

The meritocratic ideal in education systems: The mechanisms of academic distinction in the international context

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The state school lives immersed in the tension between democratic purposes and the ideals of merit and selectivity. In this context, state schools establish instruments of public praise for students who stand out academically or in other dimensions. We propose to map the rituals of academic distinction in Portuguese state schools and to discuss the widespread adoption of these mechanisms by secondary schools. However, neither their configuration nor the selection criteria are homogeneous, which points to the existence of distinct conceptualisations of excellence and margins of freedom for each school to define their own criteria for success. © 2017. The Author(s).

Academic distinction

Excellence

State school