School staff’s strategies to prevent early school leaving in a Flemish context

University of Antwerp
CeMIS
Lore Van Praag, Rut Van Caudenberg, Ward Nouwen, Noel Clycq & Christiane Timmerman

This project has received funding from the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no 320223.
Introduction

- Focus reduction Early School Leavers (ESL)
- ESL is outcome of complex number of push- and pull-factors

- Schools as monolithic entities
- Lack of agency
  
  Neglecting institutional culture & school staff’s perspectives and strategies
Methods

- RESL.eu project
- Outside mainstream education
- Focus on school staff

Data collection: Theory-based stakeholder evaluation (Hansen & Vedung, 2010)
  - Designers
  - Implementers
  - Target group

Data analysis: Principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)
Flemish educational system

Mainstream full-time education

- 3 years: Nursery education
- 6 years: Primary education
- 2 years: Academic track
  - Academic track
  - Art
  - Technical track
- 2 years: Vocational track
  - Vocational track
  - Art
  - Technical track
- 1 year: Specialisation year
- 3 or more years: Higher education

Alternative learning arenas

- Part-time vocational education and training (VET)
- Part-time apprenticeship track
- Secondary Schools for Adults
## Sample (N=29)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Designers/supervisors (Interview):</th>
<th>Implementers (focus group discussion):</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **A:** Secondary schools for adults | 1 school principal (female) | 2 teachers  
1 teacher/learning trajectory counsellor  
1 training coordinator  
1 psychologist  
1 care teacher (6 females) |
| **B:** Secondary schools for adults | 1 school principal (female) | 4 teachers  
1 student counsellor  
(4 females, 1 male) |
| **C:** Part-time vocational education and training (VET) | 1 School principal (male) | 2 teachers  
1 coordinator of employment  
1 coordinator ‘Project General Courses’  
1 counsellor of student trajectories (2 females, 3 males) |
| **D:** Part-time apprenticeship track | 1 school principal (female) | 1 apprenticeship counsellor  
8 teachers (5 females, 4 males) |
Results

Functions of education (Peschar & Wesselingh, 1995)

- Qualification
- Selection/Allocation/Differentiation
- Socialisation/Integration

BUT in alternative learning arena: outcomes of differentiation processes
Integration

- Use of holistic approach
- Focus on:
  - Target group
  - Type of education offered

Management Secondary Schools for Adults (Program A):

“So we have a group of people who, luckily, find their way to us, because there are a lot of them who don’t. But they do need a different approach or different care. A lot of support.”
Integration

- Re-engage students
- **First**: focus on pull-factors that cause ESL
- **Later**: actual educational training

Teacher and learning trajectory counsellor (Secondary Schools for Adults, Program A):

“They also just enter [our office] to tell ‘my cat died’. Then I am like ‘sorry but that does not interest me’, but just because they say ‘that actually has an effect on my learning trajectory and I am able to tell you this, I will not tell it to all my teachers but..' just having the relief of being able to tell it to someone matters.’
Qualification

- Competition with integration
- Specific professional skills?
- Transferrable skills?
- Social competences?
Qualification

- Teacher A (Program B, Secondary Schools for Adults): ‘Yes to a certain extent, I teach some of the basics of bookkeeping, but the demands on the labour market are a lot higher.’

- Teacher B: ‘It depends on the courses. In the course informatics, I teach online banking.

- Teacher A: ‘That is personal use, it does not really apply to the labour market.’

- Teacher B: ‘They need these kinds of skills to function in our society, how to deal with E-purchases, etc. that is general education.’

- Teacher A: ‘General education is necessary to function in society, technical courses need to prepare students for the labour market. For many courses, there is no need on the labour market.’
Conclusion

Functions of schooling?

- No focus on differentiation
  - ‘Last resort’
- Tension between integration and qualification
  - 1st integration/socialisation, 2nd qualification
- Diverging interpretations of qualification function of schooling
  - Specialist vs transferrable skills?
Conclusion

➢ ESL prevention?

- Focus on features vulnerable group
- Remedial approach to pull-factors: more attention to integration
- Focus on transition to labour market and particular educational qualifications offered
Questions?

Lore.VanPraag@UAntwerpen.be