



## **"Teaching about socio-economic inequalities to (try to) reduce them"**

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# Introduction

- Economic and Social Sciences (SES): subject introduced in the French high school in 1967 (from Year 11 to Year 13)
  - Initial objective: "opening up the school to society"
  - 2 pillars: interdisciplinarity and active pedagogy
  - Context:
    - Highlighting of the deep inequalities in the French educational system (Bastide & Girard, 1963 ; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964)
    - Need to modernise education to adapt to a rapidly changing labour market and society → The "Glorious Thirties" (Fourastié, 1973)
- => How does this subject address socio-economic inequalities and can it contribute to reducing them?**

# Presentation outline

## **I - The changing treatment of socio-economic inequalities in the SES curriculum**

*Exchanges with you on the situation in your countries*

## **II – Some examples of activities to address the issue**

*General discussion*

# I - The changing treatment of socio-economic inequalities in the SES curriculum

- Inequalities very present in the early SES programmes (end of the 1960's), but only in class 13
  - Essentially global perspective ("Growth and Development", international relations)
  - Also a special item (1 out of 4) about "Social change":
    - 1) Basic social structures (castes, orders, classes) and the components of social stratification: **Income inequality**, diversity of status, sense of group membership.
    - 2) Geographical, occupational and **social mobility**; its degrees, forms and means; its consequences for the structure of society.
    - 3) The social cost of change: integration and its difficulties; value conflicts and **group conflicts**
- => Strong link between economic and social dimensions and between the recognition of inequalities and the potential conflicts they may generate***

# I - The changing treatment of socio-economic inequalities in the SES curriculum

- First rewriting of the programmes following the first attacks against the SES (Bourdin commission report, etc.) in the early 1980'
- Diminution of the room of inequalities in the curriculum and cutting of the issue
  - Year 12: study of social stratification
  - Year 13: study of social mobility; study of underdevelopment and "disparities" between countries
- (Temporary) disappearance of the very word "inequalities"
- Instead: focus on economic crisis and relations between Socialist and Capitalist countries
  - => Hypothesis: rise of neoliberal ideology (C.Beullac then Minister of Education)

# I - The changing treatment of socio-economic inequalities in the SES curriculum

- 1988: New Program for Year 12: more room for the socialization mechanisms and for social politics (*but the question of inequalities is not directly mentioned*)
- 1993-95: New rewriting of curricula:
  - inequalities absent of Year 11 curriculum
  - Social classes, socialization, social and economic politics (and their limits) in Year 12 but larger room for market mechanisms
  - The very notion of inequalities only present in the last item of Year 13 curriculum: "Changes and specificities of the crisis in developing countries" (*otherwise: poverty and "exclusion" as well as social classes and class struggles*)

# I - The changing treatment of socio-economic inequalities in the SES curriculum

- 1998: the "Golden Age" of inequalities in the SES Year 13 curricula?
  - Special item : "Social change and inequalities" (indicative duration: 4 weeks) which includes :
    - "- the relationship between egalitarian ideal equality, equity, social inequality, elites, capital and economic and social inequalities, opportunities, social justice. economic / cultural / social,
    - the relationship between growth, social reproduction, mobility and structural / net inequalities.
    - the determinants and challenges of social mobility"
  - And an optional "specialised" teaching studying:
    - "- the development of democratic society and the equalisation of conditions based on Tocqueville's analysis, possibly illuminated by contemporary extensions.
    - the inequality of opportunity, based on the work of R. Boudon and and P. Bourdieu"
- => Important place given to inequalities, but also linking their différent dimensions (economic, social and political)**

# I - The changing treatment of socio-economic inequalities in the SES curriculum

- Confirmation in the 2002 curriculum
- Special item entitled "*Social stratification and inequalities*"
- 3 subtopics:
  - 1) The dynamics of social stratification
  - 2) Issues and determinants of social mobility
  - 3) Democratic ideal and inequality

# I - The changing treatment of socio-economic inequalities in the SES curriculum

Official instructions: *"In defining economic and social inequalities, the **multidimensional and dynamic nature of inequalities** will be emphasised, based on social indicators. A distinction will be made between differences and inequalities. It will be stressed that that inequalities reflect **differences in access to scarce and socially valued resources**. These **cannot be reduced to mere income or wealth**: consumption, education, health, political representation, political representation, social prestige of professions, etc. also give rise to forms of inequality which **may or may not be cumulative**. In particular, by mobilising the [tool of the] PCS [Socio-professional categories] (programme for Year 12), we will present the mutations in inequalities over the long term. The use of **appropriate statistical tools** such as the Lorenz curve, and the inter-deciles ratio.*

*An attempt will be made to synthesise the elements of analysis that lead to consider the **dynamic of the 20th century in developed economies** as that of a **secular decline in inequality**, while underlining the current uncertainties (maintenance of the averaging dynamic versus polarisation). We will discuss, using the example of contemporary societies, the existence of large middle classes and their and their possible influence on social change and mobility"*

# I - The changing treatment of socio-economic inequalities in the SES curriculum

- But strong attacks against SES curricula from business lobbies (Martinache & Gobert, 2020) => Accused of being too "pessimistic" and too "critical"
- Promotion of the vision of neoclassical view of market economics
- The multidimensional and the ("sometimes") cumulative vision of inequalities preserved in the 2010 programs (but with a diminished room). Item named: "*Is the persistence of inequalities compatible with the demand for social justice?*" => **shift towards social philosophy**
- Government action to promote social justice also examined but with a focus on its limitations while social conflicts analyzed as a "*pathology, cohesion factor or a driver of social change?*"
- Poverty and "exclusion" treated separately...

# • I - The changing treatment of socio-economic inequalities in the SES curriculum

- **Current programs:** economics separated from other social sciences
- Inequalities still only treated in the Year 13 program (*while less and less students attend this course*)
- In the economic part, only one phrase: "*Understanding how technical progress can lead to income inequalities*" => **naturalization of inequalities (legitimation)**
- In the sociological part: study of social stratification, empirical and theoretical, and of gender, but from the perspective of an "individualization" of social identities
- **But** introduction of a new chapter about the "*action of the School on individual individual destinies and on the evolution of society?*", nevertheless **ambiguous** in its formulation: "*Understand that, in democratic societies, schools transmits knowledge and aims to promote equal opportunities [...]. Understand the multiplicity of factors of inequalities in educational success (in particular, the role of the school, the role of cultural capital and family investments, gender socialisation, effects of household effects of household strategies) in the construction of construction of individual educational trajectories*"

# • I - The changing treatment of socio-economic inequalities in the SES curriculum

- **To recap:** it is not only the place of inequalities in the curriculum that is important, but also the way in which they are addressed
- **In the French case:** not linear evolution, oscillation between different scales (global or between individuals and households), isolated or systemic approach, etc.
- Recent tendency to naturalise and legitimise inequalities which goes hand in hand with a public discourse criticising the supposed hostility of the French to the market economy
- **Hypothesis:** correctly teaching socio-economic inequalities and their interactions allows students (considered as citizens) to denaturalize the social world and better understand public actions to correct them...
- **But it can also provoke hostile reactions**, from privileged as well as from underprivileged students (Truong, 2010) => ***importance of finding the right pedagogical tools to do this***

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- What about the situation in importance of finding the right tools to do this your own countries ?

- II – Some examples of activities to address the issue

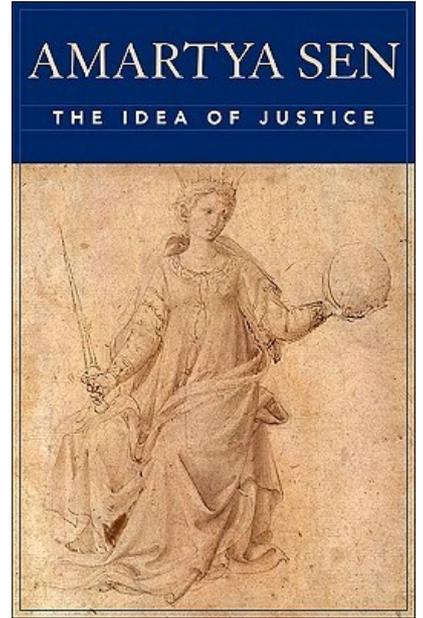
Reduce the inequalities, but how ?

What is a « fair » society ?

# 1<sup>st</sup> activity : a moral dilemma

Inspired by Amartya Sen (2009)

Purpose : understanding the different conceptions of social justice.



# 1<sup>st</sup> activity : a moral dilemma

The following moral dilemma :  
"Either a flute that must be attributed to one of three children."



# 1<sup>st</sup> activity : a moral dilemma

1 → the first says he deserves it because he is the **only one who knows how to play with it**

2 → the second claims that he is the **only one without a toy**

3 → the third says **he made the object** with his own hands.

# 1<sup>st</sup> activity : a moral dilemma

Each child epitomizes a different philosophical conception of social justics:

1→ the first child represents:

**Utilitarianism** (Bentham, Stuart Mill)

2→ the second child:

**Liberalism** (Rawls)

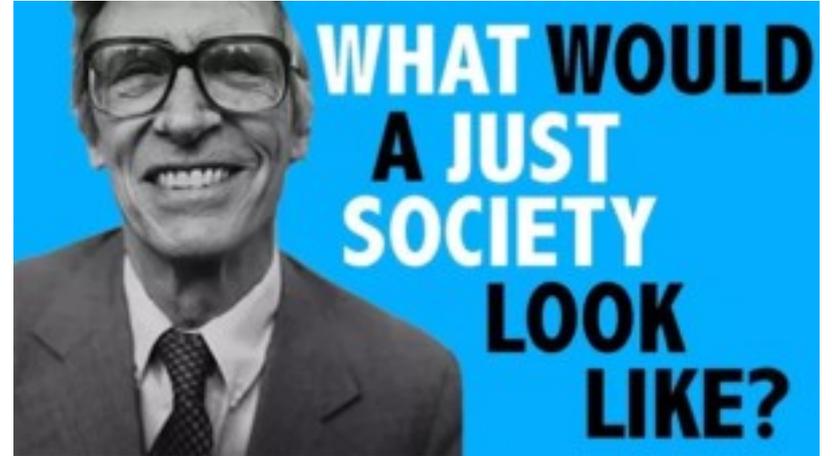
3→ the third child:

**Libertarian** (Buchanan)

## 2<sup>nd</sup> activity : experimentation

Inspired by John Rawls' *theory of justice* (1971)

→ way to introduce to students the concept of “Veil of ignorance”



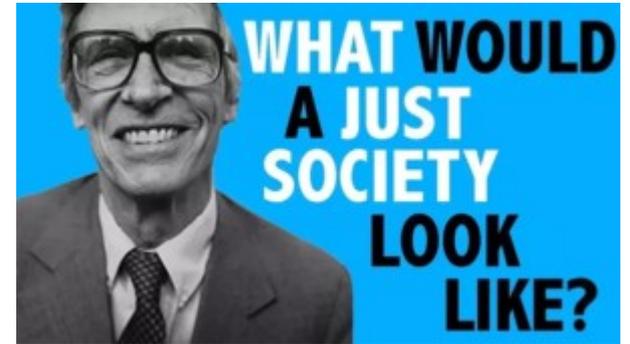
# 2<sup>nd</sup> activity : experimentation

## *Situation:*

"You arrive in a society, you are given the opportunity to comment on the principles of justice that govern it. You are rational, that is to say that you will choose the principles that will ensure you the best possible satisfaction in each of the following situations :

- 1 - You come from a **very wealthy family**, which has many powers in this society.
- 2 - You are extremely **disadvantaged in this society** ; you are very poor and have no power.
- 3 - You arrive in this society **without knowing what the social position** you are going to occupy is going to be."

Then, let the students discuss within small groups...



# 3<sup>rd</sup> activity : engage !

## Oral to defend a cause : equal opportunities for school success

Context : you are a famous scientist, and the government want to consult you to reduce the inequalities in school success.

You have to prepare your intervention :

- Choose an inequality : wealth, social environment, gender, dwelling place
- Explain how this criteria influence the opportunities for school success (by using statistics !)
- Propose a law to be put in place by the government.

→ Students register orally individually, in a limited time of 3 minutes.

Oral  
Presentation





Do you have any comments or suggestions for other activities?

The floor is yours!

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**Thank you for your attention !**

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## References

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