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SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ASSESSMENT AND EXAMINATION PROCEDURES IN FRANCE

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Recent pressures for greater democracy and opportunity in educational provision in France have resulted in a radical restructuring of the traditionally highly selective and elitist educational system Among the changes introduced to the system has been examination reform which was instituted in the mid 1970s by Minister for Education René Haby This reform involved the abolition of a public examination taken at 16 years of age (Brevet d'Études) and its replacement by a process of continuous assessment and guidance ('orientation') in schools Less radical recommendations for change in examinations at 18 + (Baccalaureat) have also been made The reforms involve postponing selection, making assessment more comprehensive, and giving a greater role to teachers in assessing students Reactions to the reforms in France and their implications are discussed It is unlikely that the reforms will have much impact unless greater attention is paid to over all reform strategy and to the ideological and institutional super structure in which changes will have to take place

The early history of educational assessment in France is dominated by the need for examinations to provide for standardized curricula and to attest to professional competence During the 19th century, these concerns gradually gave way to increasing emphasis on the role of examinations in the regulation of competition for places within the new, more flexible, social order With the expansion of educational provision in the 20th century, this role now predominates Recently, pressures for greater democracy and opportunity in educational provision have resulted in a radical restructuring of the traditional highly selective and elitist educational system, with a commitment to the comprehensivization of secondary schooling, which involves significant changes in curriculum, internal school organization and, not least in importance, assessment procedures[1] (7) Changes in assessment procedures

[1] It is important to stress, however, that these are largely policy changes The degree of real change in the ethos and institutional organization of schooling varied from school to school, since the common school could not, of itself democratize a system in which none of the fundamental controls of ideology was changed

include the virtual abolition of all public examinations below the 18+ Baccalauréat level and, officially at any rate, the discontinuing of regular promotion tests during the course of school and their replacement with continuous assessment by teachers. The Baccalauréat too, whilst still a formal public examination, has been subject to major reorganization and there is growing pressure for it also to become an award based on continuous assessment (30).

In this paper I shall review some of these recent developments in assessment procedures in order to highlight the way in which those pervasive, and in many ways contradictory pressures common to the educational systems of industrial societies at the present time, are being mediated by the particular traditions and ideals that characterize French educational provision. In the interests of brevity, I shall refer only to developments for 11 to 18-year-old students in secondary schooling, although trends parallel to those I shall describe are also discernible in the further and higher education sectors. To set these developments in their context, I shall first describe very briefly the arrangements for assessment and certification that existed prior to the well-known 'Haby reforms' of 1975 which may be regarded as something of a watershed in the attempts to modernize French education and bring it in line with prevailing democratic and egalitarian values. At the same time, the Haby reforms also heralded the parallel and now increasingly dominant theme of vocationalism and the economy's growing need for school-leavers with different types of technical training.

THE CONTEXT OF CHANGE

From the earliest days of the nineteenth century, French educational provision was recognisably a system. In particular, the early establishment of a range of national qualifications was significant in making a reality of one of the major principles of the Université - supreme central control. A decree of 1808 stated that no one could teach without a qualification from the Université or without being a member or graduate of one of its faculties. No other institution could deliver valid diplômas since 'diplomes reservées à l'État' was one of the 'grands principles' of French education.[2]

[2]The Université was set up by Napoleon in 1808 as a national system of education. It embodied the two central principles of supreme central control and a state monopoly of instruction although non-elite elementary education, which had a very different purpose and was almost totally separate in its provision, was only tenuously included (see 2).

Until well into this century, the Baccalauréat performed the dual functions of maintaining the social bias of the education system in favour of the bourgeoisie (5) and of preserving the ideal of equality in education by subjecting all candidates to a common educational experience (33) Given the size and complexity of the educational system, a common educational experience became a reality only through the existence of national examinations, despite the provision of detailed curricular objectives (1, 15) Armytage (3) goes as far as to argue that an examination as uniform as the Baccalaureat was only possible in a highly centralized system In higher education, too, although it enjoyed considerably more curricular freedom, the same assumption that national certificates were necessary to ensure national equality of provision has traditionally been in evidence

The French, it has often been noted, have a passion for diplomas and equality, they believe that the former, because they are awarded according to uniform rules, ensure the latter (27)

If examinations have played an important role in France as a means of ensuring a considerable degree of national homogeneity in educational standards and practice, they have also been of central importance in legitimating the pre-eminent position of a liberal-classical, academic curriculum (11) and in regulating access to different levels of employment Thus, despite the strongly centralized control of the curriculum and pedagogy, not least through the standardization of teacher-training procedures, as well as the explicit provision of detailed 'course programmes' and regular teacher-inspection, it was arguably the state monopoly over public examinations and certification that was most instrumental in the maintenance of national homogeneity (27) Indeed, it was explicitly intended to be so, for such a monopoly could readily be justified in the enduring French passion for diplomas as a reflection of meritocratic equality

It is this passion that continues to provide support for central control of the educational system since many teachers still feel as Napoleon did when he first instituted a national education system in 1808, that only through such centralization can national unity and equality of provision, irrespective of region or class, be ensured Thus, although the two major examination qualifications that existed prior to the Haby reforms in 1975 - the 16+ Certificat d'Etudes du Premier Cycle (also known as the Brevet d'Enseignement Secondaire) and the 18+ Baccalauréat - were both locally

set and administered,[3] they were regarded as national qualifications. Both examinations represented the logical climax of a sequentially structured curriculum in which academic prowess and competitiveness were the dominant characteristics.

EXAMINATION REFORMS WITHIN COMPULSORY SCHOOLING

It was in an effort to provide some worthwhile and realistic qualification for the majority of students whose interests and abilities did not fit them for a highly academic system that a major attempt at examination reform was instituted in the mid- 1970s by Minister for Education, René Haby. As part of his sweeping reforms, Haby sought to replace the 'Brevet' at 16+ by a process of continuous assessment and guidance known as 'orientation'. Teachers are required to record children's personal history and progress in individual 'dossiers'. They also have to hold regular meetings with the 'orientation' counsellor (a key figure in the procedure), a school doctor, a psychologist, and parents' representatives. Teachers decide at the end of the second and fourth years of secondary schooling the appropriate educational and career route for each student. Although, in theory, parents have the right both to choose and refuse what the school decides and, in extreme cases, may demand that their child be entered for a formal examination, very few challenge the combined weight of teacher opinion.[4] In reality, it is teachers who now play the determining role in student orientation through their classwork assessments, the recommendations of the 'Class Council', and the powerful 'Council of Teachers' which represents the school as a whole.

It is an interesting feature of French education that beliefs in the power of the centrally-determined curriculum to limit severely teachers' freedom to depart from the formal syllabus seems to make it a great deal easier to bring about examination reform. Where one of the major stumbling blocks in a decentralized educational system, such as that of England and Wales, is the

[3] Le Courrier de l'Éducation (16) describes the operation for the Académie of Reims in which, for example, there are 205,000 question papers for the Bac de Technicien alone. In 1978, there were 336,991 candidates for the Bac, 63,000 for Agrégation and Capes (secondary teaching qualification), 560,000 for various brevets and certificats professionels (CAP, BEP, BP, BT, BTS) including, in 1976, prior to the Haby reforms, 550,000 candidates for the Brevet d'Études du Premier Cycle - a total of more than one million every year.

[4] According to the Prost report (30) 'taux national moyen des procedures d'appel contre les decisions d'orientation en 1982 = 6.80%; taux de satisfaction de l'appel = 17.80%'.

fear that removal of public examination constraints will result in curriculum anarchy, in France, the process of 16+ examination reform and indeed abolition has been accomplished with comparatively little controversy compared with that which tends to surround the smallest attempt at change in some other countries [5]

Having said this, the alternative procedures proposed under the Haby reforms provoked a storm of protest, at the heart of which lay, on the one hand, concern amongst teachers at the degree of responsibility, and hence vulnerability to public pressure such continuous assessment implied for them, and, on the other, fear of the insidious potential for control that student assesment dossiers - particularly if computerized as Haby proposed - would have A third, perhaps less widely stated element in teachers' opposition was undoubtedly their concern at the increased work-load which continuous assessment implied Haby's only concession to the storm of protest generated by a wide variety of educational groups was to drop the idea of computerizing the assessment 'dossiers' which were to follow children from the beginning to the end of their schooling

It is a characteristic of French education that so long as the government itself is not vulnerable, reforms can be pushed through, sometimes in the teeth of considerable opposition This is one reason why there are so many national protests and strikes among teachers, since this is virtually the only way of opposing the enormous power of political decisions supported by an autonomous and autocratic national Ministry of Education, which is both the employer of every teacher in the formal system and the arbiter of everything that is to be done But, although this powerful central machinery allowed the orientation procedure to become policy, it could not ensure professional support for the change nor that the skills necessary to implement it properly would be available As with so many other reforms in French education, such as the contemporaneous institution of mixed-ability teaching in the first two years of secondary education, very little in the way of training or extra resources were provided to help teachers implement the changes Not surprisingly, the result was a feeling little short of despair amongst the majority of teachers faced with implementing pedagogical procedures and

[5] Since this paper was written, the conservative government has reintroduced a 16+ examination

curriculum change largely outside their experience and for which they were, for the most part, unprepared.

This despair, and the declining job satisfaction with it, has led to a crisis of morale amongst French teachers reflected in recent years in a spate of best-selling volumes about the problems which teachers face (see, for example, 24, 25, 31). This despair is reflected in a very high level of antipathy, even hostility, towards the national Ministry which imposes its will but does relatively little to support its employees in the new demands that an increasingly technological, vocational, democratic, and egalitarian secondary education is imposing on them.

Thus, although the abolition of external examinations at the end of compulsory schooling would seem in theory to provide a solution to the problem of controlling parent and student frustration, without negating the principles of equality and democracy, the reality seems to be rather different. On the one hand, the orientation procedure is not well enough understood, resourced, or supported to be carried out conscientiously by teachers. The result is that many dossiers are not filled in properly and guidance is not the continuous and supportive process it was intended to be, but often simply the recognition of a choice already made, often by default. On the other hand, as ought to have been anticipated, given the danger of bias in teachers' assessments of their students (5), it is becoming clear that the procedure is not as egalitarian as it was intended to be since orientation towards vocational education is six times more frequent among students from low socio-economic homes than among other students (18).

The ministry rhetoric justifies orientation in the following terms:

> Tout au long de sa scolarité il sera l'objet de la part de ses éducateurs d'une observation continue qui permettra de mieux adapter l'enseignement à ses besoins, l'aidera à se connaître et à bien préparer son orientation scolaire et professionnelle ultérieure (26, p.2).

However, many people feel that the new procedures do not function as a benign diagnostic assessment and educational guidance system, but as a source of social control. Firstly, 'assessment' provides for a far more comprehensive evaluation of the individual than does the traditional subject examination, since it includes personal and family characteristics and a good

deal of descriptive information Secondly, 'l'orientation est subie, non choisie' (19) There is a gap between law and reality over the notion of choice of educational paths Future orientation tends to be predicted by primary schooling, by social group, and by teachers' decisions In some rural areas too, organizational factors further limit the potential choice

> L'orientation fonctionne ainsi en grand partie comme un mecanisme d'exclusion successive, au detriment des categories sociales moins favorisées - on dit ce qu'on veut ils disent si on peut (18)

Or, as the Le Grand Report (14, p 104) puts it, 'être oriente' now means to be put into a 'short' (i e , less prestigious) cycle and a lycee d'enseignement professionel for vocational training It is rooted in failure rather than success and its image is of arbitrary manipulation Thus, many youngsters are 'cooled out' before they reach the stage of any public examination,[6] and many more, it is argued, are forced to make career decisions before they feel able to decide Great reliance is placed on the results of 'objective' tests at the end of troisième (the end of the compulsory stage of schooling) which, when combined in the dossier with the orientation counsellor's report, provide the principal basis for subsequent educational and career choice despite what research has revealed to be its low predictive power (13) Those who choose and are chosen to continue in the formal school system by entering the 'classes de seconde' of a lycée are accompanied by their 'dossier scolaire' which continues to play an important role in determining the choice of Baccalauréat options available and, in many cases, eventual selection for a particular course of higher education

The long-term significance of an assessment system in which the arbitrary power of the individual teacher is replaced by the benign and scientific efficiency of an impersonal norm which is simply operated by teachers has yet to be understood or even recognized (8) The choice process in guidance and counselling of this type is not nearly as open and voluntarist as the rhetoric tends to suggest (for example, 32) It has been suggested that, in French education, 'control' (assessment based on impersonal norms) is replacing 'evaluation' (the personal assessment of an individual's value) Furthermore, it is suggested that the growth of 'orientation' as the dominant

[6] Fifteen percent of students do not go to college at all according to Mme B Nonon of 'Ecole et Famille'

vehicle of that 'control' is part of a more general movement towards 'corporate management' in education in which the traditional, personal authority of local officials, schools' inspectors, and teachers is being replaced by the impersonal regulation of statutory obligations and mechanized administration.[7]

Crucial to this development is a computer-based facility in the Ministry of Education for collecting and co-ordinating a whole range of information about the functioning of the educational system on a national basis. Thus, if 'orientation' is part of a policy of 'democratization', it is also, and more significantly, closely connected with this 'rationalization' of educational administration and hence control. If continuous assesment, related to detailed, nationally-prescribed norms of performance, eliminates the injustices of the caprice of an individual teacher and the variation in the examination papers set by the various Départements (see 20, 22), it is by the same token more irresistible. Moreover, it is also a means of making a practical reality of the tradition of imposing curricular and pedagogic norms which was hitherto the responsibility of the inspector and thus represents a shift from 'process' to 'product' evaluation.

Thus, the assessment 'dossier' (the elaborate profile which follows a pupil throughout his or her school career), combined with a series of 'orientation' decisions taken by a student's teachers in periodic meetings of the Counseil de Classe, carries into the classroom the same assumptions of scientific rationality which characterize all aspects of corporate management. That is to say, the norms of performance chosen are taken to be in some sense absolute and not the values of a particular group and time. As authority within the educational system is thereby dispersed, control becomes a composite and increasingly impersonal phenomenon, impossible to pin down and hence to resist. If what is to be taught to whom, when, how, and why, can only be answered by reference to particular values, disguising such pedagogical and curricular decisions under the cloak of an apparently objective, scientific assessment is perhaps the most effective form of educational (and thus social) control yet developed.

[7] This is very much the argument of Foucault (12). Also I am drawing here on an interview with M. Guy Berger, Département des Sciences de l'Éducation, Université de Paris-Vincennes.

At the same time, it is likely to ensure also a relatively novel way of making central control a reality through the national provision of detailed curricular objectives which are then translated into evaluation criteria The co-existence of this trend with an already centralized system is doubly significant in the contemporary utilitarian climate, in that following the model of the 'classes preparatoires'[8] tracks or orientations which correspond most to society's current economic needs can receive most emphasis The number of places available in each type of course can be determined, according to a 'numerus clausus', this restriction of opportunity being arguably a good deal more significant than the actual content of such courses This is explicitly recognized in the 1983 Prost Report

> In the first place, the criteria chosen are uniform Orientation rarely takes into account pupils' centres of interest and the diversity of their aptitudes The two major criteria are their results in mathematics and their age (as we have already indicated) In the second place, orientation is frequently transformed into a procedure of practicality Pupils must be divided up between the sections that exist, according to the space available in different establishments This bureaucratic procedure, together with the rigidity of the learning programme, engenders in families a feeling of helplessness in the face of a blind technostructure In the third place, it (orientation) constitutes a vast fragmented distillation which divides up pupils between streams which are strongly bounded and hierarchic as a function of dominant social models supremacy of training in abstract science, less consideration for technical and professional training (30, p 134)

A major report was published in 1982 on the state of the junior-secondary 'collège' The preparation of this report was one of the first tasks set by the newly-elected socialist government The report, written by one of France's leading educational radicals, Professor Louis Le Grand, drew attention to some of the problems which arise from orientation - for example, students' lack of self-knowledge and of the range of possible employment opportunities which, Le Grand suggests, often makes it difficult for students to choose the most suitable career path, even where appropriate provision for this exists which is itself relatively rare The Report urged the introduction

[8] 'Classes préparatoires' are taken after the Baccaularéat for those wishing to sit for the highly competitive examinations for selection for the Grades Ecoles

of a personal 'tutorial' system in the college which could take over the existing guidance function of orientation, confining the latter to a single summative evaluation at the end of 'troisième' (i.e., at the end of the fourth and final compulsory year of secondary schooling).

> Ce brevet est le constat, en profil, des objectifs atteints par l'élève. C'est le seul moment d'une évaluation sommative (14, p. 104).

Although this proposal provoked considerable opposition, particularly amongst teachers,[9] and thus is unlikely to be implemented, it does suggest that French educational thinking is currently moving in a very similar direction to that in England in giving increased emphasis to pastoral care and student-teacher dialogue in 'formative' evaluation culminating at the point of school-leaving, in a positive, summative 'profile' report which provides a comprehensive statement of a student's school achievements. It is too early to predict what the effect of such a move might be, but previous experience suggests that however disguised, the use of school qualifications for selection will still create a sense of failure for many students with all the problems that this causes.

Nevertheless, it is worth reiterating the point that the 'orientation' procedure neatly solves several problems at once. Firstly, it provides a means of selection which minimizes potential opposition, since it appears egalitarian and democratic in line with the prevailing educational rhetoric. Secondly, it provides for greater 'product evaluation' control of teachers by clearing away some of the traditional assessment bureaucracy and making teachers directly and visibly responsible for their actions. Thirdly, it allows for a more technocratic, depersonalized approach to educational administration and more efficient 'process evaluation'. Fourthly, it provides for the most effective sort of assessment control of teachers - a combination of 'process' and 'product' evaluation in which the central prescription of curriculum norms is linked to the formal processes of student assessment.

REFORMS IN THE UPPER LEVEL OF SECONDARY SCHOOLING

It is interesting to compare developments in examination procedures at

[9] See, for example, 'Appelez-moi Maman ou la face cachée du tutorat (10).' For other views, see 17, 21, 23, 29.

the end of compulsory schooling with developments in the 'senior secondary' Baccalauréat matriculation examination which, since it was first instituted in 1808, has given automatic right of access to university education and indeed was originally regarded as the first stage of such education Originally a two-stage examination, the 'Bac' is now a once-off 'grouped' examination in which students pursue a particular specialism within a common curriculum core It has always been the case that such specialisms are not regarded equally, traditionally, the most prestigious option was classics Since the early 1950s however, by far the most prestigious course has been that leading to the Bac 'C' - Mathematics and Physical Science (4) Despite the fact that any 'Bac' holder is theoretically entitled to enter any university faculty, in practice, the possession of the certificate *per se* no longer guarantees the holder a free choice of subject specialism in higher education Apart from the fact that some universities and the very popular University Institutes of Technology (IUTs) have the right to dispense with the Baccalauréat entirely, increasing pressure of numbers had led many other faculties to discriminate more or less overtly on the basis of the Baccalauréat specialism pursued and the candidate's school record (28)

Bac 'C' is the only specialism that allows successful students access to the whole range of disciplines in higher education Not surprisingly, there is considerable competition within the senior-secondary school (lycee) to be allowed to take the Bac 'C' ption and many students will repeat a year m order to achieve a placement on this course Given this situation, the most talented students in every subject are likely to aspire to specialize in Mathematics and Science for the Baccalauréat In this way, what is intended to be a qualitative specialization between equal but different curriculum strands actually acts as a quantitative selection device between students of different *levels* of achievement

This phenomenon, by no means unique to France, is widely deplored in official circles Haby himself tried to reform the Baccalaureat by returning to a two-stage model based on a general first part and a more specialized second part This was intended to encourage universities to specify the relevant Baccalauréat subjects as entrance criteria rather than the ubiquitous Bac 'C' The first stage of such a reform was instituted in 1981 by means of a 'common core' first-year lycée curriculum which allows students to postpone specialization

A basic problem underlying all this is the 'devaluation' of the Baccalauréat as it is obtained by more and more students. The phenomenon of 'qualification inflation' (9), which besets the progressive expansion of education systems so that what were once elite credentials become generally more accessible as they become part of mass educational provision, has posed a major problem for French education. Some form of 'weeding out' procedure is now highly necessary in the more popular university faculties but the weight of tradition surrounding the Baccalauréat resists any fundamental changes in its status.

Although there is considerable lip-service paid to the idea of abolishing the Baccalauréat, the Prost report (30) on upper- secondary schooling, which was instigated by the Mitterand Government, stopped well short of abolition in its recommendations for Baccalauréat reform. It suggested instead a simpler, more decentralized organization for the examination with largely locally set papers and continuous assessment. Perhaps, more significantly, Prost introduced the idea, currently much in favour in Scotland and England and Wales, of what these countries refer to as 'grade-related criteria' and what Prost terms 'a certain number of competencies linked to referential criteria for each type of learning' (30, p.146). This is the means, Prost suggests, of overcoming the well- known subject and geographical variations in the supposedly uniform Baccalauréat without provoking the hostility that would result from any attempt to remove one of the last bastions of tradition in French education.

It is too early to say whether the Prost Report recommendations will have any effect on the problems. Meanwhile, many university faculties will continue to operate a 'numerus clausus' entry policy or will subject students to selection examinations during or even at the end of their university studies in an attempt to counteract a decline in their status brought about by the large number of unemployed graduates. Most of the unrest in recent years in French higher education has been associated with the perceived irrelevance of much of the content of university courses and their insufficiently selective entrance criteria.

Underlying this unrest it is possible to discern a more general conflict between the 'old humanist' ideals traditional to French education in which the 'esprit Carthesian' combines support for academic excellence and equality of opportunity and the 'new industrialist' values of an increasingly

utilitarian society that regards the role of education as one of providing the skilled labour needed by the economy rather than the general development of the individual intellect (34) The fact that philosophy is still a compulsory 'core' subject in the Baccalauréat is testimony to the continuing strength of the liberal ideal Equally, the tensions evident in attempts to remove from the Baccalaureat the characteristics inherited from the time when it was the first stage of elite education and to replace them with specialist preparatory education for subsequent vocationally-oriented courses indicate that some finer complementary form of selection is likely to overtake the Baccalauréat if no reform is forthcoming

The signs are that, as with the 16+ selection, it is teachers who will increasingly wield the power at the Baccalaureat level The decline in value of the Baccalauréat, which has been associated with its 'quantitative democratization' and 'qualitative differentiation' (33), has given teachers an important role in 'orienting' students into the different options Similarly, the devaluation of the Baccalaureat has increased the importance of teachers' continuous assessment in the last two years of schooling and thus of the 'dossier scolaire', a trend that the Prost recommendations have clearly taken into account

UNDERLYING TRENDS

Overall, the pressures behind the changes that have taken place in French educational assessment in recent years are similar to those in many other countries These general themes I have discussed in detail elsewhere (6) but may be briefly identified as the postponement of the key point of selection, with the progressive expansion of successive levels of the education system, making assessment more comprehensive, including personal qualities and skills as well as academic achievement in the wake of a more vocationally-oriented educational ethos, and the increasing delegation to teachers of the responsibhty for assessing students

This last trend is associated in France with the need to find new ways of curbing the aspirations of the majority of students whilst providing ever-finer discrimination between them At the same time, the postponement of the key point of selection more and more to the post-Baccalauréat stage of the entrance examinations for the pinnacles of the French educational system (the Grandes Écoles or the internal university examinations) makes it

possible for teachers to take on this responsibility without the likelihood of unbearable pressure from aspiring parents

These same trends are identifiable in other countries In England and Wales, for example, despite the stubborn commitment to external public examinations at 16, 17, and 18+, which is largely a product of the lack of other means of curriculum control, there is a powerful parallel growth of teacher-based assessment procedures The various forms of comprehensive 'profiles' currently being instituted are similar to French trends in reflecting an increasingly utilitarian and vocational rather than academic-curriculum emphasis for all but the highest achieving students This emphasis also embodies a desire to make education relevant and worthwhile for the comprehensive population now obliged to participate in the formal system at least up to the age of 16 and now increasingly, up to the age of 17 and 18 years

A major plank of educational policy in the Mitterand government involved attempts to create some measures of decentralization within the educational system Both the 16+ and the 18+ assessment reforms discussed in this paper reflect such an attempt to broaden the range of teachers' professional activity Making teachers themselves increasingly and directly responsible for the process of guidance and selection could signal the demise of the traditional role of the French secondary-school teacher, largely confined to the formal delivery of a set number of lessons each week Although the Le Grand Report's explicit attempts to change this role by giving teachers much wider responsibility for their students' development and welfare, at least at the college stage, was derided by newspaper headlines, such as '"Call me mother" recommends the Le Grand Report' (10), it seems likely that the new charge upon teachers to undertake comprehensive monitoring of their students' progress will make such a change inevitable

Thus, the signs are that contemporary developments in French educational assessment procedures are likely to lead to far-reaching changes in the educational process itself There are few indications, however, that French teachers are either committed to, or prepared for, their new responsibilities and the exposure to public censure associated with them Traditionally, their civil-servant status has protected teachers on one flank and the external-examination system has protected them on the other It seems likely that without radical changes in school organization and in pre-

and in-service training which could provide some support for teachers to encourage them to shoulder these new responsibilities (and this sort of support is not characteristic of the still heavily centralized and academic French educational machine), assessment is likely to become one of several major casualties of an educational system which is breaking under the strain of the conflicting demands of tradition and change The associated crisis of morale and ultimately of practice will not be confined to the teaching profession or to impassioned volumes with titles such as *Voulez-vous vraiment des enfants idiots?* (25) and *Les enseignants persecutées* (31) It will also include the students whose future is now at the mercy of procedures which have done little to attack the underlying problems besetting French education, whilst fuelling teachers' feelings of powerlessness to cope with their changing role

This possibility highlights the need for assessment and examination reform to be planned as part of an overall reform strategy in which, alongside the more obvious partnership of curriculum and assessment development, attention is given to the ideological and institutional superstructure in which such change is inevitably embedded The highly centralized organization of French education provides a classic example of a system in which it is possible for the letter of the law to disregard the spirit necessary for its effective implementation In succumbing to the temptation to change procedures rather than tackling the much longer-term and diffuse task of changing attitudes, it seems likely that the potential of recent assessment reforms in France to provide a genuinely different educational experience, in keeping with the needs of the great majority of students, will be missed

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