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The rural school in France: Current research contexts and positions

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PART 3

Educational Policies and Territorial Education Inequalities

Introduction to part 3

In this third and last part, the authors mainly address the territories as teaching contexts through their different contributions. Though rural or urban issues lead to reflections on educational policies or territorial education inequalities, the chapter provides reflections that are sometimes a little more controversial, such as the “territory effect,” which in certain territories complements the “master” or “institution” effects.

Angela Barthes and Yves Alpe first outline current developments with regard to the rural school, going back to its definitions, societal challenges, and the related problems addressed by research. They point out the polysemy of the research object, which has, as a result, been studied from multiple angles (geography, sociology, education sciences, information and communication sciences) and which undoubtedly requires in particular to be tackled by a multi-disciplinary approach...

Pierre Champollion subsequently posits an element of reflection on the rural issue:

he takes up the historical reflection on the education and territories problem by specific “territory effects.” He introduces here the concept of territoriality which is likely in some cases to influence education and orientation, including contradictorily, as shown with the French mountain area¹. In the example cited, territories and, above all, territorialities weigh in a comprehensive and simultaneous way, positively on education (perceptions of school, representations of territories and school performance) and negatively on orientation (levels of students’ and parents’ aspiration and expectation, projects and orientation choices).

1. In his thesis and HDR (accreditation to direct research) in particular.

Pierre Champollion further deepens his purely rural and mountain based analyzes with comparisons between targeted rural and urban areas, where the majority of differences, though not all, appear to be gradually reducing today, if we refer to the trends highlighted by the Rural School Observatory in the early 2000s and the Education and Territories Observatory in urban areas in 2014 and 2015.

More strictly rural issues return to the front stage via the issue of how territorial education inequalities are addressed at the political level: the authors, Yves Alpe and Angela Barthes, wonder if current public policies really correspond to education needs in the territories. Following a critical analysis of the multiple reports and official texts dealing with the rural school, they conclude that territorialized public education policies carried out so far by National Education remain largely unsuited to the specificities (challenges and strengths) of the rural school etc.

Just as in the first two parts, a case study brings an additional specific contribution. In the case study, Boris Meunier examines, according to gender, the effect of territory on orientation at the end of Troisième (final year of lower secondary school or form four). He shows that rural territories, relative to urban territories, paradoxically “penalize” to a lesser extent girls than boys in terms of orientation towards long and general occupations.

Chapter 11

The rural school, a polysemous object with significant societal challenges? Current research contexts and positions

11.1. Summary

In spite of its apparent simplicity, the term “rural school” refers to a complex and polysemous object, which has been and is still the subject of numerous discussions in the political sphere, community of educational actors, and that of researchers. As a result, there are many ways to approach the rural school issue and different definitions which are superimposed. However, it is a socially consensual, mediatized and defended object, which has carried throughout its history major issues of social equity and territorial development. This article aims at making an inventory of Francophone research on rural schools. It explains how researchers from different disciplines have conducted studies regarding the rural school, before identifying the current major research debates on the subject.

11.2. Introduction

The French educational system is marked by an increasing access to education, from the old regime to the present day. Education which was long reserved for a certain urban elite population, in a rather highly agricultural French economy, gradually (from the end of the 19th century until the middle of the 20th century) expanded to include rural populations. Today, the rural school which is very much diversified, is still talked about as a media object to be protected, an indispensable support for village life and in the national balance of territorial development, and as a balancing factor for maintaining fragile rural areas.

To this day, the idea of a historical academic delay of the rural school relative to the urban school remains entrenched in people’s memories. This results, without the object being really identified, in a negative image of the rural school which continues and keeps stigmatizing, having impacts on schooling (Alpe, 2006). There are also impacts on education public policies, which have frequently tried “to act for the rural school” (title of the Mauger report, 1992) according to rather questionable interpretations on the origin of “difficulties” encountered by students in rural schools, considered as disadvantaged due to geographical isolation, and movement difficulties (Lebossé 1998, Duhamel, 2003).

However, after a first phase (1960-1990) where researchers' observations are often very pessimistic (Girard, Bastide & Pourchier, 1963; Vogler & Bouisson, 1990), many studies carried out in the years 1990-2000 gave a more positive vision of rural schools' educational results and trajectories, without it really influencing prejudices and positions...

Thus, the rural school, after appearing as a significant progress in education, has become a “social problem” to be linked to the rise of concerns about the inequality of educational opportunities, which was the central object of the sociology of education in the 1960s. From there, a very active research field was set up, combining educational issues, works inspired by the economics of education, geographical and sociological approaches, but also international comparisons through the establishment of research networks (such as REIT, European Network of Territorial Intelligence).

This article aims at examining studies addressing the rural school and explaining the different contexts as well as modalities of Francophone pluridisciplinary research. It also identifies the current major problematic debates.

11.3. How the rural school became a research “problem” and subject

11.3.1. *The supposed “deficiencies” of the rural school and inappropriateness of educational policies*

As recalled by Gauthier and Luginbühl (2012), “education in rural areas is, like its entire environment, marked by the extent, sometimes long distances, remoteness of urban central areas, decision-making and funding bodies.” Deficiencies plaguing the rural school are partly due to the ills that affect the entire rural area (especially the “isolated rural”).

In many villages, the low offer of equipment, remoteness of infrastructure, and weakness of municipal resources have long encouraged parents' organization to take charge of the deficiencies that this represents. This is not without financial sacrifices, beyond the stated principles of equal access. Where small municipalities can not meet expenses, it is sometimes teachers or parents who organize lotto, empty barns, exhibitions and calendars, to try to raise the necessary funds. External actors are rarely present in rural schools and 25% of schools do not benefit from them at all. And those penalized are students of smaller schools: 38% of one-classroom schools do not benefit from the presence of an external actor, whereas schools with 5 or more classrooms are only 9% in this case (Alpe, 2016). Furthermore, the inequalities between rural schools are particularly significant, because the resources allocated by the municipalities vary enormously according to financial availability, and also depending on the priorities of local elected officials.

In addition, educational policies mainly developed from urban schools taken as models, and the specificities of rural schools, or the problems they face, are assessed only in reference to the urban model. The last school time reform in 2013 is a good illustration of these observations, and the rural municipalities are directly confronted with the impossibility of covering the additional cost imposed by this reform, thus in turn creating a significant spatial inequality (Alpe, Barthes & Champollion, 2016). The students of most small rural municipalities will thus be entrusted to a day-care center, while the municipalities with more resources, rather urban, will be able to offer additional teaching, languages, computer science, theater, sports, etc.

These resources-related deficiencies are accompanied by other difficulties. The “deficiencies” of rural students' academic success was highlighted as early as the 1960s (with in particular the studies of the INED), which was itself explained by the shortcomings mentioned above, and by the socio-cultural characteristics of rural populations, among which the relative weakness of the demand for education in rural areas (Lebossé, 1998) was often highlighted, which in turn explained the “lack of ambition” by rural students. Unfortunately, if the “lack of ambition” can be demonstrated (notably through the analysis of orientations at the end of Troisième), this is not the case for the supposed weakness of the demand for education, which has never been proven.

In spite of this situation of inequality, the rural environment can however provide education with assets which enhance learning in terms of socialization, and also of pedagogical efficiency, as shown by the different researches carried out on this subject (Alpe, Barthes & Champollion, 2016). The conditions are sometimes more favorable than in urban areas and the relationship is more stable. Knowledge of the human

environment, lesser need to address disciplinary problems as well as small numbers, argue in favor of equivalent or better results in rural areas, at least for primary education.

11.3.2. Pedagogical and institutional responses to the supposed difficulties of rural students

The first questions about the rural school do not come from researchers, but from actors: teachers, trainers, students' parents and local elected officials, intervened through active involvement (even activist) in debates since the nineteenth century², around some central themes: the need for education in the countryside (with lengthy discussions on the degree of intensification necessary for the education of rural children or training of their teachers), the role of school in the construction of citizenship, its place in the development of rural territories etc. In this context, it is above all the pedagogical aspects, school organization and teaching methods that are at the center of debates.

It is true that, as recalled by Gauthier and Luginbühl (2012), “to meet the specific needs of education in rural areas, pedagogy has sought to create procedures adapted to its audiences and invented local strategies. The development of new technologies, in particular Internet and social networks, makes it possible to address the isolation [...] These different experiments show that a rural education model exists, but that it requires a pedagogical reflection and specific professional competence.” This “model” (not theorized and relating to practice) is, however, often contested by the educational establishment, for which there can be no derogation from the basic school organization, and also by proponents of an immutable school form, supposed to guarantee the equality of children as regards school. But there are many specificities of the rural school that distinguish it from the urban school, and which probably have a role to play in the good standing of rural students' academic results. This concerns the small size of units, isolation, network organization and the organization of work into multigrade classes.

This small size, both regarding the number of classrooms and class size, is a direct consequence of rural demography. Situations vary locally, and also over time, but this characteristic remains. Although single classroom schools are becoming increasingly scarce (their number has been divided by 5 in 30 years), there are still many two or three classroom schools in rural areas.

The inspection bodies have repeatedly stressed the negative pedagogical consequences of this fact: loss of educational offer diversity, scarcity of external actors, reduction in the number of teachers a student comes across during his/her school years, while research shows on the contrary positive effects on students' levels (Alpe, Barthes & Champollion 2016; Lallai 2016).

Isolation, a true leitmotif of institutional texts, can take several forms: to the geographical aspect (movement and communication difficulties etc.), there are also issues relating to students' isolation (very small numbers, significant age range which makes it difficult to form homogeneous class groups, but also comparison and stimulation), and those concerning teachers: in many cases, beginning teachers of urban origin find themselves isolated in their classroom or school (sometimes “single classroom”), with professional socialization difficulties that this may generate etc.

In return, the educational establishment strongly encouraged (but rarely funded...) the implementation of special mechanisms such as intermunicipal educational groups (RPI), which often appear as a way of making the local people to accept class and / or school groups. The use of ICTEs enables another form of networking and is supplemented by networks of affinities, non institutional, developed by the teachers themselves to break their isolation. But as the Duhamel report pointed out, there has never been a real attempt to evaluate the pedagogical effectiveness of these mechanisms.

2. Frequent reference made in the famous Dictionary of Pedagogy by F. Buisson.

The organization of work in multigrade classes is a basic characteristic of the rural school, in France as elsewhere. This original school form, whose good pedagogical results have been attested by numerous scientific studies, is composed of different elements which, taken in isolation, can be found in other types (Champollion & Floro, 2013). Because what characterizes it is the interaction of these various elements that are gathered there. Mainly five can be identified: flexibility in managing the classroom (space, time, group, programs, etc.), diversity of modalities of the pedagogical management of students and pedagogical “methods”; simultaneity in the implementation of educational activities intended for the different groups or courses, such as to clearly enhance the gradual construction of autonomy with regard to students concerned; insertion of the class and, more broadly, the school in the territory and, beyond, within the surrounding context; general “support” position of teachers: since it is not possible for obvious reasons to handle all the lessons in their class, teachers of “multigrade” classes mostly adopt a rather “supportive” professional attitude, which differs from the usual “authoritative” attitude; the practice of an active pedagogy of autonomy, both behavioral at the level of infant or nursery classes and cognitive at the level of elementary school, which will be immensely useful to students for their further learning (Champollion & Floro, 2013, op cit.).

To these purely academic characteristics, we could add the advantages linked to a social environment where we know each other and where proximity contacts are easy, with less stress, violence and discipline problems (students and their parents frequently mention them in their interviews (Dupont, 2006)). Although these are idealized representations of the “countryside,” they undoubtedly affect the general atmosphere of education in rural areas.

11.4. What research around the rural school problems?

The rural school as a study object exists in the research community as such, but there is no well-established definition of the rural school. As a result, the orientation of studies largely depends on the original disciplines of researchers. We have identified five major orientations (the main ones for us) that involve current researchers.

The first, geographical orientation, is that consisting of defining the rural and its subcategories, to analyze what is happening in schools included in its spaces, known as rural schools. It is within these categories that all the analyses concerning the rural school are then presented, with the difficulties inherent in their variation over time (see, for example, the INSEE category changes of the last decade), but also from one country to another. Part of the historical research³ of the Rural School Observatory is based on this approach (Jean, 2007). Indeed, in France, municipalities of less than two thousand urban inhabitants belong to the rural. These rural municipalities comprise 25.3% of the French population. In other countries of the world, this threshold may vary: two hundred inhabitants in Denmark, ten thousand in Spain and even fifty thousand in Japan, and sometimes associate themselves with a notion of density, level of equipment, or economic data, such as the weight of agriculture (Rieutort, 2012).

Though this dichotomous view of urban and rural, different from one area to another, allows a simple reading grid and a first statistical approach to school situations within these national spaces, the fact still remains that a more complex reality is present in rural school analyses. On the one hand, cities and countrysides are not isolates, but interconnected spaces, with blurred boundaries, but on the other hand, the same spaces may have different characteristics (rural worker, ski resort, periurban, rural towns of senior officials, etc.).

The multiplicity of geographical reading indicators to approach the rural school then presents researchers with multiple options, often determined, they make it possible to adopt an approach of the study object and look for constants, which evolve over time. If the statistical classification tool is practical for researchers from the point of view of its implementation, it nevertheless remains on the one hand that it makes it possible to overcome a little too easily local specificities and social factors present, and on the other hand that it poses a risk of proven determinism, in the sense that a geographical categorization may lead to the

3. See volumes 1 to 4 of Alpe, Y. and Poirey, J.-L., *L'enseignement en milieu rural et montagnard* (2001 to 2010).

justification of elements that do not exclusively relate to it (for example, the successful completion of rural school).

The second orientation of research consists of not entering the debates on ruralities, but to look within the context of comparative analyses for constants or specificities of the rural school that can be found through multiple contexts. This is the position most often found in European or international research, which is considerably complicated by the multiplicity of definitions of rural areas in different countries (Boix & Duarte, 2014). Most often this position leads to the analysis of specific pedagogical components of the rural school. The rural school then becomes the center of analysis, and specificities as well as constants are sought. They can by extension define what a rural school is, without necessarily explaining the issue of contextual differentiations. It is the school form and its results that raise the issue, a school form that would rather be dominant in rural areas, without being exclusive, and without being impossible for it to be found in the city. The single classroom is an example. It is therefore an object rather than context oriented approach that is useful for specifying school forms and its consequences. In this approach, an attempt is made to identify in a similar way, particular characteristics or traits for a rural school, considered as a sum of local observations. These observations then implicitly define what falls under rural specificities, and by extension, define the study object itself, which is the rural school. These observations are sometimes substantiated and verified by statistical studies. The works of Alpe (2016), then those of Lallai (2016), are for this reason explicit: the rural school would have specificities that would support, for example, the size of the educational structures, their geographical context outside the poles and the social and cultural composition of the populations to which they are addressed. This would result in specific professional skills and acts developed by teachers, which would be responsible for the majority of good results achieved by students.

The third orientation which is more sociological, tends to focus on rural school actors, primarily students and teachers. In rural areas, therefore, there would be adapted teaching practices, which are also different according to sociological profiles. For example, for Alpe and Fauguet (2008), teachers are divided into two categories, on the one hand the “rooted,” long established teachers, who more or less reproduce the model of the former rural teacher, anchored in its territory; on the other hand, the “mobile,” younger teachers, who arrived in the rural area coincidentally by assignments and who, mostly, are expecting to return to positions located in the city. It can be assumed that these two populations show different practices, which themselves could produce distinct effects in terms of students' academic achievement. The same is true for students and parents, and sociological studies also seem to show different practices, the analysis of which is complicated today by the growing socio-economic and cultural heterogeneity of rural populations.

The fourth, combining sociology and geography, favors an entry through the analysis of spatial inequalities with regard to education, in which the rural is initially sometimes seen as the weak link. In this approach, the issue that arises, following in the footsteps of the social variability of academic success, is that of variation according to the place of schooling and its representations. These approaches primarily result from Anglo-Saxon researchers, but there are similar analyses among Francophones (Ben Ayed, 2006, 2008; Caro & Rouault, 2010; Van Zanten and Duru-Bellat, 2008; Champollion, 2013).) as well as among some Portuguese speakers (Figuiera & Duarte, etc.). Laying the bases for analyzing local variations in academic success, the rural becomes a separate category, as are for example other groups such as the suburbs.

The final orientation involves analyzing new projects in rural areas, which are not specifically defined either, such as education projects relating to the environment, sustainable development and heritage. The aim is to understand the new school-territory partnerships and new trades that are related to rural areas and to analyze how the educational components adapt to them. The approach also attempts to understand the links that are emerging between new local dynamics (rural identity, land, heritage etc.) and schools (Garnier 2014; Barthes, Blanc-Maximin, 2016). The rural school is then the locus of a specific activity that is not found elsewhere and which therefore characterizes it. For example, isolation, a corollary of remoteness, spurred us to draw from the immediate environment the resources needed for education. In addition, rural areas present a number of opportunities: close natural environment, easy field trips etc. and the way in which teachers exploit them demonstrate an integral specificity.

However, this diversity of approaches encourages collaborations between researchers towards common issues, of which we summarize the main recent perspectives.

11.5. Current major research debates on rural schools

11.5.1. *The paradox of good rural academic results*

All the sociological surveys carried out since the 1960s on social determinism show that students from disadvantaged social backgrounds have more educational difficulties than those from more affluent social backgrounds. Moreover, and almost concomitantly, many education science studies highlight the good academic results of primary school students in rural schools (Oeuvarard, 2003; Gauthier & Luginbühl, 2012). The works of the Rural School Observatory (OER) which became the Education and Territories Observatory (OET) confirm this (Alpe, Champollion, Fromajoux & Poirey, 2001 ; Alpe, Champollion & Poirey, 2003; Alpe & Fauguet, 2008; Alpe, Barthes & Champollion, 2016; Champollion, 2017), although some more isolated studies seem to temper this success (Leroy-Audouin & Suchaut, 2007).

The paradox at the origin of this study stems from the combination of this sociology and education science research. In fact, rural areas are mainly made up of families of disadvantaged social backgrounds. However, the academic performance of students in these areas is at least equal to or slightly higher than that of students from urban areas, and this is true until the end of secondary school. Why do they under these conditions obtain better academic results than those who are more favored?

Does the rural school compensate for social inequalities and why? We can identify seven avenues explored by researchers. The effect of class structures: multi-age, big brother effect, life skills (specific pedagogy of multigrade class); small size effect: monitoring of students by teachers but also by parents; the place of school in local community life: elected officials / teachers / parents proximity, inter-knowledge, attention given to the local context (natural, historical, cultural etc.); a different use of ICTEs (no computer room, self-service computers in the classroom and during lessons, networks of affinities between teachers and between classes); rural context effect, often regarded as more peaceful, less stressful; a demand for education based on life projects (probably much less today, because of the arrival of new populations etc.) and knowledge of the opportunities of the territory and its socio-economic structure (see training experiences in multi-activity in mountain regions etc.); constrained mobility effects study (leaving the countryside for lower secondary school, the rural town for upper secondary school, going to boarding school etc.) which seem in some cases to reintroduce inequalities related to social origin.

11.5.2. *Can we still talk about the lack of ambition by rural students?*

Research on the educational trajectories of rural students has shown the good standing of their results, and they also underlined their relative modes ambitions, as expressed in their educational and vocational orientation projects (Alpe & Fauguet, 2008). In view of the growing heterogeneity of the “rural” and the generalization of urban cultural models, public policies, focused on the reduction of a so-called “sociocultural deficiency,” proved to be ineffective, and sometimes even penalizing, insofar as they participate in the stigmatization of rural territories (Alpe, 2006). Yet, but excluding longitudinal follow-up, the OET’s surveys (2011-2012) show that the relative lack of ambition has apparently, in some rural areas, decreased among rural students. In the 2012 study of Troisième students (the result has not been confirmed by the second OET longitudinal follow-up not yet completed), the evolution of the lists of occupations desired by these students is particularly interesting to observe: 21 trades accounted for more than 50% of responses in 2004, and 23 in 2012. On these two lists, 16 trades are common. Just as for CM2 (grade 5 or class 6) students, the job of farmer disappeared from the top of the list. But the variation in rank of the common trades shows that it is the favored occupations (doctor, lawyer, etc.) that are gaining more space. Similarly, still in the 2012 Troisième “picture,” the percentage of those wishing to pursue long term higher education studies more than doubled between 2004 and 2012.

11.5.3. Is there a “territory effect” on the educational performance and trajectories of rural students?

Through the exploitation of OET data (followed by cohorts over six years), some researchers have argued that beyond the master and institutional effects, there could also be “territory effects” identifiable by multivariate analyses. This has raised many questions on the definition and content of this effect, which for the moment has only been validated in mountain areas (Champollion, 2013). This hypothesis is based on fairly robust statistical analyses. We illustrate our observations with an example. The national assessments of CM2 in 2011 in the Alpes-de-Haute-Provence and Hautes-Alpes, despite a higher percentage of disadvantaged social categories than in the rest of France, show results that are significantly higher than those of France. We can therefore conclude that overall results are better when students are of a more disadvantaged social background. If we report these results to the INSEE 2010 typology of territories, it appears at first glance indeed that there seems to be a “territory effect.” The most rural municipalities benefit from this advantage, and the more the municipality moves towards urbanization, the more these relative advantages disappear.

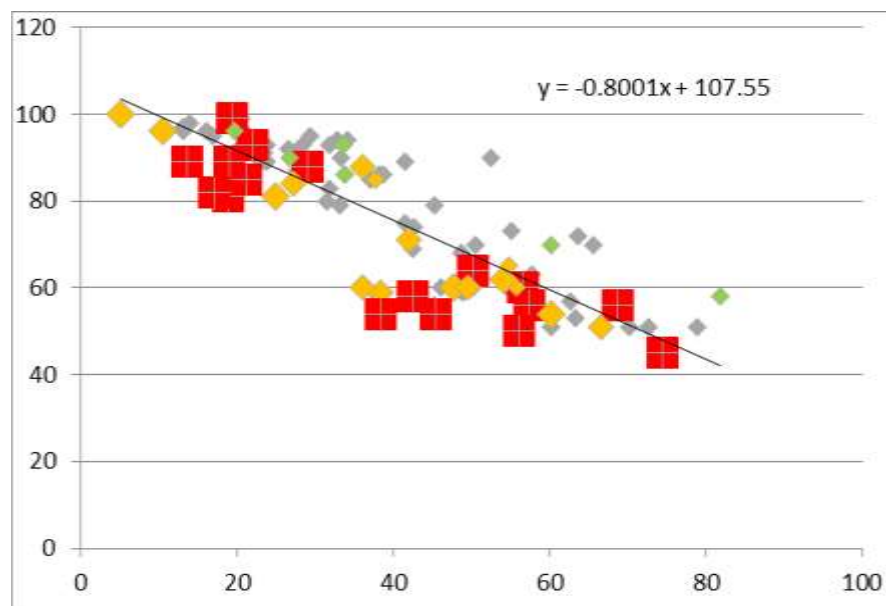


Figure 11.1. Correlation between academic performance indicators (CM2 assessments) and socioprofessional levels of families (small green squares: the rural; yellow medium squares: periurban; big red squares: urban)

ZAUR	Other rural communes	Rural crowns	Rural area poles	Multi-polarized crown	Periurban crown	Urban poles
Residues	+1	+0.5	-0.2	-0.4	-0.6	-0.6

Table 11.1. Cumulative results of residues of CM2 French and mathematics assessments in Alpes-de-Haute-Provence and Hautes-Alpes according to parents' socioprofessional categories by type of territory

However, the conclusions do not seem self-evident. The complexity of the interconnection of variables, but also the existence of sequential effects, which appear only during schooling, and often after secondary school, make questionable their reconciliation with specificities strictly related to rurality, which really only characterizes the primary school environment. It characterizes the secondary school environment to a lesser

extent and almost not (obviously!) that of high school. Thus, though it is clear that there are very powerful determinants, social origin and cultural level first, and then the specificities of pedagogy and rural territoriality, it is often difficult to isolate them and to define which is really and directly related to the territory... As recalled by Y. Grelet (2004), “the territory encloses only the poor,” if it has, there is no doubt, an effect of constraint, in particular as regards future projects and educational and vocational orientation choices. On the other hand, latest research shows that the good academic results of the rural are mainly related to the performance of multigrade classes, which are more numerous in rural areas. There would therefore probably not necessarily, at least not everywhere, be a strict territory effect on schooling, but effects of territorially located structures associated with effective professional acts (Lallai, 2016). These last comments are justified by other research (Rothenburger, 2016), which shows that teaching in rural areas can be meaningful (activated territoriality), and thus moving towards greater teacher involvement.

11.6. Conclusion

Before becoming a social sciences research object, the “rural school” was (and still is) a “social media object” according to the expression of B. Charlot (1997) which states that (p. 11): “Such objects always refer to practices and situations where they are supposed to account for the “lived” and “experience.” It is understandable that under these conditions, the definition of the object itself could encompass certain vagueness...

Moreover, it constitutes a stumbling block to so-called “territorialized” public education policies, which have always had difficulties in taking “specific” situations into account. Yet, this is where the central issue lies, and the “specificity” (of the rural school, single class, rural students and / or their families) is a central theme of further secular debates on the subject.

Finally, over the past fifty years, it has served to reveal broader issues: the place of public services in territorial development, weight of social inequalities linked to the territory, pedagogical effectiveness of alternative methods...

All this explains the difficulty for researchers to construct a real, clearly defined and delimited research object. At the same time, this situation has had the advantage of opening the field to many disciplines, and therefore to multidisciplinary teams.

Though it is not our intention here to assess half a century of studies, we can however retain some strong points.

First of all, it is clear that this issue remains important: it concerns almost 25% of primary and 20% of secondary school students, it is at the center of many clashes between the school, local elected officials as well as students’ parents, and it still generates intense debates on its methods and the training needs of teachers concerned.

Secondly, the accumulation of work allowed us to examine a number of strong assertions.

Let us first note that rural students are only in very rare cases “disadvantaged” with regard to their schooling method, at least until the end of secondary school, even if it can generate particular difficulties (particularly related to mobility problems).

It should further be noted that the evolution of the rural environment, lifestyles and communication tools has eliminated many supposed specificities: in the age of smartphone and Internet, the cultural isolation of rural students is no longer of great significance, as could be seen with the disappearance of what was one of the characteristics most often put forward (for example in the General Inspectorate reports, but also in the OET’s early works): the “lack of ambition” (or the purportedly weakness of the social demand for

education) are not always perceptible in some recent studies (see the contributions of Alpe and Barthes and Pierre Champollion in part 3 of this volume).

Finally, we must note the persistence of some specific elements. Even though the multi-lessons class, especially in the form of a single-class school, has become scarce in rural areas, it still has advantages (in terms of teaching methods and school socialization modalities) that allowed it to be disseminated to the disadvantaged neighborhoods of large cities. There still remains issues related to mobility constraints, which for example make rural secondary school students more concerned than those of urban areas about boarding school and that some cultural practices formerly taken care of by school (visits to museums for example) are in sharp decline in rural areas.

The rural changes, as well as its inhabitants, and the social representations of the “countryside” follow the trend. For example, rural students in the 2010s no longer manifest, for their future life projects, their attraction for the countryside and repulsion for the city, unlike those of the 2000s. But other trends appear: though the representations of a rather protected environment, where inter-knowledge reduces risks, are always present, they are however accompanied by new elements, related to major contemporary debates: sensitivity to sustainable development issues, interest in local heritage, and this is largely relayed by the emergence of “education for...” (Pagoni, Tutiaux, 2012) in connection with the development of territories. It is clear that there are many opportunities for the rural school, close to its environment (in every sense of the word), to mobilize and motivate its students. It remains that education public policies do not seem to have taken full measure of these changes today: paradoxically, while the academic establishment has often supported and encouraged research on this theme, it has however continued to most often ignore the findings...

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