



EUROPEAN COUNCIL OF NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

ECNAIS Conference and Annual General Meeting MADRID | 12th - 14th OF May 2011

**DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION: STRUGGLE FOR LIFE
OR CREATING THE FUTURE**

Diversity in education: Struggle for life

Luisa Ribolzi

ECNAIS

EUROPEAN COUNCIL OF NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

Means

Right to open

Right to survive

Right to compete with public on an even footing

Right to have an identity

EDUCATION IS A DUTY OF THE STATE

TWO REASONS:

1. provides equitable education for all, helping disadvantaged families
2. public schools produce at least minimally qualified individuals, trusting common values

CONSEQUENTLY,

private schools are thought as supplementary

LIMITS OF THE STATE MONOPOLY:

**In a democratic country, decisions about curriculum (contents, methods, timing, examinations...) would be influenced by the political majority: minorities have to accept an education at least partly different, or opposed, to their opinion and values;
in a plural society, common school is unable to cope with different groups' demand**

THE POLICY CHALLENGE

to ensure that every child receives an adequate education while permitting the greatest degree of school autonomy

HOW TO DO THAT?

multiplying state schools, opposing private ones: the internal pluralism of public schools doesn't guarantee in itself the right to education, because it denies the possibility of adhering voluntarily to a specific education project.
allowing private schools to exist, monitoring their accountability, and balancing autonomy with accountability

WE AGREE WITH CHARLES GLENN:

“no single instructional approach can meet the needs of every student... equity may necessitate very different experiences for different students: it is better to speak about “diversity of excellence” than about “diversity of quality”

This is not obvious.

In many countries there is a real

Struggle for existence

for the private sector

**THE ROLE OF DIVERSITY.
PLURAL SOCIETY NEEDS A PASSAGE**

FROM

COMMON SCHOOL: SAME EDUCATION FOR ALL

To

**A WIDE RANGE OF SCHOOLS: A TAILORED
EDUCATION FOR ALL**

COMMON SCHOOL

Diversity as a risk in building a cooperating community

It works

When a society is very homogenous

Based on shared values

Common schools aims to acculturate people in a fixed culture

or

to prepare for a job fostering the conformity trough only one model

Choice school

Diversity as an opportunity in building a cooperating community

It works

In a diversified society

Where common values are matched with family culture

Families, teachers, civil society can open a school

To improve the values on which it is based

In a context of centrally fixed conditions



Integrated system

AN INTEGRATED SYSTEM WHERE

*All schools are choice schools
All schools respect some basic conditions
State schools are as autonomous as the private schools
Private schools are not financially penalised
Every school is assessed on an even footing*

DOES

*Improve quality through competition
Improve change and responsiveness both to the State and to the clients
Allow family to choose the education they want*

NEEDS

*Right for private schools to open, to be funded, to be assessed,
to have an identity*

THE “AMBIGUOUS EMBRACE”

Public funding of private schools

Independently from its forms (voucher or financing of the schools)

Is necessary

But it could lead to their being (too) conformed to public schools

school autonomy is essential for the right of parents to make decisions

about the schooling of their children but on the other hand

society has a right to be sure

that the education provided to all of its children is adequate to the demand

that will be placed upon them as they become adults.

EMPOWERING PARENTAL CHOICE: THE FUNDING OF EDUCATION

*funding families: vouchers to choose every school they want, public or private, profit or non profit, but accredited → “money follows children”
funding schools, so families can send their children free or paying reduced tuition fees*

Both reforms could be positive

if, through competition, had a positive impact on educational achievement

CONSEQUENCES OF A MIXED SYSTEM

NEGATIVES:

*in competition, polarisation is exacerbated
“week” students are considered an “inconvenient” in competitive market
organizational climate doesn’t encourage innovation and accountability
competition will further inequality*

POSITIVES:

*education could be more effective
parents, students and teachers would be more satisfied
The government is no longer “preoccupied with rowing the boat”: it
cares that needs are met school autonomy will increase, and schools will
be assessed on their results basis*

CONCLUSION

Choice schools seem to be a possible answer to both aims equity common citizenship socialization.

Families are allowed to send their children in a school where they can find commonalities with home values. If choice schools, anyway, are considered as “private” in the meaning that they are not producing a common good, and for this reason they are not, or not enough, funded, inequity grows. Private schools being “affluent” schools is a consequence of the way education is funded.

We should reject the idea that the state must endow all children with significant educational choices in classroom: instead, parents should be encouraged and sustained to make decisions about their children’s education and to take responsibility for the consequences: parents have a legitimate interest in selecting the values and educational practices they prefer to grow their children.