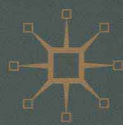


# Equity in Education



## An International Comparison of Pupil Perspectives

Stephen Gorard and Emma Smith



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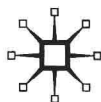
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With

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# Preface

The objective of this book is to document young people's experiences of justice in schools and beyond, and to relate these experiences to the development of their personal sense of justice and the criteria they use to decide whether something is fair or not. One particular concern was to represent the views and experiences of potentially disadvantaged pupils, including those with learning difficulties, or behavioural problems, those apparently less suited to an academic 'trajectory', recent immigrants, those learning through a second language, or who are from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds. We have now conducted a series of studies in six European countries, representing Northern, Southern, and Eastern Europe, and a comparative study in Japan. A comparative approach was used, because it allowed us to consider the natural variation in school organisation as a potential cause of any differences in the developing sense of justice among disadvantaged pupils. Our analysis considers the characteristics of the schools that pupils attend, the pupils' own family and social background, their indicators of disadvantage, and their developing sense of justice. We examine their experiences and the potential impact of their experiences on well-being, work, relations at school, involvement in tasks, and results, plus perseverance in school, ethical and civic judgements, trust in institutions, and unfairness in general. This provides important indications for policy-makers and practitioners about the role of school organisation, and the behaviour of teachers, in creating equity and helping to form pupils' sense of justice.

Pupils have quite clear views on what is fair, and are generally willing and able to express those views. Are research users willing to acknowledge and act on those views?

Much of the empirical work presented in this book has come from our research as part of the European Group on Research into Equity in Education Systems. In addition to all our colleagues whose names are listed below, we would like to acknowledge the principal contribution of Luciano Benadusi and Marc Demeuse. We also thank Karel Cerny for his coding of country of origin which is used in a section of Chapter 8, and Bernadette Giot for her contribution to the case study work outlined in Chapter 9.

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# **Part I**

## **Introduction**



# 1

## Reconsidering What Schools Are For

### Introduction

A key objective of education development is to increase participation and achievement among school pupils, especially those facing disadvantage in terms of language, poverty, ability, and special needs. Another is to enhance their enjoyment of learning and their preparation for citizenship. Much education research concerns achievement and participation. But less effort has been put into considering how to promote the experiences of fairness, enjoyment, and 'good' citizenship, and how to recognise success or failure in this. We add to knowledge in this area by looking at the impact of schools and pupil experience on how pupils might develop the civic 'values' of fairness, aspiration, and trust, by presenting the results of a new international survey of young people, using an instrument assessing their experiences of justice at school, home, and in wider society, their backgrounds, and their hopes for the future.

This book documents young people's experiences of justice in schools and beyond, relating these experiences to the development of their personal sense of justice and the criteria they use to decide whether something is fair or not. For many pupils, their experience of school is fundamental to their conception of wider society, their place as citizens, and their sense of justice (Gorard 2007a). We look at schools as organised societies and the part they play in creating a sense of justice among pupils. One particular concern was to represent the views and experiences of potentially disadvantaged pupils, including those with learning difficulties, or behavioural problems, those apparently less suited to an academic 'trajectory', plus recent immigrants, those learning through a second language, or who are from socioeconomically

deprived backgrounds. We know from previous studies (our own and the wider literature) that these indicators of potential disadvantage are strongly linked to individual pupil attainment (Gorard and Smith 2004). But more generally it seems 'information about the position of the most disadvantaged groups in education is extremely scarce and fragmented. Genuine comparative research in this respect at the EU level is currently impossible because the basic information is not available' (Nicaise 2000, p. 314). More research was needed on the effectiveness of school reforms in tackling educational and social exclusion. We considered it essential for the benefit of policy-makers and practitioners that we ask pupils and listen to their own accounts of school and wider experiences.

We were interested in describing how schools create citizens – through formal teaching, as well as in their encouragement of pupil participation in community activities, democratic structures and inclusive arrangements. We were thus concerned with learning that is not entirely attainment-focused, but that may have ramifications for pupils' actions and trajectories in wider society. If we view schools as micro-societies we might surmise that the learning of justice and fairness in school will help shape young people's notions of justice outside school. Whatever the school system, we know that disadvantaged pupils tend to make less progress than other pupils during any given school phase, especially where they are clustered together (Duru-Bellat and Mingat 1997), perhaps because they have poorer learning conditions than other pupils (Grisay 1997). Thus, pupils' experiences of justice and, especially, injustice could undermine their interpersonal and institutional trust, promote passive attitudes towards political and civic participation, generate intolerance towards others who are clearly 'different', and even lead them to doubt whether an equitable existence is possible.

Starting from equality of access, that is, the right of everyone – whatever their origin – to attend school and moving then to equality of treatment, which consists of offering identical service to all, modern society has become increasingly demanding vis-à-vis its schools, and now expects greater equality of threshold outcomes as well. Thus, in most developed countries, the expectations from schooling are that all pupils will achieve equal performances at the end of a period of education, at least in the sense of mastery of basic (i.e., threshold) competencies considered indispensable for contemporary life. Naturally, this should not restrain some, or even many, from pursuing a school career beyond compulsory education.

## Developing equity indicators for education

The discourse of economic competitiveness, via the Lisbon agenda in Europe, for example, has led to a considerable emphasis on international educational indicators, benchmarks and quality controls. In many areas 'by measuring the outcomes of national educational policies with indicators set at the EU level, rankings of the Member States are an intended outcome of the work programme' on indicators (Ertl 2006, p. 16). According to some, the building of comparable indicators is a powerful way of formulating educational policy without legislation, even though the European Maastricht treaty explicitly prohibited harmonisation of education and training policies. Whatever their downsides (Gorard 2001), international studies of different school systems can be valuable in highlighting the differences between countries and regions in the extent to which pupils are clustered by socioeconomic status or ability and the link between this and pupils' experiences of justice. International comparisons allow researchers to broaden their understanding of the impact of new policies, by comparing changes in countries in which a policy is active, with changes in a country unaffected by that policy. They present, in effect, a kind of natural and ethical experimental control.

Through data resulting from international surveys it has been possible to design indicators which describe the manner in which education systems treat the young generation for which they are responsible (Baye et al. 2006, OECD 2005). Whereas initial research work in this area tended to emphasise the effectiveness of education systems in generating test and attainment results, an interest in equity has gradually developed. At first this was based on the available documents – such as the OECD's *Education at a Glance* – but this led very quickly to creating specifically tailored evidence (Baye 2005, Gibson and Meuret 1995).

Following on from the work already undertaken by the Ad Hoc Group on Equity Issues of the OECD's Internal Education Indicators Project (INES) (Hutmacher et al. 2001), the European Group for Research on Equity in Educational Systems (EGREES 2005) proposed a reference framework allowing data to be organised into a coherent system of indicators (Demeuse 2004, Meuret 2001, Nicaise et al. 2005). A set of indicators was needed to grasp the complexity of education systems in regard to equity. The framework for a set of equity indicators was organised according to two dimensions. The first concerned the groups between which unjust differences may appear, such as where the gap between the weakest and the strongest performers is judged to be unacceptable,

and for identifiable groups of pupils such as girls and boys, immigrants and indigenous, youngsters whose parents hold less distinguished/less well paid/less qualified professions and other more favoured pupils. The second dimension considered areas where such differences can appear, including

- the external context, like poverty, and aspirations influenced by family and peers;
- the education process itself, in terms of differences in the length or quality of education received, personal development, and differences in school compositions;
- outcomes, such as the individual consequences of education like disparities in income, economic and social inequalities, social mobility, and collective benefits such as increased tolerance towards schools or others.

Of interest here were the OECD-funded Programme for International Pupil Assessment (PISA) studies, conducted in 2000 and 2003 (OECD 2007b). The first study covered 265,000 15-year-old pupils from 32 countries. The second covered 275,000 15-year-old pupils from 41 countries. The survey items included tests in literacy, maths, science, and problem-solving, as well as pupil and school questionnaires on aspects of pupil motivation, use of ICT, school organisation and so on. Following a re-analysis of the PISA 2000 results (EGREES 2005), we have previously conducted a follow-up survey with 6000 pupils in the same age range as PISA in five EU countries, focusing less on attainment (also the focus of the Third International Maths and Science Study), and more on pupils' own views of justice at and beyond school (Smith and Gorard 2006).

Large-scale international studies such as the IEA Civic Education Study have already sought to gain a clearer understanding of pupils' concepts of democracy and citizenship and how this varies across different nations. The 1999 phase of the Civic Education Study surveyed around 120,000 pupils aged 14 and 17–18 (Civic Education Study 2001). One key finding to emerge from this study was that schools that modelled democratic values by promoting an open climate for discussion were more likely to be effective in promoting both civic knowledge and civic engagement among their pupils (Torney-Purta et al. 2001). While there are many lessons to be learnt from studies of this type that can help us understand how pupils construct their notions of fairness and responsibility, their focus tends to be exclusively on issues of civic responsibility and civic engagement outside the school. Our interest



here is to examine also how systems of fairness and equity operate to influence pupils' perspectives within their schools, and so their understanding of education in general.

For the new study described in this book, we conducted fieldwork in five European countries, representing Northern, Southern and Eastern Europe, and one Pacific Rim country (Japan). Our chief source of data is an international survey of the views of 14-year-old pupils. The instrument used was developed from that used in a large relevant pilot survey conducted by the researchers, benefiting from the lessons thereby learned, particularly in the clarification of the target disadvantaged groups. Around 14,000 pupils in around 450 schools took part. We collated existing official data about the intake and performance of these schools where available and supplemented these with a classroom-level questionnaire and with observations and field notes taken during administration of the survey. We use these various contextual sources as illustrations and potential explanations of the findings from the pupils. We describe differences in outcomes and experiences between socioeconomic and language groups, countries and school types. We have also modelled the plausible social and educational determinants of the different perceptions of justice among different types of pupils. The results have been presented to an international audience of teachers, school leaders and teacher trainers for discussion and feedback both on the presentation of results and on further analyses to be conducted. The comments and concerns of these practitioners have been integrated into our analysis as far as possible.

## The structure of the book

What is equity in education, and why should we re-consider what schools are for? International studies of schooling usually focus on a rather narrow, though important, interpretation of pupil attainment. Policy-makers and other commentators want answers to questions such as how well their pupils are doing, how we can improve their scores, how well different sub-groups of pupils are doing in comparative terms, and what kind of school systems yield the best results. This traditional view of school effectiveness is re-considered in Chapter 2, suggesting that this whole field of work has become dominated by a flawed and unfruitful definition of what it means to be a good school or a good pupil.

In fact, schools and the people in them are about much more than 'pencil-and-paper' test scores. Chapters 3 and 4 consider schools as societies, both in themselves and as pupil preparation for wider society,