

1 – The Educational System in France

French Educational System is structured into nine years of common teachings (five years of “*école élémentaire*”, from 6/7 to 10/11, and four years of “*collège*”, from 11/12 to 14-15). After this 9 years of compulsory school, students have to choose between **professional** and **general/technological** teachings.

In the professional teachings there are two kinds of diploma:

- The “*Certificat d’Aptitude Professionnelle*” (**CAP**) and the “*Brevet d’Etudes Professionnelles*” (**BEP**), that are prepared in two years;
- The “*bac professionnel*” (**bac pro**) that is prepared in two years after the BEP (or some CAPs), so in four years after the *collège*.

The CAP is very specialized in profession-learning and work insertion. General subjects (French and Maths) are not very important. The BEP, instead, is less oriented to the professional insertion. It allows to know a professional field and even to carry on studying. General teachings are important, and there are fewer weeks of training than in the CAP. The bac pro is the natural prosecution of the BEP. It is a sort of BEP more specialized. After getting the bac pro, a student is able to practice a profession and even to undertake a “short study” (see below).

General and technological studies are structured into three years. The first year, called “*seconde générale et technologique*”, is common to all students who chose this modality. After that, students have to choose between technological and general studies. In both case they need two more years to get the (general or technological) **bac**.

Those who have a “bac-level” diploma (bac pro, technological bac and general bac) can continue their studies undertaking the “superior teachings”, these comprehend “**short studies**” and “**long studies**” (University and “*Grandes Ecoles*”).

Short studies last two years. After these two years, students get a diploma that provides professional insertion (like all the “pro” diplomas). These diplomas are of three different kinds: the “*Brevet de Technicien Supérieur*” (BTS), the “*Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie*” (DUT), and the “*Diplôme d’Etudes Universitaires Scientifiques et Techniques*” (DEUST). Each of them is designed to provide direct access to employment but at the same time they assure a very good general level.

Long studies take place in Universities and “*Grandes Ecoles*”. Universities are structured in conformity to European “*Licence-Master-Doctorat*” (LMD) system, and there are no barriers to admission of students. *Grandes Ecoles*, instead, are very elitist and they do not have a uniform organization.

In the LMD organization, three years are necessary to get the *Licence* that can be general (to continue studying) or professional (to go to work). Two more years are necessary to get the *Master*, that can be general (*Master Recherche*) or professional (*Master pro*). Finally, three more years lead to the *Doctorat* (to become researcher).

Because of this particular scholastic organization, in France there are some “**orientation stages**” corresponding to the scholastic years that precede a choice. This “orientation stages” correspond to:

- 1) the **last year of collège** (*troisième*), when students have to choose about high school. In the first semester they inquire about their options, supported by orientation advisors, teachers and the headmaster. In the second semester students and families have to write a provisional proposal, that will be discussed by the class committee. In the last semester students and families produce their definitive proposal, that has to be accepted by the class committee. If the committee does not agree, it has to suggest another solution, that has to be accepted by the student, who can have a recourse only once;
- 2) the *seconde générale et technologique*, when students have to choose between general and technological studies. The procedure is similar to the one described above;

- 3) the **last year of CAP and BEP**, when students have to decide if they want to carry on with their studies in the professional *lycée* until the *bac pro*, or if they want to undertake the technological teachings after an “adaptation year”;
- 4) the **last year of professional, technological or general bac**, when, after a final exam that will determine if the student can undertake the “superior teachings”, they have to choose between “long” and “short studies”.

In France, all the professional diplomas (CAP, BEP, bac pro, *Licence pro*, *Master pro*, BTS, DUT, DEUST) can be prepared in other ways: by the **alternation school/work**, by a **vocational training** and by **validating a professional experience**.

Alternation (“*alternance*”) allows students, by drawing up a special work contract, to get a diploma while they are working. The professional training takes place in the company while special training structures assure the general teachings. This procedure alternate three weeks in enterprise with one in the training structure.

The vocational training in France is now a regional competence. French Regions provide, according to annual plans, financial support for private training structures so that courses are free of charge for users. Often they are even remunerated. By this way, users (youngsters as well as adults) can get the same diplomas reachable in schools and universities.

The validation of professional experience (*Validation des Acquis de l'Experience*, or VAE) concerns those who have worked at least three years in a particular professional field. They can stand a test in which a jury (composed by professionals) evaluates their competences and decides whether to accord (even partially) or to refuse the requested diploma.

Compulsory education in France is until the 16th birthday.

2 – The counselling system in France

Scholastic as well as professional vocational guidance are managed by public institutions. The **Information and Orientation Centres** (*Centres d'information et d'Orientation*, **CIO**) are in charge of scholastic orientation. These structures depend on the Ministry of Education, and each of them has its territorial competence.

The **orientation advisors** (*conseillers d'orientation psychologues*, **COP**) are public functionaries. To become COP, there are three steps:

- 1) to get a *licence* in psychology;
- 2) to pass a state competitive examination;
- 3) to attend two years of special formation.

At the end, the new COPs receive a State Certificate and they begin to work in the CIOs.

The aim of CIOs is **to inform and to orient young people still integrated in schools or universities**. So CIOs are not in charge of drop-out youngsters.

We can see two main purposes in CIOs activities:

- 1) to **inform and orient youngsters from *collèges* and *lycées***;
- 2) to **inform and orient the large public**.

Concerning the first purpose, the service is assured through three activities:

- a minimum of a weekly presence of the COPs in *collèges* and *lycées*, so that students can easily have a meeting with them, if they want;
- activities in schools, yearly planned by CIOs and schools. Normally, the interventions of the COPs take place in the most “difficult” steps. In the first year of *collège* they find and help students with cognitive problems. In the last year of *collège* they support students who have to write their proposal about high school. In the *seconde générale et technologique* their

activity is similar, because students have to choose between general and technological studies. Finally, in professional high schools, they act in different ways according to specific necessities;

- other activities in schools: participation to parents-teachers class committees; intervention in the information days for students and parents (normally organised by headmasters or CIOs); formation of the teachers. The success of all these activities depends on the relationship between the COP and the school.

Other services, on the contrary, are addressed to students as well as adults who look for information about vocational trainings, VAE, school-work alternation, etc. Adult public is more and more numerous.

In the CIOs:

- the orientation advisors assure a permanent presence;
- there is an informative space, where users can consult brochures and info-magazines that the ONISEP (*Office National d'Information sur les Enseignements et les Professions*) send to the CIOs.

Moreover, COPs normally participate to public information days organised in France (i.e. *Salon des Etudiants, Salon de la Formation Continue*, etc.).

There are many others activities concerning service to youngsters, such as:

- 1) the “*dossier recurrent*”. It is a request of admission addressed by youngsters who didn't go to school for at least one year to the headmaster of a *college* or a *lycée*. COPs help them to write this dossier. This is the only activity addressed to drop-outs;
- 2) the “*bilan psychologique*”, a psychological test that reveals mental retardations. This test is used to select those who can attend the SEGPA, a special *collège* program for students with mental limitation;
- 3) the *dossiers* ENA (*Eleves Nouvellement Arrivés*) that concerns immigrants less than 16 years old who want to undertake their studies in France. This dossier is useful to understand the real competences of students. According to the results of the test, the orientation advisor writes a request of admission to the class that he considers the most suitable to the student's level.

3 - Structures and programs against dropping-out

3.1 *Missions Locales d'Insertion (MLI)*

The aim of these structures is the **social insertion of 16 to 25 years-old drop-outs**. Today in France there are 515 MLIs; each of them has, like the CIOs, its territorial competence. MLIs are managed by inter-municipal institutions, but they maintain the same structure and the same purposes in the whole country.

The activities follow three main directions:

- 1) **professional insertion**. In the MLIs, youngsters can get information about the vocational training regional programmes and consult job advertisements;
- 2) **health**. In a MLI you can find information and help about drugs, alcohol, illnesses, psychological difficulties, etc;
- 3) **very practical questions**: housing, rights, useful public institutions, sport, fun, etc. This is the reason why the MLIs are in charge of social, not only professional, insertion of disadvantaged young people.

People without qualification have right to a particular support: the **CIVIS** (*contrat d'insertion dans la vie sociale*). It is a contract (created by the Work Ministry) drawn up by the MLI together

with the youngster himself. The aim is to reach the “stable employment” (more than six months work contract).

The MLI advisor evaluate the youngster’s condition and competences, then the two negotiate a way to improve the job-search circumstances. The aim is to get over all the obstacles to social and professional insertion. This means solving problems not only related to the competences-improvement, but also to practical everyday life. In this perspective, the actions planned could be professional orientation or vocational training as well as housing solution, medical cares, etc.

For the action decided and written in the CIVIS contract, the person has a right to financial help. In exchange they have to meet regularly their advisor and put all the actions into practice (being present at the regularly vocational trainings, taking care of their health, stop drinking or using drugs, etc.).

3.2 The Missions Générales d’Insertion (MGI)

This is a programme created by the Ministry of Education in 1984, to help 16 to 25 years old youngsters at risk of dropping out or already drop out. Compulsory education is linked to the age, so youngsters from the 16th birthday can leave the school even without a diploma. The aim of the programme is to help weak students to get a diploma.

A special team has to individuate students demotivated or at risk of dropping out, and to propose them to the MGI programme. Then, the students meet the MGI educators in order to understand their real problems.

If there are other possible solutions, educators will propose the attendance to other institutions (for example a CIO for a re-orientation).

Those who are accepted in the programme receive a personal accompanying depending on their real problems at school.

There are four kinds of actions:

- 1) **finding and prevention measures.** If a teacher indicates a student at risk of dropping out, the MGI will offer some solutions: a social or pedagogic mediation or an alternation with periods of training in enterprises or professional *lycées*;
- 2) **welcome and motivation measures,** for students who are still at school or have left it for less than one year. The aim of this accompanying is to allow students to become aware of their potential, to build a project about their future, and to recover their motivation;
- 3) **qualification and insertion,** for students who couldn’t get a diploma. The aim is to help these youngsters finding a job or undertaking the alternative ways to get a diploma (VAE, alternation, etc);
- 4) **welcome of neo-immigrants and not-francophone people.** For this public the main problem is that they don’t speak French. So the aim is to organize them a language course and then to help them in professional or scholastic insertion.

The first three actions can be part of the same programme, depending on student’s problems and needs.

3.3 The Classes Relais

The *classes relais* are an educational programme created in 1998 and managed, at national level, by an inter-ministry group. Anyhow, local actors are very independent.

The target of this programme are 12 to 15 years-old *collège* students **who are at risk of dropping-out (or are already drop out)**. These boys and girls live a strong school-rejection process, and sometimes they have lost the basic community life rules.

The *classes relais* have two purposes:

- 1) **to reintegrate the youngsters in the school;**
- 2) **to activate a re-socialisation process.**

These special classes have been created to receive a **restricted number** of students for a **limited period** (from some weeks to one year). Normally there is one class every three or four *collèges*. One of them is the “*collège de rattachement*”, the school where the *classe relais* is officially installed, but the class can be physically out of the school’s building (in order to make the students feel better).

In the *classes relais* students can find a reinforced framing assured by **teachers and educators**, who manage the class together. So the youngsters are more strictly followed.

Proposed activities are decided according to the two purposes of the programme, so there is, on one side, the **scholastic remedy** (absolutely **personalized** according to every one’s condition), and, on the other side, the **extra-scholastic activities** to encourage the socialization between students. Even timetables are personalized, but they must tend to a normal scholastic timework.

3.4 The “DP3” and “DP6” options

The “*découverte professionnelle 3 heures*” (professional discovery 3 hours) is an option that all the students can choose for the last year of *collège*. Every student must choose an “optional teaching” that covers 3 hours per week. The subjects are: Latin, Greek, third language (stranger or regional) and, finally, the DP3.

The DP3 option’s aim is to give students a first view on the work reality. It is done by three “discovery pillars”:

- 1) jobs and professional activities;
- 2) organizations (enterprises, public administration, associations);
- 3) trainings linked to various professional activities.

Activities offered are information search, document analysis, visits in enterprises, documents elaboration, common discussions in class.

The DP3 option provides a general knowledge about some professional reality. It is not a programme for the weaker students, but, really, an option everybody. Students can see some jobs with their own eyes, and it can be a very good way for orientation.

The “*découverte professionnelle 6 heures*” (6 hours) is partially different. It covers 6 hours per week, so students who choose this programme are exonerated from the second foreign language (that is an compulsory subject).

Students who choose this programme are grouped in special classes. This choice influences other teachings. In fact, general teachings in these classes are simplified. The DP6 students purpose is that of carrying on studying in a professional lycée, and they cannot undertake the “*seconde générale et technologique*” anymore.

DP6 classes are not installed in every *collège* and they are often situated in a professional *lycée*. So DP6 students have sometimes to change their school during the last *collège* year.

Even at a pedagogic level, the DP6 is different from the DP3. There is a sort of “fourth discovery pillar”, that is very important: the **participation to goods and services production in professional lycées or enterprises**.

Besides DP3 activities, practical realizations in at least two professional fields and stages in enterprise or professional *lycée* are proposed.

We can say that, besides the activities, the main difference between DP3 and DP6 concerns the purposes. If the DP3 simply aims at giving a general knowledge of the professional world (it is an option among the others), the DP6 is a programme more suitable for weak students, not interested in general teachings and oriented to professional studies or to an alternation.

4 – Lyon

In the city of Lyon we found a special project against dropping out, an experimental programme installed in a professional *lycée*: the **Nouvelle Chance** (new chance). The *lycée de la nouvelle chance* is a new pedagogic device, created by the Education Ministry, to help youngsters who left the school without a professional qualification.

Youngsters have to satisfy these conditions to be admitted:

- 1) to be 18 to 26 years old;
- 2) to have left school since least one year before entering the program;
- 3) to have followed one year of a BEP course;
- 4) to be registered in a MLI.

In this school student can prepare the following diplomas:

- 1) **one year** BEP in accountancy, secretariat and logistics-commerce;
- 2) bac pro in accountancy and secretariat.

The recruiting steps (from April to June) are:

- 1) candidates give their personal dossier;
- 2) they sit for an exam;
- 3) they have a meeting with the programme coordinator;
- 4) they draw up an “educative contract” with the school.

Concerning practical activities, the main characteristics of the *nouvelle chance* are:

- 1) the **alternation school-enterprise**, three days in the *lycée* and two days in enterprise. According to the student’s economic situation, he/she can earn from 339,35 to 652,02 euro per month;
- 2) **personal accompanying**. Students are personally followed by teachers, who have to adapt their courses to students’ individual needs;

Moreover, a psychologist is at the students’ disposal once a month.

Finally, theatre activities are organised in order to increase their awareness of their body, and their communicative skills.

This project is financed by the Region, the Academy (regional representation of the Education Ministry) and European funds.

There is another particular “practice”, named **orientation concertée** (concerted orientation) created almost 20 years ago by the CIO of Venissieux (eastern Lyon) and some headmasters. The aim of this practice is to make students, families, the orientation advisors, teachers and class committee reach an agreement. As we saw, during “orientation stages” the last decision is up to the teachers, and it may produce conflicts between students and schools. So, two meetings (the first in January and the second in May) are planned in order to know a student’s wishes and possibilities and to discuss them with teachers and parents.

5 – Sète

In the city of Sète there are: a CIO, a MLI, one *classe relais* and three classes DP6 (one in a *collège* and two in a *lycée*).

The only local project is the ***Groupe d'Aide à l'Insertion*** (GAIN), installed in a professional *lycée* of the city (*lycée Joliot Curie*). It is a special class for students very demotivated but still interested in practical jobs. The class GAIN receives a maximum of ten students.

Students accepted in the class follow a very special programme: they are at school only once a week (on Tuesday), because the other days they are working in enterprise. On Tuesday they receive basic education (French and Maths) and, with their teacher's support, they look for enterprises willing to receive them for a period of training.

The aim of this programme is to help these students finding an enterprise willing to draw up an alternation work contract beginning in September, because this would be particularly difficult for students who leave the school without any qualification.

The advantages for students who participate in GAIN programme are:

- 1) they maintain the student status until they become apprentice;
- 2) they accumulate practical experience so that finding new jobs becomes easier;
- 3) they do not leave school in the middle of the year (it could be very bad for their CV);
- 4) they are helped by teachers during the transition from school to work.

Eight students out of ten find an employer before the beginning of summer (that's a very good result).