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Book Review

The Decline of the Republican School:
A Perspective Using OECD Criteria

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Bernard Hugonnier (2013). **Le déclin de l'école républicaine.** France: Les Editions du Net, 144 pages.

The book "The decline of the republican school" by Bernard Hugonnier addresses in descriptive/comparative terms the equality and equity of the French republican school. It is divided into three sections. The first part evaluates four aspects of school in France: equal access to education, equal means (resources), equal quality and equal opportunities. The fulfillment of these four equalities is what the author calls "equity." The author conducts a comparative statistical analysis, comparing France with other OECD member countries in terms of demographics, investment, and standardized test results. The "equality of opportunities" study is conducted based on the results of the PISA test and focuses its analysis on intra/inter institutional variance, the impact of socioeconomic status and cultural background on student performance, resilience and repetition in students from modest backgrounds, the performance of boys and girls, the performance of young immigrants, and the performance of public and private institutions.

In the second section the author explains that the fight against inequalities in school requires tackling five objectives that he considers to be key: reducing social inequalities; increasing social cohesion; facilitating social mobility; optimizing human capital; and developing skills for the economy and society of tomorrow.

Regarding the reduction of inequalities, he analyzes how years of study is related to economic and social aspects, where a higher number of years of study is associated with higher income, lower unemployment, more social participation, and increased life expectancy.

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Social cohesion is addressed briefly and in general terms, using sociological, political, philosophical, economic, and culturalist approaches. The author concludes that in order to increase social cohesion, schools must teach and develop social capital; intensify efforts to teach civic-mindedness, ethical behavior, and social responsibility; replace mass education with more personalized education focused on skills and talents, promoting individual responsibility; develop a new sense of community based on shared universal principles; and optimize overall welfare.

To facilitate social mobility, the author drives attention to the need for government intervention that not only considers social policies directed to education, including education policy, but also a fiscal and budget policy aimed at income redistribution. He observes that today student social origin proves to be a good predictor of academic performance, generating a social determinism where the educational system merely reproduces inequalities by concentrating in elite schools elite homogeneous populations. In light of this scenario, one factor that could help counteract this social determinism would be to promote more socially diverse schools.

Regarding the optimization of human capital, based on data concerning dropouts and low PISA results, the author highlights the need for the country to improve these, increasing the number of graduates in the school system and excellency in results on international standardized tests. To do this, it is necessary to develop skills derived from the globalization process which focus on environmental protection, lifelong learning, economy of knowledge, and social inclusion.

In the third and final section of the book, the author states that in a fair school all must have access to the same educational opportunities, regardless of their socioeconomic origin, culture, or sex. To build strong social cohesion, equity in education must increase, which, according to the author, entails the development of new goals, namely:

• Ensure equal access to life-long learning.
• Better meet the needs of children with disabilities.
• Improve school climate.
• Fight school failure and dropout.
• Reexamine school cycles and rhythms.
• Promote access to and intelligent use of information and communication technology.
• Reduce social determinism in higher education
• Align education and immigration policy.
• Modernize the education system.

In terms of modernizing the education system, in my view, it is important to emphasize two aspects: institutional governance and the role of teachers in the changes considered necessary.

Regarding institutional governance, the author states that institutions need greater autonomy so that those who are in charge can make the adjustments required in terms of the needs of the population, programs, teaching methods, and support and assessment of students. To do this, principals will have to receive training that enables them to meet these challenges autonomously. Additionally, initial teacher training should focus on the process of acquisition of common ground, program and instructional differentiation, and formative assessment.

The role of teachers stands out as a critical role in ensuring the success of the change process. They must not only change in the way that the text stipulates, but also take ownership of the change process and be inspired by it.

The main contribution of the book is to describe, using OECD criteria, the state of equality and equity in the French school system, comparing it with other members of this organization and providing an up-to-date overview.

Its contributions would be greater if it included a review of the experiences of the countries used as a comparison in implementing the proposed measures, in addition to other experiences, analyzing their feasibility in the French cultural context.