

# Early School Leaving: Different ways to deal with it

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**The 1989 French law already stated that no child should leave the school system without a diploma; the issue of ESL has become increasingly present in the 1990s. A special day to prevent early school leaving was organised by the AFEV (Association of the students for the town) in 2008 so that school failure should not be ignored: it was the opportunity to assess the phenomenon of ESL and to make it a top priority. As a matter of fact, the current government's goal is to cut by half the rate of ESL in five years.**

It doesn't mean that the phenomenon is new in the French society and more pupils than today may even have been concerned. In the 1970s, about 200,000 youths left the school system without a diploma. What has probably changed the way we perceive ESL is the combination of the rise of youth unemployment and the fact that a diploma has become important as a condition to access the labour market. *"We will all pay for this failure collectively, one way or another."* A recent file of the Ligue de l'enseignement (Teachers' League) even heralded (Loannides & Robert, 2012<sup>1</sup>).

However we can notice that the involvement of the parents association or teachers' unions is rather timid once they have stated the obvious. One of the reasons for this lack of energy could be that the parents who get involved as a whole are not those who are the most exposed to the problems of ESL (Balas, 2012). This discrepancy echoes the one mentioned by Cahuc et al. (2011), who says that on the one hand, privileged youth manage to overcome difficulties (related to school or jobs) whereas underprivileged youth on the other hand are forsaken. We care more for the children coming from middle-class families and for the students who manage to get organised and to be heard than for drifting youths.

This is all the more worrying as it has a great impact on the whole life of individuals. Nowadays mobility and autonomy are put forward as ideals, everyone is expected to be responsible and to choose his or her destiny but do we really give the youth all they need to acquire this autonomy (Loannides & Robert, 2012)?

We have already reviewed the works on early prevention of ESL in a previous file (Feyfant, 2012); we will now focus on the cristallisation of ESL and on the different transitions in secondary schooling.

## Several types of Early School Leaving

### *An international issue*

The phenomenon is international but each country has its own angle and its specific experimental response to it. The definition of ESL, this *"nosocomial disease of school"* (Pain, 2012), changes according to the country and also to the period. The concepts of "dropping out", "early school leaving" and "school failure" do not always refer to the same realities.

In its 2012 report, the French Statistics Institute for education called DEPP (Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance) distinguishes two categories of youths:

- the pupils leaving school **without a diploma**: *"the indicator of the people who leave initial training without any diploma, who have only obtained the "brevet des collèges" (equivalent of the GCSE), enables us to observe how low their studying level is when the youths end their initial training and enter the labour market. The data of this indicator come from the survey made by the INSEE (Statistics Institute) called "Emploi en continu" (Continuous employment)".*

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<sup>1</sup> All the [bibliographic references cited in this article are online](#)

- early school leavers: *"the indicator of the early school leavers is a **European indicator**. These youths do not have any diploma or only have the "brevet des collèges" and are **not in training**, whatever its sort. This indicator is part of the five criteria of number reference of Lisbon, conceived in the field of education and training. The data of this indicator come from the INSEE survey called "Emploi en continu" (continuous employment)". (DEPP, 2012).*

The European goals set in Lisbon in 2000 have encouraged in France the shift from the notion of absence of qualification to that of early school leaving (one could be skilled without obtaining any diploma). If we apply the International Standard Classification of education (ISCED) which was adopted in 2004, surveys show that in France 17% of the pupils leaving school do not obtain any diploma. If the rate of early school leaving has been decreasing for 30 years, it has done so more slowly since 1995 (Bernard, 2011).

At the **European level**, the notion of early leaving is important: the term used is "early school leaving" (ESL). *"Those who are considered to be dropping out are the adults between 18 and 24 years old who have a qualification below secondary schooling and who have not been in training or in schooling for 4 weeks since the day of the survey"* (Blaya, 2010a). Europe is taking steps to prevent school leaving and to increase the number of people with a diploma<sup>2</sup>. It aims at reducing the rate of ESL by 2020 so that it be below 10% (strategy called "Europe 2020", see Tréhin-Lalanne, 2013). A conference has been held in March 2012 on the policies aiming at [reducing school dropout](#).

In **Quebec**, the dropout is the one who leaves school without getting any diploma of secondary schooling (when they get 17). A distinction is made between the **dropout** (temporary study interruption) and **school withdrawal** which is final and is made formal after five years of dropping out (Potvin & Pinard, 2012). The people in Quebec speak of **disengagement** to describe passive attendance. The term of **disaffiliation** is also used. Some speak of **intellectual anorexia** (lack of appetite of some youths for studying, see Blaya, 2010a). However these youths can still be attending school.

In **Belgium**, schooling is compulsory so those who are not registered and who do not have home schooling are considered to be dropping out. So are those who do not attend for more than 20 half-day periods without any justification (Plunus, 2012). Sometimes early school leaving is not a choice but some pupils are deliberately and actively dropping out, for example because they don't manage to find any meaning in their studies. **"Démobilisation scolaire"** (complete disengagement) is the term used then. Early school leaving can also be seen as a rational choice made by young people when they consider the effort it costs them, the risks they take and the benefit they can get (Blaya, 2010a).

The Belgian report on early school leaving (Canivet et al., 2007) thus offers two definitions of ESL:

- ESL is the result of the *"deterioration of the link between the youth, school and society"* (Favresse & Piette, 2004);
- ESL is a *"progressive loss of interest for school, a process which stems from many factors, some internal to the school system and others which are not."* (Lambillotte & leclercq, 1996)

The word "déscolarisation" (dropping out of school) is also used. The **English** make a difference between the **"dropouts"** and the **"excluded"**: the first ones deliberately quit whereas the second are excluded by the institution. They also talk about **"early leaving"** and **"NEET"** (Not in Employment, Education or Training) for those who are above 16 years old. This corresponds to the generation "neither-nor" mentioned by the INJUE (Youth survey Institute in France): the youth are neither at school nor at work. This

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<sup>2</sup> See the website ["Education et Formation"](#) (European Commission) to find the figures for each country in Europe.

situation is due to a cultural change where there is no longer any professional aspiration and greater pragmatism. It is the generation of "Tanguy" (emblematic character in a French film) who is happy at home with his parents and doesn't have any training plan (Blaya, 2010a).

In the **United States**, all the people who have not completed their secondary schooling are viewed as early leavers. **Bresilian** people used to speak of "desertion" or "evasion". Most of the terms used shows how diverse the situation is because each country has its own cultural background: "démobilisation" (Glasman), school disengagement (Ballion), mental dropping out, school withdrawal, passive dropouts, active dropouts, loss of motivation, loss of comfort (Pain, 2012).

ESL is not linked to a peculiar education policy, but the phenomenon has become so important that it threatens the idea of a democratic school system and equality. The causes are varied, depending on the countries: children at work (rural areas); personal, family, social or scholar reasons.

Some argue that these terms are a more "politically correct" way to describe school failure

### *The figures of early school leaving*

In Europe, the rate of early school leaving (the English term retained by European works) for most countries is between 10% and 20% (with an average of about 13.5%). In all countries, the rate has decreased these last ten years but there are huge discrepancies<sup>3</sup>. In Italy and Romania, the rate is about 17.5%, in Spain or Portugal, the rate is above 20% and in Malta, more than 30%. In the countries of the Iberian Peninsula, until 2008, the labour market allowed to find seasonal employment quite easily thanks to tourism, which could explain high rates of early school leaving. With the economic crisis, it is a different story: it has become crucial now to prevent early school leaving.

The rate of early school leaving in Northern Europe and Central Europe is much lower. The countries which have the lowest rates (between 4.5 and 6.5%) are Slovenia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland and Lithuania. In the Netherlands, the rate has dropped from 15.4% in 2000 to 9.1% in 2011; in Luxemburg also from 7.7% in 2009 to 6.2% in 2011. In Denmark and Austria, the rate is lower than the European average (respectively 9.6% and 8.3%) but the ways of counting do not necessarily reflect reality. These two countries have to face a huge proportion of youths who have low skills at the end of their studies: 27.6% for Austria and 22% for Denmark (the average in the countries of OECD is 18.8%).

In 2003 Quebec assessed the ESL rate to be 18.5% for youths above 19. In the United States, this rate is also very high, one pupil every 9 seconds is considered to drop out of school (Siegrist et al., 2010).

France is ranked at an average level, around 12% if we use European criteria (13,3% in 2000; 11,5% in 2008; 12,6% in 2010; 11,6% in 2012). The rate is 13,4% for boys and 9,8% for girls but it is difficult to know the exact number of pupils who are dropping out. The figures proposed are different according to the areas and to the ways of counting that have been chosen. The *rectorats* (education local authorities), the schools, the minister's departments or else CFA (Centre de Formation pour Apprentis: apprenticeship schools) do not proceed in the same way (Boudesseul & Vivent, 2012). The "*déchiffreurs*"<sup>4</sup> think that the figures of the minister are not consistent and have been collected in a biased way, that's why they prefer to use the figures of the INSEE

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<sup>3</sup> The European figures on ESL are drawn from the research of the European working team on early school leaving. The Eurostat report published in 2013, April 11th is another reference.

<sup>4</sup> The "*déchiffreurs*" is a group that was created in 2012 to counterbalance the official figures given by the government. They publish the data from the same statistics on their blog to promote public debate.

(Loannides & Robert, 2012). Besides it is not always easy to compare from one year to another since counting has changed since 2008. The calculation are based on the schools' statements (which use variable criteria) on a period of time which does not correspond to the whole school year (from September to April, see Antonmattei & Fouquet, 2011).

At the end of 2009, France counted 122,000 youths out of school, whether without a diploma (17%) or with only the "brevet des collèges" (equivalent of the GCSE) (9%). 713,000 had completed and succeeded in their initial education.

In 2011, 11.9% of youths between 18 and 24 years old were early school leavers; this proportion has remained more or less stable since 2003 (DEPP, 2012). France intends to bring back this rate to 9.5% (the goal of Lisbon is 10%).

From 1989 to 2009, the rate of school enrollment in France has decreased (it drops from 89% to 84%) whereas it has risen by an average of 9.3% meanwhile in the OECD countries (Balas, 2012). Bernard (2011) points out the following paradox: if early school leaving without any qualification is decreasing in the long run, the evolution of standards (progressively longer schooling, diploma's rôle) makes them more visible.

The SIEI (System of information exchange between ministries) has been implemented in 2011 and aims, among other things at reducing the differences in ways of counting in order to know more precisely how many pupils have dropped out. This tool counts 254,000 early school leavers, which is the double of the current estimate. The figure is higher because the SIEI includes the youths who have obtained a higher diploma than the "brevet", who have enrolled in a higher education training but who have not completed it and have not obtained the diploma they were training for. The figures would be more accurate if tracking ESL pupils was based on a local basis rather than by other institutions who work without knowing each other (Boudesseul & Vivent, 2012; Esterlé & Douat, 2010).

*"Reducing unaccurate counting means promoting cooperation between the different bodies and obtaining more thorough results by favouring a locally based study of ESL and low qualifications" (Boudesseul & Vivent, 2012).*

### *Why is ESL a national priority?*

Early school leaving has become a top priority in all countries. Society is concerned with this phenomenon mainly for safety and economic reasons.

Early school leaving is often linked with safety issues because absenteeism and youth delinquency are said to be correlated. But this is far from obvious when we look at surveys on ESL (Douat, 2011), even if it proves to be the case in underprivileged neighbourhoods.

Politicians tackle this problem in Europe as well as in Northern America because on the one hand, it affects the quality of life and health of many citizens and on the other hand, it costs a great deal of money socially and economically speaking to society (Fortin, in Blaya, 2010a<sup>5</sup>). Thus, the cost of a cohort of early school leavers in Quebec is estimated to be 1.4 billion euros per year. The issue of ESL is more regarded as a social and economic issue than as a school or psychological concern. It jeopardizes the professional integration of young people. The social situation, more especially the labour market has evolved and made the destiny of those dropouts more difficult than ever: the young people who leave school without a diploma have more trouble to find a job today than they had 40 years ago and their job is more insecure. They are also a lot less able to be

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<sup>5</sup> For a comparative study between the European countries on the equity of the school systems, see Baye et al. (2005).



mobile (Boudesseul et al., 2012). Professional integration now constitutes a challenge and a significant investment for the states.

According to the OECD, the dropouts are twice more likely to end up jobless. Social consequences are also important: problems of mental and physical health linked with ESL are costly (risky behaviour, early pregnancies, violence, suicide, etc.). Moreover, there is some form of social reproduction: early school leavers who have become parents are more likely to have dropping out children. It is now clear that there is also a significant difference in the way individuals take part in society: 25% of early school leavers are voting whereas 50% of people with a high education degree do so (Blaya, 2010a).

ESL affects everybody: individuals, families, the State, social services, supranational bodies (European Union) because of the social and political cost it entails. Indeed there are long-term consequences of ESL in our societies which are more and more competitive and where manpower is more and more specialized. That is why Europe planned to reinforce prevention, tighten links between general teaching and vocational teaching or facilitate going back to school or training (Blaya, 2012).

### *Different categories of early school leavers*

Many articles associate early school leaving with personal or family break-ups especially in families with a working-class or immigrant background. Early school leavers have got common points even if each path is unique (Feyfant, 2012): they are detected by the institution, of humble social background and live in insecure conditions and experience difficulties in learning the basics (Douat, 2011).

However reality is much more complex: more and more youths coming from privileged backgrounds are dropping out. Disabled people can also be viewed as invisible dropouts (Caraglio, 2013).

Different **categories** have been listed to understand pupils who are dropping out.

The **typology of Kronik and Hargis** (1990) makes a difference between:

- **pupils in trouble** (with learning or with behaving properly);
- **quiet pupils** (learning difficulties but with no behavioral problems);
- **silent pupils** (who fail at the exam).

The **typology of Janosz** (2000, taken up by Bernard, 2011 and by Gilles et al., 2012) is drawn from a study on longitudinal samples from two different times (1974 and 1985) and makes a difference between:

- **silent and discrete pupils** (40%, no behavioral problems, conforming to school's demand, poor results, underprivileged background);
- **inadapted pupils** (40%, learning difficulties and behavioral problems, rather negative psychosocial profile, delinquency, deviant behaviour);
- **disengaged pupils** (10%, few behavioural problems, low school involvement, average grades but undervalued schooling);
- **underachieving pupils** (10%, serious behavioral problems, low achievement, failure).

The **typology of Fortin et al.** (2006) makes a difference between:

- pupils with **hidden antisocial behaviour** (lies, theft, racketing, drugs), lower than average achievement. They conform to the standards, they do not get caught, their family doesn't supervise them too much, there is a low family solidarity and they are suffering from severe depression;
- pupils with a **low interest and motivation** for school: they are achieving quite well but they get bored. They think that there is a low level of order and organisation in the class and they have a high level of depression, consider family emotional support negatively;

- pupils with **learning and behavioral difficulties**: they are underachievers and have trouble behaving themselves. They commit offences and suffer from severe depression. Their family support is very low and they have a poor opinion of the organisation and communication in the family (but there is still family cohesion and parental supervising);
- **depressive students**: their grades are in the average, they don't misbehave and they view teachers positively. But they suffer from very severe depression, from a low family cohesion even if there is emotional support and a family organisation with strong parental supervising. They have a negative view of the atmosphere in the class.

## Causes and symptoms of early school leaving

Predictive causes of ESL as far as young children are concerned have been dealt with in a previous report (Feyfant, 2012). They are definitely manyfold; the main variables are the school's climate, aggressive behaviour, depression, lack of attention, problem-solving in the family and family functioning (Blaya, 2010a; Blaya 2010b; Douat, 2011; Fortin et al., 2004). For Gilles et al. (2012), the causes of ESL break down into two categories and four sub-categories:

- Factors which are internal to the school system: this includes organisation, structure and the interactions between teachers and pupils;
- External factors, for example family and social factors and factors proper to the dropouts themselves.

Many theoretical patterns of early school leaving exist<sup>6</sup>: some are emphasizing elements linked with the pupils (behaviour, psychology, achievement); others insist on elements linked with school (teaching practices, relationships, school's atmosphere); other elements are also mentioned (parents for example) but the conclusion that the authors are drawing is that *"almost 55% of the explained variance comes from variables which are close to the pupil. These variables belong to four great systems: the pupil himself, the class (the teacher), the school and the parents"* (Potvin & Pinard, 2012).

The causes we will focus on in this file are those pertaining to School. Indeed, among the different factors accounting for ESL, school's variables are the most important statistically. A comparison between Quebec and France shows that even if the causes of ESL cannot be really compared, the school's factors are predominant in both cases (Blaya & Fortin, 2011). These variables include more especially: the school's climate as a whole, the lack of clarity in the rules, the perception of the innovative capacity by teachers, the support of teachers and school involvement (Blaya, 2010a).

According to the website Eduscol<sup>7</sup>, [the themes that are most often associated to ESL in the projects led in the schools](#) are about orientation and links with the professional world (13%), dealing with learning difficulties (12%), help and individualised support (11%), teamwork and interdisciplinary approaches (10%).

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<sup>6</sup> See Potvin and Pinard's article (2012) to find Finn's, Garnier's, Stein & Jacob's, Battin-Pearson's, Tinto's or Wehlage's patterns.

<sup>7</sup> Official website for the professionals of education.



However, the teachers' representations of early school leaving could be more thorough. When the teachers speak of a pupil who is dropping out, they account for it by talking about the family or individual causes whereas they rather mention family and school system when they talk about ESL in general (Canivet et al., 2006). The family is often seen as responsible by education professionals, all the more so if it comes from an underprivileged background. (Esterlé, 2012).

### **The example of Sweden**

The Swedish pattern is completely changing. It had two specificities:

The role of popular education was very important as well as continuous training which guaranteed everyone, thanks to the *komvux* (Town training centres for adults) the possibility of taking up school whatever they studied. This profoundly inclusive school intended to found a cohesive society by fostering cooperation, in particular between researchers and people working on the field. Educational thinking was at the heart of the training, more than teaching how to teach subject by subject.

From the beginning of the eighties, the existing cooperations have been under strain and today productivity, efficiency or countable rationality are given pride of place. The associations whose part was essential are losing some of their subsidies and teachers are losing their autonomy. Grades have been reintroduced in primary school while the rôle of *komvux* has lost its importance. Teaching practices is gradually replaced by early detection methods and learning difficulties tend to be medicalised: experts are no longer teachers but doctors. *"We have shifted from a system where assessment had a function of teaching support to a system of sorting and exclusion"* (Avery, 2012).

### **Absenteeism**

Absenteeism and early school leaving are often linked. ESL must be considered in a circular way: non-attendance must be thus viewed both as the cause and as the consequence of ESL (Canivet et al., 2006). Indeed, non-attendance can be a symptom of ESL, it is even the easiest way to track down thanks to the administrative tools used by the education supervising department ("*vie scolaire*"). However, collecting non-attendance data is not easy because people disagree on the definition of non-attendance. In France, the non-attendant pupil is the one whose behaviour stands out with repeated voluntary absences. Non-attendance is considered to be serious when it is more than 10 half day periods over a month but schools do not report in a similar way. In 2010, the government's statistics on education could identify 7% of non-attendant pupils in secondary school: 3% in middle schools, 8% in highschools and 20% in Vocational schools<sup>8</sup>.

Non-attendance in primary school remains trivial. According to a memorandum issued by the CEREQ (Study and research center on qualifications), tracking down non attendance in vocational schools (where the issue is the most striking) has become difficult because of the many different situations and the way of addressing them. In some cases, the way of dealing with non-attendance is becoming so time-consuming for the supervising staff that they can't find time for more educational activities. The problem is so huge that the rules cannot be respected any longer and addressing the problem on a case-to-case basis has become standard (Divay, 2013).

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<sup>8</sup> About absenteeism in vocational schools, see the short article by the Cereq "Dealing with absenteeism in vocational schools: rules and practice" (Divay, 2013). It includes indications on the way absenteeism is dealt with in schools ("*vie scolaire*" commission, report to the local education authority, suspension of family allowance, meeting with the parents, etc.) See also the report of the MEN on [absenteeism in secondary school in 2011-2012](#).

The DEPP (statistics department of the ministry) has observed a steady rise of unnotified absences between 2004 and 2008 and unjustified absences have remained the same between 2009 and January 2010 (Antonmattei & Fouquet, 2011). However it should be pointed out that the voluntary non attendant pupils are far more numerous than official statistics would have us believe (Blaya, 2009). Among the main characteristics of non-attendance, let us remember that even if serious non-attendance affects boys more than girls, occasional non-attendance is more or less the same for both sexes; a pupil is more often absent if he or she has repeated a year.

The supposed link between non-attendance and delinquency (Antonmattei & Fouquet, 2011; Bernard, 2011) accounts for repressive policies in many countries (Anglo-saxon countries, France, Spain), especially toward the parents (removal of parental allowances, fines, imprisonment, etc see Douat, 2011). Non-attendant pupils are more distressed than delinquents and stay for the most part at home (Bernard, 2011; Blaya, 2009, 2010a). Non-attendance is often accounted for with repeated school failures, boredom, violence, peer pressure and reject, social isolation, a depressive state of mind or behavioural or mental health problems (Blaya, 2010a; Blaya, 2012<sup>9</sup>). The institution is concerned with absenteeism downstream once it's been tracked down but it has trouble working upstream and taking action in prevention against it.

### *At school*

Pierre Cahuc is the co-author of an indictment against a School which is at the heart of the "*sorting machine*" (Cahuc et al., 2011): the institution is failing in its mission to help the most vulnerable, to give them confidence because it is too busy sorting out pupils and getting rid of the weakest. As we have seen, the factors accounting for ESL which concern the school system can fall into two categories (Gilles et al., 2012):

- **Organisation and structure of the school systems:** the existence of very varied school paths with very different achievement rates between schools proves to favour early school leaving. In those cases, there is a strong hierarchy in the study paths and some pupils are relegated or shelved in the most poorly considered studies (vocational training in France, for example). We can speak about an institutionalized school leaving process. It should be pointed out that repeating a year is also a factor of dropping out.
- **Pedagogical factors:** this refers mainly to the factors linked to the interactions and relationships between teachers and pupils. The authors talk about a Pygmalion effect when the teachers' expectation brings about failure, dropping out or success for pupils. Dealing with inactivity in the class is very important: effective time management which avoids inactivity periods during the class encourages the pupils to get involved in the required tasks and decreases the risk of dropping out.

According to Hugon (2010), "*the first signs of early school leaving appear in middle school when the pupils have to adjust to a completely different schooling than the primary one*". Indeed, the **school sense of belonging** which is essential for the pupils to get involved in their schooling is strongly reduced when there are several teachers. In middle school, the multiplicity of teachers and the insistence on results tend to loosen the relationships with the teachers. Early school leaving thus depends for a great part on what is experienced with the teachers. School has its responsibility whereas it is very rarely targeted in the research studies: only youths and their families are observed and surveyed. (Blaya, 2010a).

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<sup>9</sup> To go further on the link between absenteeism and ESL, see the part written by Blaya in the book by Gilles et al. (2012).

## Boredom

Although it is not a direct cause of ESL, boredom is the symptom of inadaptation or dysfunctioning. It is often announcing absenteeism or else of drug or alcohol use which are factors of ESL. Boredom can be brought about by learning difficulties, unacknowledged precocity, a system which is ill adapted to the individual features of some children or else by forced orientation. This can lead to absenteeism or to an internal form of ESL ("passive dropouts" which means that even if they are present, the pupils are "elsewhere").

Non-attendance leads the pupils to the margin in so far as they feel a greater solitude and shutting themselves up in a feeling of self-negation. Their social skills are affected. A negative spiral is set in motion (Blaya, 2010a) To fight against boredom at school, the report Antonmattei & Fouquet (2011) recommends to rethink the training of the teachers and the schools' directors to implement the common core of knowledge and competences which allows to make teaching meaningful.

## Care, school climate and violence

School climate<sup>10</sup> is the variable that has the strongest impact on early school leavers, up to 10%. For Debarbieux, school climate is mainly linked to the relationship between pupils and teachers. Yet, the idea of "school climate" is not perceived in the same way in all countries.

England's system is more based on the person's development and offers a much more positive environment for the pupil's well-being. The teachers are better trained than their French peers for tracking down pupils who need psychological help. The notion of **care** is important: teachers showing care in their day-to-day practice can reduce "*by three the risk of moving a step further to early school leaving for pupils found to be at risk*" (Blaya, 2010a). Similarly, the report of the AFEV (2012) points at the great lack of support by teachers felt by youths when they drop out (Bavoux & Pugin, 2012).

The link between **behavioural problems** and early school leaving has not been proven with supporting evidence by research. Fortin et al. (2012) show that there can be such a link for boys but nothing worth mentioning appears for girls. What's more, most of the pupils who have behavioral problems do not drop out and for most pupils, problems of attitude do not last. Conversely, there is a correlation between ESL and violence. Violence is present in different ways and can originate in a poisonous school climate or tense relationships between teachers and learners. Some forms of violence are ill known in France such as harrasment and bullying between pupils while they have been studied a lot in Anglo-saxon countries. Still this harrasment or this bullying is highly correlated with absenteeism; pupils who suffer from it have trouble focusing and their grades collapse. Non-attendance serves as a way of avoiding the obstacle and gradually shift towards school withdrawal. Pupils do not really feel they belong to their school and are thus more vulnerable. It is a vicious spiral: "*Victimisation makes the difference between pupils at a risk of ESL and pupils who are not at risk*" (Blaya, 2010a).

## Labelling

School labels pupils: the good ones, the bad ones, etc. This labelling<sup>11</sup> remains for a long time and children identify themselves with the label they are given. We thus observe that difficulties become natural. Some factors have an impact on the acceptance of a label:

- how often the label is used;
- how much authority the person who puts the label has;

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<sup>10</sup> See Baye et al. (2005) for a comparison of the perception of climate at school in the European countries.

<sup>11</sup> See "labelling sociology" by the sociology school in Chicago.

- the support and assent given by the other teachers;
- how public the label is;
- how the label becomes institutional through orientation.

This institutionalisation reinforces the risk of ESL. School tends to make the pupils' differences pathological when it doesn't succeed in keeping them focused and tends to externalise treatment. It is difficult to match the intention of providing the same schooling for everyone and taking specificities into account: differences are ironed out, even if it means "shelving" pupils away from the classes said to be "normal".

## Career guidance

In France, the responsibility of guiding<sup>12</sup> pupils towards a vocational course which is often unwanted and causing suffering cannot be denied in early school leaving (Bavoux & Pugin, 2012). What's more what pupils learn in the different subjects is not sufficiently connected to help them elaborate meaning from what they learn (Antonmattei & Fouquet, 2011). Vocational training is regarded as a "*dominated teaching order*" and guarantees a function of school and social relegation (Palheta, 2012). The pupils in the vocational branch are the first to be affected by early school leaving, whatever the country, at least in Europe (France, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, Austria, Germany, Denmark, etc.) However the issue of careers prospect is not everywhere managed in the same way and the perception pupils have depends on its role within the school system.

In France, it happens mainly through different thresholds (breaking points) with a key role played by the last year in lower secondary school. In Germany or in Austria, these breaking points happen earlier (sometimes as soon as the pupils are 10 years old). In Quebec and in Denmark, the emphasis is on a career prospect path in the long run (the term used is "*école orientante*"), which implies a gradual process.

For Duru-Bellat (2006), we are to make a difference between education, career prospect on the one hand and selection on the other hand. What comes first at school is the education goal: to help the youth to integrate in life and not only professionally. Structuring them on an intellectual, civic, social and personal ground is vital, at least in the first steps of schooling. The logic of selecting pupils cannot be applied at this stage. Equality of results should prevail then, which requires "early and resolute" positive discrimination. The only thing that is left to define is the age when this education stops being crucial: end of the last year in lower secondary school? Baccalauréat (A-levels)? It is definitely a political choice (Duru-Bellat, 2006). Then, school must also prepare the pupils to the labour market.

Until then, the challenge has been to open the system in a democratic perspective. Schooling is less selective but pupils are thus more selected through gradual clearing, which leads to perverse effects: we can see it particularly with the guidance towards vocational schools through failure (Cahuc et al., 2011). Even within vocational courses, selection is strict because of the hierarchy between the studies. Duru-Bellat **recommends career prospect to be more professional and more responsible** and selection to be "formative". Others would prefer choices to be made later (Desclaux, 2012).

Other factors can come into play and make this guidance a difficult experience: school pressure with a high demand on school work; family pressure to succeed, which pushes the parents to start "*making everything in their daily life an opportunity for teaching their child*" (Blaya, 2010a); social and spatial inequalities to access knowledge which are linked to the problem of teaching offer (the choice is not the same in a big town or in a

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<sup>12</sup> About career guidance, see the article « la relation école-emploi bousculée par l'orientation » ("Career guidance warps the transition between school and job") (Endrizzi, 2009).

rural area). The pupils thus have the impression of not choosing their own destinies and encourages them to give up (Bavoux & Pugin, 2012).

Guiding pupils towards vocational schools in France differs from what is done in Germany. Beyond the Rhine, the vocational path concerns 70% of the pupils and is working in a tightly-knit cooperation with the government, the employers and the unions. Sandwich courses are the rule. The courses are approved of by almost everybody while the employers are very strongly committed to the quality of the training, the teaching staff and the teaching material equipment; they feel committed by the fact that they are employing apprentices. In these countries where this type of sandwich courses, youth integration is easier (their unemployment rate is lower). But cultural differences (subject-related knowledge, school organisation, the pressure coming from the State, the exam, etc.) make it difficult to transfer this pattern as it is. What makes the real difference is not apprenticeship but the employers' commitment. Yet the German system is more efficient in the industrial sector than in the service field which requires more general skills (Duru-Bellat, 2006).

## The fight against early school leaving

The programmes fighting against ESL are wavering between **prevention** and **compensation**. European works on ESL also see a third intermediary step: **intervention**. The tendency in all countries is to promote prevention (and intervention) rather than compensation which is much more costly and produces fewer results.

The evolution of state policies against school failure tends to individualise the problems and to target specific categories of children with special programmes: special needs, migrants, minorities, precocity, etc., rather than targetting specific areas. (Demeuse et al., 2009).

Steedman and Verdier (2010) compare the situation in France, in Germany and in England. **In France, there is a rather curative tradition** with the second chance schools, individual training credit, professionalizing contract, integration contract or CIVIS but we also witness a development of **prevention** within the school system: [PPRE](#) (personalized project for educational success), preparatory course to vocational training, development of apprenticeship, DIMA program (a device dedicated to the initiation of sandwich course branches but which has been very lately given up).

Structures like MGI (to help integrate pupils) are working half-way between prevention and compensation insofar as they aim at preventing ESL and attempt to get the pupils back to a training with a diploma. The temporary devices or the GAIN (integration support groups) in the schools belong to **intervention**. The MGI have become MLDS (mission to fight against ESL) and is present to organise the [FOQUALE](#) networks called "*Formation qualification emploi*", "Training for Qualification and employment".

**In Germany, the fight against ESL is based on professional training leading to qualifications.** Access to a vocational course is rather preventive: the youths haven't chosen to abandon the school system but are waiting for some training. Since 2008, Germany has chosen to focus its efforts on transition periods (between general education and vocational training then between the last one and access to a job). They plan to abolish isolated training transition offers and to connect these different stages. In 2009 the "case managers" were created in 1,000 schools (Berufseinstiegsbegleiter) in order to help the pupils in their transition towards vocational training. The fact that these policies are regional creates disparities between the Länder. There are also courses to acquire qualification which are meant to prepare an apprenticeship or else support schemes for those who have trouble during their apprenticeship. For the weakest pupils, a skill-unit system has been installed.



In the **United Kingdom**, the preventive measures concerning preschool devices are the financial support of pupils aged 16 to 19 in order to encourage them to stay at school (which has been suppressed), diverse training devices according to age and situation (basic training, vocational training, apprenticeship). The government plans to change the criteria of compulsory education by 2015: the youths will have to participate to education and training up to 18 years old but with more flexible conditions (academic training, vocational training, sandwich course, half-time training if need be for the workers). Curative measures aim at encouraging people to get back to their training or to find a first professional experience. There are different schemes for the 16-18 years old who enter the labour market and for the 14-16 years old who have learning difficulties. In 2006, two schemes have been created to solve the problems of employment and training of NEET. For those who have a job, some schemes exist to help non-qualified individuals to get a training (train to gain) or to promote going back to work after 6 months without employment (NDYP, New deal for young people).

In **Finland**, since January 2011, it is the town councils' duty to manage the youths who have been socially relegated and to reintegrate them into school or vocational training. Town councils are called upon each time a youth quits school (Balas, 2012).

### *Preventive measures*

The fight against ESL has to start way before the pupil is dropping out (Feyfant, 2012) because the breaking point only reveals dysfunctioning or problems that happened in the past. Some causes may be more important than others, especially early internalization of failure, suffering at school which is getting worse in secondary school, unwanted study path...

Rules have been listed after studying successful preventive schemes (Blaya 2010a). In order to be effective, action must be taken at different levels and take into account the different personal, family and school environments:

- Academic, social and commitment skills should be fostered for the pupils;
- Teaching should be focused on adaptable behaviour, motivational teaching and class management for the teachers;
- Challenging problems of organisation and staff management should be tackled with rigorous implementation of preventive schemes, for the school heads;
- Educational and relational practice should be questioned and given new breath, more value should be given to success at school for the parents.

As a consequence, school culture should be completely transformed, which implies questioning the current teachers' organisation and training.

Many programmes are offered by the ministry, the local and territorial bodies, the associations but, with no global steering, these complex devices may not be really effective (Blaya, 2012). They revolve in general around coaching, individualised paths, communication between adults, self-esteem, meaning given to learning or else observation and prevention units.

### *Other pedagogical possibilities*

On the [ONISEP website](#), three axes are mentioned to prevent early school leaving in secondary school: educational support, Training and job discovery scheme to prepare active career guidance and renovation of vocational training. The goal of these axes is to allow the pupils to give meaning to their schooling. There is also the [PPRE](#) (personalized project for education success) which takes targetted and concerted actions and which brings parents, pupils and educative teams together.

Different teaching programmes are also offered: vocational discovery classes, integration classes, sandwich courses. There are also bridging devices ("classes relais",



"ateliers relais", classes or workshops which allow some students to stop and think and also keep learning outside the standard class) in middle schools or else the MFR a structure which belongs to agricultural teaching and offers vocational training.

The case of E2C ("*Écoles de la seconde chance*", second chance schools) or EPIDE (integration state school) yield interesting results in the fight against ESL<sup>13</sup>. Those classes are meant for the youths for whom schooling is no longer compulsory. The first E2C was created in 1997 in Marseille. The creation of these schools stemmed from a white book adopted in 1995 by the education ministers of the member states of the European Union and it has led to a network since 2009 (Antonmattei & Fouquet, 2011; Schajer, 2013). The EPIDE were created in 2005 and depend on three ministries (Defence, vocational training, town policy) while the ministry of the "Education nationale" has a seat at the administrative board. These schools welcome willing youths between 18 and 25 years old who have left the school system without any qualification. The teaching focuses on citizenship education<sup>14</sup>. For the pupils who are in great learning difficulties, there are in France [adapted teaching programmes](#) with the SEGPA (Adapted general teaching and vocational training Section) or the EREA (Adapted teaching regional school).

Beside these programmes, some pedagogical actions have proven to be effective. Care, giving more meaning to learning, interdisciplinary openness, epistemological approaches are undeniable assets (Goémé et al., 2012).

Hugon offers elements to take into account at the teaching level:

- Great flexibility in terms of time and space management;
- Cultural ambition and purposeful learning.
- Systematic reflexion on the law and everyone's place.

She highlights the efficiency of alternative teachings (Freinet, interactive or cooperative teaching). Institutional teaching is working fine for the youths who are highly intellectually and emotionally insecure. Adults coaching youths, sandwich courses (particularly with humanitarian projects with Southern countries via associations) or else "progress meetings" (instead of class meetings) are many positive tracks to be tapped and made full use of.

Other more limited and more circumscribed projects have also interesting effects: they aim at strengthening or brushing up basic knowledge, a linguistic basic learning (FLE for example, French as a foreign language), the fight against illiteracy, interdisciplinary projects, cultural openness, etc.

All these existing projects are beneficial to the most vulnerable pupils but these practices "*have a paradoxical place in the professional culture of secondary schools' teachers' because although they are ignored in the teachers' initial training, the inspectors expect and call on those who experiment them to train their colleagues*" (Hugon, 2010).

There are possibilities which are acknowledged to be necessary but which have trouble being widely spread because they suppose to change the paradigm whereas the school system's organisation is still meant to favour elitism and selection (Mons, 2007). In an [article](#) published in the Huffington Post for the fifth special day organised by the AFEV, meant to refuse to ignore school failure, Mons sees two problems:

- The "*lack of consensus on the emergency and the necessity of strongly modifying our school system*" because the authors finally conclude that the current system is working well;
- The unfair treatment of different territories: in spite of a very centralised system, the French school is one of the unfairer in terms of success.

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<sup>13</sup> See the website of [ONISEP](#) for a short presentation of existing programmes.

<sup>14</sup> To evaluate all these programmes, see the report of the General Inspection (Antonmattei & Fouquet, 2011) and the report of the Teachers' League (2012).

The solution will necessarily imply a synergy locally between the schools (from the kindergarten to the university), between the teachers, the parents and the other education actors, the outside partners, etc. But within the schools, we must collectively apprehend the issue of early school leaving, lead a team reflexion and develop a culture which is specific to the school. Indeed the experiments cannot be directly transposed, they must be adapted to the different contexts. This adaptation means a collective involvement (Canivet et al., 2007), as well as teams' stability which is an asset to confront the complexity of the phenomenon (de Saint Denis, 2012).

### **The example of Quebec**

The Quebec has been seriously concerned with early school leaving, as early as 1970, which brought about a reform in school practices in the years 1980. Class organisation is abandoned and replaced by an organisation by year within unique schools with a wide range of choices in secondary schools while career guidance is linked to the rest: there is no threshold but a global approach in the long run, which allows to make sensible choices. Vocational training is enhanced, the families are more involved in the school and motivational work is launched in order to develop the feeling of belonging to a school. The number of youths coming out of the school system without any qualification has been divided by three between 1999 and 2006 (passing from 34% to 12%, see Balas, 2012). The OECD reminds us that in Quebec 73% of the graduates come from general education whereas 27% come from vocational education (in France, the proportion is the reverse). Thus it seems that a more diversified path in a general course with a common ground for everyone is more efficient in terms of motivation and prevention of ESL than following early vocational career paths (Blaya, 2010a).

*"Individualized teaching with competent partners"* so as to enhance the pupil's skills and favour individual support must be developed. More *"à la carte"* teaching would be beneficial, especially for precocious children who are not ahead in all subjects. This would enable the pupils to get involved in activities while developing a feeling of belonging to a school (Blaya, 2010a). Flexibility is recommended (Antonmattei & Fouquet, 2011).

In the United States "alternative education" has been developed (Siegrist et al., 2010). The concept dates back to the years 1930s (Dewey) but has only really appeared from the years 1960s. For the US department of Education, state school (primary and secondary) corresponds to alternative education when it meets the needs of the students who fail in the traditional system by providing non traditional teaching which helps or complements the standard system and which does not correspond to special or vocational education.

The movement gathered momentum in the years 1980-1990s when people were faced with the difficulty of dealing with esl, failure, delinquency issues, etc. The goal was to provide the failing students with other opportunities to receive an education.

In the years 2000, the different reforms intended to address the problems of more and more various populations by diversifying approaches. Alternative education becomes more and more institutional even if it is impossible to tell what it really is because of the great variety of experimentations as varied as the people they target. The magnet schools, charter schools, vocational programs of study can all be considered to be alternative education. This education proves to have positive effects on the pupils' feeling of belonging, the community's involvement, self-esteem and the pupils' success? The collaboration between the different actors is vital: the school, youth employment, schemes fostering training sessions, youth protection service, legal system, social and health services, etc.

## Meeting the pupils' needs

If the pupils' needs are not satisfied, then the ESL risk is increasing: the need to feel secure, to have quality relationships, to have supportive and structuring adults around, the need for dignity and justice, the need for meaningfulness (Canivet et al., 2006).

We touch upon the notion of **care** here. For the pupils at risk, the presence of supportive adults who are guiding them, support them and acknowledge their work is vital. Only one adult of this kind can make the difference and can allow the pupil to develop a sense of belonging to school, which is a positive factor. Supportive relationships with teachers can cut by half the ESL rate. In the **Netherlands**, the "care committees" provide social and educative services to the pupils and are present in 95% of the schools (first and foremost in the vocational courses) in order to offer the youths the personalized guidance they need and the support they lack in their family. This idea of guidance and advice (guidance in Denmark, for example), of coaching (in Austria), of tutors or mentors (in Spain) is very important in the European research papers.

What happens at the school level has an impact on the fact that the students at risk remain at school or not:

- Building trust by providing success opportunities;
- Communicate on the relevance of education for the future;
- Helping pupils to develop their inner motivation;
- Helping pupils to solve personal problems (health, stress);
- Creating a caring and supportive environment and supporting the pupils with genuine relationships between teachers and pupils (trusting relationships).

Among the pupils at risk, many eventually stay at school. The researchers raise the question of "**resiliency**": it would be more efficient to develop it in pupils rather than tracking students at risk of dropping out. Indeed some think that rather than looking for potential dropouts, **we had better tackle the issue by developing protecting factors: fostering inner resilience skills** (in order to help them create meaning and purpose from their academic experience) and **favouring helpful relationships between adults and pupils** (Siegrist et al., 2010). The experiment of the Milwaukee state schools from 1998 to 2005 which included 2,500 pupils has shown that the resiliency-based curriculum has had positive effects on attendance, academic results and has decreased early school leaving (Hupfeld, 2007).

Among the features of the resilient pupils, one can list motivation, optimism, autonomy (in effective work, in organisation), social skills, capacities to solve problems, stress management, the capacity to make connections, etc (Siegrist et al., 2010).

We shouldn't wait for the pupils to be effectively dropping out but it is imperative to develop resilience building skills in order to help them face the situations which could otherwise tip the balance towards early school leaving.

Well-being at school has been studied by the UNICEF in a report where the Netherlands and the four countries in Northern Europe are given pride of place whereas the United States, Lithuania, Latvia and Rumania are far behind, in the last positions. France ranks 13th (out of 29) with very varied achievements (Adamson, 2013).

## Preventive schemes

There are preventive schemes either for pupils and teachers or for parents. Canivet et al. (2007) are presenting two tested tools of prevention in their report: a guide called "**Clés pour l'adolescence**" (Keys for teens) has been published in Switzerland, which allows to work on self-confidence, the climate in class, communication, active listening. It is a tool of personal development for the youths which is useful when they pass from primary school to secondary school. It also intends to attract the parents to school. A second guide has followed called "**Clés pour l'action**" (Keys for taking steps).

In Canada, the method called "**Les petits pas**" (Little steps) is an action and activities guide in order to prevent ESL during the transition between primary to secondary school.

Cahuc et al. (2011) are mentioning American schemes which are targetting parents and which have been successful. Working toward the families is important to bring the teachers' and the parents' representations closer (Canivet et al., 2006): for the first ones, the family factors are essential (lack of parenting, parents' loss of interest) whereas the second ones say they are interested in their children's studies and rather pinpoint difficult relationships (or a lack of relationship) with the teachers (fruitless PTAs<sup>15</sup>, lack of contact, etc.). Researchers believe that bringing families and school closer (who are both actors in this process) is a priority to fight against esl, to bridge the gap between the two cultures: academic culture on the one hand and family cultures on the other hand (Douat, 2011). In Denmark, the Retention caravans (a scheme aiming at retaining the migrants' children within the school system, particularly the vocational courses), offers specific teachers' training, homework help for children and support for the parents, greater cooperation with them.

Europe urges the member states to take more into account the specific public of the newly arrived migrants' children who are more and more numerous and who are more at risk of dropping out than the others. A few countries like Denmark or Sweden are helping this public in a thorough manner (linguistic support, help with homework, openness and cooperation, intercultural education, see Dumcius et al., 2013).

### Academic success and perseverance

Since 2008, in Quebec, an experiment aims at acting upstream in order to avoid ESL and at favouring academic perseverance by grounding their action in the territories and by bringing school closer to the community (Perron et al., 2013). The goal is that every pupil might get a diploma or a qualification. Academic perseverance is a process which is taking time and which requires to take into account personal, family, academic and social factors.

The goal of these alliances is to promote educational success. The people in Quebec make a difference between the academic success and global educational success:

- Academic success refers to the acquisition of the required skills to develop one's intellect and to master knowledge. It aims at the making of a pupil/citizen to be as well as the diploma. The goal is to favour social and professional integration of individuals;
- Global educational success aims for the complete development of young people (physical, emotional, intellectual, social, moral), self-accomplishment, happiness. It corresponds to a community approach.

The indicator of perseverance and academic success (IPRS) is calculated from the passing rates for the ministry's exam of the language used in teaching, from the rate of pupils leaving school without a diploma or qualification, from the rate of graduation after 5 years in secondary school and after 7 years.

It seems that school success is linked to the capability of a pupil to build self-confidence, to make connections, to set up goals, to manage his or her stress, to improve his or her well-being and to understand his or her motivation.

Aptitudes for **cooperation** appear to be rather qualities possessed by the persevering pupils whereas the dropouts stand out with **strong self-affirmation** and **individualism** (Tièche-Christinat et al., 2012).

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<sup>15</sup> Parents Teachers Association

## Curative measures

### Attracting the dropouts

State schools in France which accept to prepare ESL pupils for an exam are few. They include a thousand of pupils more or less and are gathered within the [FESPI](#) (Federation of innovating state schools). These schools can be found only in some big towns (de Saint-Denis, 2012). The FESPI unites a dozen of experimental secondary schools which concern either all the pupils or a specific public (among whom dropouts). Teamwork is very much present, in partnership with external actors (authorities, associations, ptas, etc.) Among the innovating schools, we can find the micro high-schools<sup>16</sup>, the PIL (Innovating highschool Center) or else the middle school "Clisthène" in Bordeaux.

According to the report of AFEV, these schools ("mission locale", micro-highschools) are rather effective: 80% of the youths surveyed have elaborated a training plan (academic and/or professional) and have realized how important a training with a diploma is in order to favour their professional integration. The individualised help they could get is an asset (Bavoux & Pugin, 2012). The PIL allows for great teaching freedom but its success depends on the teachers' good will (Balas, 2012).

The issue of attracting dropouts again with the diploma or with vocational training has been raised for a long time, the second solution being often widely favoured (de Saint Denis, 2012) in the oldest programmes like E2C (Balas, 2012).

Bernard (2011) quotes the assessments made in the United States which are showing that the success of alternative programmes depends on a few conditions: a reassuring learning environment, a helpful and committed team, a school culture which encourages risk taking, autonomy and vocational cooperation, a high level of supervision and small classes in order to encourage pupils to be more involved.

An experiment on ESL was born in 2009 in France, involving 20 highschools among which 16 vocational schools in varied territories, launched by the scheme "*Professionnalisation de la lutte contre le décrochage scolaire*" (Professionalising the fight against ESL). It urges to implement GAIN (Integration help groups) in education local authorities. The goal is to attract dropouts again. The GAIN include the headmasters, the CPE (Education Advisor), career path advisor and psychologist, social worker, the nurse, the teachers, etc. The pupils can be offered tutoring, participation to a workshop or another activity within the school or else visiting a company (Divay, 2013).

### Tackling ESL on a territorial basis

Research agrees on the benefit of fighting against ESL on a territorial basis, which means getting the school's actors, the territorial authorities, the external partners (parents, associations, companies, institutions, etc.) to work together by making everyone's actions consistent with one another.

Today, new structures have been added on top of old ones, layer after layer and everyone takes action without knowing the others' work, which does not contribute to effective care. Some pupils can be taken care of by different actors while others are left aside. Each partner has a role to play: associations (local or national) for example have always known how to keep in touch with the families whereas school does not always manage to do it. (Balas, 2012; Plunus, 2012) and they have a complementary role with their own skills (Moreau, 2013).

A recent report of the CEREQ recommends to **ground the policy of ESL prevention on a territorial basis** in order to fight against individuals' and families' difficulties which are linked to the vulnerability of living conditions (personal and professional) or to the cultural weakness (Boudesseul et al., 2012). People in Quebec have gone a long way in

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<sup>16</sup> See the report of the Teacher's League for a presentation of micro high-schools.

this territorializing way of working and have created the concept "educative alliances", which has been taken up and is developing at the moment.

## New educative alliances

We often speak about "cooperation" or "partnership" but the term "alliances" implies *"strong commitment of all actors toward a goal whereas the idea of cooperation implies 'complementarity' between professionals"* (Tièche-Christinat et al., 2012). The first educative alliance is probably the one between the teacher and his or her pupils. The emotional support provided by the teacher is vital for the pupil's success (Lessard et al., 2012).

In front of the varied situations and ESL causes, it is necessary to have several professionals from different sectors working together: teachers, school staff, and people from youth aid and support service, health sector, legal field, after-school care, the police, etc. (Gilles et al., 2012). But as long as the youth who is likely to drop out is not causing trouble, no alliance is set up. When the problem comes up, we tend to transfer it toward a specialized organisation, thus preventing alliances to be set up.

To take care of the dropouts when they are actually dropping out is inefficient. What is best is *"continuous services all along the pupil's schooling"* (Tièche-Christinat et al., 2012). Educative alliances allow us to have a global and diverse view of a youth's situation and to launch a temporary more targeted supporting device with all forces working together, in order to have an impact on the schools (the educative project should be consistent with the local actual situation, cooperation with the outer world should be encouraged) and to assess the impact of the policies field by field. The Netherlands talk about the "golden triangle" meaning cooperation between the State, the city councils and the schools (and the companies even if they are less involved). In Denmark, the cooperation between the Education department, the Employment department, the city councils, the social partners (trade unions and employers' organisation) is at work in the schemes called "Youth Packages" to fight against ESL.

In France, the compensation programmes implemented by National Education involve local partnerships, whether it be classes or workshops called *"relais"*, school reintegration schools (ERS), general integration missions (MGI) or priority education schools (Antonmattei & Fouquet, 2012).



### The example of Switzerland

Youth unemployment has become a preoccupying issue at the beginning of the years 1990 and made ESL a problem to solve for economic reasons. In the shire of 'Vaud' special structures have been established in order to attract pupils to school again. The structure called MATAS (Temporary and alternative Optional courses) are "parenthesis" structures, which means that they are a transition and aim at reintegrating the youths in the standard system. They belong to a study path, with a teaching principle of compensation: readjust the youths to the academic standards so that they go back to the school system. As For the youths who have almost finished their studies, they are prepared to enter the world of work.

There are also individualising structures: small structures, available teachers, unexpected changes of activity, different curricula, therapists and external people who aim at restoring the individual (taking his needs and his suffering into account) and on the other hand to restoring the teaching, with diverse people stepping in and diverse subjects. Resorting to alternative teaching is frequent (cooperative, differentiated, individualised, active, participative teaching, etc.) These structures are based on educative alliances (teachers of different subjects, guidance advisors, therapists, special needs teachers, vocational and social tutors, educators, psychologists, etc.) but do not mention partnerships with the outside world much, except parents and training schools or companies (Tièche-Christinat *et al.*, 2012).

### Two approaches for these alliances

Potvin & Pinard (2012) observe two different approaches for educative alliances:

- The **academic approach**: it emphasizes the interactions between school, family environment and the pupil's experience. The alliances are made within the school and aim at fulfilling the first missions of school: teaching, socializing, giving qualifications. ESL is rather viewed as a school and family problem, the goal of the care is the youth's involvement in his or her schooling. ESL is accounted for with variables which are close to the pupils, prevention is centered on the pupil (quality of his academic learning, of his socializing, of his commitment at school and after school), on the teachers (method, class discipline, relationship between teacher and pupil), on the school (social and educative climate, safety), and on the parents (emotional support, parenting);
- The **community approach**: it was born fifteen years or so ago in Quebec (in the area of Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean) and intends to be more global. Educative alliances especially take place at the level of after school activities. With this approach, early school leaving is regarded basically as a social problem and as a result affects the whole community. All the actors bear the responsibility to take steps. The actions are centered on a territory (outside school). This approach has been taken up by the Education Ministry in Quebec and has led to the creation of IRC<sup>17</sup> (Regional concertation bodies). This approach corresponds to what is being done in Belgium with the concertation devices involving different sectors to fight against ESL (Gilles *et al.*, 2012; Plunus, 2012) or in France with the personal Project of educational success (PPRE).

These two approaches do not affect the same systems and the same variables. A mixed approach should thus be adopted by making everybody's roles and goals clear in order to create a consistent universe for the youths where all the actors are "*mediators*"

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<sup>17</sup> To go further on this community-based approach, see also the article by Perron and Veillette (in Gilles *et al.*, 2012), especially on the CREPAS action (Regional Council of prevention against school failure in Quebec).

*between the pupil and the social structures".* Indeed it has been proved inefficient to act only on the children and not on the family or on other actors in the environment. The parents' involvement is vital: we should find new forms of cooperation (Potvin & Pinard, 2012; Blaya, 2010a).

### *Three levels of alliances*

In the book by Gilles et al. (2012) on educative alliances used to fight against ESL which came out with the [2010 AMSE congress](#) (World Association for Education Science: the targeted countries are Belgium, Bolivia, Quebec, France, Luxemburg, Sweden and Switzerland), Potvin & Pinard (2012) see three different levels of educative alliance: micro, meso and macro levels.

#### **Micro level: youth-family-school**

It is an academic approach which echoes the notion of academic educative success (rather than the notion of global educative success). The focus is more on teaching practices which have positive effects on academic perseverance and pupils' success (Lessard et al., 2012) and on bringing together academic and family cultures which can bring about misunderstandings between the family and the school (Esterlé, 2012).

#### **Meso level: social, legal and health fields**

Whether it be in German Switzerland with the classes "Time out" (Gilles et al., 2012), in France with the "relais" classes or in French Belgium with the SAS (Attracting pupils to school) or with the implementation of institutional teaching, we can witness new forms of alliances with other adults and other teachers. In the shire of Vaud (Roman Switzerland), the structures of this kind are working on two dimensions: on the individual and his or her identity but also on learning and class work. Working on both aspects at the same time requires many actors to act: teachers, therapists, educators, vocational tutors, craftsmen. *"Alliances thus take on a teaching, educative and social colour and doubtlessly require a demanding partnership otherwise the success of attracting pupils could be jeopardized."* (Gilles et al., 2012).

#### **Macro level: community devices which involve alliances within the regions or states**

The macro level alliances have been experimented by the CREPAS (School Quitting Prevention Regional Council) in Quebec and have involved many actors in a region (youths, parents, teachers, academic world, politicians, the government, unions, public health, companies, etc.) in order to prevent school leaving. These community-based actions serve as catalysts for educational changes (Perron & Veillette, 2012).

In the United States, people came to realize that these alliances are interesting at the end of the years 1990 when alliance schools appear in Texas for example. A partnership with the IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation) promotes new supporting approaches for underprivileged children in a hundred of schools. At that time, the BUILD (Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development), also supported by the IAF, has improved the school system in the area of Baltimore in spite of industrial decline, segregation and poverty. These initiatives have developed further after the election of Barack Obama as president. These educative alliances and this community-based approach are becoming more and more important judging from the creation of a SIG (Special Interest Group) on the topic, within the AERA (American Educational Research Association) in August 2007. Between 500 and 800 groups of this sort today in the USA are striving to improve the school system within a community-based approach (Gilles et al., 2012).

## A few examples

The General Inspection report explains how these alliances work (or the way they should be working) in France and provides in great details the legal framework as far as city councils, local authorities and childhood protection services are concerned (Antonmattei & Fouquet, 2010). Exchanging information between the different actors has proved to be so important that the SIEI (Interministerial information exchange system) has been created. Closely afterward coordinating platforms have been created to prevent early school leaving: they bring together different actors at the level of one territory: national education executives, people responsible for agricultural education, CFA (apprenticeship vocational schools), "[\*missions locales\*](#)" (institutional bodies supposed to find solutions for dropouts), employment public service, youth information network, territory-based elected bodies. This structure is under the responsibility of the prefect and aims at coordinating the detection and attraction actions so that all solutions can be considered and redundant care or the absence of care be avoided (Antonmattei & Fouquet, 2011; Lachaud et al., 2013).

In Quebec and in the Netherlands, the pupils' care is made easier since each pupil has a number (a code) at the beginning of his or her school years, which enables to follow the different paths taken and to know about each individual situation instantly.

In Luxemburg, the coordination of the different actors' actions (teachers, educators, psychologists, guidance-trained teachers but also parents or companies) belongs to the ALF (Local Action for the youths) which was created locally in 1984 and which was made national and institutional in 2008. The ALF belongs to the National Education minister and to the Vocational Training minister (Houssemand & meyers, 2012).

### **The example of Luxemburg**

Although Luxemburg is a rich country, early school leaving affects a great number of young people (17.8% in 2009), even if the unemployment rate is low compared with the European average (between 4 and 6%). The ALJ is working in the schools by organising internships in companies, by guiding and following pupils in their choices and also outside school by taking care of the teenagers in trouble and by building a special path of integration. Those who are working are educators. The ALJ is present at different levels: with the pupils who have difficulties at or with school or who have already dropped out; with the highschoools in order to find out broad solutions; with the school system in order to assess its efficiency and monitor new actions. The ALJ acts as a mediator, the educators are independent third-party, which guarantees neutrality in front of the actors who are involved by the educative alliance: school, families and companies.

## Going further

Early school leaving is a long process which is hardly detectable before it is effective. Academic factors prove to be important but are associated with family, social or personal factors. All societies fall prey to the issue even if it is raised differently. Very often educative policies, values and ways of functioning of school systems are themselves factors which are favouring esl.

In France, the meritocratic ideology "*enhances the personal responsibility of each in his or her social success and consequently in his or her failure*" (Brown et al., 2010) But sociologists have shown that the social background of individuals has an important impact on their future. Social inequalities become school inequalities. To speak about individual merit is a delusion all the more obvious when we know how important the teacher's influence, the class and the school is in the pupils' success (Brown et al., 2010).

For Duru-Bellat (2006), meritocracy remains a necessary myth but the competitive logic which it implies is at odds with the school logic.

*"It would be wise, given the uncertainties around the notion of merit, to organise an explicit selection which would include, beyond the academic level, many criteria of the pupils' value, leaving the door open to a second chance. According to this pattern, the logic of academic merit would come up later, would be more targeted, less crushing and hegemonic. Besides other merits than those selected by the school exams would be acknowledged" (Duru-Bellat, 2006).*

The diploma is becoming more and more important in the professional integration, which makes the absence of any degree a real handicap. In the years 1970, the youth without a diploma were 1.5 more likely to be unemployed than the ones with a degree whereas in the years 1990, they were 2.5 more likely to be. So the gap between people with or without a diploma is widening significantly (Cahuc et al., 2011).

Does it mean that more education is required? Duru-Bellat (2006) thinks that if the motto "*more and more education*" is legitimate for individuals, we should question its purpose. On the other hand, we cannot imagine the same education to reduce social inequalities and to support innovation and growth. More common education should be considered and less unregulated education: more homogenous teachings at certain levels and more diverse teachings at others. The author thinks that we had better think in terms of content rather than levels, in terms of quality rather than quantity.

The lengthening of studies has had perverse effects in so far as they are financed at the expense of those who are not pursuing their studies. This aim which seems to be positive is hiding widening inequalities which is reinforcing the risks of early school leaving for the most vulnerable people.

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