

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

France case study report 2 Priority Education Zones (ZEP) and Priority Education Networks (REP)

This report was written by Richard Étienne on behalf of the France Country Team:
Richard Étienne with Pascal Tozzi and Chantal Étienne



Département de Sciences de l'Éducation
Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3, France

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

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Priority Education Zones (ZEP) and Priority Education Networks (REP)

Rationale and Aims

The election of the first leftist President in 1981 gave birth to an educational policy devoted to a greater equality. Bourdieu and Passeron's theses (1964 and 1970) were used to make a diagnosis and 'affirmative action' provided patterns to be implemented. There was a phrase ("*discrimination positive*") to signify that those who have less would get more. This policy of Priority Education set up in 1982 by Minister of Education Alain Savary has undergone numerous changes until now.

The aim of Priority Education is to allow access to High School studies and University to everyone and today to increase the percentage of pupils from these underprivileged areas or from these schools with special needs so that they can attend 'classes preparing students for the entrance exams to the Grandes Ecoles' and so be accepted in the 'Grandes Ecoles' in which the elites that rule France politically or economically are trained.

Description, Implementation and Financial aspects

The building of Priority Education is a long story. We shall cut it short. In fact, the first decision makers inspired by town-planning policies distributed school buildings like public services in new towns. The extra financial means were related to the town's policy when it first developed. A Priority Education Zone committee gathered the people involved and made up the decisions on the extra means regarding staff recruiting. Based on '*cultural capital*' and '*distinction*' quoting Bourdieu, this pattern ended in 1988 when the first assessment showed that the gap between ordinary schools and priority schools had not changed (25 percent below). From that day on, step by step, teaching has been refocused on learning and on knowledge together with a twofold movement: extension of the number of schools with the setting up of a network that concentrate on the pupils' and families' difficulties and then focusing on smaller number of schools that welcome the pupils that have bigger needs. For example, in 2006, in the Academy of Montpellier, 24 secondary comprehensive schools are maintained in Priority Education but 5 are selected in order to become Schools of Ambition and Success and to drive Ambition and Success networks with primary schools. The 19 other secondary schools will quit the system.

The Priority Education financial means are divided into two parts: the main amount is devoted to '*indemnité de sujétion spéciale*' (individual allowance) that is 90 euros a month. We can estimate that 100,000 people are concerned. The yearly cost amounts to 10,800,000 euros that must be compared to the money given for different projects (9,000 euros per Education Priority Zone for a total cost of 2,250,000 euros). An additional cost must be taken into account: the hiring of extra staff (coordinators and teachers who are in charge of inexperienced teachers whose posts are in these zones). That implies 1,000 people for an average of 36,000 euros per year cost 36,000,000 euros. According to a study led by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE, 2003), the extra-cost of a ZEP's pupil (around 5 percent) has not brought back a significant advantage. Nevertheless, this assessment has been widely questioned (<http://www.sudeduccreteil.org/spip.php?article22>) for two reasons. First it deals with the whole of the population and not with the different learning methods used in these areas. Second recruiting young teachers for half pay of elderly and experienced teachers is not included in the global educational cost. To conclude, it has been established that some ZEP had less means compared to inner cities schools where the pupils are more privileged.

Since 2007, focusing on pupils individually has been reinforced and is based on actions that are not specific to Priority Education such as Tailored Programs of Educational Success (PPRE) or Individual Monitoring. However, President Sarkozy reasserts his aim to *equality of opportunity* even if gave up '*discrimination positive*' in December 2008. He created two aims for 2009 and 2010: 25 and 30 percent pupils with scholarships will attend 'classes preparing students for the entrance exams to the Grandes Ecoles'. For the time being the percentage is 23 which shows the ambition is not so great all the more as it only concerns 10 percent of College students.

Evaluations, Outcomes and Recommendations

It is quite difficult to assess the results of Priority Education. There are some financial means but they are not related to project policies. For the first decade, there was no evaluation but then the actors had to invent some kind of evaluation to carry out their project. Now, from 1988 on, there has been a part for evaluation and results

And yet there are some skills to explore the local and regional particularities (Broccolichi *et al* 2007:32): "*There are numerous difficulties when we try to interpret local differences that come from a complex combination of geographical, historical, economic, demographic and political factors*".

They conclude by saying (*ibid.* 47): "*The comparative study of ZEP caters elements to set up an assessment of the risks the pupils are exposed to*". This point of view reinforces current researches asserting that the macro-sociological approach erases the differences, mainly those who are due to practices, training and project management. Conversely, to find some bases to fight the inequality of results due to socio-economic inequalities (but it is also linked to religious, linguistic, ethnic minorities that are concealed in France and melted in the politically correct category mentioned above), it is obvious that situated researches pinpoint positive and negative results and to lean on their analyses to improve a policy that can be successful only on the long run.

Inspiring from these authors and other researchers, we can put forward first the *picture* of the schools (Étienne and Amiel 1995), which is all the more important since the state repartition of pupils among the schools that depended on the residence has been suppressed (2007).

Second recommendation is about *school effect* well known by researchers (Duru-Bellat 1990). The school principal must be chosen for their skills to manage the team of teachers. And they must be in charge for a minimum period of six years. They should also develop a positive thinking of the pupils and their families.

The third point is that most teachers are beginners and do not get the proper assistance they should have to tackle the difficulties. Of course, they become good professionals but as they are uprooted (mostly from the south of France) they leave their position once they are skilled enough to handle problems and then move to their native Region (Gelin *et al.* 2007).

The fourth recommendation is not to trust school autonomy; each actor has to retort to *subsidiary*: to give only responsibility to the level that can handle it. For example a school cannot organise teachers training. Educational research regarding the vulnerable young people can only be developed on a treble level, Regional, French and European.

The fifth recommendation concerns intermediate levels in educative administration. They divert incitements to be transformed into injunctions. They should change their position from top to support so that the actors can rely on their resources.

Finally, to resort to imported solutions from other countries must be examined and fitted by the actors in relation to researchers, trainers and governors who are well aware of the difficulties to transpose *best practices* from a place to another.

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Websites:

- <http://centre-alain-savary.inrp.fr/CAS/>: governmental website with a scientific committee in charge of the evaluation of the Priority Education within the Socrates
- <http://www.association-ozp.net/> : non governmental website with a lot of information on the functioning and policy of Priority Education
- <http://www.sudeducriteil.org/spip.php?article22>: a union website that expresses a heated reaction towards the INSEE investigation (2003)