general skills and know-how expected from the pupils and on the development of the personality.
- The Latin pattern: Brazil, Spain, **France**, Greece, Italy, Romania, Turkey. With a differentiated structure, a separation between primary schools and junior high schools, orientation at 14 (Turkey) or at 16 (France) and an academic structure based on national curricula split in subjects with numerous graded tests.
- The East-Asian pattern: Korea, Japan, China, Russia. With a mixed structure, a partially common structure in junior high schools, a separation between primary schools and junior high schools, an orientation at 16 and an academic orientation.
- The Germanic pattern: Germany, Austria, Belgium, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Switzerland. With a differentiated structure and an academic orientation.
- The British pattern: Australia, Canada, the U.S.A., India, Ireland, Mexico, New-Zealand, the United Kingdom. With a mixed structure; progress-oriented.

Nowadays, the academic orientations are submitted to transformations as they are influenced by international surveys: the progressive orientation, which is considered a « good practice », is more and more integrated into the educational systems.

I/ The international context that triggered this study (Regnault, 2017)

I/1 At the beginning of the sixties

At the beginning of the sixties, tremendous changes are to be noted:

- The countries face similar challenges and systems experience a lack of solutions. The comparison of educational systems experiences a shift in paradigm due to the globalisation of the issues, above all caused by the interdependence that is specific to the relations between the citizens and the states. As it turns out, the global system becomes more and more the new paradigm. The post-war cultural expansion, supported by significant media structures (UNESCO, World Bank), led to an increasing interdependence of national educational systems (Schriewer, 1997).
- Before this period, international comparisons took place in a context of a scientific cooperation between independent research centres. Their gradual integration into inter-governmental structures modified the use of scientific cooperation which became a political cooperation. The OECD and the UNESCO have developed some international evaluation of educational systems

from the 1960s onward in order to compare their achievements. (Malet, 2011).

1.2/ Since the year 2000

The interdependence is more and more important and social media more and more widespread. Yariv-Mashal (2006) states that « the other is measured » by comparing countries using a same scale. « I » and « the other » are part of a same pattern. However, this integrative process can become a discriminative process as the countries are ranked and therefore submitted to a hierarchy (Cowen, 1999).

In 1997, Debeauvais stated that, for international structures, comparisons were setting new objectives: instead of being mainly based on quantitative and descriptive data (number of pupils, spendings related to the teaching field, description of institutions, setting up of aims), the efficiency of educational systems – i.e. their adaptative ability and capacity to face new issues – was considered an economic competitiveness and a social cohesion factor. This is why those structures today give greater prominence to evaluation. However, the UNESCO and the World Bank aren't alike (Debeauvais, 1997):

- The UNESCO favours dialogues and interactions between national decision-makers, specifically during the State members' General Meetings (every two years), the world Conferences of the Education Ministers (every two years in Geneva in the IBE), the Regional Conferences. The UNESCO provides documents and experts' reports;
- The World Bank is also an inter-governmental structure with other constraints, since the importance of the governments is linked with their contribution; this differs from the principle that states « one country, one voice » which rules other international structures within the United Nations. Its North American management style implies that their importance towards the various governments depends on the loans granted by the World Bank, loans that are key in financing reforms in developing countries; the World Bank decides to grant loans that will be used in educational projects or other sectors;
- The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) is an international structure we are specifically interested in as it assesses the educational systems in the world and is widely publicised. Even though education isn't part of its mission, it remains key thanks to the quality of its scientific papers and communications. It published its first study in 1992, entitled: “*Views on education*”, which featured international educational indicators. Since then, this report has been published almost every year, with improved additions; the publications represent a unique gathering of data dealing with the transformation of educational systems in the OECD countries (Bottani, 2001). Answering a call from some governments and based on an international report, the OECD missions an international panel that proceeds to a detailed and comparative assessment of the topics. 800 researchers form the think-tank, mainly composed of economists, sociologists, several lawyers and researchers from other fields of expertise. The financial resources come from the contribution of the countries. Contrary to the UNESCO, the staff isn't recruited according to national distribution criteria. As such, the secretary is quite independent as regards political matters and is in a position to oppose a scientific approach to political strategies. The programme includes a part dedicated to education. For some years, the OECD has been analysing the links between education and work thanks to two groups: the educational Committee that represents the interests of mainstream political powers in charge of governing countries and the CERI (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation) which remains quite free to act since its field of expertise is based on innovation and research;
- The IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement), an American research centre, had an influence over the OECD. Created in 1961, it was the first large-scale company that offered valuable quantified data in comparative studies. Husen and Postlethwaite are among its most famous names. The studies are: TIMSS (Trends in Mathematics and Science Survey) and PIRLS (Progress in Reading Literacy Survey).

II/ The current international context

Since 1990, the educational and training world has tremendously changed in any developed country, giving birth to a new society: the society of knowledge (Petrella, 2001). This researcher has highlighted five key consequences triggered by these societal changes:

- Education dedicated to human resource, i.e. how education for and by a person has been driven out.
- Non-commercial education has become commercial education, i.e. how education was submitted to a market-driven economy.
- Education as a surviving tool in a time of global competition, i.e. how education has become a place where competition is taught instead of a cultural knowledge about life.
- Education serving technology, i.e. how technocracy took over.
- Education dedicated to equality, instead of education to equity.

The starting point was the taking into account of the idea of “human resources”. A man is a resource that needs maintaining in order to make it more efficient at the service of the producing society.

Dale (2005) states that the principle of the economy of knowledge is more and more widespread and influences the three aspects of the “national educational system”. “System” refers to a changing process in the constitution of educational sectors, as parallels sectors sharing various responsibilities are developing on different scales. “National” refers to the complexity of managing education, the transition from governing to managing.

II. 1/ From national to local

Public educational policies are being widely discussed in the northern countries: the major role played by the State on the educational markets is challenged. One strong argument against this principle is that educational markets may lead the service providers to offer better quality services at better prices (Hanhart, 2002). The national frame isn't an educational policy standard any longer, as educational policies are organised through self-regulation and decisions made by the schools and the local authorities. Debates about centralisation-decentralisation, the criticising of the way the State acts or the fact that privatised teaching are but the visible face of the major crisis of the “school pattern” that strengthened in the 20th century. The expression “education-training”, unavoidable today in the political vocabulary and international relationships, expresses the ongoing change. According to Rose (1999), education isn't limited to school any longer. The expression “education-training” is often completed by “life-long learning”. The process unceasingly repeats itself and is everyone's responsibility, as the citizen is “responsible” and “sensible”, which means that he is well integrated in the working and consumption markets (Novoa, 2006).

II.2/ Reporting to the user: the “New Public Management”

Keeping this view in mind, the suggestions about the reform of public management, named “the New Public Management” also apply to the educational systems and tend to strengthen the educational institutions. This increase in autonomy doesn't imply a loss of control from the public institutions as they are compelled to achieve some goals, which means that they must give account of the results and of the resources they are granted. Mons (2008) suggests that the user – be he the parent or the pupil – who for years was denied the right to be part of decision-making processes, has become all important in the theory of a social change that derives some of its aspects from the “New Public Management” trend: the results of the public service he took part in must be presented to the final user, who then arbitrates the upcoming political decisions. In 2001, Tiana had observed that the citizens were already asking to be more informed about the

situation of the educational systems and the results it had effectively achieved.

The State reforms can be synthesised as a set of beliefs (De Grauwe, 2010):

- The schools achieve better results when they are granted more autonomy,
- The State must focus on the regulation and the assessment of numerous service providers and shouldn't issue offers on a direct basis,
- The responsibility towards the "clients" must complete, or even supersede, the responsibility towards the hierarchy,
- The choice and competition among providers will produce a higher quality and an increased efficiency.

II. 3/The public show society

The media more and more shape politics, mainly through a permanent assessment of public opinion. It could be defined as a "democracy of the moment" which is also "an emergency system". As a matter of fact, such politics are set up and managed through an overexposure of opinion polls and indicators, statistics and indexes in the media. Mirrors are in excess, that reflect several images at the same time, though in fact elaborating a same principle. Hagenbüchle (2001) suggests that the high visibility of political life has led to a public show and acknowledges that the chances of having a constructive debate are thus limited. Such a show gets more and more organised in an international space and thanks to a comparative logic. The constant comparison of "international data" "inevitably" leads to a common vision and "non-negotiable" solutions (Yariv-Mashal, 2006).

III/ The current systems of assessment on the international level

III. 1/ Mutual accountability

Scales and international indicators set up mutual accountability that requires from every country, every citizen, to be compared with others. We never mention such words as "homogenisation" or "uniformization", which are no longer accepted in the experts' speech. We now speak of "dialogue", "system understanding", "transfer", "communication opportunity". Comparison is now a "method of governance", a concept that is more and more referred to in the political and scientific environments. Logically, this word is defined by correlated words: contractual culture, partnerships, flexible adjustment, flexible framework, "benchmarking", open processes etc. (Sisson & Marginson, 2001).

III. 2/ Standardised assessment

According to Mons and Pons (2009), standardised assessment is no new method in the educational systems of developed countries. While, in the past, a standardised assessment based on the measurement of learning processes mainly focused on the pupils, nowadays its span of action is much wider and connects pedagogy – its usual ground – to politics as it is now one of its managing tools. These systems now comply with the new orientations set up in the educational policies which have been developed in the OECD countries since the 1980s (Mons, 2007). We can better understand standardised assessment if it is connected to four recent evolutions in the educational systems:

- based on a quantitative assessment of the learning processes and on the priority given to cognitive goals rather than to social goals in a broad sense (Osborn, 2007), linked to the development of the concept of competences as economically defined in the theory of human capital, taking into account the idea of "human resources". The human being is a resource that needs to be sustained so that it becomes more efficient in order to serve the productive society (Petrella, 2001).
- The development of a new form of social control of the teachers and of the schools by the

administrative educational staff (districts, towns, deconcentrated structures, regions, according to the countries), very often part of reforms about decentralisation and school autonomy (Maroy, 2008).

. The change in the distribution of powers among central or federal decision-makers and the local authority supervisors, whose span of action is now extremely controlled (Broadfoot, 2000).

• The increase in the accountability of the School towards the public sector, in general, and the parents in particular, as part of new relationships among the political world, the State, the administration, on the one hand, and the citizens, on the other hand; these new relationships depend on the emerging of the “democracy of the public sector”, in which common property isn’t placed under the supervision of the official managers any longer.

III. 3/ Efficacy, efficiency, equity

According to Charlot (2008), those words are based on a speech about control and transparency: to know it all, to control it all, to anticipate it all. This implies that innovation is a progress in itself. The Foucauldian panoptic (1975) is still accurate today as regards the educational field, in the way it analyses the jail system which highlights the presence of a feeling of an invisible omniscience in the prisoners.

As education is considered a key factor of competition for the nations, the development of a culture of assessment and the spreading of information have favoured the efficiency of national educational systems, which have gradually shaped education so that it has become a cross-border trade in education (Loomis, Rodriguez and Tillman, 2008). As they are linked to the public debts of the nation-States that are immersed in a global economy, the educational and training policies have progressively moved out from the local or national context that more and more depend on global economy (Bottery, 1994).

III. 4/ The comparison used as a means of governance: good practices, benchmarking and categorising. Surveys about the results obtained by educational systems.

Good practices

These practices have proved how efficient they are in some specific situations in a country and they set examples as patterns that apply in quite similar situations in another country. Therefore, as good examples, they are meant to be replicated. However, the implementation of these practices in a global context raises a question: what is the part played by culture, economy and social issues in the successes or failures of such practices? Are these practices the best, for whom and according to which patterns? Who sets the criteria, on which grounds? (Abdoulaye, 2003)

Benchmarking

This word implies differentiation or competitive calibration. This marketing technique or quality management consists in studying and analysing management techniques, organisational patterns of other companies in order to be inspired and to yield the highest profit. For instance, the European Union resorts to this technique in the 2000 Lisbon Strategy. As a support in the “Open Method of Coordination”, it measures national performances through statistics indicators, scorecards and rankings. The aim is to set out “good practices” that can be transferred to another context.

Ranking

Several ranking types can be listed:

• “Active” ranking that deals with classifying and sorting out a set of elements according to one

or several pre-existing criteria (alphabetical order, size, colour, etc.).

- Ranking more precisely, i.e. a system better organised and structured according to hierarchical criteria;
- “Passive” ranking which means taking into account the result of a competition in a broad sense (after a race, a competitive exam, assessing the best sales, etc.). It is both the assessment of the strength of a competitor and the ensuing ranking (Rauhvargers, 2011).

The purpose of international surveys about the results of educational systems is to get to a simplified and understandable ranking, by the general public, in order to provide a guide to clear data and good practices for the user who will be able to choose what best suits him.

PISA

Since 2000, the PISA surveys (Program for International Student Assessment) have been conducted every three years by the OECD and deal with a sample of pupils aged 15, that is to say at the end of the compulsory education, in 72 countries of which 36 are members. The surveys were conducted in 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018. The teachers are involved. The next survey will take place in 2021.

According to Schleicher (2019, 11), *“contrary to many national and international assessments, PISA doesn’t aim at assessing whether the pupils are able to reproduce what they were taught at school. PISA assesses their skills and ability to go beyond what they have learnt at school in order to solve the problems they may face in daily life”*.

PISA also investigates the satisfaction pupils feel towards life, their relations with their peers, their teachers and their parents and their school activities.

These assessments are analysed and interpreted; this data processing produces the country ranking and thus, the comparison of school achievements. Reconsiderations are under way. The States that reached the weakest results are going to improve their systems by taking elements from patterns and pedagogies from the best ranked countries. The OECD is issuing “good practices” that are becoming international standards.

To be precise about the PISA survey, let's specify that these assessments occur in a period of transition for the pupils who are then invited to get out of the educational system to enter a career path; they aim at assessing the Reading Literacy, the ability to understand, to use and to analyse written documents, and to think about their meaning to play an active part in the society. The different types of documents to take into account are “continuous” texts (descriptive, narrative, informative, argumentative and injunctive) and the “non continuous” texts (forms, graphs, maps, etc.) In the former assessment, sciences were key and the goal was to assess if the pupils are able to use their abilities and knowledge rather than the ability to gain knowledge. The aim is to acquire skills – to the extent that the ability to perform a task or to think are considered more important than simply acquiring their knowledge.

IV/ Finland results and educational politics since the 2000s:

IV.1/ History and reforms

The Finnish educational system follows the Bottom Up logic, which is an ascending and decentralised approach of educational policies compared with the Top Down logic, which is a descending and centralised approach of educational policies, France illustrating this latter approach (Charlier & Pierrard, 2001).

Contrary to France, Finland, as an independent country, is very « young » as it has just celebrated

100 years in 2017 As such, and even though it is independent, it went through the torments of the second world war and the political choices of the time, which generated:

- An educational system based on the German system with an early orientation and separate sectors, until the early 1990s.
- A still strong influence of Sweden that, after the second world war, imposed the learning of the Swedish language - the official language in Finland.

Contrary to France, less reforms have been implemented in the Finnish educational system. Rather than reforms, major trends have been the norm¹ :

- 1970: end of the « unique junior high school »; primary and junior high schools become a unique school. Orientation takes place at the age of 16. The teachers are educated at the university.
- 1990: the government announces the beginning of the reform, supported by local authorities and the teachers (decentralisation), with positive effects on the reducing of social inequities. From a pedagogical point of view, the number of teaching hours has been nationally set and the pupils are no longer selected according to their abilities: the concept of competence appears. The teachers and the teaching institutions are no longer assessed: trust develops, comparisons and competition among the teaching institutions gradually fade out.
- Beginning of the 2000s: the basic school that includes primary and high school teachings becomes one and sets up a common base.
- 2012: the orientations of the « new reform » are determined (2016-2020), that define the end of the common base and prioritise an interdisciplinary teaching. Local authorities define their priorities along with national priorities.

The reforms stem from a collaboration among the government, the educational system trade unions and employers, local and regional actors.

Like in France, the State sets up a frame concerning the national curriculum that will be enforced on the whole territory. Contrary to France, once the frame is set, the implementation of the curricula is currently under the local and regional actors' responsibility. If the favourable factors and parameters can be activated thanks to the teachers' training, the assessment of the school, an active involvement from the local partners and the staff's representatives, all agree on considering education of a paramount importance for the country. The decentralisation process, which started in 1990 and is accompanied by a public consultation that takes place every 5 years, requires a commitment from the local and national partners such are local authorities' employers (KT) and teachers' trade unions (OAJ).

This system has been assessed through the PISA and PIRLS tests. Since 2000, Finland has repeatedly ranked first but Asian countries are currently in a better position, among which are Singapore, China and Korea. However, it remains the first in Europe. It is to be noted that, contrary to countries like France, Finland hasn't planned its educational policy according to the test results but was surprised by the impact of its educational policy orientations over its results.

IV.2. / The financing of the Finnish educational system

The indicators provided by the OECD grant access to the data of numerous countries, educational matters included, which offer immediate opportunities to highlight some significant figures. The costs per pupil according to his/her educational level are expressed in PPS

¹ A lot of greetings to our colleagues in Finland : Irmeli Halinen, Head of Curriculum Development, Finnish National Agency of Education ; Raimo Alaarratka, Arts teacher ; Vesa Raasumaa, Principal, Sammonlahden Koulu, Lappeenranta.

(Purchasing Power Standard), i.e. in a shared currency that sweeps away price level discrepancies among countries and that allows meaningful comparisons of GDP in volume among countries. In order to allow such comparisons, the educational cycles in primary and junior high schools regarding Finland have been separated.

From the OECD database (actualised on October 28th, 2019), the financed cost per pupil according to his/her educational level for the two countries is different. If the cost per pupil in France increases tremendously in the same amount as it does at the educational level, the same doesn't apply in Finland. Because grade repetition doesn't exist in Finland and seldom applies in France, they won't significantly alter the provided data and they show that Finland spends most of its educational budget in primary and secondary schools until the high school level. In these two fields, this country goes well beyond the OECD and EU averages. The emphasis is then specifically put on the fundamental learning stages. Access to education for all is one of the core educational principles in Finland. Education is free, including books, transports, canteen; university is free as well (books excepted).

A specific management

The specificity that consists in including local partners in the educational system is also noticeable in the financing of the educational system in which the State and local authorities are taking part. The State grants a fixed part of the budget and adds an adjustable one that enables a free educational system and a financial participation in some specialised teaching hours. Local authorities set priority areas from which the money collected by the State is reinvested in teaching hours according to local goals.

IV. 3. / The organisation of the current system

In Finland, school before the age of 7 is possible though not compulsory. The cycle from the age of 7 to 16 refers to the "basic" school system that includes primary school and the equivalent of junior high school as from 1970 and that defines compulsory schooling.

This cycle is followed by national curricula similar to the French ones and in many countries, characterised by what corresponds to 3 high school years, completed by a university cycle in three parts: Bachelor in 3 years, Master in 2 years and finally PhD.

The main axis of the educational system: Basic education

The country's specificities play a key role in the general organisation of the educational system, at least as refers to this "Basic school" cycle: the wide geographical span, the low density of the population and the tough climate lead to the concentration of all kinds of activities in selected sites; local authorities can then fully participate in educational matters. The school system is, per se, a real living space where everyone plays an active part, including in the technical and material organisation. The concept of "School life" and its related job positions (educational advising, control) don't exist, as the teachers are required to perform these tasks in the whole structure (classrooms, corridors, inside/outside common spaces, canteen included). However, trust being key in the Finnish educational system, they seldom interfere, even in class where lecture course isn't the rule, making the pupil the main actor in his/her learning process.

On the teachers' side

Contrary to France, a very large majority of teachers belongs to the OAJ (almost 90 %) and the nature of the trade union differs from the French one. If the OAJ also fights for the teachers' rights, it is independent from a political party and it started from both a will to reach solidarity in

cooperation and from a genuine desire to share a practical expertise in pedagogy. This last point makes it a privileged partner in negotiations and talks during the writing of educational laws of orientation.

Enjoying shared pedagogical methods and adjusting its educational policy in experimentations that are meant to take place in the classroom, Finland purposefully chooses to rely on the teachers as leaders to bring the educational system to success. Initial education and vocational training are then promoted.

There are two types of teachers in Finland: the “class teachers” who deal with general schooling, and the “subject teachers” who deliver a specialised teaching. If most “class teachers” teach until the 6th year, they also accompany until the 9th year. The teachers are trained at the university where they get a Master 2 degree; the “class teachers” get a general training based on various subjects whereas the “subject teachers” are taught their own field of expertise. However, child psychology is one of the main subjects.

Throughout their career, the teachers take part in the system of assessment of their school and they benefit from a constant adaptative training, which is strengthened and adjusted according to the results they have achieved following an assessment that can last one year. The teachers are encouraged to conduct some experimentations in their class, which will also be useful in the setting up of the five-year period consultation.

Finally, even if the teachers also fulfil a large part of the duties that refer to school life, their teaching time differs according to the subject they are teaching and not according to their job qualification. For instance, a maths teacher will teach 24 lessons a week (45 mn), whereas a teacher of Finnish will teach only 16 lessons. Such a difference comes from the fact that the teacher of Finnish will spend more time marking copies, and not in the presence of the pupils.

Even if this system doesn't contradict a more academic system such as the French one, the way it operates differs a lot and the differences between both systems is huge. The emphasis is put on a skill-based assessment; the pupil actively participates in the building of his/her own curriculum in order to validate his/her skills. However, this system may question the level of general culture: a pupil may “avoid” arts even if they are fully part of the French curriculum system until the end of the junior high school years.

How relevant is it to place those two countries on the same scale, as PISA does? To which extent is such a comparison possible? Aren't those surveys - initially based on research tools - a political tool that, above all, aims at conducting reforms?

IV.3./ The most recent reforms

The latest reform of the system which covers the years 2016-2020 is about teaching from the primary to the university levels, vocational training for adults included. Each level consists of two distinct and complementary parts: national and local. If “local” integration is encouraged in France by texts promoting partnerships that don't often materialise, it isn't the same in Finland where national and local are balanced as regards the implementation of the reform and represent the main reason for it, for any teaching level. “Reform” thus means the simultaneous taking into account of educational aims in a broad sense, national and local.

The beginning of this reform and its implementation were progressive; they started with the consultations and the publishing of the 2012 national curriculum. Further on, the design and the implementation of this reform takes place in the wholeness of the educational system of the 7-16

years old, which seems to show that the split between “primary” and “secondary” teachings doesn’t exist; this allows some homogeneity and a better individual follow-up of the schooling.

The integration of this new national part of the reform started with the internet consultation of educational partners, in order to:

- define the main trends at the end of 2012 ;
- study and decide about primary schools in September 2013 ;
- study and decide about secondary education in April 2014.

In parallel, the introduction of local curricula was studied, that led to their implementation in September 2016 according to the national curriculum, so that the reform was implemented in totality.

Encouraging a better integration into the current world

The Finnish system seems to be a flexible system that aims at adjusting to the demands of a new world, either as a trend towards globalisation or as a loss in the quality of life. This reform is meant to produce citizens owing skills that require the integration into the current world (TICE, among others) and the need to live and build a sustainable future: its aim is to educate acting pupils so that they become acting citizens. The curriculum and the pedagogy have been reviewed in order to reach these goals. They are based on the 3 pillars of sustainable development: Economy, Environment and Social. The number of lessons has been increased (from levels 1 to 9), adding for instance sports or social sciences. The subjects qualified as “environmental” have been integrated into the educational cycle from levels 1 to 6, such as biology, geography, physics-chemistry or health sciences. Finally, the State grants a financial support to the towns that, in addition commit themselves to providing foreign language lessons.

The part played by the national level

Every level starts with the “national” implementation (National Core Curriculum – NCC) followed by the “local” part of the reform. The NCC details the aims and basis of the “basic” education (basic school), including the transversal skills to be integrated.

The part played by the local, from a pedagogical point of view

As part of a genuine intention of decentralisation, the State has transferred some competences to some local services in the towns for the teaching of students belonging to the basic school cycle.

In order to illustrate this decision that takes place at a local level, a town named Lappeeranta (South Karelia) has chosen to dedicate its political town orientation to the “Green Reality” (a sustainable development initiative based on the themes designed by the UNO). This scheme is a true political ambition, in the strict sense of the term: the citizens commit themselves to the collective project and all the shops, industries (educational institutions including universities, transports, town halls, hospitals, etc.) are actors in this scheme. This shows a common will to achieve a goal as well as an interdependence of the actors. Such an interdependence means that the educational institutions are compelled to connect, not only to outside partners but also, on a vertical axis, to pre-primary classes until the university (that also integrate pupils during collective activities); this gives meaning to what is taught.

V/ The results achieved by France and the educational politics since the years 2000:

V.1/ History and reforms

The French educational system has been structured according to the Top Down system (Charlier,

Pierrard, 2001), a descending order, a centralised approach of educational politics compared with the Bottom Down system, ascending, i.e. a decentralised approach of educational politics which is the situation in Finland. It deals with a school-sanctuary, a separated space that needs to be protected by fences or walls. It is separated from the usual living spaces. The child separates from his/her family and community ties, in order to become a pupil (Pachod, 2019).

On the historical level, the educational system was based on the German system, with an early orientation and separated branches until 1975, when the single junior high school was created, which is still in place today. The structure is divided between the elementary school and the first lower secondary school. The core curriculum is complete in this cycle. The junior high school pupils study a common curriculum that ends with a final exam, called “Brevet des collèges”. The orientation takes place at the end of the junior high school years, at the age of 15 or 16.

France, which ranks 7 among the main world economic powers reaches a 495 result in PISA 2015, barely above the OECD average which is 493, and ranks 27. France hasn't progressed since 2000. In 2018, France ranked 23 out of 79 countries. The results are stalling and the educational inequalities linked to social classes are still present. The Ministry assumes that the reforms concerning elementary schools, allowing half class groups, will produce results when these pupils enter the junior high school.

Processing the answers to the questionnaires has led to the conclusion that the French system achieves mediocre results as regards reading, writing, oral communication and that it provides a material that doesn't always fit with the pupils' profile. French pupils are less able to deal with a literary text compared with other countries; therefore, it is advisable to focus on the language studied in class, be it oral or written, and to reconsider the teachers' education by developing their practical training.

The very average quality results achieved in the PISA assessments, as shown by the level of the pupils, may reflect inefficient pedagogical practices, as the pupils learn and integrate the knowledge transmitted by the teachers and don't deal with a competency-based approach.

The very average quality results achieved by France in the PISA assessments reflect social inequalities: social origins play an important part in the success in the studies. For instance, a pupil who comes from a disadvantaged background is less likely to be successful in his/her studies, compared with a pupil who comes from a more privileged environment. This observation also applies to the school institution, which will be granted less means to the extent that it depends on an underprivileged environment. Disruptions and a lack of equity remain as far as education is concerned.

In France, the socio-economic background has more impact than in the other OECD countries (20 % in France versus 13 % in average in the OECD countries), and 40 % of the pupils coming from an underprivileged background have difficulties (34 % in average in the OECD countries). Schleicher (2019) points out that the institutions located in zones where education requires specific attention, seldom enjoy the best teachers and are run by heads of school with limited powers and who don't get sufficient support. A higher turnover is also specific to those institutions and some of them are experiencing important difficulties in making lasting and reliable contacts with the families.

Here are the details of the reforms, from 2010 onwards, that are linked to PISA results:

• 2010: fight against illiteracy as early as in the kindergarten years

Following the PISA 2009 results, another lever for action consists in focusing on basing learning, helping the pupils as early as possible and fighting against illiteracy as early as in the

kindergarten years. In the primary school curriculum, strengthening what has been learnt is key: repetition, recitation of operating tables and verb conjugations specifically, so as to produce automatic response as well as prioritising reading aloud by the teacher and the pupils. As a consequence, most of the educational accompaniment dedicated to the acquisition of basic knowledge will have to be reinforced.

• **2011: the new political priority: the ÉCLAIR system and the Internats d'Excellence boarding schools**

Following the PISA 2009 results, and according to the ministry, one of the levers for action consists in encouraging the autonomy of the school institutions, customising the resources and developing experimentations, diversifying the access to excellence by readjusting priority education, in opening Internats d'Excellence boarding schools and in implementing the ÉCLAIR system (schools, junior high schools and high schools for Ambition, Innovation and Success). The aims of this priority education programme are as follows:

- To improve the studying atmosphere and to encourage everyone to succeed.
- To strengthen the teams' stability.
- To favour equal opportunities.

Such a programme offers innovations as regards pedagogy, school life and human resources to be implemented within every institution or school.

• **2013: the reorganisation of the school :**

- The 2012 PISA results are weak, which, according to the National Education Minister, account for the reorganisation of the school and the necessity of reforms.
- France ranks 25 out of 65 countries. The following is observed: the gap is widening depending on the social level, the pupils who are weaker in maths develop anxiety towards the subject. The cumulative effects of these results aim at having the reforms accepted.

The system named: "more masters than classrooms" (National Education Official Bulletin, 2012) has pointed out the needs for more school masters so to implement new pedagogies such as differentiated pedagogy (Legrand, 1986, Minister of Youth and National Education, 2016). Annie Feyfant, from the French Institute of Education (IFE) offers a study and a full analysis of this orientation, of its definition, of its goals, of its complexity, of its practical implementation through case studies, always with the pupils' help in view (Feyfant, 2016). This pedagogy often takes into account the diversity of the pupils in their learning processes, which provides the key to the educational system and offers a personalised pedagogical support. Meyrieu provides us with a reference to the Finnish model, that still ranks among the first in the PISA European results and that offers a balanced pedagogy as well as an example of pedagogical differentiation: every pupil and his/her difficulties are taken into account and dealt with individually, within an educational frame, that lets the children free to experiment rather than to be taught through a one-way and imposed transmission of knowledge (Meirieu, 2016).

The Peillon reform deals with academic paces, i.e. the transition to 4 days and a half instead of 4 days, including on Wednesday mornings and the end of classes at 3:30 in order to implement the NAP (New Pedagogical Activities), designed to offer cultural and sporting activities to children who can't enjoy them because of their social class. This reform should allow the pedagogical differentiation in the classrooms (Ministry of Youth and National Education, 2016).

- The reform and the teachers' education through the work-linked training during the second year of the Master

This reform aims at reinforcing the practical and pedagogical training of teachers on site. The former French system was consequence-logic based: the decision to integrate a teaching course

and its practical training was made later on, after passing the Master 2 and the competitive exam. The simultaneous system combines theory and practice during the basic training years. The competitive exam takes place at the end of the Master 1, in the year 2013-2014. In their second Master year, the students become trainees as they receive a work-linked training and they are paid €1,600 a month.

- ***2016: the reform of the junior high school***

The reform enables the institutions to enjoy some independence. Its aim is that the junior high school allows the pupils to learn better in order to succeed better by mastering the fundamental knowledge and by developing the skills required in today's world. It grants more freedom in the management of the institutions thanks to interdisciplinary teachings, personalised accompaniment and work in groups (20 % of the school time). The reform isn't financed on permanent funds but is based on the creation of 4,000 teaching positions.

In reaction to PISA 2009, in 2011, the Ministry of Education aims at making the institutions grow more autonomous (the ÉCLAIR system). It becomes "REP" (Priority Education Network) and REP+ in neighbourhoods experiencing the greatest social and school difficulties. The network involves a partnership between the school and the junior high school, which facilitates the distancing from the neighbourhood secluded area. The REP+ is granted 10% extra hours so to dedicate team working time for the teachers.

The 2015 junior high school reform grants independence to the institutions. The Minister of Education, Najet Vallaud-Belkacem, bases this reform on the results of the national and international assessments that she deems unquestionable. She observes that the junior high school deepens school difficulties. She bases her assumption on the PISA results and on the "Cèdre" (Cedar) studies conducted by the Ministry, that show an important decrease in the results over the decade, at the end of the junior high school years, as regards written comprehension, maths or history-geography.

- ***Since the 2018 and 2019 beginning of the school year, the classroom duplications in the first grade and second grade of preparatory schooling.***

A maximum of twelve pupils per classroom, in the "REP" and REP+, and the system named "Homework Done": these systems are part of the prevention and fight against poverty strategies (Blanquer, 2018), based on the principle of equal opportunities. Jean-Michel Blanquer is the actual Minister of Education.

The scientific community becomes part of the High Council of School Curricula ("CSP"), probably influenced by the Singapore system, which has become number one in the PISA ranking (CNESCO, 2016). Blanquer, in his book untitled "The School of Tomorrow", suggests an approach through experience, science and international comparison. He recommends these three "pillars" to have an efficient school and remains convinced of the necessity of having some scientific knowledge in order to implement pedagogies. Thanks to the MRI progress, neurosciences have developed and have triggered scientific experiments in classrooms. Our children's brain is under scrutiny. The researchers are then developing softwares to support pedagogies for "another more egalitarian school". Learning has become the topic of scientific research.

- ***2019: the school of trust***

Education is made compulsory from the age of 3 so to anchor knowledge as early as possible. Learning lasts until the age of 18. The NAP are suppressed since the parents strongly criticise them. The towns can either keep the teaching time to 4 days and a half or to come back to a 4-day teaching. A connection between the school and the junior high school is organised. The teachers' education will be more focused on practice with less university lectures. The inclusive school service is set up. The ESPE become INSPE (Upper National Institute of Teaching and Education).

V.2. / Financing the French educational system

As the search for efficiency, through the Accountability concept and the rationalisation of the educational system, is important, the evolution of the funding of the French educational system is shown here below.

It has gone through transformations or at least attempts as part of the numerous institutional reforms which are often triggered by international comparisons. These transformations raise questions we'll answer briefly.

The evolution of the fundings

Even before the decentralisation laws as regards school teaching, the State remains the main fund provider in education. If we look at international comparisons, the internal educational spending ("DIE") must be taken into account since all the educational system fund providers are part of it; this allows pupil's or student's cost calculations (Szymankiewicz, 2013).

According to international comparisons, France, with 6.7 % of the GDP (2018) – figures that have experienced a 1 % decrease in the span of 20 years – remains above the average of the OECD which records 5.9 %. As regards the pupil's or student's cost, the breakdown of the way the various educational categories are financed remains absolutely unusual (Cytermann, 2019). France is both the country where the difference between an elementary and secondary pupil's cost is the highest (about 20 % in the OECD countries compared with almost 90 % in France), and where the gap concerning the cost of a student and the cost of a high school pupil is the smallest.

The impact of international comparisons on the performance of educational systems

Since the years 2000, France has been facing three international comparison phases: PIRLS about the reading skills of pupils aged 10, PISA about pupils' skills aged 15 and the Shanghai ranking of the best universities, which have led the country to question the educational system performance, including in higher education. Therefore, the question of the efficiency of educational spendings in France has been raised on a regular basis (Cytermann and Chevaillier, 2012). The same topic appears in the parliamentary reports about the budget of education, that show that the results remain in the average and even are on the downward trend, despite a decrease in the number of pupils and an increase in the number of teachers.

The analysis conducted by the OECD by comparing the PISA results and the means injected in the educational field, meet the conclusions of most educational economists (Cytermann, 2012): once a specific level of development has been reached, there is no correlation between the means invested in education and the results: France and Finland share the same amount of educational spendings but they achieve very different results. The same applies to the Czech Republic and the USA, with similar results but very different levels of educational investments.

A recent document from the OECD concludes that "among economically advanced countries, the amount of the educational spending is less important than the way the resources are used and the

best systems of education favour the quality of the teachers”.

As regards France, the results aren't correlated to parameters that measure the importance of the means: size of the classrooms or number of hours granted to the pupils. Such an analysis has led to cost-saving measures impacting the educational budget from 2012 onwards.

The limits of funding according to performance

Guillaume and al (2002) think that no country has ever succeeded in linking performance to the granting of means. The explanation seems simple: when a goal hasn't been reached, it isn't often easy to detect its causes and thus to draw the consequences about the granting of means. Moreover, according the 2017 report of the Court of Auditors, funding the performance doesn't occur in the school teachings nor in the breakdown set up by the ministry among the academic institutions, neither in the breakdown set up by the rectors of the school institutions.

The importance of the way the means are granted

Numerous analyses conclude that, beyond the question of global means of the educational system, the way those means are granted should be questioned as well as the important inequalities that remain between the school institutions and academies.

The well-known specificities of this educational system concerning the differences in the educational funding in the various educational institutions remain. Such specificities absolutely justify the priority granted to primary schooling, according to the law about the school system reorganisation.

The way the means are split also raises the question of equity. The recent reports of the Court of Auditors in 2010 and 2013 criticise the efficiency of the priority education policy, lamenting on the fact that the Ministry of Education spends twice as much in doubling a class than in priority education.

The perspectives

Since 2012, the budget of Education has benefited from a priority treatment and has slightly progressed, thanks to substantial job creations that are part of the chart included in the law about the school system reorganisation (55,000 over five years). These job creations are mainly dedicated to ensuring a sound training to produce good teachers and to favouring primary education.

V.3. / The current system organisation

Primary school include kindergarten and elementary schools. The children go to school at the age of 3. Kindergarten lasts 3 years (first, second, last section). The school is free with national curricula. Elementary education lasts 5 years: preparatory, elementary 1st year, elementary 2nd year, fourth grade, fifth grade). Secondary education includes junior high school and high school. Junior high school lasts 4 years and all the pupils attend it. In the high school, the pupils have two options: general education, technological or vocational education. They end with the exam named “baccalauréat” (general, technological or vocational). The passing of the exam is compulsory in order to further enrol in higher education. Almost 88 % of the pupils passed the “baccalauréat” in 2019.

Higher education consists of Bachelor degree, general or professional, in 3 years. The Master degree requires 5 years and the PhD 8 years. The “baccalauréat” is necessary to study at the

university. Simultaneously, the “IUT” (Institut Universitaire Technologique: Technological University Institute) and high schools teach to get the “BTS” (Brevet de Technicien Supérieur”: Senior Technician Degree) and “CPGE” (“Cours de Préparation aux Grandes Ecoles”: Preparatory Course to enter Higher Education Institutions); all of them last 2 years and select the students from their school file.

The teachers’ training depends on National Education competitive exams following a work-linked training in Master 2. As regards the school of trust, the competitive exam takes place at the end of Master 2, at the beginning of the 2020 school year.

The training is organised according to subjects and fields. Interdisciplinarity is quite unusual in the educational system. The assessment is based on the curricula and quantitative grades are granted. France is gradually setting up a competence-based assessment by decreasing the amount of quantitative grades.

V. 4/ The reforms of lower secondary education

The organisation of junior high schools

Junior high school teaching is structured in four levels and pedagogical cycles. Those cycles lead to assess the pupils’ acquired skills and knowledge over a longer time and to implement a more efficient pedagogical support. Every pupil is taught 26 hours a week and can get a complementary optional teaching.

As regards the compulsory 26 teaching hours, the complementary teachings (practical and interdisciplinary - EPI (2015 reform) – and personal support – AP) amount to 3 hours in sixth grade (cycle 3) and to 4 hours in 5th, 4th, 3rd grades (cycle 4). The way the complementary teachings is organised is set up by the administrative board of the institution following the advice from the pedagogical council. Computer skills are assessed throughout the school years, from the age of 6.

The common core of knowledge, based on skills and culture (2016 junior high school reform) deals with what every pupil must know and master at the end of the compulsory school years. It includes all the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to succeed in the studies, personal life and future life as a citizen. The school textbook shows the parents their child’s achievements and progress, in a full and detailed assessment. The mastering of the common core of knowledge is required for the passing of the junior high school national degree (“DNB”). This degree, if, it hasn’t been passed, doesn’t prevent entering high school, assesses the knowledge and skills acquired at the end of the junior high school. It is balanced between the common core of knowledge assessment (continuous assessment) and the final exams. Every assessed subject is part of a specific assessment except in sciences (two subjects), and an oral assessment.

The pupils’ orientation at the end of junior high school takes place as early as in the 6th grade and continues the following years thanks to the “Parcours Avenir” (Path to the Future) and through a continuous dialogue involving the pupils, the parents, the teachers, the educational advisers, the heads of the institutions and the psychologists from the National Education.

The most recent reforms:

The 2016 reform:

- The EPI, a collective and interdisciplinary work conducted by the teachers in small groups.
- The reinforcement of language teaching: the first foreign language in the preparatory course and the second foreign language in the fifth grade.

- Personalised accompaniment for all the pupils.
- A new common core of knowledge, skills and culture, the first one dating back to 2005.

Since 2017, the system “Homework done” offers to the willing pupils in junior high school an accompanied study time to do their homework. Helping pupils to do their homework – especially the weakest ones – enables them to succeed.

A reform of the French Certificate of General Education has been planned in 2021.

VIII / Similarities and differences between the two countries

The similarities are as follows: historically speaking, France and Finland have modified the way the pupils are oriented, i.e. from an orientation that took place at the end of the elementary school to an orientation that now takes place at the end of the high school years. In both countries, the orientation takes place at the age of 16.

The numerous differences are the following:

- France depends on the Top Down system: national curricula, schools without autonomy, a highly regarded school that sets limits, the society must adjust itself to the school system, the child is separated from its former social groups: family, culture, religion (such is the case for instance concerning laicism); an external partnership is constrained as it is somewhat considered a source of risks.
- Finland depends on the Bottom Up system; the guidelines are adjusted according to the local conditions, schools don't set limits, the school system must be adapted to the society, the child isn't separated from its social groups such as family, culture, religion (thanks to an educational offer concerning mother tongues and religions), external partnerships are easy to set up as they are highly recommended.
- The French structure is differentiated as it separates elementary schools from high schools, with a full common core in the first lower secondary school. The Finnish structure is undifferentiated without any separation between elementary and secondary education, and a full common core in the first lower secondary school as well.
- France is academically centred on curricula with numerous assessments. Finland enjoys a progressive and constructivist approach, is child-development and know-how centred, with few graded assessments before the age of 11.
- As regards the problems raised by PISA, French faces inequalities regarding school results that are triggered by socio-economic inequalities, and regularly ranks in the PISA lower average ranking. Finland isn't impacted by such social inequalities and still ranks well in PISA and is first among the European countries.
- The reforms implemented in the wake of the PISA results don't influence the Finnish reforms, which fully follow the OECD recommendations.

France will set up numerous reforms, among which is individual support; it focuses on basic learning, implements an experience-based system and a problem-solving system. As part of the French vocational training, the teachers are trained according to the Singapore method. The independence of the school institutions is guaranteed through the ÉCLAIR system. A teachers' training reform is set up in France, together with a progressive and constructivist approach. Interdisciplinary teachings are developed thanks to the EPI in junior high schools; however, such a system was questioned in 2017. Since the beginning of the school years, in 2018 and 2019, class division has been implemented in the preparatory class and the second year of primary school. Education is now compulsory, following a 2019 decision about the “school of confidence”, so to facilitate the transition towards elementary education and also to prevent religious separatism.

Conclusion: the link between the 7 recommendations from the OECD and the reforms

These recommendations come from the OECD surveys (Dumont, Instance et Benavides, 2010):

- To give the pupil the prominent place.
- To have a constructive approach of the learning process thanks to active teaching.
- To favour cooperative relationships among the pupils.
- To develop friendly and safe links between teachers and pupils.
- To understand the teacher's part as a guide, a facilitator.
- To produce positive assessments.
- To associate an interdisciplinary and a collaborative learning, with the mastering of the knowledge required in every subject.

Perspectives: questions about the junior high school teachers: the influence of local over global.

In the second part of the research dedicated to the glocalisation phenomenon that takes place at a local level, we will distribute a questionnaire to the teachers and will conduct some interviews with some teachers from different categories, identified after the processing of the questionnaires. Here are some of the questions:

- How teachers today can conduct complicated missions, as they are sometimes split, in their daily work, between the core values of their job and the call to rationalise their action, which affects the professional norms and makes their original mission more complex? How conscious are they of such calls for rationalisation?
- What knowledge do they have about international surveys? Do they draw a link between the results of these surveys and the reforms?
- How, in their class or their school, do teachers face the world changes? Which changes are taking place in their school institution?

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