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WHAT ROLE FOR THE SCHOOL?

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WHAT ROLE FOR THE SCHOOL? ¹

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In the pages that follow, we examine the place of norms and values in late modernity. We particularly underscore the paradox that, in many areas, we have at the same time fewer and fewer certainties and more and more knowledge; we then consider the role of the school in this context and put forward some proposals for a research programme.

¹ A French version of this text is available, under the title « Faire société » dans un monde incertain. Quel rôle pour l'école ?, see Cahier de recherche du Girsef n° 110. https://cdn.uclouvain.be/groups/cms-editors-girsef/demey/Cahier_110_final.pdf

Beyond its functions of teaching and training, and of distributing social and vocational qualifications, the school deliberately or unintentionally transmits to each of us a set of norms, values, principles of meaning and action that contribute to the construction of our identity – and also our relation to others. This socialising function of the school and, by extension, its contribution to the social integration of individuals within a collectivity, was at the heart of the first sociological reflections on education (Durkheim, 1922) but was subsequently neglected by researchers, who concentrated on the performances of educational systems, the competences of pupils or the matching between the school and the labour market. In the current context, in which the question of the social integration of individual has become a major issue in our globalised, multicultural

societies, this research project aims to put back at the centre of the analysis the role of the school in the construction of people's relation to others and to the collectivity. Such reflection seems urgent at a time when the debates to which terrorist attacks have given rise "have put the spotlight on the role schools should play in the civic and moral education of the whole population, in particular by creating a spirit of openness, critique and defence of liberties" and also in "combating radicalisation [and] facile amalgams" (Alliance Athena 2016).² We start out, however, from the premise that such an analysis cannot be made in the terms of the 20th century. To analyse the school's contemporary role in social integration one has to take into account the radical changes in contemporary societies and their modes of regulation and integration.

An uncertain world

These transformations can be grasped, first intuitively, then analytically, by contrasting the present situation with that of Durkheim's time. A first difference, central for our topic, should be foregrounded: in Durkheim's time, the school could count on a number of "certainties" that were "taken for granted," as to, for example, what was to be expected from a "good" pupil or a "good" teacher, the roles that each had to

play, the values the teacher should defend, transmit, and even embody (Van Haecht 1985), the different types of teaching appropriate for different categories of pupils, etc. (Grootaers 1995). Possession of such "certainties" naturally settles a whole series of problems before they even arise, and provides a stable normative framework to organise the process of social integration of individuals by the

² In its communication dated 26.8.2015, the European Commission stated that "the tragic outbursts of violent extremism at the start of 2015 sent a reminder that education and training have an important role in fostering inclusion and equality, cultivating mutual respect and embedding fundamental values in an open and democratic society" (EC 2015: 2).

school. Now these normative references and many others besides are shattered (Derouet 1992; Dubet 2002). The answers are no longer given. What can be expected of a pupil or a teacher? What values should be championed? What objectives should be pursued – equity or efficiency of the system, development of the pupils, their future employability, critical faculties, technical knowledge, creativity, rigour, adaptability? There are many possible answers, but none of them is any longer self-evident. Even the fundamental notion of the “school form” (Vincent 1994), which had been thought very stable, now has less solid normative grounding: the fundamental distinctions it made between different roles (teacher / pupil), specific times (learning / work time) and distinct places (in school / outside of school; in classroom / outside of classroom) are no longer as obvious as they once were.

The question obviously arises: how did the situation evolve in this way? To answer it, we must point to another important evolution, parallel to the first: the quantity, quality and diversity of knowledge about education are much greater now than in the past. The two observations are not unrelated (we have at the same time much less certainty and much more knowledge) and in fact form the two faces of a paradox typical of modernity: gains in knowledge systematically produce new zones of ignorance and indeterminacy: “What was previously accepted as self-evident and, as it were, ‘life-worldly’ is now made visible as a peculiarity of a certain way of observing” (Luhmann 2002: 59, see also Luhmann 1995). So, as we wrote elsewhere, it is

correct to say that (late) modern society is a knowledge society, in the sense that it is structured to multiply the points of view on itself and on everything that constitutes it, but this is a situation which leads, paradoxically, to many more uncertainties than in the past (Mangez et Vanden Broeck 2016: 124). The paradox goes far beyond the field of education. It fundamentally characterises the state of modernity in the early 21st century: never before has a society had so much knowledge in so many domains and sub-domains, never before has a society been so aware of facing uncertainties (Beck 1992, 2009), especially as regards its future (Luhmann 1991; Rosa 2010). The proliferation of uncertainties affects all the major institutions of modernity. While science has evolved by multiplying, subdividing, fragmenting itself and abandoning any ambition of a unified view of the real (Abbott 2001), “culture” too is clearly much more fragmented, multiple, proliferating and deterritorialised now than in the past; everyone, and more especially any young person, is now confronted with a heterogeneous, unordered, unhierarchised cultural offer, produced in contexts and by groups other than his or her own (Sarup 1996, Clam 2003). Modernity presents us with a plethora of possibilities: how can one know what to do, what to believe, what to think? Uncertainties proliferate regarding the future and the decisions to be made (Mangez and Vanden Broeck 2016). These developments clearly transform the conditions in which the process of social and cultural integration of the younger generations takes place and the role the school can play in it.

These changes can be understood analytically in the following way. If, for a time, the school had relatively established normative references, this was because it was bound up with (non-educational) institutions which provided these references for it (Dubet 2002). First there was religion and then the nation state, its social structure and its institutions (science, culture, the economy, the family, etc.). In other words, the school was, for more than a century, able to shape individuals relatively adjusted to society (social integration) only because it was itself structurally coupled, in the framework of the nation state (systemic integration), with a social structure, a political system, an economic system, a legal system, a culture, established ways of life and a certain conception of living together which – even in a divided societal context like that of Belgium – provided the necessary references for its work of socialisation

(Gellner and Breuilly, 1988)³. These structural couplings bound the systems together and so limited the scope of what was normatively possible. It was because it was anchored in a societal context that school could count on an “institutional programme” (Dubet 2002) that supplied self-evident answers. The greater or lesser degree of systemic integration thus appears as linked to the degree of stability of the norms mobilised in the process of social integration, which means that a change in the modalities of systemic integration inevitably affects the conditions of social integration (Archer, 1996).

Now what fundamentally characterises the present situation is that the “structural couplings” (Luhmann 2012) that were established in the golden age of the nation states are progressively unravelling. This is what Dubet⁴ emphasises when he refers to the “growing dissociation” or “progressive

³ It is clear in the Belgian context that the very form of the educational system, with its networks, its organising powers, its communities, corresponded to the complexity of the Belgian social and political system: by making room for its different fractions, inculcating in the new generations knowledge and values common to the whole of society and/or their (linguistic, philosophical) community, the school thus served as a support for societal integration (including the reproduction of its philosophical, linguistic and social divisions). The school and the other major institutions were coupled together and placed in the service of the society. They moulded themselves to its form and values (not without tensions, battles and “wars” over schooling). On these questions, see Bastenier 1998.

⁴ Dubet writes as follows: “To put it another way, we are experiencing the exhaustion of the idea of society as the [systemic] integration of an economy, a culture and a political sovereignty – an integration necessary for the establishment of continuity between the actors’ subjectivity and the objectivity of their positions and, therefore, for the interlocking from which the individual arises [integration social]. In fact, this conception could only prevail insofar as the society was, in reality, the modern, democratic, industrial social formation (separated from religion, made up of equals, with a complex division of labour). But this ensemble formed a society within a national state” (Dubet 2005, n.p.).

separation of what the very idea of a [national] society strove to integrate: a market, a culture, and institutions” (Dubet 2005, n.p.). For long time nation states did indeed play a central role in the systemic integration of modern societies (Dubet 2014; Gellner and Breuilly 2008). Partially decoupled from its national context, each functional system is now tending to globalise itself (Teubner 1996, Kjaer 2010; Holzer et al. 2014). It then links up communicatively with other actors situated in other contexts but engaged in the same functional activity. This groundswell of globalisation leads each functional system to turn ever more towards its own processes and its own outputs (Vanderstraeten 2004; Jessop 1990). It becomes more technical, more complex, while at the same time losing its normative references. The movement that is emerging, in part imperceptibly, in the background, is that of the shift from a world organised into nation states (putting the “national community” and its

values at the centre) to a world organised into different domains (centred on specific reference problems, including education, and on the endless pursuit of more efficient solutions to them).

In this context, the social order is no longer so much based on shared values but much more on various conventions and coordination mechanisms which require no normative consensus in order to function: money, qualifications, contracts, technical frames of reference and standards are all means which, in a given domain, enable people to coordinate with one another without a real normative consensus. The problem of the social integration of individuals within a collectivity unfolds in this context marked by functional differentiation, the rise of self-referentiality, the pursuit of efficiency and the creation of deterritorialised mechanisms for technical, impersonal coordination.

Reconstructing universes of reasonable meanings

These transformations make it possible to understand a number of difficulties relating to social integration, and in particular to the school's role in it. The school can no longer appeal to a shared vision of society as a basis for the process of social integration (Derouet, 2000). The few works that currently explicitly raise the question of the school's contribution to the social integration of the rising generations stress the growing difficulty or even inability of today's schools to implement an "institutional programme" (Dubet, 2002) of socialisation. It is clear that this indeterminacy radically changes the parameters of education and socialisation. How are judgements to be made when the normative references become unstable and contingent? Is the capacity to cope with uncertainties itself becoming the only possible stable reference? Should different values be taught to different publics? Is it up to the publics or organisations, and no longer the institutions, to determine the values and models that they want to prioritise?

The normative and the cognitive entertain a complex relationship: if the normative guidelines that were taken for granted are disappearing, this certainly does not mean that we are moving towards a world without norms. The development of normative indeterminacy (and therefore, in fact, of a non-coordinated plurality of norms on the societal scale) has as its immediate corollary a new need to make choices, establish orientations, i.e. reconstruct norms, on scales mostly other than that of the nation

state. With the decline of the institutional programme, a space of possibilities has opened up that continuously demands to be reduced. But because the norms are no longer given by the institutional context, they have to be determined and constructed. Choices have to be made, bearings established, answers provided. Universes of reasonable meanings have to be reconstructed, on a local scale or in networks of deterritorialised organisations. Where the normative references were once taken for granted and could serve as stable, invisible anchorage points for the process of education and socialisation, they now, at least for the external observer, take the form of orientations taken up within a space of possibilities. Unless performance itself is made a norm – and many people quite naturally do so in this context marked by self-referentiality (Ball 2000 and 2012; Maroy 2008) – the challenge for the actors is to connect education with values, projects, points of reference, in order to reconstruct universes of reasonable meanings.

Very little is currently known about how the educational landscape is being reconfigured and about the diversity of experiences that an increasingly fragmented system offers its pupils. In the framework of the current discussion, we start out from the proposition that the normative indeterminacy that is developing produces different effects at different levels: that of educational systems, that of organisations, and that of the actors in the socialisation process (teachers and pupils). At each of these levels, processes that are

indissociably cognitive and normative, but of different natures, are at work with a view to re-establishing references for education and socialisation. We formulate a threefold hypothesis, set out in detail in the rest of the text: contemporary normative indeterminacy contributes to:

- (1) **the development and expansion** of a global governance of education, capable of absorbing more and more elements through the (inevitably reductive) self-referential prism of performance;
- (2) **fragmentation** of the educational institution into different organisations each taking specific normative orientations;
- (3) **growing complexity and diversity** of the experience of socialisation, which increasingly imposes on young people and their teachers the burden of reducing and ordering the excess of possibilities (the lack of certainties) that confronts them.

Before describing each aspect of this threefold hypothesis specifically, a remark must be made. We have highlighted the development of normative indeterminacy. This does absolutely not mean that everything is possible, but rather, as we have indicated, that the once self-evident

normative references tend to disappear and call for new forms of determinations at various levels. Using a spatial metaphor, we conceive these implicit and explicit normative determinations as capable of being structured vertically, in accordance with relations of domination, and horizontally, on the basis of particular orientations and objectives. In other words, the orientations adopted regarding socialisation and education at each of the three levels corresponding to our threefold hypothesis may depend both on social relations (it is known, for example, that some teaching is reserved for and certain values are promoted among particular social groups depending on their dominated or dominant position in the social structure) and on specific normative projects (some organisations, some schools, some teachers adopt specific orientations on the basis of their own projects and values: particular pedagogies, faith schools, for example). These two dimensions, which relate to questions of inequalities and redistribution, on the one hand, and values and recognition on the other, may of course interact in many ways (for example, the promotion of a particular value or project may attract a particular type of more or less privileged or disadvantaged public).

I. The level of the system

Here, our analysis starts out from the paradoxical situation described in the introduction (more and more knowledge, fewer and fewer certainties) and aims to discuss its consequences at the level of educational systems: how does “the system” cope with a plethora of knowledge and a lack of certainties? How is the resulting high level of complexity reduced? How do people try to establish new certainties?

Education as a global problem

This situation, which, on the systemic scale, is one of crisis (how does one know what is to be done?) has the clear consequence of making education a *problem* that is posed on a global scale and for which solutions can / must be sought, everywhere in the world and at every moment. Normative indeterminacy and the ensuing need to seek solutions give rise to intense “knowledge work”: numerous devices are being set up to observe educational systems and operators on an ever more global scale (Mangez and Vanden Broeck 2014). This corresponds, in the educational system, to the observation made by Esposito in her remarkable analysis of the economic system: “in times of high uncertainty attention tends to shift [...]: one observes what others do rather than how things are” (Esposito 2013: 8). These

devices are developed and promoted by specific bodies which manage to constitute themselves as reference points precisely by channelling and crystallising global communication about education: this is the case with the OECD (Henry et al. 2001: 90), for example, and, increasingly, the EU (Grek 2010), especially in the contexts of the countries of the “North,” and UNESCO (Verger 2016) or the World Bank (Molla 2014) for the countries of the “South.”⁵

This capacity to channel and crystallise the global flow of communication about education results from several factors. Beyond their ability to mobilise powerful resources – economic, symbolic (prestige), media and scientific – (Mangez and Hilgers 2012), the strength of these governance bodies (distinguishing them from government bodies) stems not from political power (they often have none) but rather from their capacity to constitute themselves as “macro-observers” of educational systems on an international, even global scale through knowledge work that gives a central role to quantification procedures (Rose 1991; Grek 2009; Ozga 2009; Werron 2015; Hartong 2016), to the identification of good practices or exemplary cases, and to processes of comparison (Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal 2003; Carvalho 2012; Freeman and Mangez

⁵ Some for-profit companies (which often describe themselves as “learning companies,” such as Pearsons or McKinsey (Hogan et al. 2016) themselves play a role of macro-observers: <https://www.pearson.com> and <http://mckinseysociety.com/topics/education/>

2013). In this way, and even when they are not formally sites of political decision-making (although government members are often involved in them, alongside other actors), these governance bodies can exert an undeniable influence on education. It is as if educational systems had to a large extent slipped out the control of their traditional governors (Charlier and Croché 2005). In conceptual terms, the idea of the macro-observer, the “evaluating third party,” developed by Rosanvallon (2006), or that of “universalised third parties” who participate in the world “not by acting but by observing,” developed by Werron (2015), make it possible to designate these agencies (Mangez and Cattonar 2011), and at the same time to highlight the marginalisation of nation states.

Self-referentiality

In the context of a global (or international) governance of education, and under the scrutiny of these macro-observers, the aim of educational managers often comes down to improving their position in the international comparisons and rankings. Education seems to set itself in a dynamic increasingly focussed on its own performances (Ball 2000). The outputs of the system become inputs for subsequent iterations of the system in a self-sustaining dynamic: the system is guided by the pursuit of improvement of its own results.⁶ A form of self-referentiality is at work:

the aim is always to take the outputs of the system (in the form of numerical data or “best practices”) as inputs for its next iterations (cf. also Simons 2014).

Even if they are presented as strictly cognitive, the observations made by these governance agencies and the lessons (recommendations) they draw from them are not normatively neutral (Muller 2000; Surel 2000). Their supposedly cognitive work installs a general orientation towards “performances” and “results,” of which the switch from teaching to learning (Biesta 2010), the centrality of “learning outcomes” or the omnipresence of a semantics of “quality” (Ozga 2008) are very characteristic manifestations. This does not mean that these bodies are only interested in the question of the effectiveness of learning and are oblivious to any other imperative: in fact they are capable of absorbing and integrating different types of objectives, including questions of equity or social justice, questions of social inclusion, or topics such as the development of critical faculties, creativity or enterprise, or, more recently, in the framework of an Open Method of Coordination in education, the prevention of radicalisation (European Commission 2016). While these bodies are capable of taking account of a diversity of issues in their reflection, they are nonetheless characterised by the fact that they are always interested in them through the (inevitably reductive) prism of

⁶ In the French-speaking Community of Belgium, the initial ideas and very terminology “pact for educational excellence” illustrate this dynamic clearly: the aim was to “strengthen quality” at all levels (apprenticeship, educational offer, teacher training, governance of the system).

performance. Whether the concern is equity or effectiveness, development of critical thinking or enterprise, or even preventing radicalisation, etc., the aim is always to identify best practices and above all to (try to) measure the efforts and performances of educational systems or operators. So, every new issue, question or value seems capable of being integrated and “absorbed” in a system of performance measurement. Unlike educational organizations (cf. Axis 2) which can / must make choices in favour of one or another normative orientation (which contributes to the fragmentation of the field, cf. Axis 2), the governance bodies seem able to integrate multiple imperatives (equity *and* efficiency, critical thinking *and* enterprise, formal and informal learning, school-age learning *and* life-long learning, etc.), filtering them endlessly through a self-referential focus that makes them take the (inevitably reductive) *form* of performances. Normative indeterminacy (too little certainty, too many possibilities) functions here as a resource that offers the “system” multiple opportunities for **expansion** through absorption-reduction of new elements.

Governance and its actors

Given these developments, an important question that arises is that of the place of the actors and, more precisely, their capacity to act on the global system of the governance of education that is now taking shape. It is clear that the system seems to produce its own logic autopoeitically, it seems able to feed on critiques, literally to use them to pursue its own development (expansion),

to absorb values by “*trans-forming*” them into good practices, recommendations and indicators. What then is the place of the actors: can they influence the governance of education? How and under what conditions? Is the system capable of reproducing itself independently of their will? Finally, how does participation in the bodies of governance in turn affect and transform them?

Various actors are involved in the agencies of governance. One of the particularities of the context of the European governance of education is that, alongside experts and representatives of national education systems, one finds a series of stakeholders including various interest groups (IGs) and a number of social and trade-union movements (SMs) active in the area of education on an international scale. The latter are indeed increasingly organising themselves internationally: “Civil society coalitions are re-scaling their activity and creating more links at the international level, in parallel to the increasing role of international organisations in the framing of national education policies” (Verger and Novelli 2012: 5).

Study of the *participation* of these actors (IGs and SMs) in European governance seems to us to constitute a particularly pertinent way to understand the normative and cognitive work produced in these bodies. What effects does the mere fact of entering into the system of governance and bringing in their preoccupations and their normative orientations (their values) have on the system of governance, on their values

and on themselves? Our hypothesis is that is at the level of social movements and some interest groups that efforts are made to try to combat the self-referential tendencies that, as we have suggested, predominate in these bodies and generally lead them to make performance improvement the only possible normative horizon. By reposing the question of values and meaning in education, IGs and SMs try to interrupt the dynamic through which governance leads educational systems to use their results

alone as points of reference to determine their future orientations (Todd 2016). Little is known about how the governance bodies receive the normative demands and critiques addressed to them, especially by SMs, even if, as we have suggested above, it may be hypothesised that they often show a considerable capacity to absorb and take over critiques. Nor is much known about the effects that participation in the bodies of governance may have on the actors and their orientations.

II. Organisation level

The second line of analysis concerns the level of organisations. The growing normative indeterminacy fundamentally changes the environment in which organisations operate. The normative references are no longer self-evident; they multiply and appear as so many possibilities. Organisations can no longer simply relay a specific institutional programme. We hypothesise that, at the level of **organisations**, the loss of grip of the norms and values established within nation states and the corresponding exposure of educational systems to varied demands induces a process of fragmentation of the field and differentiation of the educational projects promoted by institutional entrepreneurs (Garud, Hardy and Maguire, 2007), organisations or sets of organisations – which, as local actors, are more constrained than actors working at the level of the system – to make explicit or implicit choices among the various potential normative references. They are ‘immersed’

in several worlds (Derouet et al, 2000) and must indeed arbitrate among the different norms that may frame their work, activity or their trajectory. They thus operate a reduction of this complexity by privileging one or the other finality of an increasingly composite educational universe, or – more rarely – by questioning its social form (the ‘school’ form). In breaking (more or less strongly) with the idea that educational organisations share common goals and/or the same social form, they are also forced to try to reinstitutionalise their alternative projects locally and are sometimes led to fight on a broader front in the hope of influencing the potential redefinition of a federating institutional project. This tendency parallels and echoes the evolution of ways of governing: the last ten years have seen a strong reversal of the way of reforming the school, which is now more centred on the local, the networking of innovations and experimental devices, and the consultation or even association

of the different stakeholders of the system in its reform. Likewise, the organisational actor (Drori, Meyer and Hwang, 2006) is increasingly present as a legitimate form of coordination, initially dominant in the economic field, and now widespread in many fields, including education.

In this context, some organisations already present are repositioning themselves in the field; new organisations are being created within it; and others are entering the field, where they previously had no presence. And networks of organisations are restructuring themselves, prioritising or criticising some goals of an increasingly composite institutional project. Our first explorations indicate that the critiques of the various dimensions of this project may bear on the rigidity of the “school form” as a hindrance to individual fulfilment (the “artistic” or “subjectivist” critique), or the type of society and social relations for which the school prepares (the “societal” critique), on the competitive, selective and inegalitarian nature of the school or on the contrary on its incapacity to produce future elites (“social” critiques), or on its inability to valorise specific communities, academically or culturally (critique based on “recognition”). These critiques of the institutional project of the school, or the more exclusive valorisation of one of its goals, are thus increasingly intertwined with a critique of its form (role differentiation, relation to time, space, knowledge, to others, to authority). The critique of the “school form” becomes all the more possible with the decline of the nation state that had instituted it.

The question structuring this line of analysis thus bears both on the nature of the institutional fragmentation and on local or broader attempts at re-institutionalisation of alternative projects. We thereby address a question that is too weakly theorised in the social sciences, namely the emergence of new actors and new organisations – or the repositioning of established actors and organisations – in a given social world or field, taking care to grasp the social, structural and institutional conditions favouring the development of new organisational forms (Johnson and Powell, 2015).

To study this specific level of organisations, it seems relevant to mobilize some contemporary versions of sociological neo-institutionalism and the ecological approach to organisations, again in its contemporary version. The classic neo-institutional approach essentially gives an account of a progressive homogenisation of organisational structures and forms as an effect of cultural pressures and isomorphic processes (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). It is based on the twofold premise of weak actors and fields that are fairly homogeneous in terms of the normative principles that organise them. The approach we develop here differs on these two points. First, it gives greater importance to the capacity of organisations to criticise, appropriate and transform the norms of the field, and also generate new norms. Institutionalisation is thus also local in nature (Powell and Colyvas, 2008). Secondly, it is based on a different conception of institutional fields, understood rather as much more

fragmented social spaces, guided by diverse, conflicting principles of rationality (Thornton and Occasio, 2009), which offers organisations or institutional entrepreneurs latitude to deploy alternative projects, while at the same creating difficulties for them, because they have to operate in a more complex, even contradictory, normative space.

But organisations and entrepreneurs do not always confront this plurinormative environment individually. Sometimes they adopt collective positionings, on the scale of sets or networks of organisations, as can be understood through the ecological approach to organisations. This approach seeks to understand the formation, diversification and development of “populations”, i.e. “aggregates of organisations that share a common dependence on material and cultural environments. Empirically, populations have been identified as sets of organisations that produce similar goods or services, use similar resources, and have similar identities.” (Haveman and David, 2008: 572). This last dimension of the definition of populations has become important in recent years, with the concept of organisational form, which emphasises

the idea that populations of organisations are also “socially-coded identities compris[ing] both rules of conduct and signals to internal and external observers” (ibid.: 575), and thus defined as common-sense categorisations used by the actors to make sense of the perceived discontinuities in social identity.

On the basis of these theoretical references we define two objectives for our further research efforts devoted to organisations. The first goal is descriptive. The aim is to map synchronically the fragmentation of the institutional field, positioning the organisations and entrepreneurs according to the normative referents that guide (especially as regards their approach to “living together” at school and contributing to the more global “living together”), but also describing the formal or informal networks, and perhaps the populations of organisations that they constitute. The second goal is to understand diachronically how these new actors – or traditional actors whose project has been transformed – succeed (or not) in legitimating themselves and institutionalising their project at the strictly local level, or more widely.

III. The level of actors in the socialisation process

As a complement to the systemic and organisational approaches developed above, our third line of analysis leads us to examine how two types of actors in schools – teachers and pupils – are affected by these major changes in the institutional environment. The central hypothesis here is that contemporary normative indeterminacy contributes to greater complexity and diversity of the experience of socialisation, such that young people and their teachers must increasingly bear the burden of reducing and ordering the excess of possibilities (the lack of certainties) that they face.

A complementary hypothesis is that this normative indeterminacy can be taken in hand and thus partially reduced by the normative orientations adopted at the level of individual schools. While the “individual school” effect has been noted in the literature to date mainly in terms of academic performances, in fact it goes beyond this. A number of studies indicate that schools are also differentiated universes of meanings which, as such, can have a significant impact both on the professional ethics or identities of the staff working in them and on the pupils’ identity construction processes and trajectories of moral socialisation. Research has shown that individual schools develop specific “organisational identities” (Draelants and Dumay, 2011) resulting from a process of adjustment both to the expectations of the

system and to the specificities of the local environment, leading to the creation of “educational niches” (Dupriez and Cornet, 2005). This hypothesis is all the more relevant given that the French-speaking Belgian system is characterised by a very pronounced specific school effect because of the strong segregation of publics, induced by the presence of a quasi-market schools as extensively documented empirically (Dumay and Galand, 2008; Lafontaine and Monseur, 2011; Danhier et al., 2014).

Our analysis thus leads to a twofold hypothesis: the one put forward and extensively deployed by contemporary sociologies of the subject (Dubet; Martuccelli; de Singly), that it is now up to the individual subject to construct meaning and him/herself resolve the tensions linked to normative complexity and the plurality of logics of action; and the complementary hypothesis of the recomposition of normative local universes (or local spaces of socialisation) at the level of educational organisations. In other words, we postulate that the work of recomposition of meaning does not take place in a social and organisational void but is always mediated by contexts. In this sense, through its capacity to develop a specific organisational identity and make “choices” in terms of specific educational projects, the individual school can “take charge” of a significant part of the handling of normative complexity. The empirical

survey will make it possible to explore the work of normative recomposition done by

the actors both at the individual level and that of local spaces.

Teachers

The mandates and professional identities of teachers are historically defined around the twofold task of teaching and socialisation. In the institutional programme of the school, the two were fairly closely articulated. The traditional “school form” is itself an explicit foundation for this dual mandate, making it possible simultaneously to discipline bodies and minds and to transmit to its pupils a transversal corpus of knowledge and behavioural norms. But – faced with the growing weight of the logics de performance, the deployment of ever more self-referential devices and increasing normative indeterminacy – the work of socialisation has become uncertain and, as has been seen, exposed to a process of fragmentation of the educational field. In a society that no longer offers a commonly accepted vision of itself, whose cohesion is no longer based on a shared, taken-for-granted world view, what judgements do teachers make in their everyday interaction with their pupils? Which values do they select, what goals do they propose, what “model man and woman” do they valorise when they teach? What universes of reasonable meanings do they reconstruct when they transmit knowledge and interact with their pupils? What type of relationship to knowledge and the world do they instil when, outside the classroom, references proliferate and cultural universes collide, value systems compete and the great

collective narratives that marked the first phase of modernity and contributed to the foundations of the educational systems of the nation states are being eroded?

These issues generate a first series of questions around teachers’ identity and professionalism, which are developed in the section below. In the section that follows it, we hypothesise a diversification of the answers given depending on the schools in which the teachers work.

Teachers faced with a redefinition of their professionalism

Teachers are indeed particularly exposed to the developments set out above and to the emergence of a new paradigm (Maroy and Mangez, 2011), in which the school is seen less as an integrating institution and more as a production system to be managed efficiently and effectively with the aid of standardised measures of pupil performance. In particular, through the coordination instruments (standardised tests, feedback to schools, benchmarking, etc.), teachers’ work, historically characterised by strong professional autonomy (Hargreaves, 2000), becomes more constrained, observed and measured (Dupriez and Malet, 2013; Ranson, 2003). In such an environment, priority is naturally given to the cognitive and instrumental goals of educational systems, which, much

more than the other missions of the school, are subject to external measurement and various devices for giving account (“accountability devices”).

But, more generally, these new coordination instruments are accompanied by a redefinition of teachers’ professionalism. This new professional model, which valorises the “reflexive practitioner” (Cattonar and Maroy, 2000), mainly emphasises professional competences linked to pupils’ cognitive development (mastery of the knowledge to be transmitted, pedagogical techniques, reflexive capacity, etc.), and not so much the manifestation of “moral qualities” and “exemplary behaviour” previously demanded of teachers.

Several studies have been made, mainly in the UK and North America, of the influence of these new modes of governance on teachers’ craft and professional identity. In the British case, for example, they show a radical break between the world of trust and professional autonomy that prevailed until the 1980s and the new environment characterised by multiple demands to give accounts to management and the inspectorate. These studies also illustrate the emerging tension between the traditional professional identity of the British teacher and what is valorised by the new modes of governance. For most British teachers, their job has been historically oriented towards nurturing the “well-rounded individual” (Moreau, 2009), i.e. the child in all his/her facets, who needs to be supported and accompanied through the educational process. Recent

surveys have revealed a widespread fear that the central focus of the profession is shifting, turning teachers into “pedagogic technicians” (Ball, 1999) preoccupied with their pupils’ performances rather than a global approach to educational work (Biesta, 2010).

But aside from British and North American work, often dealing with only some aspects of the issue, in other parts of the world and notably in French-speaking Belgium there is little research explaining how the modes of governance, the multiplication of possible normative references and the decline of the common institutional programme affect teachers’ professional identity and more especially how they understand and undertake their mandate of socialisation.

Between performances and moral socialisation, contextualised responses

While the accountability devices are mostly focussed on the cognitive role of the school, educational objectives and tasks of socialisation nonetheless remain at the heart of the expectation made of schools. In all the educational systems, the education objectives are even (re)affirmed. In French-speaking Belgium, for example, the “Missions” decree of 1997 clearly states the importance for the educational system and each of its schools “to promote the self-confidence and personal development of every pupil” and “to prepare all pupils to be responsible citizens, capable of contributing to the development of a democratic, pluralist society of solidarity, open to other cultures.” Education

professionals are in fact confronted with a twofold paradox: on the one hand, the rhetoric on the importance of the school as a place of socialisation and education in citizenship and as the crucible of a common culture comes into contradiction with the new instruments of governance of educational systems, which prioritise the cognitive goals of the school. On the other hand, the structural decoupling of the major institutions, of which the school is one, the weakening of the great contemporary narratives, and the growth of normative indeterminacy make the injunction to educate, socialise and transmit values to its pupils much more uncertain and complex.

What is known about the reactions of teachers and educational systems to such tensions? Tardif and Levasseur (2010) have shown how, in North America, the tension between the pursuit of effective teaching and the pupils' support needs has led to the introduction of types of school staff. For several decades now, the North American educational systems have made extensive use of specialised professionals (guidance counsellors, psychologists, librarians, speech therapists, etc.) who take on many tasks within schools for socio-educational purposes and "behaviour management" of pupils, especially those who deviate most from the academic norm. This North American trend illustrates a process of increased division of labour within the educational personnel, with a separation of roles between those who provide the more "noble" function of teaching and other professionals, with a more precarious

status, responsible for what is sometimes seen as the "dirty work" (Le Floch, 2008).

European educational systems have been less confronted with this integration of new agents in all schools, responsible for tasks of integration, socialisation and upbringing. It seems that in European systems, including that of French-speaking Belgium, the tension between the pursuit of performance and that of socialisation (Ball 2000 and 2012; Maroy 2008) is rather managed through a differentiation of the educational offer depending on the school that is attended. Such differentiation is most visible in secondary education, with some schools clearly oriented towards the acquisition of knowledge and competences, and others that have put socialisation and upbringing at the heart of their project (Barbana, Dumay and Dupriez, 2015). In parallel to the growing fragmentation and growing segregation of the school system (Merle, 2012), and in the context of relative normative indeterminacy described above, the profession of teacher is itself tending to diversify according to the contexts in which it is practised (Barrère, 2002; Cattonar, 2006; Jellab, 2005). We hypothesise that schools can be seen as sites of "complexity reduction." Depending on the public that is catered, the school's position on the educational market, and the school's project, an explicit and implicit curriculum develops and makes it possible to put down markers for the work of socialisation and the nature of the expectations made of pupils and also the teachers. The involvement of the teachers in the

definition of the common local norms and their degree of conformity to them will be studied. We hypothesise that they will depend in particular on the strength of their loyalty and of their organisational identification with the school.

Altogether, while research has shown the evolution of the school institution being based less than before on a substantive educational project and more on impersonal coordination mechanisms, little is known about how these transformations affect the teachers. Our future research at this level will precisely aim to grasp how teachers conceive and take on their mandate to

socialise the pupils. Faced with the plurality of norms in society, what values and what models do they privilege? Why and how do they adopt certain orientations within a space of possibilities? Do these choices significantly vary depending on the public to which they are addressed (schools whose intake has high cultural capital, positive-discrimination schools, etc.) or depending on the normative project particular to their school (alternative pedagogies, faith schools, coaching schools, etc.)? How do they manage possible tensions between objectives defined at the level of the system and those defined by their school?

Pupils

The final part of our current reflexion is centred directly on pupils and explores the experience of socialisation that they construct in school⁷. Classically, socialisation is defined as the process through which an individual becomes a competent member of a group or a culture (by learning its norms, values, representations of the world and ways of behaving). This aspect will focus on a specific dimension of socialisation, “moral” socialisation, regarded as an “essential piece in the life of democratic societies”

(Boudon 2013) and social integration inasmuch as it concerns a socialisation that is simultaneously axiological (education in values), normative (construction of the relationship to the norm) and political (construction of the moral subject and the citizen). While experience at school remains a major experience in the pupil’s identity construction (particularly in view of the considerable time that young people spend in school but also because of the subjective and social importance given to schooling in terms of place in society and

⁷ The school does not, of course, have a monopoly on the process of moral socialisation. This is also the domain of the family. Horizontal (peer-group) and out-of-school (media) socialisations also play an important part (Rayou, 1998; Pasquier, 2005). The latter, like the development of normative indeterminacy, no doubt complicate the work of moral socialisation performed in the school environment. Because our research is centred on the role of the school in moral socialisation, these other actors will only be studied indirectly.

occupational future), little is known about how schools participate in the construction of pupils as (future) citizens and shape their representations of society, their definitions of the “just” or their reference “we” (identity and political reference community).

The school and moral socialisation: transmission pathways

Various ways in which the school contributes to moral socialisation can be distinguished. It first contributes through the transmission of school knowledge, both through specific lessons (civics, ethics, religion) and more broadly through general subjects (French, history, geography, etc.). Research in the didactics of disciplines (Chevallard, 1985) has shown that school knowledge differs from common-sense knowledge or scientific knowledge through its educative dimension and its axiological dimension. The values that are embedded in the objects of knowledge that teachers shape and transmit to pupils are an integral part of the work of moral socialisation of pupils. The school also contributes through discourses in which values may be explicitly stated or through activities organised by the school (charitable activities, retreats, etc.). Some values may also be indirectly transmitted within the school through the pedagogical and curricular priorities that are set out, the specific projects and activities developed, the informal messages sent by the adults in the school, or through concrete normative devices inherent in the implementation of

a particular version of the “school form” (relation to rules, to time, space, the body, the expression of individuality, etc.). In other words, in parallel to the values that it explicitly declares it wishes to transmit – its explicit moral curriculum – inevitably co-communicates another, parallel, hidden message, inextricably incrustated in its practices, flowing from the mere fact of “schooling,” of differentiating schools and classes, organising time and space, making curricular or pedagogical choices (inevitably implying representations of the pupil to be educated), structuring the sequences and objects of teaching, interacting with pupils, formulating expectations of them, evaluating, “ranking” and orienting them – all of which constitutes its implicit moral curriculum (Forquin, 2008; Mangez and Liénard 2008). Altogether, the pupils’ experience of moral socialisation is generated in the interplay of the continuities – and discontinuities – between the implicit and explicit curriculum (expectations), since the two types of curriculum cannot be regarded as necessarily congruent. We also hypothesise that, in some contexts, explicit moral education and implicit moral education tend to function in relatively independent ways and that studying their divergences and even potential contradictions is a promising path to research in order to understand how pupils develop a relation to values that is sometimes remote from the one the school aims to inculcate, and in some cases develop moral dispositions perceived as deviant.

We further suggest that what constitutes the explicit or implicit curriculum varies according to context, depending on the “type,” “stream” or “form” of teaching – and also on the schools’ organisational identities. Exploratory research has shown to what extent dispositions that are explicitly developed and monitored in some streams may be completely neglected in others, because they are taken for granted. For example, in general streams, the curriculum emphasises reflexive capacities, autonomy and responsibility; in technical and vocational streams, mainly attended by pupils of working-class origin, distinctly more instrumental dispositions are taught (often in a hidden way), such as submission to authority or other attitudes expected of people destined to occupy subordinate positions in the world of work. More generally, these differences reflect different conceptions of the type of person these different forms of teaching are meant to train, particularly as regards the formation of social and vocational aspirations. The scholastic development of moral dispositions and the experiences that pupils have of normative indeterminacy also depends on the school they attend. A priori, we think that that this can play a part in the handling of normative indeterminacy in two different ways: either the school makes particular axiological choices and so acts as a reducer of normative complexity, facilitating the individual’s confrontation with it; or the school maintains some openness to normative plurality and opts to develop dispositions towards reflexivity

that can prepare its pupils to handle this complexity themselves. In either case, the school would thus function as a key intermediate operator in the face of normative indeterminacy but probably with different and unequal consequences for the pupils.

The experience of socialisation through unequal school careers

The normative complexity inherent in the diversity of local universes (the synchronic dimension) is accompanied by a more diachronic complexity linked to the diversity and increased complexity of routes through schooling. The variety of possible routes through our educational system opens the field to educational careers which, again, are not only different but unequal (some “schooling circuits” are more marked than others by periods in segregated environments). Drawing on what has been learned from pragmatist approaches to identity (Mead, 1963; Honneth, 2002) and on the notion of the “moral career” (Goffman, 1968; Becker, 1985), we can state that the construction of the self is a dynamic, interactive process, and that the individual learns to construct him/herself as a member of a society through relations of reciprocal recognition. Transposed to the school field, this conception has made it possible to generate the notion of the school career, postulating that the construction of the pupil’s social identity is to be related to the school environments successively frequented – which present configurations

that differ in terms of access to educational resources, models of recognition and integration, and construction of the capacities for action (Verhoeven, 2011). Thus, from differentiated school circuits, each pupil constructs an individual image of his/her academic capacities, his/her social and cultural identity and the social and institutional recognition that this may command, while “learning” that he/she has more or less control over his/her life choices through the possible experience of relegation. For example, pupils presenting a “restricted school career” in disadvantaged, low-capital urban and educational spaces tend to develop a negative view of their capacities, a sense of academic exclusion (“good schools” being experienced as inaccessible), an instrumental relation to learning and a passive relation to counselling.

It is clear that studying the work of moral socialisation that is done in schools is in no way disconnected from the more traditional question of educational inequalities. The confrontation with diversified school universes and the existence of unequal school careers produce dispersed experiences of socialisation, which, it may be hypothesised, prepare pupils unequally to cope with the complexity of the contemporary world and to construct themselves as actors within it. In other

words, the feelings of recognition, justice and capacity to act as citizens that young people experience and through which they construct themselves vary depending on school careers unequally marked by relegation and disqualification.

To sum up, a key aim of future research will be to grasp the role that schools now play in pupils’ moral socialisation and to study how this process concretely works in the light of the transformations of the field and of educational organisations outlined in the other parts of this project. This aspect also connects the study of moral socialisation with that of the diversification of schools and their organisational identities. This question seems to us essential in a French-speaking Belgian context characterised by considerable segregation between school types. In this regard, while the effects of segregation on pupils’ performances and their chances of success have been well documented, the way in which this separation of school publics influences their social dispositions (world view, conceptions of the common good, relation to values and to others) is still to be studied. We shall therefore ask: to what extent are the growing organisational fragmentation and segregation accompanied by a diversification of pupils’ experiences of socialisation?

Transversality: system, organisations, socialisation

We have described three forms of questioning that start out from a common “problematic”. The issue of the relationship between the axes is clearly important. How do the orientations adopted at system level, organisation level and actor level interact? In the literature one finds a dominant perspective clearly inspired by Foucault, related to the “conducting of conducts.” In this perspective, orientations adopted at the system level, i.e. devices for systemic regulation (“competence” standards, external evaluations, discourses on “quality,” etc.) very profoundly impregnate the actors and organisations, supposedly led, as if governed from within, to understand themselves in the terms imposed on them by the discourses and knowledge emanating from the agencies of governance and ordering reality. It seems to us, however, that this strong capacity of systems to shape behaviours and identities is more often supposed than truly empirically established. The empirical observations that we make and which motivate this research project suggest on the contrary that, while orientations are indeed set at system level, one observes a diversity, in fact a growing diversity, of projects and behaviours at the organisation and actor levels (schools seeking to be increasingly alternative and different from one another; different forms of contestation of “the system” are developing; many pupils defy injunctions). This leads us to hypothesise that the relations between systems, organisations and actors are weakly coupled relations of

interdependence, enabling the different levels to function with partial autonomy while influencing one another. Our analysis is thus conceived in three distinct axes precisely so as to study this relative autonomy and these interdependences among levels and their effects on pupils. An important added value of this way of framing the problem, distinguishing it from existing work, stems from the fact that it intends to study and combine analysis of levels generally studied separately in distinct projects.

But the unity of our framework and the interlinking of the questionings on the different axes also derives from the fact that each of them is observed in the light of the same fundamental tension between, on the one hand, the tendency of the systems, organisations and actors to focus on results and performances and, on the other hand, the desire of some social movements, organisations and actors to see education embody values and projects that have meaning for them or at the societal level. This fundamental tension between self-referentiality and attachment of education to particular values is at the heart of our common research program. It is moreover one of the main tensions running through educational systems on a worldwide scale. In studying how this fundamental tension is deployed in each level and in specific areas, we are in fact studying a problem that runs through all modern educational systems, even if each system structures the tension and copes with it in a different way.

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