

ACCEPT PLURALISM

Tolerance in discourses and practices addressing cultural and religious diversity in French schools

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**Tolerance in discourses and practices
addressing cultural diversity in French schools**

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SciencesPo.

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**Work Package 3 – National Case Studies of
Challenges to Tolerance in School Life**

**Deliverable 3.1 – Final Country Reports on Concepts
and Practices of Tolerance Addressing Cultural
diversity in Schools**

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Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe (ACCEPT PLURALISM)

ACCEPT PLURALISM is a Research Project, funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Program. The project investigates whether European societies have become more or less tolerant during the past 20 years. In particular, the project aims to clarify: (a) how is tolerance defined conceptually, (b) how it is codified in norms, institutional arrangements, public policies and social practices, (c) how tolerance can be measured (whose tolerance, who is tolerated, and what if degrees of tolerance vary with reference to different minority groups). The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium conducts original empirical research on key issues in school life and in politics that thematise different understandings and practices of tolerance. Bringing together empirical and theoretical findings, ACCEPT PLURALISM generates a State of the Art Report on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Handbook on Ideas of Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Tolerance Indicators' Toolkit where qualitative and quantitative indicators may be used to score each country's performance on tolerating cultural diversity, and several academic publications (books, journal articles) on Tolerance, Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in Europe. The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium is formed by 18 partner institutions covering 15 EU countries. The project is hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and co-ordinated by Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou.

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Summary

French schools and the challenge of diversity

As a place where **a discourse on national identity meets a diverse population**, French public schools allow to analyse a concrete response to the challenge of diversity. The French education system is centralised and 90% of the school population is enrolled in state-funded public schools. Even private schools receive public funding and the content of their teaching is monitored by the state. The French education system is managed by the Ministry of National Education and **curriculum contents are decided at national level**. It is a powerful instrument to convey national representations of French identity. However, it is also a place where **diversity is widespread although not equally distributed**. School is compulsory until 16 years of age and children of foreigners, should they be legal or illegal residents in France, go to school starting in first grade (6 year old). Although there are no statistics to measure the diversity of the school population, it is fair to estimate that 9% of pupils are children of immigrants. This does not encompass, however, the totality of the pupils with an immigrant background. Moreover, the unequal repartition of wealth and space makes it more likely to find a high level of diversity in disadvantaged areas, at the outskirts of the major cities.

As **a space where the principle of *laïcité* is enforced**, the French education system is a relevant *locus* to analyse **tolerance to religious diversity in practice**. The principle of *laïcité* (the French understanding of secularism that confines religion to the private realm) was first and foremost enforced in public schools with the 1882 Ferry laws that made education free, compulsory and *laïc* (the formal separation of Church and State occurred later in 1905). Concretely, it excluded religious teaching from public schools. The teaching of moral values - previously taught as part of religious classes - was replaced by civic education. During civic education classes, at primary and secondary level, pupils learn about *laïcité*, equality and their rights as citizen. Civic education is taught by teachers of history and geography (25% of the curriculum in history and geography is dedicated to civic education). However, the recent issuing of a 2004 law to reassess the application of *laïcité* and prevent all pupils from wearing religious signs inside public schools stirred a debate on the toleration of religious diversity in the French education system.

The focus of the study

In this report, we analyse the schools' response to the diversity of its population. **How is diversity approached in the content of the teaching and in the interactions with the pupils?** Is there a specific discourse on tolerance or acceptance of diversity? And if there is such a discourse, how does it operate in practice? Do teachers have the feeling that they are fostering tolerance or acceptance in the content of their teaching and their interactions with pupils? What is the perception of the pupils on that matter?

To answer these questions, two case studies were selected, for which literature reviews, press reviews and interviews with key actors were conducted (n=14). Participation in school activities have also been used to explore the perception of pupils. The first case study focuses on religious diversity and the second case study encompasses a broader sense of diversity in relation to the immigration history of the French society (cultural and ethnic diversity). **To analyse our findings we refer ourselves to three different notions: intolerance, tolerance and acceptance**. While *intolerance* is about the majority population rejecting the beliefs and practices of a minority population, *tolerance* is about letting them happen but disapproving them. We contend that *acceptance* is about considering the others as equal and admitting them as normal. While the **first case study** deals with **tolerance**,

intolerance and acceptance, the **second case study** focuses on the inclusion of immigration in national narratives and deals more exclusively **with acceptance of others as equal**.

Main findings on acceptance of religious diversity in school interactions

The first case study looks at the issue of religious expressions in schools with a focus on **the implementation of the 2004 law banning the conspicuous display of religious signs in French schools**. It shows that the enforcement of the 2004 law was considered a success by its proponents because it put a halt to a difficult situation encountered by schools principals who had to decide if a student displaying a religious sign (such as a female student wearing an Islamic veil, for instance) was to enter or not the school. With the law, this difficult phase of negotiation disappeared; pupils stopped wearing religious signs in schools (even if they wear religious signs outside schools). Besides, few pupils opted out of schools according to the Ministry's figures, which, to them, demonstrate a good understanding of the law.

However, upon further investigation, the implementation of the law and the debate that it stirred have led to some ambiguities around the notion of *laïcité*. **Although teachers appear convinced by the philosophical objective of *laïcité* as a principle that guarantees the neutrality of the classroom and the equal treatment of each individual; in practice, they express concerns that French public schools may foster a sense of two-tier *laïcité* with disproportional room allocated to Catholic expressions** (namely the calendar of holidays) **and little mean to accommodate Muslim practices** (absence on *Aïd* or *Hallal* food). One interviewee suggested that the restrictive interpretation of *laïcité* that promote the 2004 law may be sending negative signs to French people of Muslim background.

In sum, although *laïcité* as a principle seeks the acceptance of individuals as equals in the French understanding of equality: all are treated equally regardless of their origin or religious belonging, *laïcité*, in practice, may appear as a two-tier concept that excludes practices from the norm (toleration) or even ban them (non-toleration).

➔ **Policy recommendations:** A reassessment of the way *laïcité* is enforced in French schools is necessary in view of its complying with core principles such as neutrality and equality towards pupil's religious practices or background. It requires:

- The **training of administrative staff** in their enforcement of *laïcité* (enforcing *laïcité* does not sum up to ban expressions of other religious faiths than the Catholic faith in the school);
- The addition of explicit developments on what *laïcité* entails in **textbooks for civic education classes** (*laïcité* entails the absence of expressions of religious faith in the classroom but not the discrimination of one religious faith over another).

Main findings on acceptance of cultural diversity in curriculum content

The second case study analyses curriculum content with **a focus on the introduction of immigration issues in history programs in 2008**. It shows that the difficulty to add immigration history in the curriculum comes from the lack of legitimacy of the topic in the historical field and the construction of immigration as a *problem* in the public debate. Past experiences of teaching of the history of Islam shows that some teachers tend to reluctantly tackle issues that may sound controversial due to the political context. However, it has been demonstrated that immigration history should not be taught in connection with current events but rather included in the regular succession of historical events. Moreover, it should not be targeted at specific population, or taught exclusively in schools that cater to a diverse population, since the contribution of immigration to national history is a topic that equally concerns minority and majority populations.

The observation of a lesson on immigration in post-war France and a discussion with pupils (9th graders) show that **immigration history reveals valuable pedagogical resources for teaching and is well received by pupils.**

The challenge in the inclusion of immigration in historical lessons lays in the ability of the curriculum to mention the contribution of immigration history in the regular succession of historical events (not in a specific chapter). In practice, the teaching of immigration history should not be targeted at population with immigrant background specifically, but introduced to all school population. Through the mainstreaming of immigration history, curriculum contents and teaching practices may be more acceptant of the diversity of the French population.

→ **Policy recommendations:** The mainstreaming of immigration history, curriculum contents and teaching practices to foster the acceptance of the diversity of the French population. It requires to:

- Provide **ready-made material** for teachers to teach immigration history to students;
- Extend and render accessible the offer in **teacher training** on the topic of immigration history, and
- Financially support and promote **community initiatives** that organise workshops on immigration history with primary and secondary students (e.g. Association Citoyenneté Jeunesse).

Concluding remarks

In France, there is a shared belief that acceptance as equal can be reached through the neutrality in schools. This conviction, however, does not go without criticism towards the use of a distorted version of *laïcité* to stigmatise Islam and the contention that religions are not treated equally (the presence of Catholic holidays in the academic calendar, for instance). Admitting as normal the immigration component of the French population is at the core of the introduction of immigration history in curriculum. However, instances of exclusion or processes of ethnic ascription might also be at play in practice. The necessity to monitor teaching practices will be crucial along with the training of teachers on this dimension of their teaching.

Keywords

France, Education, Diversity, Immigration history, *Laïcité*, Civic Education, Religious signs, Toleration, Acceptance, Neutrality, Equality.

1. Introduction

1.1. The French school system: public, state-funded and laic.

In France, school is free, secular and compulsory from 6 to 16 years of age, since the late 19th century (Ferry laws of 1881-1882). This implies that children of foreigners, should they be legal or illegal residents in France, go to school starting in first grade (6 year old) and that children cannot be home schooled, for instance. This has the further consequence that children in France are schooled in a large majority in public schools (state run) and the development of faith based schools, or schools following alternative pedagogical models (“private schools” which means private run and partly state funded), is limited.

Breakdown of school population and number of schools public/private

School Population	Schools
Breakdown of School Population Public/ Private 9.952.684 pupils in public schools 2.026.136 pupils in private schools Total School Population: 11.978.820	Breakdown of Schools Public/Private 56.877 primary, secondary and high schools 8.970 primary, secondary and high private schools Breakdown of Private High-Schools According to Religions 818: Catholic high schools 3: Jewish high schools 1: Muslim high school

Source: Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, *L'Éducation nationale en chiffres*, Edition 2010

The French ministry of National Education administers the French school system. The notion of a National Education system emerged with the French Revolution. The first Ministry of Public Instruction was created in 1828 and later entitled Ministry of National Education in 1932, it is one of the oldest ministry in place in the French government, the first employer of the country and one with the largest budget (60 billion euros in 2010 against 40 billion euros in 2009 for the Defence ministry).

1.2. Cultural and religious diversity in the French education system

Considering the unifying mission of French schools, cultural and religious diversity were able to find little expression in the French education system. However, the diversity of the school population and the various religious beliefs that they share, have challenged the institution in a number of ways that we will examine in the following paragraphs.

1.2.1. Religious diversity and French schools

Religious diversity is not represented in French public schools and there are no official figures for the religious belonging of the school population. As for private schools, the majority of them are catholic¹. Among the 821 private high schools, only 3 are Jewish (Paris region, Lyon, Nice) and one is Muslim

¹ Since the 1959 Debre law, all parochial schools have to allow all pupils regardless of their religious belongings.

(Lille). A notable exception to the absence of religious expressions in public schools is the case of the two departments of Alsace and Moselle (*see below*).

The Specific Case of the Departments of Alsace and Moselle (North-East of France)

Since the two departments were not French but part of the German Empire when the major *laïcité* laws were passed (1882 Ferry Law and 1905 Separation of Church and State) the Concordat law of 1801 signed by Napoleon 1 is still enforced. It implies a different kind of separation of religious matters from the public sphere. As regards schools, religious classes are taught in public schools for all three religions that were presented at the time when the Concordat was signed i.e. Catholic, Protestant and Jewish. The classes are not mandatory, and pupils can chose to opt out of religious classes.

With an increasing presence of Muslim people in the two departments (estimated to 100 000), there has been a mobilization for Islam to be integrated to the Concordat law. This would mean that Islam could be taught in religious classes in public schools. One depute from Metz (Moselle) François Grosdidier proposed a law in 2006 for the inclusion of Islam in the Concordat law (Law proposal number 3216). It argues that the failure to update the 1905 law – particularly as regards state support to religious buildings that were erected before 1905 – has created a situation of inequality for Muslim people and that this situation is even more blatant in the Departments of Alsace and Moselle. The law proposal, however, has not been followed up so far.

However, as a place where religious expressions should not be represented, the French public system has been challenged by the religious beliefs of its school population. In the past two decades a reassessment of *laïcité* has been put forward to deal with the display of Muslim signs of belonging such as the Islamic headscarves. This may be understood in the larger context of the “school war” (*la guerre scolaire*) that is the series of debate and mobilisations that arose anytime the legislation pertaining to private and religious schooling has been at stake (in 1882, 1959 and 1984). Indeed, it is worth noting that **the separation of schools from catholic education in 1880 did not take place without sharp debates and numerous instances of conflicts until the end of the 20th century**. On the one hand, defenders of the freedom of conscience have advocated the exclusion of any religious signs and expressions from public schools. On the other hand, proponents of private schools and the clergy have supported the freedom of education.

- The debate that arose following the Ferry law of **1882** concerned the absence of religious teaching, and religion as a whole, in French schools. Opponents of the Ferry law were concerned that public schools would **lack moral guidance**. This explains why the French education system of the Third Republic (1870-1940) invested heavily on the teaching of Republican values and replaced religious education by civic education (Deloye 1996). Originally labelled as “moral instruction” and replaced in the 1950s by “civic education” (*éducation civique*) this part of the curriculum, taught by teachers of history and geography, aims at explaining to pupils their role as citizens.
- Following the Second World War, the General de Gaulle and the government of the Fifth Republic proceed to rule over the funding of private schools since the question of state aid to Catholic Church had been discussed several times in relation to the financial plight of some parochial schools. However, the debate arose on the extent of **state control** that church schools would accept **in return for financial support**. After much debate, the **1959 Debre** law was passed with a provision stipulating the state control of any school accepting state support and an obligation to open doors to all pupils, regardless of their origin, belief or opinion.

- In 1981, François Mitterrand and the socialist government added one development to the so-called “school war”. The left-wing government proposed a law to merge private and public schools in a unified and laic Education system based on the fact that private schools received public funds. It received strong criticism on the part of the defendants of private schools (mainly catholic private schools) who saw this as a threat to the **freedom of education**. It led to the Movement for Free Schools of **1984** (*Mouvement pour les Ecoles Libres*) with numerous demonstrations taking place in Paris, Bordeaux, Lyon, Rennes and Lille. The law proposal did not go through and the Socialist Education Minister had to resign. However, it shows how the question of *laïcité* in the education system can polarise French public opinion in a context where the religion at stake is the catholic religion (members of the catholic clergy took part in some of these demonstrations).

This succession of mobilisations and debates over the legislation on private and public schools demonstrates that the application of *laïcité* in French public schools is a politically charged question. However, the “school war” has mainly taken place in relation with the Catholic religion and with a concern for its power over the society in general. It is only after the first headscarf affair broke out in **1989**, that **the debate on laïcité in schools became shifted from Catholicism to Islam**.

The first “affair of the Muslim headscarf” took place in 1989 in Creil, a distant suburb of Paris, when the school director of a secondary school took the decision to exclude three young girls because he considered that their Muslim headscarf were religious symbols and undermined the principle of *laïcité*. Called upon on the issue, the State Council (*Conseil d’Etat*)¹ then ruled that the wearing of the headscarf was “not contradictory to the values of the secular and republican school” and let it to the teachers and school directors to decide whether or not pupils were using this as an instrument of proselytism and disturbance of school activities².

However, this liberal interpretation of *laïcité* was later invalidated by **the 2004 law that ban the wearing of conspicuous religious signs** (such as Islamic veils, Jewish kippahs, large Christian crosses and Sikh turbans) in French public schools on the ground that it is going against the principle of *laïcité* in public schools. One year after the law passed a report was issued stating that 649 cases of pupils wearing religious signs were reported during the 2004–2005 academic year, out of which 496 took it out, 71 registered to distance learning and 72 opted out of schools (either because they registered in private school or because pupils were over 16 and could stop going to school³). The report concluded that the law is effective (Cherfi 2005).

When the 2004 passed, it was argued that this would be the only law targeting the display of Muslim signs and that it would be limited to the education system. However, **recent developments have proven that the passing of the 2004 law opened the door to further claims towards the restriction of religious expressions**. In 2010, a group of deputy gathered to propose a law forbidding the wearing of the full Islamic veil. The law was passed in October 2010 and started to be apply in April 2011⁴. Even though this do not relate to schools specifically, one of the arguments that was used was the fact that mother who came to pick up their children in school would not be recognised by teachers. This argument was contested by school teachers who said that, in practice, mothers wearing a full Islamic veil would uncover themselves to female-staff. However, this introduced the issue of mothers wearing Islamic veil in the discussion. Following this, a new development occurred in March 2011 when a

¹ The State Council, (*Conseil d’Etat*) is the highest administrative authority in charge of advising the French government. It is composed of 350 High Civil Servants, among which 80 can be assigned outside the State Council at high administrative positions.

² State Council ruling of November 27, 1989.

³ School is compulsory until 16 in France.

⁴ www.visage-decouvert.gouv.fr

school director complained to Education Ministry Luc Chatel that mothers wearing veil accompanied children in school activities. The minister, at the time, suggested that a decision might be taken to forbid this practice, but no official directive were issued so far¹.

The challenge of religious diversity in relation to French schools is mostly publicised in connection with the wearing of Islamic veil by women inside schools. However, it should be replaced in the larger context of the enforcement of *laïcité* in French public schools that condemns all expressions of religious belonging and in the long “school war” over the separation between parochial and public schools. This contextual element is important to keep in mind because actors may justify that debates around *laïcité* and Islam are contentious today because it has always been this way when it comes to religious expression in French public schools (“*With Catholics too, it was not simple*”²).

1.2.2. Cultural diversity in French schools

It is hard to assess the diversity of the school population considering the limited data that the Education Ministry gathers and disseminates on the issue. The Education Ministry issues numbers regarding the social background of pupils (6% pupils in secondary education benefit from a scholarship on social criteria), the repartition of the school population in between private and public institutions (90% in public and 10% in private), the result to the *baccalaureate* (85% of pupils graduated from High School in 2010, that is 65% of their age group) but no breakdown in ethnic origin³. The only figure available is the number of pupils who benefitted of the adaptation program for newly arrived migrants (Initiation Classes, CLIN): 0, 3% of the total school population in 2003 (18.600 pupils). It is possible to estimate to 9% the number of children of immigrants in the school population considering that the French population encompassed 9% of immigrants in 2005.

How does the French education system deal with diversity in its school population? It is worth noting that previous to considerations related to immigrant population, the French school system had to tackle **the challenge of the regional diversity of its population**. It was the goal of the institution of French education system in the 19th century (Weber 1976); however, it has been an ever present challenge since then. In this respect, historian Jean-François Chanut demonstrates that the Universal imperative was not imposed unilaterally on local realities (Chanut 1996). When looking at the practice of teaching from 1879 to 1940, he found that teachers have accommodated regional identities in the content of their teaching. They have organised activities and school staffs have arranged for the celebration of local festivities. He therefore showed that there was a certain margin of interpretation in between the legal framework and its implementation.

A certain room has been allocated for the cultural diversity resulting from immigration in the 70s. First, emigration states such as Algeria, Morocco, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Turkey and Yugoslavia obtained through bilateral agreements that the children of their nationals growing up in France could attend **language and culture classes** in addition to their usual curriculum (Falaize 2008:47). This has to be understood in the specific framework of the relation between foreign authorities and their nationals. Should it be for economic or national concerns, their policy is to keep in touch with their nationals. Classes have been set up in a limited number of primary schools, and taught after school by employees paid by the consulate of the respective countries. Even though these programs can be presented as an acknowledgement of the cultural diversity of the French population, it is rather the case that it aims at maintaining links between children of immigrants and their parents’ country of

¹ *Le Monde*, 4 March 2011.

² Interview with Union representative for secondary and high school - UNSA Education, 3 May 2011.

³ Ministère de l’éducation nationale, *L’éducation nationale en chiffres*, 2010. Available at : <http://www.education.gouv.fr/pid338/1-education-nationale-chiffres.html> [last access May 21, 2012]

origin. The French education system does not invest in it (some of these classes are still running) and **it does not qualify for a policy of recognition.**

Second, **the concept of intercultural education was introduced in the training of teachers inside the education system from the 70s to the 80s** (Lorcerie 2003). The notion of intercultural education came from theoretical reflexions on Action Research and implied that teachers put the discovery of other cultures into practice in schools: they had pupils tell their family story, organised festivities where culinary and traditional costumes could be displayed (Falaize 2005). These practices have accompanied the handling of a diverse population in French schools up until the mid-80s, when it started to be **criticised for** allowing too strong a construction of the Other in the school context and **essentializing foreign cultures** (Berque 1985).

However, since the mid-80s it has not been replaced by any training that provides tools for teachers to deal with the cultural diversity of the school population and the paradigm of integration has replaced the *culturalist* approach of the 1970s. Moreover, recent reforms have limited the training of teachers, leaving lesser room to their learning of teaching techniques (they used to take a preparatory year during which they would teach only a few hours under the tutelage of a senior professor and attend specific classes on teaching techniques). As such, the question of **the formation of the teachers and their preparation to face diverse populations** in terms of academic level, social and ethnic background is **underdeveloped** to this day¹.

Finally, the French government designed **positive actions** targeting specific school populations, but policy makers have relied exclusively **on social criteria**. Priority Education Zones (*ZEP*) were created in 1984 to bring more educational resources to specific areas that were identified as disadvantaged (Glasman 2000). It was in keeping with the official discourse on republican integration and the refusal of any specific treatment according to ethnic or cultural difference. The policy consisted mainly in a redistribution of resources (concretely, schools that fell into the *ZEP* category had extra budgets) and did not entail tackling difference from a cultural or even a religious point of view. However, sociological studies have shown that educational practitioners resort to powerful categorisation in terms of ethnicity, cultural traits and religious affiliation (Lorcerie 2003). One may therefore argue that the official silence on migration-related diversity has favoured the unofficial development of ethnic and cultural categorisations in educational practices.

Since 2000, the European directive to combat **discrimination** involves monitoring discriminatory practices in the French education system². However, the limited data issued by the ministry of National Education according to the ethnic origin of the school population allows for little analysis. So far, the main findings are that children of immigrants make more progress in school but this could mainly be explained by their original lower level than the majority of pupils (Caille, Valette, 1996) and that educational disadvantage of children of immigrants can be explained by their parents' socioeconomic condition (Brinbaum, Kieffer, 2005). The Trajectoire and Origin survey of 2008 also shows that discrimination is mainly perceived by pupil in curriculum counselling (Brinbaum, Moguerou, and Primon 2010).

While the diversity of the school population is a demographic reality, the absence of data and the lack of specific training for teachers leaves little means to researchers to have a clear (and documented) knowledge of the issue. The normative assumptions guiding the handling of cultural and religious diversity also explain this situation.

¹ UNSA, *Reconstruire une authentique formation professionnelle des enseignants*, Février 2011 Available at : <http://www.unsa-education.org/telechargement/education/Formerderesenseignants.pdf> (last access May 2011)

² European Directive 2000/43

1.3. The normative assumptions motivating the handling of cultural and religious diversity

Central to the handling of cultural and religious diversity in French public schools are the notions of neutrality and equality. It is believed that **limited expressions of diversity guarantee the equal treatment of individuals**.

1.3.1. Laïcité and the neutrality towards religious diversity in schools

Laïcité is put forward when it comes to dealing with what is perceived as a display of religious belonging such as the Islamic veil in French schools. *Laïcité* advocates the neutrality of public spaces (public schools being one of them) which means that signs of religious belonging should be absent from them¹. It is seen as a guarantee that all individuals are treated as equal, regardless of their belonging to one religious faith. It is also seen as a guarantee that religious dogmas do not influence the education of pupils. As such, *laïcité* is seen as fostering the freedom of conscience.

Laïcité is usually presented as belonging to a broader set of ideas, referred to as Republican principles. However, one may distinguish the philosophical principal of *laïcité* inherited from the period of the Enlightenment and the historical construction of *laïcité* - its institutionalisation in French legislation, its use in the political debate and its perception by public opinion.

As a principle, *laïcité* goes beyond toleration because it aims at the equality of all citizens and their respect as equal (Pena-Ruiz 2005: 67). However, the successive headscarf affairs in schools led to a restrictive interpretation of the principle of *laïcité* in the legislation. In the first headscarf affair, the State Council ruled that female-pupils could wear headscarves in schools as long as they were not proselytising (in which case freedom of conscience was at stake). However, the 2004 law banning the wearing of religious signs took out this possibility to appreciate the level of proselytism, leading to what may be regarded as a less liberal interpretation of *laïcité*. Finally, one may identify an increasing use of the concept of *laïcité* to argue for the limitation of religious practices in France, in particular Muslim practices².

1.3.2. Cultural diversity and the universalist principle in schools

The normative assumptions motivating the handling of cultural diversity in the French school system is hard to pin down. **The level of acknowledgment and articulation of the cultural diversity of the school population is very low** in the administration and among teachers. The Republican principle of equality implies that no distinction of origin, race and religion may be articulated in the public space acts as an important obstacle. As a place where young generations are to learn what it is to be a citizen, it is considered important that the category of ethnic origin is not mentioned. This principle of neutrality is pervasive in the discourse of the actors, as we will see in the interviews conducted for this research. This is yet another challenge of cultural diversity in the French school system, that it is one hard to track down in the discourse of its actors.

Notions of neutrality and equality that guide the handling of religious and cultural diversity in the French context are meant to make diversity not just tolerated but considered as equal. The philosophy is arguably that of acceptance of the other as equal, in a civic sense (Dobbernack, Modood 2011). However, the case studies give insights into a range of practices that differ from the philosophical

¹ On the notion of public space see Bowen 2005; for a critique of the over-stretching of the concept of public space in the political debate, see Delphy (2011) "Il existe déjà un code de la laïcité" *Contretemps*, 2 April. <http://www.contretemps.eu/interventions/il-existe-d%C3%A9j%C3%A0-code-la%C3%AFcit%C3%A9>.

² Claude Guéant (Interior Ministry), "Les prières de rue sont une entorse au principe de laïcité", *L'Express*, 15 avril 2011.

principles. In this report, we thrive to identify whether these practices pertain to toleration¹, non-toleration² or acceptance³.

1.4. Motivation of Case selection and Methodology

The evolution in the interpretation of *laïcité* in French schools and the debates that it induced in connection with the increasing religious diversity of the population makes it an interesting case in point to analyse dimensions of tolerance and acceptance in French schools. However, it tackles mainly the religious dimension of diversity in France. The challenge of cultural diversity may be analysed differently, by looking at the content of the teaching and the interactions between teachers and pupils.

The analysis draws on a **literature review**, a press review, a collection of **secondary sources** on the issue and material collected during the fieldwork. The fieldwork consisted in:

- A selection of **interviews** (n=14).
- One **group discussion** was organised so that three teachers gave their point of view on teaching to diverse population and their opinion on curriculum content. They were chosen so as to have a balance in terms of gender, origin, experience in the field and population they are teaching to.
- One session of **participatory observation** was organized on 7 April 2011 in a secondary school outside Paris.
- Half a day of observation of history lessons was organized on 10 May 2011 in a high school outside of Paris.

1.4.1. The implementation of the 2004 law on *laïcité*

The first case study of this report focuses on the discourse of actors in the education system with the aim to assess **the impact of the 2004 law on school practices and the understanding of *laïcité***. We distinguish the political discourse on *laïcité*, which operates as an important contextual element in this discussion, and the different points of view of school practitioners (principals, teachers and school staff).

For this case study, 8 interviews were conducted from January to May 2011 with two principals, 3 union representatives, 1 NGO representative, 1 community organiser and one interview was conducted with 3 administrative officials in charge of education policy at the level of a department (Paris Region)⁴. Interviews with teachers for the second case study were also used in the analysis when they referred themselves to *laïcité*.

¹ 'Toleration: Individuals, groups and practices who seek or for whom/which claims of toleration are being made *and* to whom/which toleration is granted, and the reasons given in favour of or against toleration' (Dobbernack, Modood 2011: 32).

² 'Recognition, respect as equal and admission as normal: Individuals, groups and practices who seek or for whom/which it is claimed that toleration is not enough and other normative concepts, namely those that focus on majority-minority relations and the reform of institutions and citizenship, are or should be more relevant. They also include claims and processes towards the reconsideration of difference as a 'normal' feature of social life. Such concepts include equality, respect, recognition, accommodation and so on, and the reasons given in favour of or against these propositions' (Dobbernack, Modood 2011: 32).

³ 'Non-toleration: Individuals, groups and practices who seek or for whom/which claims of toleration are being made *but* to whom/which toleration is *not* granted, and the reasons given in favour of or against toleration' (Dobbernack, Modood 2011: 31).

⁴ See Annexe for a complete list of the interviews and interview guide.

1.4.2. The extension of the history curriculum to the contribution of immigration to national history

To be able to discuss the acceptance of cultural diversity in schools in a context that has a low level of articulation of the issue, we **look at curriculum content and teaching practices**, and evaluate the extent to which there are instances of recognition. The recent introduction of immigration in history programs is a starting point, although the change was decided in 2008 but not yet implemented. The case study clarifies the context during which the program change was conducted and with which political aim. It gives the point of view of teachers and pupils on the issue.

For this case study, 6 interviews were conducted from January to May 2011 with one principal, one education officer in charge of overseeing the teaching of history at the level of a district, one person in charge of promoting the teaching of immigration history at the French museum of immigration in Paris, and 3 history teachers. One group discussion was organised with 3 other teachers of history in secondary schools and several sessions of participatory observation were conducted in secondary and high schools to discuss the issue with pupils¹.

The initial phase of discussion with teachers of history and geography was a way to establish contact and be able to go and attend some classes. The organization of participant observation in French public schools is difficult because it requires the approval of the administration. With the initial agreement of the teacher, it facilitated the process. Also, the lack of teaching on immigration history at the moment made it possible to justify the presence of the researcher as a “specialist” on immigration history to speak in class. Schools appeal to outside speakers for a number of activities (typically artistic activities).

One difficulty of this fieldwork is that teachers and school administrations are trained to avoid being specific about minority identities (e.g. identify students by their parents origin or religious belonging, name minority groups, etc.). However, they are all confronted to the reality of a diverse school population. As such, the introduction of immigration in history programs, although not yet in practice, made a valuable starting point to discuss matters pertaining to diversity in general.

In a context where the limited recognition of diversity is seen as a guarantee for the equal treatment of pupils, French schools are a difficult topic of analysis. However, an investigation into the understanding and practice of laïcité allows capturing the ways in which the French education system deals with the challenge of religious diversity. As a value that aims at fostering equality and freedom of conscience, it is a valuable case in point to explore the practice of tolerance in French schools. As for the cultural diversity of the school population (in terms of ethnic origin), it is best captured through an analysis of curriculum contents and the extent to which they are able to give an equal representation of all, regardless of race, origin or religion.

2. Case study 1: Religious signs and expressions in schools

2.1. Introduction to Case study 1

The question of religious symbols in French schools is best exemplified with the debate that arose with the wearing of the Islamic headscarf. Five years after the passing of the 2004 law², it is worth analysing **how the law effected perceptions of toleration in schools**. In this case study, we will first distinguish the various types of actors involved to understand the different levels of discourse and

¹ See Annexe for a complete list of interviews, discussion groups and participant observation.

² LOI n° 2004-228 du 15 mars 2004 encadrant, en application du principe de laïcité, le port de signes ou de tenues manifestant une appartenance religieuse dans les écoles, collèges et lycées publics

positioning on the issue. Second, we will analyse how practitioners see the impact of the 2004 law at the level of school practices. Third, we will analyse the recent development that pertains to the application of the law and how this has been used as a springboard for demands of more restrictions towards women wearing veil. We will show that **the challenge lays in the meaning that actors give to laïcité** in their approach to religious symbols in schools.

2.2. Types of groups and actors involved

2.2.1. Principals

Instrumental in the passing of the law were the **principals** who are at the head of secondary or high schools and more precisely, the professional organisation representing principals, the SNPDEN (*Syndicat national des personnels de direction de l'éducation nationale*). Principals were first to be concerned by the issue because they were the one who had to take the decision whether or not a female-student was wearing a headscarf in a conspicuous way according to the 1989 decision of the State Council, later reaffirmed in the 1994 Bayrou directive. This put them on the front line, first, to speak with the student and, second, to negotiate with the parents who may defend their daughter(s).

2.2.2. Teachers and pupils

Contrary to principals, **teachers** are not exposed to the decision to exclude or not a student wearing the veil. From this point of view, teachers were not on the front line of the mobilisation for the law. However, teachers of history and geography are in charge of teaching civic education (25%) and teach the 2004 law when pupils arrive in secondary school (6th grade 11 year old). Moreover, they may be confronted to situations in which pupils refer themselves to religious beliefs (e.g. when teaching on the history of the three monotheist religions).

2.2.3. Governments

At the political level, it is worth noting that the law was proposed by the government following the Stasi report commissioned by President Chirac (right-wing). It is a top-down process even though the Commission based its recommendation on a selection of hearings (civil society, practitioners, political representatives and pupils)¹. The law was therefore the fact of **governmental politics** and a decision taken in consultation with a number of experts.

2.2.4. Civil society

At the level of the civil society, the discussion and passing of the law raised debates, polarised **civil society and led to the creation of new groups**. On the one hand, proponents of the law saw the reaffirmation of the principle of *laïcité* justified in light with previous pressures that religious groups had put on French public schools (*cf. supra* Introduction, the Movement for Free Schools in 1984). Professional unions that value *laïcité* such as the Educational branch of the left-wing union UNSA is one of them. Moreover, some feminist activists argued that Islamic veil represents the domination of men over women in the Islamic religion².

¹ The Commission composed of 18 members proceed to 81 public audition and 51 auditions behind closed doors. One audition included the participation of 220 pupils from 6 different high schools (Stasi, 2003).

² Françoise Gaspard (1989), « Pensons aux musulmanes qui se battent ! », *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 26 octobre-1er novembre

On the other hand, some other proponents of *laïcité* argued that the principle is already in the 1958 French Constitution (article 1) and did not need to be reasserted (e.g. the NGO, Ligue de l'enseignement). New groups were formed that criticised the law for stigmatising Islam (e.g. Collectif Contre l'Islamophobie en France) and/or contended that the Islamic veil was not necessarily an instrument of domination of men over women (e.g. Collectif une Ecole pour Tout-Es). Moreover, they expressed concern that the law might discourage the schooling of girls practising Islam

2.2.5. Public opinion

Surveys show that **public opinion** was supportive (80%) of the 2004 law banning the conspicuous display of religious signs in schools (Tiberj 2008:62)¹. Surveys also show that people who recognize *laïcité* as an important value for them are people who declare anti-immigrant feelings and position themselves on the right side of the political spectrum (Barthelemy, Michelat 2007). This is a major change in view of the history of *laïcité* in France. Over the 19th and the 20th century, *laïcité* has been a value mainly defended by left-wing political parties. This last element is important to bear in mind because it indicates a change in the understanding of *laïcité* and the set of value it is associated with. In the following part we will see that actors all refer themselves to the concept of *laïcité* but their understanding of it may vary.

2.3. *The 2004 law: a case of tension between toleration and non-toleration*

During the debates that took place when the law was passed, associations expressed the concern that girls who would like to keep wearing their veil would opt out of school and, the option of private school being costly, that the schooling of female-pupils was at threat. This concern was best expressed by a gathering of activists from secular, religious and feminist organisations under the title Collectif une Ecole Pour Tout-Es (CEPT). However, one year later, the report that was issued as part of the monitoring of the law (see Article 4 of the law below) stated that they were **only 47 exclusions of pupils** among the 639 religious signs that were listed by principals and that among the students who did not want to take out the Islamic veil or Sikh turban half of them registered to distance learning².

The 2004 Law Banning Religious Signs in Public Schools¹

LAW number 2004-228 of 15 March 2004 controlling the wearing of religious signs and clothes in primary, secondary and high schools

Article 1 (...) "In public schools (primary, secondary and high schools), the wearing of signs or clothes by which pupils signal conspicuously their religious belonging is forbidden.

The rules of the schools entail that the implementation of the law through disciplinary action is preceded by a dialogue with the pupils.

Article 2 The law applies on all French territory (including overseas departments and overseas territories)

Article 3 The law comes into effect with the new school year (2 September 2004)

Article 4 A monitoring of the law shall be executed one year after the law

Source: Journal Officiel n° 65 du 17 mars 2004 page 5190

¹ Opinion poll on a representative sample. The questions was: "Some young girls wants to keep their veil in class. Some think that this should be accepted because all religions should be respected. Some other think that this should be forbidden because in a *laïc* school there should be no religious signs" RAPFI Survey (Tiberj 2008)

² The 2005 report on the law stated that:

- 639 religious signs (2 Christian crosses, 11Sikh turban and 626 Islamic Veil) were listed in 2004-2005

- 96 of these pupils opted out of schools before any disciplinary measure was taken (50 registered to distance-learning, the rest of them enrolled in private schools, went abroad or stopped going to school when they were older than 16 year old)

- 47 of these pupils were excluded by the disciplinary board of their school for wearing Islamic veil (39) or Sikh turban (3). Half of them (21) registered to distance-learning. (Cherfi 2005)

Some cases of tension were reported, notably, the disappointment of families who thought that by “dialogue” the law meant a possibility of negotiation (Cherfi, 2005: 13), which was not the case, as it was stated in the circular providing guidance for the application of the law: “Dialogue does not mean negotiation and is, of course, unlikely to justify that the law does not apply”¹. Some cases were unexpected too, as stated by the representatives of the SNPDEN: they did not expect that the law would prevent the schooling of Sikh pupils, for instance².

From the small number of exclusions that were reported by the end of the first year of the application of the law, the report concludes to the good understanding of the 2004 law. It goes so far as arguing for a “law effect” (*effet loi*) that makes *laïcité* understood as a principle that guarantee the freedom of people and more importantly their freedom of belief (Cherfi 2005: 36). Can the 2004 law be accredited of an educational impact on learning what *laïcité* is? What exactly does it mean to say that the law works? The interviews that were conducted for this case study help us clarify some of these points in the following part.

2.3.1. For whom the law works?

For **principals** who had to take the decision to exclude or not a student who was wearing an Islamic veil, the passing of the law and its implementation solved the issue. During one interview, a principal acknowledged this change:

*“After the passing of the law, it is clear that we enjoyed a blissful peace. Before, you had to deal with the pupil, the family and even some religious associations. You had to negotiate. After the law; no more of that...”*³

Principals have different arrangements with students wearing Islamic veil *outside* school. In one of the school where we conducted an interview, the administration had arranged for a changing room *inside* the school so that students could come in veiled and change into plain clothes. According to the administration it was a way to show respect to these pupils. However, this arrangement is left to the principal. In practice, principals do not know the number of pupils wearing veil outside schools.

For **some teachers who acknowledged the role of the 2004 law into publicizing *laïcité***, the passing of the law made it “easier for them to teach”⁴. They recall that it became easier to teach issues pertaining to religious history *after* the law passed, because it reaffirmed the principle and made it easier to ban the expression of religious beliefs in the classroom. For instance, some teachers organise a visit to a church when they teach about the birth of Catholicism and they recall encountering more opposition on the part of the students and their family before the law passed than after (students may argue that they do not want to go to a Catholic church because of their own different religious belief)⁵.

However, **some other teachers** do not consider that the law was instrumental in reassessing the principle of *laïcité* in schools and **think that it was not necessary**. They consider that *laïcité* is part of their teaching already and that the law did not change anything. Their point of view goes against the report that was issued one year after the law was passed that mention a “law effect”. Teachers who express this point of view think that the law was not necessary because issues of students wearing Islamic veil were solved before with the intervention of principals. Furthermore, they tend to distinguish the meaning given to *laïcité* in the public debate and their understanding of the principle of

¹ Circulaire N.2004-084 of 18-5-2004.

² Interview with a representative of the SNPDEN, 18 April 2011.

³ Interview with a principal of a high school in Seine Saint Denis

⁴ This element was mentioned during the group discussion.

⁵ This element was mentioned during the group discussion.

laïcité as a guarantee for freedom. They might go so far as to contend that the law had a negative effect by stigmatizing Islam and make it more difficult to pass on this value to pupils¹.

It is important to note that these teachers do not criticize the notion of *laïcité* as such; they are actually convinced of it can convey a message of tolerance. However, they want to dissociate themselves from **the discussion on *laïcité*** going on at the **level of government politics** on the issue that they see as fostering intolerance to other religions.

2.3.2. What is the impact of the law on the understanding of *laïcité*?

An important dimension of the implementation of the law relied in its explanatory power. The law was designed to let a time for dialogue and “pedagogy” before the principal takes any disciplinary measure (namely the decision to expel a pupil from school). It is therefore in the interest of the **policy-makers** who initiated the law to state, after one year, that the impact of the law is that the value of *laïcité* is better understood. The directive mentioned that the dialogue was to “convince the student of the importance to respect the principle of *laïcité*”². Here, we can contend that the issue is not so much the understanding of *laïcité* than preventing a too high number of exclusions to happen. What is at stake is to limit the exclusionary power of the law. It should not push pupils out of the school system because it would be a breach in their legitimate right to education in France.

In the interviews conducted with **principals and their representative in the union** (SNPDEN), we observed that they often relate situations when girls take out their veil before entering a school. We interpret this as a sign that they intent to show that the law did not prevent these pupils to go to school but rather made them understand what *laïcité* entails in French public schools. This is why the case of the pupils wearing Sikh turbans appears to them as an unfortunate side effect. In this case, there was not such a situation where these pupils could take out their turban and the fact that they had to opt out of school is interpreted as a failure of the law. This also shows that the law targeted specific religions (the usual examples that were given were always: large Christian crosses, Jewish skull-caps and Islamic veils).

Moreover, what we can observe is that the meaning of ***laïcité* has become a matter of discussion on the part of various actors**. For instance, two Sikh **pupils** who were excluded from a high school in Saint Ouen were interviewed and one of them said: “For me the neutrality of the State lies on the neutrality of the institution (notably teaching content), not on individual appearance”³. That the two pupils distinguish teaching content and individual appearance is interesting. It shows that despite all attempts by the legislator to prevent negotiation, individuals find ways to accommodate the enforcement of *laïcité* while not departing from its core principle of neutrality.

2.3.3. *Laïcité* as a mean for toleration, non-toleration or acceptance?

Instead of arguing that **the law** led to a better understanding of *laïcité*, we would rather argue that it **sparked a debate on the meaning of *laïcité*** that continues today. “*Laïcité* is a preservation of freedom” or “*laïcité* is a guarantee of neutrality” are phrases that were articulated by teachers, union

¹ Interview n. 2. with history teacher on 10 May 2011.

² Circulaire N.2004-084 of 18-5-2004.

³ Rym Nassef « Signes religieux : ‘On regrette ce qui s’est passé’, *Respect Mag*, 8 November 2010.

representatives or activists encountered during fieldwork. We analyse this discussion by referring ourselves to the three notions of intolerance, tolerance and acceptance¹.

First, we found teachers convinced of **the message of tolerance that laïcité as a value can convey**. In practice, they are convinced of the necessity not to articulate any religious or political opinion in class. An example of this is that they thrive to remain neutral regarding their own religious belonging. One teacher of history in secondary school who has a Muslim sounding name said he made a point of not answering questions on his religious belonging coming from pupils. This extends to particular identity, such as regional origin, for instance: one teacher who speaks with a southern accent said she does not tell pupils which region she comes from in France.

Second, we asked most of our interviewee if laïcité was a value of tolerance and they all answered positively, to the exception of two of them who found “tolerance” a negative value, because it implies that one does not approve of what the other do (which in fact match our definition of tolerance). In this case, it was argued that *laïcité* went beyond tolerance and that it was a way to treat all pupils equally. For this people, **laïcité, as a principle, could be seen as a tool for acceptance**, in the French understanding of equality: all are treated equally regardless of their origin or religious belonging. The absence of signs to identify these religious belonging is the condition to equality.

However, some of these teachers also contested **the actual practice of laïcité in French public school** because of the room that it makes for Catholicism. They recall that pupils often ask questions about the academic calendar and criticise the fact that catholic holidays are still the rule (Christmas and Easter notably).

“The principle of laïcité is not applied fully. Pupils, they compare all the time between Catholicism and Islam. (...) For them, it is an acknowledgment that does not exist”².

One teacher further argued that pupils may have the impression that **laïcité, in practice, is a two-tier concept**: it bans the expression of religious symbols that pertains to Islam but it allows for the expression of Catholicism³.

Moreover, one principal argued that **laïcité as it is institutionalised in the 2004 law can be regarded as an instrument of intolerance**. He suggested that, even though he could see the benefit of the law for his own sake, he could also see how this was not sending the right message to the French population. He said he could feel the “frustration” among young girls and young boys. He mentioned that some female-pupils in his school wore large headbands to cover most of their head as a way to by-pass the law:

“Up until now, no young girls came wearing a veil in the school, but I can see that some of them wear headbands. There were already some headbands right after the law passed, but now these headbands are bigger... Personally, I wonder now... I was supportive of the law... But, lately, you can tell there are raising debates. (...)

We are, right now, in a moment where neutrality rules. We live quite well. But for some, we can see frustrations, for girls and for boys. So we can accept that there are some plural expressions or that people can express themselves through what they wear. We can also shift to the English way and have people wearing veils or kippah and live together. I don't know⁴.”

¹ As a reminder, we consider that, while *intolerance* is about the majority population rejecting the beliefs and practices of a minority population, *tolerance* is about letting them happen but disapproving them. Furthermore, we contend that *acceptance* is about considering the others as equal and admitting them as normal.

² Interview with a teacher of history and geography, 11 May 2011

³ Interview n. 1. with history teacher, 10 May 2011

⁴ Interview with a principal of a public high school, Seine Saint Denis, 8 April 2011

The reference to the “English way” shows that the principal identifies two ways to deal with the expression of religious belonging. On the one hand, the absence of religious signs (the French way) and on the other hand, the allowance of religious signs (the English way). The reference to the English or the Anglo-saxon type of politics of difference is a consistent rhetoric phrase in French discussion on difference. It does not necessarily reflect an acute knowledge of the way politics of difference are put in practice in the UK or in the US, but rather an acknowledgment that things can be done differently and it is a choice that French legislation made to ban the display of religious signs because it bears with its Republican principles. *Laïcité* in fact is far from being only applied in France and there is a general trend to separate religious from public matters on the impetus of the European Union (Bauberot 2009). In fact, by alluding to the “English way”, the principal suggests that the comparison with other countries could be a resource for change. In which case, his statement indicates that the restrictive interpretation of *laïcité* that is enforced with the 2004 law can evolve.

The main benefactors of the 2004 law are the principals. As for the female-pupils wearing an Islamic veil – the main target of the law – they did not opt out drastically from French public schools but went on to take out their veil when entering the school. The notion of laïcité is the main lens through which issues pertaining to religious diversity are approached. The implementation of the law, however, sparked a debate on laïcité that some criticise as stigmatising Islam. One may distinguish laïcité as a principle that seeks the acceptance of individuals as equal and laïcité, in practice, which may appear as a two-tier concept, or even, in some instances, an instrument of non-tolerance.

2.4. Recent development regarding religious symbols: between exclusion and demands of inclusion

2.4.1. School girls summoned to wear less conservative outfits

The passing of **the law delineated the space where religious signs and belonging are negotiated** as exemplified by the following incidents that took place in Saint-Ouen (Department of Seine Saint Denis) in March 2011.

A number of young girls were summoned to the office of the assistant principal because of the way they were dressed (they wore long dresses). Support groups who publicised the incident on the internet argued that the school supervisor went beyond the scope of the law and expressed discriminatory point of views¹. According to them, she pointed at women wearing long dresses on the ground that they had Muslim sounding names. During one of our interviews, a representative of one union expressed regrets that, as a professional organisation, they were told not to give an official response to these events². According to him, what had happened was part of the normal proceeding of the law. What was presented as a summons was in fact the phase of dialogue that is provided by the law. However, these pupils did not attempt to enter the school wearing a veil. To this, the representative of the union objected that the attitude of some of these pupils had been provocative: they had made it clear that they were wearing Islamic dresses (although not covering their head) and one of them was the niece of a new Imam who had arrive in town. It is true that the circular attached to the law mentions the “wearing of a sign or a dress that can be immediately recognizable as a religious sign of belonging (...)”. This is the argument that the assistant principal was reported using. According to her, the long dresses qualified for religious dresses.

This incident shows **the tension over the dress of young women with Muslim sounding names in French high schools**. The law and its prescription (the type of dress, the procedure) give elements for

¹ « Musulmanes, ôtez cette robe longue qui nous insupporte !!! » *Soutien Palestine*, mardi 15 mars 2011.

² Interview with representative of SNPDEN 18 april 2011.

various actors to negotiate claims of exclusion (on the part of the school supervisor) and demands of inclusion (on the part of the pupils).

Moreover, when the law was passed, it was stated clearly that it applied only to pupils and it *did not apply* to pupils' parents'¹. However, that aspect of the law has been challenged recently.

2.4.2. Mother taking part in school activities threatened to be excluded when wearing veils

In 2007, the case of mothers wearing veil taking part in school activities was brought up (this is more the case in primary school where anytime a teacher has to organise an outing the ratio is 1 adult per 5 children and the number of parents accompanying the group is crucial in the organisation). Called upon on the issue, Education Minister Xavier Darcos had followed the recommendation of the Halde² to stick to the 2004 law that only applied to pupils and added that it could qualify as discrimination on religious criteria³. This has also been described to us as a common practice by representatives of a union specialised on primary schools⁴. However, in March 2011, a school director opposed a mother wearing a veil to accompany children in some school activity. Although the mother received the support of parents associations, the school director wrote to Education Minister Luc Chatel who stated that she was right to exclude a mother wearing a veil from school activities⁵. Luc Chatel grounded his decision on a proposition of the High Council for Integration to extend the obligation of neutrality that is expected of all public agents to mothers occasionally accompanying pupils.

The decision of Education minister Luc Chatel to extend the obligation of neutrality to mothers accompanying children proves that there is **a general trend towards an intolerant interpretation of *laïcité***. It should be noted that the High Council for Integration is not a legal body such as the Halde was and the discriminatory dimension of the decision cannot be excluded⁶. Moreover, this decision of the Minister has not yet been followed by any actual directive and school staffs that organise outings with the help of mothers wearing veil are not going against the law right now. Finally, it has been criticised as unpractical (the number of parents being available and willing to accompany school outings is limited).

The case of mothers accompanying children in school activities also shows how **the 2004 law** has been **a springboard for further claims on women wearing veil in France**. The shift from pupils to mothers is illustrative of this. One could also bring the example that was given in support of the law forbidding the wearing of the *niqab*: it was mentioned that mothers wearing a full veil covering their face would not be able to be identified by school staff when they come and pick up their children, causing a security problem. However, during one interview with primary union representatives, they objected that this was "imagination" because the practice is that mothers uncover their face to female-school staff⁷. They added that the relationship with family pupils at this early age is fundamental and

¹ As for education staff, they should not wear any religious signs as part of the regulation concerning all public servants

² The High Authority for the Combat against Discrimination and for the promotion of Equality was created in 2004 in application of European directive 2000/43, article 13: "Member States shall designate a body or bodies for the promotion of equal treatment of all persons without discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin."

³ Stéphanie LeBars, « Luc Chatel interdit aux femmes voilées d'accompagner des sorties scolaires », *Le Monde*, 04/03/2011

⁴ Interview with a representative of a primary school union, 13 April 2011

⁵ Stéphanie LeBars, « Luc Chatel interdit aux femmes voilées d'accompagner des sorties scolaires », *Le Monde*, 04/03/2011

⁶ In May 2011, the HALDE (the High Authority for the Combat against Discrimination and for the promotion of Equality) disappeared as such. However, the fight against discrimination is included in the remit of the Defender of Human Rights and most of the legal service of the former HALDE is now operating under his authority (Dominique Baudis was appointed Defender of Human Rights in 22 June 2011).

⁷ Interview with two representatives of SNUIPP

requires that school staff learn to know the parents of the pupils. They do not give away children to parents they do not know.

Recent developments such as the tension exerted on girls wearing headscarves outside schools and the threat to exclude mothers wearing veils from taking part in school activities exemplify the trend that schools have become the main battle ground to debate issues of religious diversity in France through the lens of laïcité. Events that took place in the winter of 2011 indicate a trend towards an intolerant interpretation of laïcité, one that limit the wearing of Islamic veil and identify practices (such as the wearing of long dresses) as proselytism.

2.5. Conclusion to Case Study 1

The presence of religious symbols in French school is problematized as infringing the neutrality of a public space. This understanding of laïcité is deeply entrenched in the interpretation and the teaching of the instructors in primary, secondary and high school. However, when looking at the argumentation of the law of 2004, it was not so much the neutrality of the school that was at stake than the necessity to counter Islamist strategies and pressure on families and female-pupils (Weil 2005). This context of the law is possible to observe in the analysis about the case of the young girls wearing long dresses, the idea that one of them is akin to the Imam of the city is quickly brought up so as to confirm that it is a situation of provocation or proselytism.

The comparison between the different religions is always present. On the one hand, the long history of conflicts between proponents of *laïcité* and Catholics justifies that various actors present this value as something that is not only contentious with regards to Islam. Interestingly, in our interviews, we found that interviewees often gave concrete examples related to the Catholic religion rather than with Islam. It is their attempt to show that the law applies equally to all but it is also downplaying the importance of the Muslim religion in the all debate around *laïcité*. It shows that Islam is not a topic easy to talk about for interviewees. On the other hand, the call for neutrality that implies the implementation of *laïcité* contrasts with the presence of catholic habits in the school, the academic calendar being the most visible element. It is also problematic, because it draws **a clear line in between one established, majority religion, that is Catholicism and one minority religion that is Islam.** From this, one teacher concluded that his pupils may have the impression of a “two-tier *laïcité*”.

Even though the argument of *laïcité* is at the top of the agenda, **the argument of gender equality has also been put forth with regard to the Islamic veil.** When the first mobilisation took place around the first headscarf affair, some feminist activists took position against the wearing of the Islamic veil in solidarity with feminist women leading a similar struggle in the Muslim world (Rocheffort 2002:150). However, since 2004 some feminist groups have taken a different position and criticised the claim that female-pupils wearing veil necessarily responded to outside pressures (Collectif Ecole pour Tout-Es). They argue that it is patronizing to contend that female-pupils wearing veil did not do it of their own choice and it is paternalistic to focus all the attention on the body and the dress of the women. Thus, the argument of gender equality is a tool for proponents of an intolerant interpretation of *laïcité* but there is a growing critique that they do not articulate a legitimate concern for gender equality.

During the conduct of the fieldwork - during the interview but also during the time we spent in secondary and high schools - we found that, **despite the strict enforcement of laïcité in the French education system, some arrangements were being made:** in some of these schools, girls can enter wearing their veil and change to plain clothes in a cloakroom, when we looked at food menu there was always an alternative to red meat to arrange those who would not like to eat red meat that is not *Hallal*, teachers report that on the day of *Aïd* (Muslim’s New Year) they do not schedule any assignments or such.

However, concerns were expressed that the interpretation of *laïcité* as a value that guarantee **neutrality, freedom, and in some respect equality is put at threat with the growing debate on *laïcité* taking place at the political level** (government and extreme right politicians). This debate on *laïcité* is seen as laying too strong the emphasis on Islam and conveying a negative image of a Republican value.

→*Policy recommendations: The instances of discriminations or evidences of a two-tier *laïcité* in French public schools (with more room allocated for Catholic holidays than Muslim holidays for instance) are a threat to the Republican promise of equal treatment regardless of pupils' origin, race or religion. For this reason, the enforcement of *laïcité* in French public schools should be reassessed in view of its core principles that are equality and neutrality towards religious beliefs.*

It requires to:

- *Train administrative staff in their enforcement of *laïcité* (enforcing *laïcité* does not sum up to ban expressions of other religious faiths than the Catholic faith in schools);*
- *Add explicit developments on *laïcité* in textbooks for civic education classes (*laïcité* entails the absence of expressions of religious faith in the classroom but not the discrimination of one religious faith over another).*

3. Case Study 2: Tolerance and diversity in the school curriculum

3.1. Introduction to Case Study 2

Considering the unifying mission of the French education system, the content of the curriculum is a crucial component for the transmission of national representations. In this case study, we will mainly **focus our attention on the teaching of history, geography and civic education** as a relevant locus to analyse issues pertaining to recognition and acceptance of cultural diversity. Since the establishment of a French education system in the 19th century, curriculum contents and practices have been considered the main conveyor of republican values such as equality and *laïcité*. As mentioned in the introduction, the necessity to replace religious education by civic education resulted in the creation of a specific curriculum entitled **civic education**. In secondary and high school, civic education is taught by history and geography teachers¹.

Moreover, following the creation of a Museum of Immigration in 2007 (*Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*) a commission composed of historians and teachers has been appointed to discuss the opportunity to introduce **immigration history in French curriculum**. As a result, higher officials in the Education ministry decided to add immigration history to the new history curriculum for secondary and high schools². Even though this curriculum extension was announced in 2008, it is not yet effective. However, the decision-process, the successive phases of implementation and the opinion of school teachers provides elements to identify and discuss the main challenges related to curriculum extension.

In this case study, we posit that **curriculum contents are in direct relation with issues of acceptance**: elements that explain the formation of a diverse society and present the various components of a population as part of a comprehensive whole, are likely to foster the acceptance of all individuals, regardless of their ethnic or social background. However, the analysis will also take into

¹ The exact title is 'Education civique' in secondary schools and 'Education civique, juridique et sociale' in high schools.

² For a detailed description of the content of the new program regarding immigration history, Annexe "Immigration history in secondary and high school curriculum"

account the variations that occur in the implementation of the curriculum and will question teaching practices.

First, we will identify the type of actors involved in the decision to extend the curriculum. Second, we will identify the main challenges in the implementation of a history curriculum that includes elements on the history of immigration. Third, we will discuss the purported difficulty to teach immigration issues. And, finally, we will analyse how teachers link issues of diversity to curriculum content and civic education.

3.2. Types of actors and groups involved

3.2.1. Education officers and academics in charge of curriculum content

Curriculum contents are decided at the central level of the state by **higher education officers** in the ministry of Education. In August 2008, the Education ministry announced new programs for the teaching of history, geography and civic education in Secondary School to be implemented starting September 2012¹. In September 2010, new programs for the teaching of history and geography in High school were announced. They will be implemented starting September 2011².

New programs are decided in a consultation with a selection of **academics**. As such, the setting up of a Pedagogical Commission in the French museum of immigration (*Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*) headed by Historian Philippe Joutard and the commission of a report on the teaching of immigration history, might have influenced the introduction of immigration in History programs (Falaize 2008). However, historians have also criticised the difficulty to channel curriculum change, especially on a topic such as immigration history that is already suffering from a lack of legitimacy in its own field (Noiriel 2002: 160-162).

Finally, **education officers** at the level of the region and the department are in charge of the evaluation of history and geography teaching in secondary and high schools. They are the one to inform teachers of the new programs and to organise sessions so that they can familiarize themselves with new content and methods.

3.2.2. Teachers

Teachers are in charge of translating the prescribed curriculum into concrete teaching methods and contents. Handbooks are published according to the programs and are lent to pupils for the duration of the school year (or, alternatively, they are at their disposal in the classroom). However, there can be a strong discrepancy in between the **prescribed content** and the **actual teaching**. In depth surveys have demonstrated that there is a margin of interpretation in between the two (Falaize 2008). In the following, we will give some indication on teaching practices that we could gather from our interviews with teachers and observations conducted in class³.

3.2.3. NGOs and institutional support

¹ Bulletin Officiel spécial n°6, 28 August 2008.

² Bulletin Officiel spécial n°9, 30 September 2010

³ See Methodology Note for more details.

A number of NGOs are working in the field of education and are acting as partners in the conduct of intra or extra curriculum activity on the teaching of tolerance (e.g. Association Leo Lagrange)¹ or the preparation of visits to museums such as the Immigration Museum (e.g. Citoyenneté Jeunesse²).

The Museum of immigration (*Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration*) acts as an institutional support for the teaching of immigration history in schools. It has specific services in charge of building a network among teachers and teachers' organisations. It provides trainings and online resources for teachers³.

3.2.4. Political debate

Curriculum contents are a topic of occasional debates in France, especially when it comes to history. In 1979, a project inspired by the Annales School of History and the work of Fernand Braudel had been designed to change the history curriculum from a succession of events and characters into a structuration around themes, bringing various approaches of social sciences. It met strong criticisms by conservative thinkers on the ground that such a curriculum was not teaching the "History of France" and it was not implemented.

Along this line, the publication of a new history curriculum in 2010 raised numerous critiques. Opponents criticised the cutting of chapters on Louis XIV and Napoleon to the benefit of new chapters on Hans China and the Malian Empire. They argued that children need to know French history before learning about the history of other continents. To be sure, the addition of immigration history attracted less attention, and as a result less criticisms. However, the two topics are sometimes conflated in the discourse of the actors, which is problematic because they are two distinctive issues. More precisely, we argue that, while **the inclusion of immigration history is about acceptance**, on the contrary, **explicitly putting the teaching of African history in relation with the presence of pupils with African background** contributes to ethnic ascription and **is not about recognition**.

The question of curriculum content is also linked to a broader debate on national memory and the issue of Memory Laws that emerged in the past decade. The practice of issuing **Memory Laws** in the French context is usually linked to the role of history in the construction of national identity (Thiesse 2010). They consist in four Memory Laws (*lois mémorielles*):

- *Gayssot Law of 13 July 1990*: first Memory Law to ban the expression of revisionist statements on the Holocaust;
- *Law of 29 January 2001*: "France acknowledge publicly the Armenian Genocide of 1915"
- *Taubira Law of 21 May 2001*: the law acknowledges that the slave trade was a crime against humanity. It added that "school curricula and research projects should pay attention to the slave trade and slavery in the proportion that those events deserve" ;
- *Law of 23 February 2005 on the French presence overseas*: the law proposal initially included an article stipulating that school curriculum should acknowledge the positive role of colonisation ("The French presence overseas and notably in North Africa"). That article, however, did not pass.

The possibility to acknowledge a positive role of the French colonial period sparked a controversial debate (Bertrand 2006). It revealed a general unease on how colonisation is remembered and made it clear that there were groups, powerful enough, to defend a positive vision of colonisation all the way to the National Assembly (Scioldo-Zürcher 2010).

¹ <http://www.leolagrange-fnll.org/> (last access May 2011)

² <http://www.citoyennete-jeunesse.org/thematiques/histoire-de-l-immigration-en-france> (last access May 2011)

³ <http://www.histoire-immigration.fr/education-et-recherche/la-pedagogie> (last access May 21 2011)

3.3. The challenge of introducing immigration history in national curriculum

3.3.1. The topic of immigration in the historical discipline

When Gerard Noiriel published *The French Melting –Pot* in 1988, he argued that, while immigration was a major component of the French population, in comparable proportions to the United States, it was **not a legitimate topic of study for historians and social scientists**, nor was it recognized as a constitutive feature of French national identity (Noiriel 1988). This is why he called it a Denial of Memory (*un non-lieu de mémoire*), taking the expression from Pierre Nora's series of volume on France's Places of Memory (*Les Lieux de Mémoire*) (Nora 1984).

In the two decades that followed, **research on immigration history in 19th and 20th century France** developed. Following up on a tradition of labour history, historians worked on the successive waves of immigration, at the turn of the 20th century and during the interwar period. The literature produced in the 1980s and the 1990s laid the emphasis on immigrants' integration because historians wanted to use immigration history as a case in point to respond to rising manifestation of xenophobia (high score of the National Front in local elections of 1995). Moreover, historians and social scientists have researched the management of public action towards immigrants (social or administrative). Central to their demonstration, has been the call for the recognition of immigration issue as a valid entry to approach the study of the French state and the construction of national narratives. **These successive calls for recognition reveal that the topic of immigration in the field of history remains to be acknowledged.**

3.3.2. The politics of immigration history

The opening of a museum of immigration in 2007 brings further evidence of **the difficulty to establish the topic of immigration in national representations**. The project had been formulated by immigrant associations with the support of historians, since the beginning of the 1980s (Escafré-Dublet 2008). However, it was the result of the first round of the Presidential election of 2001 and the presence of an extreme-right candidate that prompted President Jacques Chirac to appoint a specific commission to reflect on the creation of a museum on immigration. After much discussion and debates (Blanc-Chaléard 2006, Green 2007), the museum finally opened in 2007, but President Nicolas Sarkozy did not come to its opening, which may have reflected his disagreement with a project that intend to celebrate French immigration history.

During fieldwork, when we asked teachers, **why**, in their opinion, **immigration history was introduced** in French curriculum and how they interpreted this choice; the political dimension of the decision was pervasive. First they expressed the idea that it was a respond to a **“social demand”**. They made reference to the debate surrounding the Memory Law described earlier on. Second, one of them pointed to the contradiction in between this change in program and the repressive turn of immigration policies (“a double injunction”)¹. Curriculum changes are decided by higher officers in the administration of the ministry of Education and we can suspect that they result from a different process than the current state of governmental policies towards migrants. It is true, however, that the change is decided at the central level of the administration. By this remark, the teacher also acknowledges that curriculums are national issues and changes in curriculums are political. It shows how **at the level of their teaching, instructors of the French education system, interpret the direct impact of government politics.**

¹ Interview teacher of history and geography, 11 May 2011.

3.3.2. National identity in French curriculum

The decision to introduce immigration history in curriculum participates in a **general reflexion on the construction of national narratives that are more inclusive**. In a similar fashion that immigration history has thrived to impose its legitimacy as a topic of historical inquiry, a number of historians have argued for change in the teaching of national history in school. Among them, Suzanne Citron has published and campaigned for the necessity to convey a sense of “us” in national history curricula instead of pointing at immigrants’ cultures as different (Citron 1989). She has argued for a better introduction to issues such as slavery, colonisation and decolonisation. The idea is that, for children whose parents or grand-parents may have been linked to these dark moments of French history, it is hard to have a clear grasp on what is their past; they are left with the expression of conflicting memories on the part of various actors (Liauzu 2005).

The literature on the construction of national narratives in school curriculum is also concerned with the **teaching of sensitive topics in schools**. In France, this discussion may apply to the Algerian war, the Holocaust and the Second World War (Ernst 2008). Beyond the idea that official narratives are reluctant to reveal the dark side of history, the general argument is that those topics may be hard to teach because teachers may have to compete with alternative versions expressed by pupils or outside actors (families, associations and the media). Curriculum designs have usually responded to this challenge with the provision of extra pedagogical material and specific trainings. However, we contend that immigration history should not be regarded as a sensitive topic at the same rate as the Holocaust, the Second World War and the Algerian War. For this reason the question of immigration history might be considered separately from this literature.

The challenge of introducing immigration history in national curriculum comes from the lack of legitimacy of the topic in the historical discipline and the construction of immigration as a politically charged topic in the media. However, there have been calls for the construction of national narratives that are more inclusive and immigration, along with decolonisation and slavery is one of the topics at stake.

3.4. Is teaching immigration issues problematic?

3.4.1. The political dimension of immigration issues today

The question of immigration is often presented as a problem. Media regularly associate immigration with illegal immigration, violence or poverty. No matter how long standing these representations are, they are mainly a **political construction** of the issue rather than an objective analysis (Hmed, Laurens, 2008). However, when it comes to teaching immigration history the idea that it could be problematic was mentioned in the interviews.

Two levels of difficulties should be distinguished that are not expressed by the same teachers:

- **1. Media convey a negative image of immigration** and the voice of the teacher is one out of many that pupils will hear.

“They are much more exposed to the political discourse, to what is said on television about it, or even the family discourse on the issue...Me, I have a few hours of class with them”¹

This dimension of the difficulty to teach is to be taken into perspective with new reflections that are emerging about teaching practices in the era of internet. Teachers are not the only recipient of

¹ Interview with teacher of history and geography in secondary school, 11 May 2011.

knowledge for pupils and they have to guide them in their collection of information¹. This obstacle can be overcome by providing extra training on the use of new technologies in support of teaching methods.

- **2. Teacher will face contestation coming from pupils** when this topic will be talked about. One education officer in charge of implementing the new programs said:

*"I can foresee that some teachers, not all of them, but some of them, will tell me 'I can't teach this'"*².

Even though we could not find any teacher articulating such a statement, it was mentioned to us that some colleagues may have articulated a similar concern³. Even if immigration history has not been introduced in the program, teachers make this comment in relation with an already existing part of the program that introduces Islam in an historical perspective (in 7th grade). In his study on the teaching of immigration in schools, Falaize already demonstrated that difficulties in teaching topics that are in connection with immigration issues may arise when they are taught in link with current events (Falaize 2008: 185). The challenge lies in **teaching immigration history as a regular topic of history in line with other historical events** in the timeline of the class. It should not be treated from the perspective of present times (what Falaize calls "presentism"). This obstacle can be overcome by providing readymade pedagogical materials that deal with immigration history to be included in the regular succession of events taught in class.

3.4.2. A specific topic for a specific group of pupils?

Beyond the idea that some teachers may find it more difficult to teach immigration issues lies the assumption that there are specific difficulties that arise with certain groups (namely pupils with immigrant backgrounds). Even though immigration history is not part of the program yet, one teacher mentioned how he heard similar comments when it comes to teaching the history of Islam. To him that is more a pretext to uncover issues that pertains to discipline:

*"I heard it 'I'm freaking out because I have to teach on the history of Islam' ...or the ones who wants to avoid it and say they do not want to teach it because of laïcité. I remember one teacher who told me that one pupil did not want to read an extract of the Bible in a literature class for religious reasons. I had this pupil in class myself and I had him work on the history of Christianity and he did not object. My impression is that he used the religious argument or the teacher used the religious argument, but in fact this was more a question of discipline than a question of belief."*⁴

What is problematic regarding the argument of the difficulty to teach immigration issues to children with an immigrant background is that it is a way to ascribe them a specific trait. Conversely, the person in charge of immigration history training at the immigration Museum noted that it was problematic that teachers would come and attend the training "because they have a lot of children with immigrant backgrounds" in their school population⁵. **Immigration history should be taught** as any topic of history that is part of French history **to all pupils and not taught specifically to children of immigrants**. There is, otherwise, a risk of ethnic ascription that does not foster **acceptance** but rather exclusion.

¹ Cf. The creation of an association of teacher of history and geography to gather and promote knowledge on new technologies in support of teaching methods, <http://www.clionautes.org/> (last access 21 May 2011)

² Interview with education officer.

³ Interview with teacher of history and geography in secondary school, 11 May 2011

⁴ Interview with a teacher of history and geography, 11 May 2011.

⁵ Interview with the person in charge of promoting immigration history among teachers of history and geography at the Immigration Museum in Paris, 12 April 2011.

3.4.3. Results from participatory observation in a secondary school

During the fieldwork for this case study, we organised a session of **participatory observation** during which a teacher of history and geography in a secondary school taught one hour on post-war immigration in France to 9th graders (from 15 to 17 year old) and during the second hour there was a discussion with pupils about their interest in immigration history (and the possibility to go and visit the museum). The teacher used documents with numbers and graphs to have pupils describe the successive waves of immigrants to France in the post-war period and their concentration in specific sectors of economic activities. One text described the difficult housing conditions in the 70s. A second text described the political mobilisation of second generation against discrimination in the early 80s and pupils were able to see a video capture of the events available on line¹.

It is true that when national origins of immigrants were brought up during the exercise, some pupils started referring to each other according to the nationality of their parents. However, the teacher was able to put these specific origins in perspective with the help of the graphs. Moreover, pupils identify each other by foreign nationalities in their interactions routinely.

Finally, when we engaged the discussion on the teaching of immigration history, we found that they saw this as an opportunity to give another vision of immigration than the negative one that they see is conveyed by the media. One of them however, noted that they were “good things and bad things” about immigration but the problem is that people “need to know”. The pupil was referring herself to the bad image of immigration that she saw conveyed in the media and the positive aspect of immigration that had just been mentioned, such as the economic contribution for instance. However, the fact that she ended her statement by the need to know about immigration in general goes beyond the positive or negative dimension of immigration. It is rather **a legitimate demand for recognition of immigration history as part of the usual historical events that are taught in class.**

The main challenge in the introduction of immigration in the teaching of history is to give it full legitimacy as a regular topic. This necessity is identified by the initiator of the change in curriculum and also corresponds to the demand of the pupils that were observed.

3.5. The cross-disciplinary approach to tolerance teaching

During the fieldwork, the new programs including immigration history were not yet implemented. The change was decided in 2008 and although the new programs are available on line, not all teachers knew or had looked at the programs. However, they identified three teaching elements that related to the cultural diversity of the French population (in different order):

- Immigration flows in geography (8th grade) ;
- The history of Islam (7th grade) ;
- Citizenship rights in civic education (7th grade).

In this respect, the new chapter on immigration history as it is defined in the program for the 9th grader will be a different input: “Immigration and the French society in the 20th century (as part of “Changes in the society, 10% of History teaching”).

Teachers’ description of the content of the teaching in link with diversity **revolves around the teaching of civic education** and is centred on two core notions: citizenship and *laïcité*. One important element is the definition of French citizenship as civic and the articulation of ethnic or religious origin as dissociated from this. In echo with what we observed for Case Study 1, it is imperative for these

¹ A selection of archives of the French television are available on line: <http://www.ina.fr/> (last access September 2011)

teachers that religious and ethnic forms of belonging are kept private (i.e. not articulated in the classroom) on the part of the pupil and on the part of the teacher.

Civic education is conceived as the main tool to approach questions of cultural diversity. One should add that **the teaching of civic education comes with a different pedagogy** than with other disciplines. Teachers have to launch debates and the format of teaching is participative¹. This is part of the new core pedagogy that was implemented in 2005 (*socle commun de compétence*). It assigns to history teacher the task to train pupils to take part in debates. The French education system is characterised by a form of teaching that is close to the format of lecture. As such, we could observe that college pupils were reactive in class, but high school pupils were taking notes most of the times². Critics of this system have been formulated and have prompted the introduction of new requirements in the pedagogy such as the ability to take part to debate, albeit in limited proportion (only the teaching of history and geography is concerned by the development of the capacity to debates). However, the content of the teaching that we could observe was little interactive. Moreover, curriculums are heavy and teachers are often worried that they will not be able to cover it all in one academic year if they give too much time to pupils' interactions.

Finally, **the value of tolerance was understood as guiding their teaching** of issues such as the history of religion (and combat prejudices towards different religions), the principle of *laïcité* and the rights of citizens. Moreover, the necessity to launch projects with **outside partners** that has been imposed to all secondary and high school by a 2005 law (*les projets d'établissement*) led principals to run educational projects with various education NGOs (one such organisation is Leo Lagrange that runs specific activities to combat prejudices inside schools)³. The theme of tolerance and antidiscrimination action is favoured by heads of school. While the impact of such activities is hard to appreciate, the fact that these projects have to take place opens more avenues for tolerance teaching in schools.

3.6. Conclusion to Case Study 2

The challenge in the introduction of immigration history in curriculum content is to present this topic as **a legitimate topic of historical inquiry and not an addition dictated by the current situation** with immigration (namely the repressive turn of immigration policies and the presentation of immigrant populations as problematic). This challenge has some major implications in the actual practice of the teaching that researchers have pointed at: the pitfall to take immigration history from the perspective of the present times and not in line with other historical events. In fact, the history of immigration can reveal important pedagogical resources for the teaching of history (Joutard in Falaize 2008: 9).

While the concern for the integration of immigration history among regular historical events has been identified as channelling the understanding of the issue, it is interesting to put it in perspective with the notion of recognition. **The extension of the French curriculum to elements of immigration history is not understood as a demand to accommodate minorities** nor is it aiming at the specific representation of a group. On the contrary it aims at addressing the school population without pointing at specific groups. This approach to the topic fits in the Universalist argument and the quest for equality regardless of one's religious, racial or ethnic belonging. On the other hand, one may point out at the mobilisation around the Memory Laws or the creation of the Immigration Museum as indirectly

¹ One teacher did refer to that dimension of the teaching practice and how he usually took the opportunity to let pupils speak freely during that hour of class (one every two weeks of class). An other teacher, however, said she had them reacted on texts but the format of the teaching was still close to a lecture. Group discussion, 16 March 2011.

² Observation of three lessons of history in high school, Seine Saint Denis, 10 May 2011.

³ Interview with principal of secondary school 7 April 2011 and May 2011

accessing to some specific demands. The 2011 Taubira Law resulted partly from the mobilisation of groups in favour of the recognition of the history of slavery. The project of a museum of immigration was supported by many associations created by immigrants. Moreover, teachers and education officers did mention that the extension of the curriculum is accessing a “social demand”.

There is a sense that curriculum extension cater to some specific problems, but how?

The argument for curriculum extension in the French context has been to access the demand to produce national narratives that are more inclusive for new generations, and therefore more accepting. That dimension appears important considering the feedback that we obtained from pupils who we met during the fieldwork. However, the literature on education to tolerance or the experiments that have been run on the teaching of black history in the US show mixed results: **pupils have different ways to assimilate teaching contents**¹. Furthermore, as we pointed earlier, the margin between prescribed curriculum and the actual content of the teaching can be extensive.

➔ Policy recommendations: Curriculum contents should mention the contribution of immigration to the history of France in the regular succession of events (not in a specific chapter). In practice, the teaching of immigration history should not be targeted at population with immigrant background but introduced to all school population. Through the mainstreaming of immigration history, curriculum contents and teaching practices may be more acceptant of the diversity of the French population.

It requires to:

- *Provide ready-made material for teachers to teach immigration history to students;*
- *Extend and render accessible the offer in teacher training on the topic of immigration history;*
- *Financially support and promote community initiatives that organise workshops on immigration history with primary and secondary students (e.g. Association Citoyenneté Jeunesse).*

4. Conclusion

4.1. Instances of non-toleration and call for acceptance of religious symbols in schools

The **first case study** on religious symbols in schools touches upon issues of toleration and non-toleration. The implementation of the 2004 concerns practices that are formerly described expressions of religious belonging. However, considering that it applies disproportionately on girls wearing Islamic veils (Cherfi 2005) the practice of the law is that it pertains to elements of religious diversity that are regarded as foreign.

Does the practice of the law correspond to non-toleration, toleration or acceptance? The answer can hardly be straightforward. It is true, considering the recent development on girls wearing veils outside school and mothers taking part in school activities, that the law has become an instrument to express **non-toleration** on the part of some actors (principals, government politicians in this case). In support to this, one principal expresses his concern that the law is sending a signal of exclusion (“creating frustration”) to some parts of the population.

¹ Conference on the Memory and Public Use of History in Europe, Centre d’Etudes Européenne, Sciences Po, Paris, 25 March 2011.

However, it is important to distinguish opinions on *laïcité* and opinions on the debate on *laïcité*¹. The interviewees distinguished in many instances the principle of *laïcité* that they see as guaranteeing a form of **freedom through neutrality** from the use of *laïcité* in the public debate (“*a form of laïcité that is distorted*” they said)². Many teachers and principals expressed a firm belief that *laïcité* could be a principle to follow to insure equality for all, and in turn acceptance in the polity. Some of them also criticised the current debate on *laïcité* as stigmatising Islam.

Furthermore, one interviewee asserted that *laïcité* could be a way towards **recognition**³. Interestingly, his assessment was immediately followed by the acknowledgement that ‘recognition’ is an Anglo-Saxon concept that does not apply to the French context and that it was ‘daring’ to articulate it as such. The fact that his organisation is engaged in cultural activities that imply the “representation” of cultural diversity through art might explain the ease with which he articulated a concept closer to the idea of recognition. As a matter of fact, the French interpretation of difference is reluctant to consider political representation as a mean to reach equality. In this sense, it is not surprising that very little mention of strategies to reach acceptance through recognition and representation of religious diversity can be found.

In sum, the case study on religious symbols in France demonstrates that there is **a firm belief that acceptance as equal can be reached through the neutrality towards religious expression** in schools. This conviction, **however**, does not go without **criticism towards the use of a distorted version of *laïcité*** to stigmatise Islam and the contention that religions are not treated equally (the presence of Catholic habits in the organisation of the academic year, for instance).

4.2. Accepting immigration history as a regular topic of teaching

The **second case study** touches upon issues of recognition with the inclusion of immigration history in the history program of secondary and high schools (more precisely one chapter in 9th grade and one chapter in 11th grade).

What is at stake is the acknowledgment of immigration as **a legitimate topic of teaching in history**, and not a matter that is only relevant for a specific group of the population. Studies have been done on how to teach immigration issues as part of the regular curriculum and how immigration and integration are topics that might be helpful to develop other pedagogical skills in history (the ability to distinguish what might be common to the immigration experience and what might be different depending of the context of the migration, for instance).

The challenge already exists at the academic level in the (late) development of a field of immigration history in the discipline. It could also be observed in the creation of a museum of immigration in Paris (2007). It is linked to **the difficulty to recognise immigration as an inclusive part of the national narrative**.

It is hard to assess the impact of the extension of the curriculum as of yet. The change in program was decided in 2008 but has not been yet implemented (in 2012 for 9th graders and in 2011 for 11th graders). However, in the way the issues are presented, **the necessity to legitimate immigration history participates to the process of admitting as normal** (a *regular* topic of history). This demand is pervasive in the proponents of the introduction of immigration history in French curriculum. Instances of exclusion or process of ethnic ascription might also be at play in practice. The necessity to

¹ “*Laïcité: trois heures de débat pour clore deux mois de polémiques*” *Le Monde*, 05 April 2011.

² « Une *laïcité* dévoyée », interview with teacher of history and geography, 10 May 2011.

³ Interview with representative of La Ligue de L’enseignement, 5 May 2011.

monitor teaching practices will be crucial along with the training of teachers on this part of the curriculum.

4.3. Further inquiry on instances of non-toleration and admission of minority as equal

Starting from an analysis of questions of tolerance in schools allows identifying some further topics of inquiry for the next phase of the research. We identified that with the 2004 law banning religious signs in schools, a new window of opportunity opened for politicians to articulate further claims to restrict the access of public space to women wearing veil. Attempts to apply a restrictive interpretation of *laïcité* has been contested and led to the mobilisation of various groups that will be further investigated in the subsequent stage of this research.

5. Annexes

Methodology

Case study number 1 on religious signs in school

1. 15 March 2011: Three administrative officials in charge of the education policy at the Council of the Seine Saint Denis
2. 7 April 2011: Principal secondary school Seine Saint Denis
3. 8 April 2011: Principal high school, Seine Saint Denis
4. 13 April 2011: Two union representatives for primary schools SNUIPP – FSU
5. 18 April: Union representative for principal of secondary and high schools SNPDEN
6. 13 April 2011: Community organiser for NGO Léo Lagrange
7. 3 May 2011: Union representative for secondary and high school - UNSA Education
8. 5 May 2011: Representative of NGO Ligue de l'enseignement
9. 5 May 2011: Principal of public secondary school in Seine Saint Denis

Case study number 2 on curriculum extension

10. 11 March 2011: District inspector for the teaching of History and Geography
11. 12 April 2011: Person in charge of promoting immigration history among teachers of history and geography at the Immigration Museum in Paris
12. 10 May 2011: Teacher of History and Geography in high school
13. 10 May 2011: : Teacher of History and Geography in high school
14. 11 May 2011: : Teacher of History and Geography in secondary school

Group Discussion

16 March 2011: Three teachers of History and geography.

Observation:

- 7 April 2011: One class, 9th grade, Secondary school in Seine Saint Denis
- 10 May 2011: Three classes in a row (10th grade, 11th grade and 12th grade) High school in Seine Saint Denis

Interview Guide

Case study number 1 on religious signs in school

- What types of issues related to diversity emerge in schools?
- What are the decisions that are taken to deal with these issues?
- How do you evaluate the solution adopted?
- According to you, what were the values that informed the solution adopted?
- Do you think that the decision adopted solved the issue or that it persists? Why?
- What could be an alternative decision to solve the issue?
- According to you, what does it mean to 'tolerate' cultural diversity in school?
- What are the practices and the norms that structure tolerance in school?

Case study number 2 on curriculum extension

- What do you think of the decision to introduce immigration history in French history curriculum?
- Do you think this decision was taken to solve a specific issue? And if yes, what kind of issue?
- According to you, what were the values that informed this decision?
- Are there tensions in relation with the content of the curriculum that you may link to the diversity of the school population?
- What could be a better alternative than introducing immigration history in French curriculum?
- According to you, what does it mean to ‘tolerate’ cultural diversity in school?
- What are the practices and the norms that structure tolerance in school?

Immigration History in Secondary and High school Curriculum

		h/week	Civic Education	History	Geography
<i>Secondary</i>					
Year 6	6e	3h	Teaching on the presentation of self: enforcement of laïcité. <i>Since 2009</i>		
Year 7	5e	3h	Teaching on Equality and Diversity <i>Since 2010</i>		
Year 8	4e	3h			Migration and Tourism in the World (10% of Geography Teaching) <i>Starting 2011</i>
Year 9	3e	3h30		20 th Century History: Labour migration. A century of immigration in France (5% of History teaching) <i>Starting 2012</i>	
<i>High School</i>					
Year 10	2nde				
Year 11	1ère			Immigration and the French society in the 20 th century (as part of changes in the society, 10% of History teaching). <i>Starting 2011</i>	
Year 12	Terminale				

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