1. INTRODUCTION: CAREER PATHS, INTEGRATION WITH THE WORKFORCE AND SCHOOL DROPOUTS

Eric Verdier (2010) presents four types of models to describe the educational and vocational guidance systems:

**Academic Agreement:**
« Based on a selective competition regulated by evaluating performance in school; each person is trained according to their level of education before facing the job market ».

**Professional Agreement:**
« Relies on a cooperative relationship between the school and the company with a view to preparing young people for working life by means of education. »
« It depends on the academic agreement that guides young people towards training and then a professional specialism. »

**Universal Agreement:**
« Makes school into a major institution for integration [...] The transition between the education system and employment is organised around funding methods for flexible training systems in order to promote dialogue between the two ‘worlds’ [...] to fight against the irreversibility of choices made and to shape individual autonomy. »

**Market Agreement:**
« Fundamentally the choice of career path is a matter of individual responsibility but it falls to interventions by public bodies to guarantee, for all stakeholders, the transparency of price-quality ratios in order to manage potential information bias. »

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Academic guidance in France is generally close to the academic agreement, even if a compromise is gradually being established between it and the professional agreement. *Schools conduct selections of students which the labour market relies on.* Each study pathway should (ideally) lead to a type of job (Dubet, 2014). So, at the end of high school, students can be guided into professional pathways that don’t conform to their choice because their grades do not allow them to access the general academic pathway. This pathway, *endured and unwanted* by the pupil, is one of the factors that can lead to someone dropping out of school (Glasman, 2014). A youth who has not chosen the pathway in which he is studying will often find it difficult to work hard, find meaning in learning and stay motivated.
If they drop out, they are likely to face a double penalty (or triple if we take the social stigma into consideration): they will not have a diploma prepared and will be confronted with more barriers to enter the labour market. Indeed, the unemployment rate among those with no qualifications is well above the average: in 2014, 50% of non-graduates were unemployed three years after leaving the education system compared to 23% on average (Bernard, 2015). It’s also in response to these difficulties in integrating with the workforce that school dropouts have initially been designated as a «problem» (Bernard, 2015).

What actions can be implemented so that the pathway is chosen by the young person, and then how can these young people be helped, especially those with learning difficulties, to fit into the world of work? As part of the RESOLIS Meetings «Let’s get together against school dropout», representatives from five associations and a collective have reflected on this issue and their thoughts, and recommendations have been transcribed in this article. The actions presented here all fight against dropping out of school, at their own level, by facilitating the pathways and/or the employability of young people. They do not all specifically target young people at risk of dropping out or those who have dropped out of the school system. The projects from the five associations and the collective are briefly described in the next paragraph but further details are available from action summaries on the free access RESOLIS Observatory.

The GR21 (Groupe de Réflexion pour le 21ème siècle) is a collective of seven citizens who reflect on ways to fight against dropping out of school, and then conduct projects voluntarily. They have based themselves for five years in the area around Creil (Oise) as an information point for various associations. Members of GR21 have for example found that many young people lack reference points to make use of career forums or participate in choosing their educational or vocational pathway. The «art of storytelling» project, in partnership with the AGIRabcd association, enables an active or retired professional to talk about his working life, to arouse the curiosity of middle school students and answer their questions for the duration of a lesson in the presence of a teacher. More generally, GR21 strengthens intergenerational solidarity so that active or retired volunteers can share their experiences with young people to help them understand the world of work and thus find their path.

Ecoles de production receives young people from 15 years upwards who are in the process of dropping out. Free for students, their schools offer them the opportunity to learn a trade while promoting close coherence between practical exercises (2/3 of the time) and theoretical lectures (1/3) on the same site on the same day. Young people respond to real orders according to market conditions; it is this production that allows the implementation of an inductive pedagogy, that of «Doing to Learn». Even the theoretical lessons start from practical situations in order to enable young people who have been in trouble with the school system to learn differently and give meaning back to learning. Today, at the national level, seventeen schools welcome 700 students and offer them different training: services (catering, traditional restaurants), industry, automotive, construction and landscaping trades. Pupils prepare vocational diplomas such as the CAP (Certificate of Professional Skills) or BEP (Certificate of Professional Studies). It is not unusual that they finish school with several job offers and the placement rate at the end of course is almost always nearly 100% and these jobs are permanent positions.

1. http://resolis.org/uk
France Bénévolat en Seine et Marne values young people and their skills through the «Volunteer Passport» to facilitate their (re)integration into an educational system, into training or into the professional world. Members of France Bénévolat support the youth in the realisation of their project and give them a «Volunteer Passport» at the end which certifies the skills they have acquired. This passport is recognised by the National Association for Adult Vocational Training, Job Centres and the Ministry of Education as part of the Accreditation of Experience Acquired (VAE). France Bénévolat therefore reengages young people in difficulty through pedagogy based on a project and facilitates their integration with the workforce by formalising their skills. Across the academic year 2014/2015, 20 «Volunteer Passports» were distributed and 10 youth projects were supported. Other actions are currently underway in various secondary schools such as trade forums, a pass/architecture class, intergenerational workshops around the fashion business, or a Graff project in a middle school in Seine-et-Marne.

Passeport Avenir helps young people from modest backgrounds in several regions of France to boost and pursue their academic and professional goals through tutorials with company employees and themed group workshops. Passeport Avenir also seeks to create a generation of different leaders from modest backgrounds and different cultures in order to show young people examples of success. These tutorials are a great help for young people as they allow them to discover the business world, have individual coaching and build a professional network which then facilitates integration. Passeport Avenir has supported 4,320 students during the 2014-2015 school year and 18,280 since its creation in 2005. Six months after the end of their studies, 100% of the young people supported found jobs; they are guided towards sectors that are recruiting. Passeport Avenir mainly works with university students but also organises workshops in high schools.

The Tournesol Association has set up a school in Paris under contract with the Ministry of Education which welcomes 30 young people from 11 to 20 years old with impaired cognitive or mental functions every year. Of the three classes, in addition to educational learning, one is dedicated to the development of autonomy and in opening out to the professional world where the young people are helped to work towards their career path. In 2016, a new organisation «Tournesol passerelle pro» will be launched in collaboration with ARERAM (Association for Re-education of Children and Re-adaptation of adults in medico-social difficulties). It will accompany 10 young people over 20 years old towards employment in an ordinary environment by helping both youngsters and companies to keeping the former in employment. Since its creation in 2011, 109 young people have been educated in the Tournesol school; 46% were able to continue schooling after Tournesol and 11% have found a job in a mainstream or a protected environment.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS: HOW TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE ON THEIR PATHWAY AND WITH THEIR INTEGRATION?

3.1. A CHOSEN PATHWAY BUT WITH THE RIGHT TO MAKE A MISTAKE

The pathway and integration problems that create disengagement in school are particularly visible in vocational channels that aren’t chosen by young people. Some students endure a pathway that was assigned to them based on their grade, even due to places being available in that sector, and therefore are more likely to drop out. We must therefore fight against these forced career paths by helping young people to better understand the opportunities that are available to them and the jobs that exist, by pushing them to pursue their ambitions, by preventing stigmatisation of vocational programs and by developing them. Saying that, young people should not feel that their pathway in middle school is irreversible; not everyone knows what career they want to pursue at that age and in any case their wishes can change. The Programming and Pathway law 2013 anticipates the setting up of more flexible pathways, including a secondary profession on a progressive pathway, but it is still too early to assess its impact. Everyone should have the right to make a mistake, should be able to redirect themselves and different skills deserve to be valued (not only academic knowledge but also interpersonal and technical skills...).

3.2. DIVERSIFIED PARTNERSHIPS

To reach young people, the associations presented above have established various partnerships: with other associations, with local youth centres, local businesses, networks of carers and schools. These organisations redirect young people towards the associations as they offer a particular service and were able to show their experience. Most associations pick up young people by word of mouth: a youngster who’s happy with his visits to the organisation can talk to another one. It’s also a very effective process as peer groups have a huge influence in adolescence. Passeport Avenir also invites young people who are or have been tutored, to speak to classes in high school in order to prevent difficulties with pathways.
With the Ministry of Education

Though good relations with the Ministry of Education are necessary and often factor in the success of a project, they are also difficult to put in place. Associations (at least those that have contributed to this article) certainly don’t wish to work in opposition to the Ministry of Education, to the Centres of Information and Guidance, or any other service that’s already available to young people, but as a complement to them. The goal here is not to point out their errors and promote our own successes; the objective is instead to enable young people, especially those in difficulty, to find a way to achieve and pursue success.

Being registered with the Ministry of Education allows the learning tax to be collected. Being under contract with the Ministry of Education allows official frameworks and standards to be used, such as the common core skills, and enables teaching positions to be funded as well as occasionally convincing local authorities to take charge of transport (for example for young disabled people who go to the Tournesol establishment). Being supported or at least recognised by the Ministry of Education is a proof of the project’s seriousness that can facilitate partnerships, with schools in particular.

Organisations and apparatus have been created within the Ministry of Education to build links between actors, particularly on the issue of school dropouts: the FOQUALE networks and the Projects to Fight against Dropping out of School (MLDS) for instance. Schools are now more often required to work with other institutions but also with non-institutional partners. However, efforts are still needed from within the Ministry of Education, as highlighted by the associations, also in opening up to partners from civil society. National guidelines are sometimes difficult to apply and adapt in the field. For the moment they often depend on the will of the head teachers and directors of the organisations. We must therefore continue and strengthen incentives so that educational teams work better together, especially to help young people in difficulty, and also so that they are open to partners: communities, associations, companies... Maybe start by valuing what already exists, support the teams already involved in these issues through collaboration, and at the same time develop teacher training as working together is how to learn. We can also envisage the evolution of some official posts in the civil service, for example inspectors who could serve as intermediaries and project organisers in order to capitalise on the projects operating in their region.

With the world of work

Young people have very poor understanding of the different professions that they can do, as well as the ways that can lead to them. It is therefore useful to develop more trade forums, to organise discovery classes for professionals, company visits, links with the professional world, and to spend time on career pathways.

The mentoring systems with active workers also enables young people to gradually develop a network that will be useful at the moment when they join the workforce. Young people therefore discover company codes, the language and the conduct that have to be adopted.

The partnerships that associations develop with business are not only one-way; they not only benefit the associations and youths who are supported but also employees and the company. Indeed, the employees engaged as mentors can increase their knowledge of their environment, feel socially useful and flourish in their life and work. These partnerships are also ways for companies to fulfil their corporate social responsibilities (RSE). To convince these private stakeholders, it is important to highlight the many benefits they can derive from these projects: the diversity of the actions proposed to their employees, the impact on an area, or even the skills that employees can gain.

Associations can also serve as a link between young people and businesses. France Bénévolat 77 for example allows professionals to recruit apprentices while being able to discuss with a representative from the association. The Ecoles de Production train young people for a specific trade; they are therefore able to work in business at the end of their studies. This is particularly beneficial in «shortage occupations» in which manufacturers are very critical of the training provided by the Ministry of Education and deplore a lack of skills among young people.

Finally, some professionals have difficulties in highlighting their business and attracting young people. Associations can help them, in particular by offering them spaces to present to young people.
3.3. APPROPRIATE TEACHING METHODS

Some associations, such as Tournesol or Passeport Avenir, have identified a specific profile of young people that they will help: for the former, young disabled people, for the latter, young people from modest backgrounds and/or different cultural backgrounds. But even in these specific cases, the public is diverse: different disabilities, some serious others less so, and different origins with varying degrees of social and academic difficulty ... Finally, the main criterion for participation in these projects is the motivation of the young people supported. All the authors of this article are careful not to stigmatise the public with whom they work.

A common feature of the associations represented in this article is the implementation of active teaching methods: young people are in a process of development, with the help of other people and the information made available; they learn by doing. Another is to consider a youngster as a person and not just as a student and to quite comprehensively take charge of them: tuition, guidance, placements, but also potential problems with their environment, for example. To give confidence back to young people, especially those who have left the school system, time needs to be taken to look at them, to enhance the skills of each person and to start from who they are, to help them move forward; and for this, working in small numbers is important. With the goal of «empowerment», the associations, with the help of their partners, try to give the necessary impetus to young people so that they can then find their place in the world of work and in society more generally.

All of them also try to give meaning to learning: showing that academic learning will help them in the workplace, starting with practical skills and moving towards theoretical ideas, or even with an educational project through which young people will progressively become aware of the learning needed for the accomplishment of this project.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. THE QUESTION OF EVALUATION

Evaluation has become necessary to be able to account for expenditures to donors in particular, but it is also, for everyone, an important moment of reflection to improve their project. Several evaluation methods are possible, depending on the projects and/or resources available. The associations typically distribute questionnaires to young people and sometimes their parents, as well as to mentor volunteers, in order to measure their satisfaction and to gather their impressions of the project and how it was conducted. The number of young people who find training or employment after having benefited from the support of an association is a common indicator. Also the level of participation and attendance of young people, as well as the involvement of volunteers, is measured.

Impact studies may also be conducted by external organisations, such as the one carried out by Passeport Avenir. They allow a more detailed evaluation and a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses. These studies are quite expensive but may eventually be conducted by companies in the form of sponsorship through skills.

However, it remains difficult to isolate the different factors affecting career paths and employability and thus it is difficult to evaluate the impact of the project itself. Group studies, with the presence of a control group, may provide answers but they are expensive to implement. Beyond the quantitative impact, the associations underline the increased confidence among the youngsters and that they realise their potential. Although subjective these are important aspects to consider.

4.2. CONCLUSION

Multiple services are offered to young people to help them in their career path: by their class teacher, by career counsellors, regional guidance services and associations. Young people are often faced with an abundance of information that they do not always manage to use effectively. It is difficult to embark on an educational pathway without knowing about the occupations to which it can lead. To make better decisions regarding career paths, it is important to work together with youngsters: the Ministry of Education, associations and companies. Then, young people can meet professionals, young people who can become success stories, and gradually build their own professional project. An appropriate and well-chosen pathway seriously reduces the risk of them dropping out. For this, it is also necessary to reassert the value of vocational courses that must no longer be seen only as a «way to the garage».

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2. See the article “Develop young people’s personal skills and abilities to prevent school dropout” published in this special issue.
An appropriate and well-chosen pathway may also facilitate integration with the workforce as the youngster will probably be more motivated. However, efforts must be made to help them enter the job market, especially those who do not have a significant network. Mentors and the recognition of skills by a Volunteer Passport for example, can be helpful with this issue.

In summary, guidance and employability are important issues for the success of young people and all stakeholders (Ministry of Education, associations, public services for guidance and integration, local businesses) must work together.

5. REFERENCES


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