NESSE

NETWORK OF EXPERTS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

Lessons from research for policy makers

An independent expert report submitted to the European Commission

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report draws on European and international literature to examine the causes and consequences, and possible remedies for, Early School Leaving (ESL) in Europe.

ESL is defined as the percentage of the population aged 18-24 with at most lower secondary education and not in further education or training. In the EU, 16.9% of boys and 12.7% of girls are early school leavers. Reducing its incidence to 10% by 2020 has been one of the key benchmarks of European education policy cooperation. It is a worldwide phenomenon (rates in the USA are much higher).

Why is ESL a problem?

Individual ESLers are more likely to be unemployed, to be in precarious and low-paid jobs, to draw on welfare and other social programmes throughout their lives, and to encounter difficulties in gaining a place in vocational training. They are much less likely to be "active citizens" and to become involved in lifelong learning. One European estimate puts the additional lifetime income for a student staying at school for an extra year at more than €70.000.

The wider "economic" costs in terms of lower productivity, lower tax revenues and higher welfare payments, are huge. 2009 research[1] shows that, in Canada, the cost of early school leaving is estimated to be more than $37.1 billion per year.

ESL generates very large "social" costs (it has been shown to lead to later social breakdown, increased demand on the health system, and lower social cohesion). It perpetuates the cycle of which it is part.

In the long-term, ESL constitutes a tremendous waste of potential, for individual, social and economic development.

The causes of ESL

ESL always occurs in particular contexts that produce and shape it in specific ways. It has both individual and institutional causes**.** It results from interaction between family and social background, and school processes and experiences. It is the culmination of what is usually a long process that often begins before a young person enters school.

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[1] http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/LessonsInLearning/49-02_04_09E.pdf

Although ESLers are not a homogeneous group, ESL is associated with a wide range of economic and social disadvantages. ESLers are more likely to come from workless households; be male rather than female; come from vulnerable groups, such as the disabled, those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), teenage mothers and those with physical and mental health problems; come from minority or migrant backgrounds (in the EU as a whole, 30.1% of non-nationals are early school leavers compared to 13% of nationals); and to be concentrated in particular areas.

In many cases more than one of these risks is present, and multiple disadvantages increase significantly the likelihood of negative outcomes.

The individual factors associated with ESL are largely rooted in very poor family and community backgrounds and experiences. However, many ESLs have none of these characteristics, and many with these kinds of characteristics also successfully complete schooling.

Regarding the whole problem of ESL as one of individual vulnerability frames policy responses in unhelpful ways. Though few of these factors are easily amenable to direct policy intervention, it is possible to identify and respond to the kinds of experiences and circumstances, especially in schools, that promote or retard the likelihood of young people from similar backgrounds becoming ESLers.

ESLers are likely to have developed patterns of academic achievement, problem behaviour and poor attendance as early as pre-school education that are strongly predictive of the likelihood of their subsequent early leaving. They typically perform badly at school, and are academically and socially disengaged from school. They are more likely to be absent, and to be seen as discipline problems.

ESLers are much more likely to come from schools with low socio-economic status intakes, where the school composition effect -the effect of the overall social class composition of a school population on the outcomes of individual students- is clearly visible. This effect is refracted through schools' organisation and management, teachers' attitudes and peer effects.

The prevalence of ESL varies across the Member States. It is influenced both by the structure of education systems and by local labour market contexts, and the pattern of vocational education.

What can be done about it?

Responses to ESL tackle it at different stages in the process. The recognition of the very early origins of behaviours associated with subsequent ESL makes pre-emptive strategies, such as good quality Early Childhood Education and Care, a high priority. Traced through longitudinal studies, such interventions have been notably successful in reducing later ESL. Even though the payoff for such investment is delivered only after a decade, this is clearly a strong reason to support the further extension of the provision of quality ECEC.

Practical and realistic preventative strategies for schools can be *structural*, *student focussed* (targeting individual students or groups of students), or *school wide* (affecting all students). **Structural** strategies could be introduced to address clear causes of ESL such as the social class composition of schools. However, political pressures around such issues seem to have limited the development of this option. **Student focussed** interventions have been directed to protecting "at risk" students against pressures that could lead to them becoming disengaged. These include mentoring, especially one to one, and monitoring students. Such interventions should provide intense support, and make optimum use of other government and community services. For many of these interventions, screening for, and targeting, the students most at risk is recommended. Another successful student focussed intervention is the provision of financial maintenance allowances to enable students to resist financial difficulties of staying at school.

School wide interventions focus largely on a range of curricular innovations, for instance the introduction of more vocational and technical education, or greater cooperation with other agencies, including workplaces. There is considerable emphasis on the need to move from subject-based to skills-based curriculum and the recognition of key competences. School organisation that recognises the particular needs of potential ESLers can be successful in reducing the incidence of early leaving. It is possible to identify key elements of disengagement from school, and devise appropriate responses to them.

Second Chance programmes have been introduced to "rescue" those who have already left school early. These have been most successful when they have offered alternative experiences to conventional schooling, but generally it is considered better to try to ensure "first chance" success.

Conclusion

Overall, the report reflects a feeling that for all the enormous amounts of time and money that have been expended over decades on trying to solve the issue of ESL, the seriousness of the issue has neither been properly recognised nor effectively responded to. Many of the responses are based on diagnoses with rather narrow views of the nature and depth of the issues. While we do not lack for examples of apparently successful interventions, there are rarely attempts to "join them up", in more comprehensive programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

Early school leaving (ESL) is regarded as a major problem not only in Europe but across the developed world. In the EU, 16.9% of boys and 12.7% of girls are early school leavers (European Commission, 2009), and reducing its incidence to 10% by 2020 is one of the key benchmarks of EU education strategy. This report sets out to indicate and clarify its complexities, to identify its multiple causes and to propose practical policy responses that enable progress towards that goal.

The social and personal problems associated with ESL are found in a range of areas -labour markets, employment difficulties, schools and vocational training organisations. Their consequences are experienced at a number of levels -individual, family, community- and for prolonged periods of time. The impact of ESL is felt in national and regional economic competitiveness, in social cohesion, in individual lives.

Different perspectives on ESL are driven by varying views of the kind of threat it represents - compassion for afflicted young lives, affront at a range of social injustices it encapsulates, fear at its potential for social disruption, concern at the loss of economic capacity. In recent years the relationship of ESL to labour market and qualification needs has increased in prominence, while its relationship to social inequality has received less attention (Dekkers and Driesen, 1997). (Eventual) employment is clearly recognised as the alternative, or "opposite", to ESL, and as the target of remedial programmes. Entering employment is taken as the "normal", or default route for young people. Transitions are seen as transitions to work, as much as transitions to adulthood.

However, measures to combat ESL are also claimed to deliver significant wider social benefits. These include preparation for further education after school, and for lifelong learning. Especially in the USA, social benefits such as reduced crime and increased neighbourhood safety have been associated with successful anti-dropout programmes.

The literature on ESL is vast and international. It contains different definitions and theoretical understandings of ESL and different policy orientations towards it. Nevertheless, one notable feature of the literature is the continuing broad consensus on ESL's causes and effects. From the early 1970s the "facts" of ESL have been revealed and confirmed by a very large number of studies, though their prevalence and implications vary.

This report aims to lay bare recognised causes of ESL and thereby to identify possible remedies more effectively. While the focus and purpose of this report is ESL in Europe, we will also refer to research carried out outside Europe where it strengthens the evidence base and suggests alternative policy possibilities.

ESL always occurs in particular contexts that produce and shape it in specific ways. Its multiple causes -for instance the level of parental education and school composition- always interact with each other. Though ESL is always experienced individually, it also generates enormous fiscal and social costs across societies, through the burdens it creates for a range of public services. And though it is an individual problem, approaching it as just a problem of individual vulnerability, or seeing individuals as themselves responsible for their ESL, fails to recognise the deeply social nature of the problem. While we can point to the characteristics of ESLers, and isolate a range of background factors associated with ESL, these are not sufficient in themselves to "explain" ESL. Approaching the problem in this way frames policy responses in unhelpful ways.

Though few of these factors are easily amenable to direct policy intervention it is possible to identify and respond to the kinds of experiences and circumstances, especially in schools, that promote or retard the likelihood of young people from such backgrounds becoming ESLers.

This report refers to ESL as **a process,** not an event. That process involves both the individual ESLers and their personal histories, and what happens to them when those personal histories meet the public world and life of the school. One of the main findings of the report is that in very many cases the route to ESL begins before the child goes to school. Later academic, behavioural and social patterns are often laid down in the first encounters with pre-school. These patterns become salient, and often negative, before the age of leaving school is reached. They lead young people to become "disengaged" from school, and create problems for schools, especially when they are concentrated in homogeneous institutions. The report emphasises the importance of "school composition", the effect of the overall social class composition of a school on the individual outcomes of its students. This works in a range of ways, most of which take forms that propel those vulnerable to ESL in that direction, rather than inhibiting that trajectory.

When it comes to considering possible solutions to the problem of ESL, we are faced with ample alternative possibilities. One of the notable features of ESL is its persistence in the face of decades of effort and massive amounts of money and ingenuity in trying to overcome it. Given this, the form of our response has been to focus on ways of "interrupting" the process leading to ESL. This means that we need different solutions for different points in the process. The report distinguishes three broad stages and associated strategies. The first stage is what occurs before the student gets to secondary school, and the responses here are seen as "**pre-emptive**". Here, we depict and explain the basis of, one outstanding example of pre school intervention. This is followed by a **preventative** stage, where we concentrate on efforts to inhibit the pressures experienced by those already at risk of ESL in

secondary school. We describe several approaches here, including the difficulty of addressing the school composition effect. The focus is on both (individual or group) student focussed and school wide approaches, looking booth inside and outside the school and classroom. Finally, we consider what we call "**rescue**" attempts, aimed at bringing back in those who have already left school early.

Overall, our feeling is that the seriousness of the issue has neither been properly recognised nor effectively responded to. We find very little reference in the literature to the question of the sustainability of even the more successful interventions. And while we certainly do not lack for examples of apparently successful interventions, there are rarely attempts to "join them up", in more comprehensive programmes.

Within that broad approach, this report has followed three main strategies. The first is to focus mainly on literature that is of high academic quality and based on sound evidence. The second is to combine literatures across two dimensions. One takes an "individual life course/vertical" perspective that sees ESL as not a single event but the culmination of a process. The other recognises that ESL cannot be treated in isolation from other social, economic and political processes. Together, these perspectives explain why remedies that are successful in one place may not work in another place. The third strategy is to focus on linking apparent causes to interventions designed to address them. This involves identifying, and providing evidence of, successful broad *strategies* of intervention as well as details of the *tactics* of particular interventions. Where particular interventions may be seen as exemplary in some way they are elaborated more fully.

Outline of this report

Chapter 1 sets out the official EU definition and benchmark of ESL. It discusses its advantages and disadvantages, along with some possible alternatives.

Chapter 2 contains the main discussion of the causes of ESL. It works through an "All Factors Framework" and examines the evidence around the main factors associated with ESL, focusing especially on their interactions. These factors are Individual; Home and Family; School related; Migrants and ESL; and wider societal factors.

Chapter 3 examines what kinds of problem ESL is and its personal and social consequences.

Chapter 4 sets out some proposed responses to the causal factors identified in Chapter 2. It distinguishes *pre-emptive*, *preventative* and *compensatory* policy approaches.

CHAPTER 1: HOW IS EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING DEFINED AND MEASURED?

Definitions

We gain some perspective on definitions of ESL and their consequences, by comparing the EU definition and measurement of ESL as represented by the EUROSTAT Labour Force Survey (LFS) measure, which was set out above, with other international and national definitions and measurement.

The USA, Canada and the OECD define early school leaving in similar ways, all different from the EU definition. In the USA, early school leavers, "drop outs", are those who have not graduated from High School. This focus has a number of benefits. The single benchmark, attainment of a High School Diploma, covers the whole of the US education system and provides a clear idea of what the outcome of compensatory policy would be: get young people re-enrolled and graduated if and when they drop out. Policy in the US is based on clarity of definition and measurement of the problem**.** However, the US early school leaver numbers have proved hard to shift. At least 30% of young people do not graduate from High School on time in the USA; for black males, around 40% fail to graduate; in 2005 around one quarter of 20 year old males were high school dropouts (Levin *et al, 2007).*

The OECD ESL focus is on 20-24 year olds with education below upper secondary education and is therefore closer to the US and Canada focus: completion of upper secondary education. The EU has a separate benchmark for this: young people (20-24) with Upper Secondary Education. The implications of this for definition, measurement and policy need to be recognised.

The EU definition of ESL is pragmatic because Member States have a range of definitions of ESL which drives their measurement of and policies to address the problem; the EU focus on completion of lower secondary education balances different national preoccupations[2]. It is a

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[2] See the comments of the European Court of Auditors: "the use of varying definitions of ESL within a Member State has not facilitated the targeting of geographic areas for assistance or the measurement of the impact of initiatives. On a wider level, efforts to adopt the Eurostat definition would assist Community efforts in tackling the problem of ESL".

The GHK study (2005, pp. 136-137) presents a range of national definitions. Embedded within them are quite distinct preoccupations:
- Failure to complete upper secondary education (or high school) and not attending further education or training
- Failure to gain qualifications required for participation in higher education
- Failure to complete compulsory schooling
- Failure to gain qualifications at end of compulsory schooling
- Failure to participate in education or training on completion of compulsory schooling
- Failure to gain qualifications required to access to a range of labour market opportunities
- Failure to participate in any form of education and training between the ages of 18-24
- Failure to participate in any form of education and training by 18-24 years olds in the period of four weeks prior to the European Labour Force Survey.

valuable headline indicator which receives further specification and measurement addressed in the 2009 progress report (European Commission, 2009) which breaks down the ESL group in terms of level of education achieved, gender, unemployment and non-national status of early school leavers.

Some shortcomings of the indicator identified in the research literature (GHK, 2005; Psacharopoulos, 2007) are:

- The focus on 18-24 years olds means that it is a retrospective measurement. The US measurement of status and event drop out and the Canadian cohort measurement are more robust and specific. Measurement of who drops out, when and with which level of qualification should be the aim if measurement is to more successfully contribute to policy.

- The EU ESL measure on its own does not tell us about those who have successfully completed lower secondary education and those who have dropped out of schooling at ISCED 0 or 1.

- The numbers of individuals with lower secondary education tells us nothing about the quality of attainment achieved at that level. There is a gap between the EU ESL and Upper Secondary Education indicators: the indicators make it difficult to take account of the range of different education and training offers beyond compulsory schooling which are an extension or development of lower secondary skills.

- The Labour Force Survey focus on a four week period prior to the survey can seriously underestimate the amount of relevant education and training which individuals will have undergone but which will still not mean that they have achieved a qualification higher than ISCED 3c short.

- The definition of what counts as education and training in the EUROSTAT measure is so broad that it tells us very little about the extent to which there has been a meaningful increase the in the level or quality of learning.[3]

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[3] The EUROSTAT definition of relevant education and training beyond lower secondary education 'includes initial education, further education, continuing or further training, training within the company, apprenticeship, on-the-job training, seminars, distance learning, evening classes, self-learning etc. It includes also courses followed for general interests and may cover all forms of education and training as language, data processing, management, art/culture, and health/medicine courses' (EUROSTAT, 2005).

CHAPTER 2:   WHO ARE THE ESLers AND WHY DO THEY LEAVE SCHOOL EARLY?

This chapter describes the ESLers and presents the key factors associated with ESL. It makes use of an "All Factors Framework" to:

- indicate who the ESLers are, how they have been defined, and what the consequences for understanding the problem, and addressing it are

- indicate the major factors associated with, and predictive of, ESL

- highlight the different levels where these factors are found.

2.1. Who are the ESLers? Individual factors

ESLers are more likely to:

- come from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, such as workless households or households which would be described as the working poor, with insecure conditions of employment

- be male rather than female; In the EU, 16.9% of boys are early school leavers compared to 12.7% of girls. In all countries with the exception of Bulgaria and Romania, boys are significantly more likely to be early school leavers than girls. At the same time, reductions in rates of ESL have been faster for girls than for boys

- come from vulnerable groups, such as the "Looked After", the disabled, those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), teenage mothers and those with physical and mental health problems

- have had a history of disengagement from school, for instance of absence, truancy, expulsion

- to have achieved poorly in school

- to come from minority or migrant backgrounds. Minority ethnic and/or migrant groups are seen as over-represented within early school leavers in the Netherlands, Austria, Norway, Spain and England[4]

- to have experienced high rates of mobility—both residential mobility and school mobility

- to be concentrated in particular areas; The clustering together of young people from poor families, in communities with particular patterns of occupation, employment and unemployment, of migrant and minority populations, with low community levels of educational achievement, produces a form of class and ethnic "ghettoisation" with increased risks of and consequences for ESL (EGREES, 2005).

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[4] Kendall and Kinder, 2005

This report does not suggest that ESL is "caused" by these kinds of factor. Many ESLs have none of these characteristics. Many young people with these kinds of characteristics also successfully complete schooling.

2.2   How have they been classified?

ESLers by no means constitute a homogeneous group. The only thing they "objectively" have in common is their age group and the fact that they have left school early. Despite this, much of the literature tends to impose a broadly common identity on ESLers. This is typically, at least implicitly, a negative identity. They have "failed" to do what is expected—and increasingly, required—of them. They are assumed to be "at risk".

Referring to them as "at risk" youth shifts the focus to the young people themselves. If they were seen instead as "*marginalised* youth", the nature of the problem and who "caused" it would appear rather different. At the same time, the responsibility for addressing it and the appropriate means of addressing it are changed as well (Te Riele, 2006). While the same factors may characterise a majority of ESLers, representing the whole problem of ESL as one of individual vulnerability may come to frame policy responses in unhelpful ways. This is evident from other ways of classifying ESLers.

Classification based on the 'actual working and schooling careers after leaving school' (Dekkers and Driesen, 1997)
- successful unschooled manual worker
- school returner
- money earner
- voluntary unemployed
- enforced unemployed

Classification based on the basis of individual characteristics (Janosz, 1994)
- maladjusted, who have poor grades and who behave poorly at school
- underachievers, who just have poor grades
- disengaged, who perform better than the maladjusted and the   underachievers, but simply do not like school
- quiets, who, other than having slightly lower grades, resemble graduates more than dropouts.

Classification based on young people's reasons for leaving school early (Dwyer & PRC, 1996)
- positive leaver, making a positive career choice with employment or further training
- opportune leaver, there is no definite career path, taking the opportunity to change life patterns
- would-be leaver, does not leave but reluctant to stay
- circumstantial leaver, forced to leave for non-educational reasons
- discouraged leaver, interest and performance in education is low
- alienated leaver, discouraged and non-compatible with school life.

2.3   How do definitions matter?

How we categorise ESLers will have an effect on the kinds of remedy we propose for ESL. The first classification is concerned with the labour market consequences of ESL. It would seek remedies in changing the nature of the link between school experience and achievement and employment. The second is concerned more with psychological states that may predispose young people to leave school early. Remedies might involve early identification of these problems, and interventions to "correct" them. The third is based on the relationships between school experience and labour market opportunities. Remedies might involve creating alternative links, or new pathways, between the two stages, for instance.

These classifications indicate the complexity of the category ESL. For instance, leaving school early is not necessarily a negative, or a passive, a regretted, or a forced, decision (though it is important to recognise that in many cases, the idea that a conscious decision is either possible or made, may be mistaken). While there is a clear association between leaving school early and unemployment, not all ESLers move into unemployment. Indeed, in some cases early leaving is motivated by the possibility of gaining employment.

2.4   The All Factors Framework

The findings of a series of research studies analysed in the production of this report (Ferguson, et al, 2005; GHK, 2005; Kendall and Kinder, 2005; Walther and Pohl, 2005; ReStart, 2007; Raymond, 2008) have been combined to generate an All-Factors Framework, which locates the range of factors which increase the risk of ESL within five levels:

- Family and Community
- Schooling
- Pupil and Peers
- The Education System
- Employment and Training

It contains 43 major factor categories, with 190 sub categories, giving some indication of the breadth of the field. While this is crucial to indicate the breadth of the issues, it is only practically helpful when we examine the *interactions* between the parts listed. This is the main agenda of this report. Only by understanding those interactions will we have a better idea of how policies might mitigate the inherited burden of social disadvantage at individual, family, school and community levels.

How are Family and Community elements associated with ESL?

These comprise:

- Family and household level variables, such as: single-parent family, parents with a low level of education, large family size, other dropouts in the family, household stress; Household mobility; family process/dynamics; limited social support for remaining in school; home-school culture conflict; assumption of adult roles (for example, minding younger children, high levels of employment or pregnancy/childrearing).

- Wider social issues, at the level of the society and community rather than at the level of the family. These include such factors as low socio-economic status/social class; minority group status; male gender; and some community characteristics

High risks of ESL are associated with high levels of economic inequality

In the EU, 10% of children live in families which are below the poverty threshold (EGREES, 2005). In Canada, Ferguson et al (2005) found that low levels of family income were a decisive factor with 'close to 50% of the sample(of ESLers) living with under $30,000 per year and nearly 60% living below the $40,000 cut off point (Ferguson et al, 2005, p. 17). Absolute poverty influences the ways in which parents can support their children; relative poverty influences the social distances, status of employment types and sense of well being of young people and their families. High levels of ESL are strongly correlated with high social inequality (as measured by the Gini- coefficient) (Walther and Pohl, 2005: 9).

For families and communities, poverty both relative and absolute, is linked with a higher likelihood of risky lifestyles involving substance abuse and criminality, mental and physical health problems, precarious living arrangements including homelessness. For particular minority groups, physical and cultural segregation provides the most visible demonstration of how economic and social inequality produces "vicious circles of deprivation" (Walther and Pohl, 2005, p. 10). The clustering together of young people from poor families, in communities with particular patterns of occupation, employment and unemployment, of migrant and minority populations, with low community levels of educational achievement, produces a form of class and ethnic "ghettoisation" with increased risks of and consequences for ESL (EGREES, 2005).

Patterns of ESL mirror the patterns of economic and social inequality that are reproduced from generation to generation. They underlie the perception of early school leavers as disaffected, alienated and resistant youth (Pemberton, 2008). Disaffection, alienation and resistance are linked and produced over long periods of time in conditions of persistent economic and social inequality.

For young people who are at risk of ESL, their family constitutes both a risk and a potential protective factor (Ferguson et al, 2005). Where young people are growing up in circumstances of family conflict, weak family ties and separation, the risk of ESL is increased (GHK, 2005). There is nothing predetermined in this, but young people with disrupted upbringing, moves between homes and schools, are more likely to be disengaged from schooling and lack support from strong parental engagement with their children, with schools and with teachers.

For some early school leavers, the fact of their early school leaving is only one of the features of their lives that brings them to the attention of public authorities. Individual, family and community experience of being targeted and means tested, of perceived stigmatisation, of being treated as a case, of demeaning treatment, of being coerced, are not conducive to trust in public institutions including schools. The ways in which social problems are addressed by public institutions and agencies can be counter-productive and actually increase the risk of ESL. ESL can be caused by a withdrawal from public institutions and their processes in general rather than by a rejection of education and training itself (Walther and Pohl, 2005).

What Effects do Parents have on Early School Leaving?

The All Factors Framework shows that the biggest difference between ESLers and other young people is the level of parental education, though some of this may be explained by increasing educational opportunities in many countries (GHK). This relationship is especially marked in the case of girls; mothers' level of education had greater effects on girls than on boys (ibid). In addition, ESLers' parents were more likely to be unemployed, and when they were employed, to be much more likely to be involved in manual rather than intellectual work. However, the relative advantage of having more educated parents varies significantly across countries. It is strongest in the Eastern European countries (except Slovenia) and smallest in Sweden and Finland (Ianelli, 2004).

Parenting practices represent a key link between home and family circumstances and early school leaving. The consistent findings of research[5] are that dropouts come more often from families characterized by:

- a lack of supervision, a permissive parenting style
- leaving their offspring to make more decisions themselves
- poor aspirations regarding their children's schooling
- less engagement with their children's schooling
- negative reactions to school underachievement
- low level of verbal interaction between mothers and children,

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[5] Astone and McLanahan, 1991; Ekstrom *et al.,* 1986; Rumberger, 1983; Rumberger *et al.,* 1990; Hess and Holloway, 1985.

Though parental socio-economic status is clearly an important factor, parental aspirations and expectations for their children's education appear to be even more influential (Fan and Chen 2001). This appears to hold almost irrespective of children's actual academic performance and engagement in school (Looker and Thiessen, 2006). These expectations exert a strong independent effect on educational trajectories after controlling for marks and parental SES (Crosnoe, Mistry and Elder, 2002). However, the evidence is not wholly consistent. Alexander, Entwistle, and Horsey, (1997) found that neither the prevalence of parents reading to their children nor children's readiness to confide in their parents regarding school had a significant effect on graduation rates. However, young people who did confide in their parents at age 16, and whose parents were involved in school organizations, were more likely to graduate. Those who reported strict discipline in the household were significantly more likely to graduate from high school; for females, this mitigated the effect of earlier low levels of achievement.

Some authorities have suggested that the evidence in this area is strong enough to justify processes of screening and targeting young people at most risk from these factors. On the basis of a finding that the difference between students who *unexpectedly* failed to complete high school in Quebec, and those who expectedly either completed or failed to complete, was almost entirely accounted for by three factors:

- Having a mother that did not finish high school
- Being from a single-parent family in early childhood
- Repeating a grade in primary school.

The authors concluded that "having experienced all three factors practically guaranteed not finishing high school, thus defining a crystal clear target group for policy". They suggest that:

> Without screening (for attention-related difficulties), intervention (such as helping parents better understand supervision during adolescence), and follow-up, individuals facing such cumulative risk are most unlikely to graduate (Pagani et al 2008, 175-6).

The paradox of parental involvement

Such evidence could provide a solid basis for interventions with parents of potential ESLers, for instance in the form of parent education programmes designed to improve their understanding of how best they might help their children stay in school. However, it is necessary to be cautious about the conclusions that can be drawn from the literature on the relationship between parents and schools. While parental involvement is often presented as a key positive factor, and one that is negatively related with the likelihood of ESL, it is important to recognise the nature of the model of parental involvement on which such claims are typically based.

The apparent paradox of "parental involvement" may come from the fact that it does not perform the same role in all schools and for all parents. There are significant and relevant differences between what working class and middle class parents (usually mothers) understand by parental involvement in schools. While middle class parents assume that the schooling of their children is a shared responsibility, working class parents tend to assume that it is the school's responsibility. The same phrases, "contacting the school", "checking homework", "helping with homework" and "talking to teachers" appear to have different meanings for (middle class and working class) parents' (Lareau, 1996:59; see also Lawson, 2003:123).

Young people's experience of schooling is in part a reflection of individual, family and community expectations of schooling**.** For some young people, their disengagement from schooling would be supported and confirmed by attitudes and experiences in the family and local community. Families and communities can have contradictory social, behavioural and cultural expectations to those of the school. This contributes to situations where absence and truancy are condoned, where young people are encouraged to withdraw from school to help with home, family and employment.

2.5. What are the relationships between experience of schools and ESL?

While there is a clear relationship between family socio-economic status and the risk of ESL, (a) not all young people from disadvantaged backgrounds leave school early, and (b) the mechanisms linking various kinds of disadvantage to ESL are not clearly recognised. While there are multiple possibilities—poor parents; unsupportive communities; poor health; need for children to work outside the home—their individual and combined effects on eventual ESL are not clearly known. Establishing the relative importance of these factors, and the nature of these causal links and mechanisms, is a crucial step towards enabling policy makers to formulate evidence-based, and possibly targeted, pre-emptive measures. One major influence is school-based factors; the evidence suggests very clearly that ESL is a consequence of the *interaction* between home/family/community based factors and school based factors.

 The effect of schools starts very early

The processes leading to school dropout are often established early in the school career. Both males and females, but especially males, were handicapped by starting school with poor grades. In addition, maternal education, family poverty and aggressive behaviour during first grade are related to graduation 12 years later, either directly or indirectly' (Alexander, Entwistle, and Horsey, 1997: 110).

Several longitudinal studies have shown that ESL is the culmination of a very long process that starts for many before they go to school. One study of Black first-graders from an urban community in USA who were deemed "at-risk of dropping out" found that by the time they reached graduation age 57% of the males and 45% of the females had dropped out of school

(Ensminger and Slusarcick, 1992). The exceptions were students who achieved A's or B's, as opposed to C's and D's, in the first grade. This effect was more pronounced for males than for females, though only little more than 50% of males in this category graduated. Resilient children - those who were identified as living in poverty, but had achieved A's or B's in first grade – were much more likely to graduate. These individuals were thought of as "especially competent". By contrast, students living in poverty with poor first-grade academic results had very low graduation rates. Children's behaviour during the first grade was also an important predictive factor: those considered as aggressive during the first grade were less likely to graduate 12 years later.

Another major longitudinal study, (Alexander et al, 1993; 1997, 2001), found that about 60% of children in lower SES families drop out of school versus 40% overall and 15% of those in higher SES families. The strongest association with ESL was family socioeconomic level. Alexander et al suggests that this association was so strong that 'the dropout problem in Baltimore, at its core, is a problem of economic and social disadvantage'. Other factors of the kind that appear in the AFF, such as family structure, mother's age, family stress, and maternal employment were also associated with the risk of dropout. Entwistle and Hayduk (1988) also found that later school performance was related to early influences of parents (and also of teachers), even when controlling for cognitive ability. They found that parents' estimates of their children's academic ability in the third grade were related to children's academic outcomes four and nine years later.

In a longitudinal study that followed children from birth to age 19, Jimerson et al (2000) confirmed the importance of early family and school experiences for the likelihood of later drop out. They also point out that while school attendance, problem behaviour, and academic achievement may identify likely dropouts, by the time these effects occur, it is too late to do very much about them. They therefore recommend assessment programmes before age 5, even if they run the risk of over identifying those at risk of later dropout.

All these findings suggest that patterns of academic performance are established early and that the social context within the family and the classroom are important in the establishment and maintenance of these patterns. However, without that support, the risk of dropout increases. "Recovery from a shaky beginning at school is always possible; but by the time dropout-prone youths get to high school, the battle for many effectively has been lost. How does one "reengage" children who exit the primary grades plagued by self-doubt, alienated from things academic, over-age for grade, prone to "problem behaviours", and with weak academic skills?" (Alexander et al: 2001).

Do different school conditions make a difference to ESL?

There are few references in these studies to the quality of the school experience. This is significant, especially in light of the evidence that poor quality Early Childhood Education (ECE) is worse than none (see NESSE/Penn 2009). Finn et al. found that three years or more of attending small classes (in primary school) affected their graduation rates "by about 67% for three years and more than doubling the odds for four years" (Finn et al, 1997,220). However, these effects were not explained by improvement in academic performance, even if it was carried through later grades. This is taken as evidence of changes in students' attitudes and motivation, pro- or anti-social behaviour, and learning behaviour. The effect of early experiences on staying on at school is social and behavioural, rather than merely cognitive. This has very important implications for designers of policies aimed at attenuating ESL; it is not just a matter of cognitive performance, but of what will be referred to below as "engagement" with school.

How does school organisation affect ESL? Some school organisation effects on ESL

As noted above, ESL is a product of the *interaction* between home/community/family factors and school factors. Research on school composition, school organisation and school culture shows how all of them are related to ESL.

The importance of the school composition effect. It refers to the ways that the characteristics of the student body as a whole, especially its social class make-up, affect its processes and influence the achievement of its students, even after taking into account individual students' socio-economic status (SES). Going to a predominantly low SES school will depress students' average scores, while going to a high SES school will tend to raise them. The effect is that a young person -with the same mix of dis/advantages and the same history of school achievement- will leave one school early but would not leave another school early. This effect is widely noted and recognised. It is statistically significant in every country in PISA (Willms, 2006:52).

This has an important effect on how we view ESL and possible remedies. If it is limited, it is schools that should be held accountable if it remains high. In so far as the compositional effect is the crucial factor in ESL, it limits how far it might be possible to reduce ESL through school improvement (Thrupp et al, 2002:484). Different kinds of remedy are called for, such as policies directed at changing the social class make up of schools. This is discussed in the next chapter.

Knowing how the school composition effect works may be another way of finding effective ways to address it. Disadvantages of attending low SES schools derive in part from organisation and management processes. They have more discipline problems than high SES schools, and many more very difficult guidance or discipline cases. They experience more non-teaching related problems, and have less time to spend on planning and monitoring

performance. Fundamentally, they have less time available for actually teaching, at the same time as they encounter much less compliant and less able students (ibid: 498).

Peer effects also play a part in young people leaving school early. In low SES schools, students may actively try to subvert the school, and disparage any students who seek to succeed in the school's terms (Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993:180). On the other hand, peer interaction around shared hobbies, books and out-of-class activities, may raise overall academic performance (ibid:179).

School size has been found to have an effect on ESL, above and beyond its relationship with the quality of relationships among school members (Lee and Burkam, 2003:385)

Teacher support and guidance, and students' trust in their teachers reduce the likelihood of students' dropping out of school early. This is especially the case for socially at risk students who enter high school with low educational expectations and a history of school-related problems. "When adolescents trust their teachers and informally receive guidance from teachers, they are more likely to persist through graduation...those who benefit most are students most at risk of dropping out of high school…" (Croniger&Lee, 2001). The same authors point also to the importance of the neighbourhood effect of schools, which seems closely related to the compositional effect. They point out that the environments where young people live can overwhelm not only them but the teachers they rely on (Ibid: 572).

The student "disengagement" phenomenon and its association with ESL

One key medium through which these compositional effects may become 'factors leading to ESL' appears to be their effect on young people's "engagement" with school. This shifts the focus from "structural characteristics" such as SES or race to ESL 'as a process of disengagement from school, perhaps for either social or academic reasons" (Rumberger, 1987:111), which is consistent with the 'ESL as process' view outlined above. So, a third response to these issues involves developing means of enhancing and improving levels of student engagement.

In a review of literature on disengagement, Fredricks et al (2004) start from the possibility that engagement may help to protect individuals from dropping out of school, and that it is crucial to know how this works if we are to be able to design effective interventions aimed at reducing ESL. For instance, is it more important to change student–teacher relations or to change academic tasks? Or is it equally important to deal with both?

Among the key elements mentioned in these literatures is that dropouts:

- do less homework
- exert less effort in school
- participate less in school activities
- have more discipline problems at school
- show low behavioural engagement
- have social difficulties and negative attitudes towards school
- are more likely to truant, and to be suspended

In addition, we need to bear in mind the discussions earlier in this report on the importance of early experience of home and school for potential dropouts.

Table 2.1 (next page) provides a summary of factors identified in British and Canadian research as being associated with disengagement from school.

2.6. The effects of wider societal and education system-related factors on ESL

One final set of causal questions asks how far and in what ways the nature of education systems themselves might be associated with ESL. It is based on the assumptions (a) that neither problems nor solutions are found only at "ground level", but are also the result of factors taking place at other levels of the system, and (b) that the solutions to "immediate" problems may be found only at other levels, especially if it can be demonstrated that they are the origin of those problems.

Each young person's educational career is framed by schooling opportunities and choices that differ cross-nationally as the result of educational policy decisions made at the national level. These are themselves framed by both economic and structural conditions such as labour markets and international trade and competitiveness, and cultural and social differences within and between countries. While variation between countries does constitute a major difficulty, some broad generalisations are possible, such as the finding that comprehensive secondary school systems seem to produce better overall academic results that those that select for secondary education (EC 2006).

Key "education governance" factors linked to ESL include:

- the length of compulsory education
- pupil-teacher ratio
- class size
- comprehensive versus differentiated compulsory education
- post-compulsory educational programmes
- repetition of class
- public (and private) expenditure on education and the quality and efficiency of the spending (GHK)

Table 2.1 Factors in Disengagement

School Factors	Curriculum Factors	Family factors	Individual Factors
Teachers lack skills to work with disengaged students	Perceived irrelevance of curriculum	Education not valued – limited support to remain in school	Issues with self-esteem, confidence, social skills, coping skills and resilience
Lack of training opportunities for teachers	Prescribed academic curriculum	Absence condoned by parents	Negative experience of school including discrimination, academic failure and transfers to lower level of education
Lack of educational resources and support staff	Lock in to inappropriate vocational/academic courses	Household problems, processes and dynamics	Relationships with peers: • Outsider/loner/bullying
School admission policies	Reduction in pastoral time as a result of curriculum pressure	Contradictory social, behavioural and cultural expectations	• Friends beyond school attracting out of school • Alpha female/male – high degree of autonomy, behaviour problems and actively influencing others' disengagement
Lack of supportive pastoral systems	Inappropriate pedagogy – focus on curriculum content rather than learners	Expectations of assumption of adult roles and caring responsibilities	
Insufficient career advice and guidance	Incompatible learner and school norms		• Colluder/disputant – non-attendance influenced by truanting peers
Teacher/pupil relationships	Lack of alternative education provision with formalised accreditation		Lack of academic ability, special educational needs and difficulties in coping with traditional assessment procedures
Low status of vocational education			Boredom, alienation, discouragement, Health problems including mental, health problems leading to absence and substance misuse

Adapted from Ferguson et al, 2005, Kendall and Kinder, 2005 and ReStart, 2007

Outside formal schooling, the availability of paying jobs at various levels, the range of labour market opportunities and their expectations and the availability of good quality training are all factors that shape trajectories and influence decisions towards ESL. The point has also been made that ESL does not necessarily lead to unemployment. This is not due so much to the personal qualities of the ESLers as to the structure of opportunities facing them when they leave school. This varies greatly across the EU, depending on the combination of how vocationally specific schools are, and employment protection legislation (Wolbers, 2007). However, van Alphen (2008) suggests that it is labour market interventions, rather than education system differences that account for the cross-national variation in the likelihood of ESLers being unemployed.

2.7 What are the relationships between ESL and Migration?

The question of early school leaving and migration is especially complex since neither "migrants" nor "ESLers" are homogeneous and stable categories. European research has shown the diversity of the relationship between migration and early school leaving. However, research shows that policies to reduce early school leaving for "local" students can be effective for migrant young people too. Moreover, targeted approaches for migrant groups can draw upon findings about the specificities of their needs and how these can be successfully addressed (NESSE/Heckmann, 2008).

Migrant and ethnic status interacts with local cultures and customs, socio-economic status and gender in complex and different ways across Europe (Walther and Pohl 2006). In the UK for example, it is white working class British boys who are most likely to leave school with low levels of qualification (Palmer et al, 2007)[6].

In the EU as a whole, 30.1% of non-nationals are early school leavers compared to 13% of nationals (European Commission, 2009). However, the latest data on early school leaving and migrant young people shows the diversity of situations in the EU (see Table 2.2 on the following page).

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[6] The Palmer et al (2007) study found that 33% of poor white boys failed to successfully complete lower secondary education, with the equivalent figure for poor white British girls 23%; for poor boys from ethnic minorities the figure was 17% and the equivalent girls' figure was 12%.

Table 2.2: Percentage of Early School Leavers with Migrant Backgrounds, 2006

	ESL with Non-national Backgrounds	ESL % 2007
Poland	3.1*	5.0
United Kingdom	11.3	13.0
Hungary	12.8	10.9
Slovenia	12.8	4.3
Romania	13.1*	19.2
Bulgaria	13.2	16.6
Denmark	17.8*	12.4
Czech Republic	19.5	5.5
Estonia	20.4*	14.3
Luxembourg	21.0	15.1
Netherlands	22.0	12.0
Sweden	22.1	12.0
France	26.6	12.7
Finland	26.7*	7.9
Cyprus	28.0	13.6
Austria	28.3	10.9
Belgium	30.0	12.3
Germany	30.3	12.7
Spain	44.3	31.0
Malta	44.8*	37.6
Greece	45.0	14.7
Italy	49.6	19.3
Portugal	51.2	36.3
Ireland	Missing Data	11.5
Latvia	Missing Data	16.0
Lithuania	Missing Data	8.7
Slovakia	Missing Data	7.2

Note* = limited reliability because of low number of non-nationals

(Data Source: European Commission, 2009, p. ???)

Migrant populations are diverse and they present different challenges in terms of whether they are:

- racially, ethnically and culturally distinct from the indigenous population and subject to forms of discrimination

- high/low skilled and bringing particular kinds of expectations of the host community

- rich or poor in the social/cultural capital which is meaningful in the new context

- newly arrived with complex language and cultural needs

- second and third generation migrants with established patterns of need and aspiration

- illegal migrants with complex forms of insecurity and instability

- refugees and Asylum seekers, potentially bearing complex heath and welfare needs

- citizens from former colonies with a history of social and cultural engagement with their new context

Table 3.3. Factors of ESL for Minority Groups

Type of Minority	Factors of ESL
New Immigrant workers	- Precarious residence status - Precarious work arrangements - Unprepared education system - Language problems
2nd/3rd Generation Immigrant Workers	- Increased risk of ESL and unemployment - Low Socio-economic Status - Sub-cultural coping strategies
Citizens from former Colonies	- Low socioeconomic status - Increased risk of ESL and unemployment
Refugees/Asylum seekers	- Precarious/illegal residence status - Devaluation of previous qualifications - Language problems
Traditional Ethnic minorities (especially Roma)	- Low socioeconomic status - Prejudice, discrimination and segregation - Low school attendance - High unemployment in all age groups - Language problems

Adapted from Walther and Pohl, 2005, p. 46.

Key Factors in the relationship between ESL and Migration

In broad terms, particular kinds of migrant categories can be said to be more "at risk" with regard to the likelihood of becoming an early school leaver. While it is important for policy to be built on the clarification of the range of issues and their possible impact for particular categories of migrant, the thrust of the All Factors Framework approach is that factors associated with family background are found even more strongly in the case of migrant families. For example, in families where both parents are working long hours with low pay, difficulties at school and young people's difficulties with their peers are likely to generate myriad, though highly diverse, forms of risk of ESL.

In terms of **socio-economic factors**, there is clear evidence that migrants are more likely to be unemployed (or employed in the informal economy), to be in poorly paying jobs, and generally to enjoy lower standards of living than those brought up in the host countries. This broader socio-economic context can also have a kind of "multiplier effect" in extending the ways in which migrant status produces additional risk factors.

The broad category of **cultural factors** that are unique to migrant children can affect the value accorded to education in both positive and negative ways. They can explain the educational success of some migrant young people, as well as the likelihood of others leaving early. Broad cultural factors are difficult to address by specific policy programmes particularly where these have a short-term policy horizon. However, such factors as

language learning and adaptation of schools to the cultural specificities of migrant young people are clearly conducive to policy intervention.

Risk of and protection from early school leaving for migrant young people is closely associated with a complex set of **home factors**. The GHK (2005) researchers found that dropping out of school can be related to incidents at home such as abuse, threats of arranged marriages and bereavement. Some non-attenders indicated that their parents had encouraged or condoned truancy. Families of young men in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in a large UK northern town, for example, tolerated their not attending school (GHK (2005, 86). For some migrant groups, the home and community context provides significant factors which pull young people out of school and away from higher expectations and this can be highly gender specific (Britton et al, 2002; Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002).

Long-standing **systemic and school practices** can produce misunderstanding and conflict with migrant young people, their families and their communities**.** There is some evidence of school and teachers being unwilling to engage with the educational practices and expectations of migrants. In Canada, Ferguson et al (2005), found significant differences in expectation of children between schools and their families, under- or non-recognition of prior educational achievement and practices of inappropriate age-grade placement (Ferguson et al, 2005). Practices of segregation or targeting, even based on something as amenable to policy intervention as language instruction, may be seen as forms of stigmatization. And this in turn can lead to a lowering of expectations, outcomes and aspirations that feeds into a culture of early school leaving.

Wider societal issues arise as language and cultural factors interact with unstable residency and housing conditions, employment, poverty and the characteristics of schools systems and individual schools to create powerful combinations of multiple-disadvantage. The broader social context that produces these multiple risks for migrant young people cannot be divorced from consideration of patterns of prejudice, discrimination and segregation which are associated with historical patterns of racism. Education *can,* though, challenge the ways in which prejudice, discrimination and segregation in terms of race, gender and class are reproduced through both policy and the experience of school.

CHAPTER 3: CONSEQUENCES OF EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

3.1   What Kind of Problem is ESL, and Who For?

 It is useful to break this question into two parts, what ESL is a problem *of*, and who it is a problem *for*. These questions are frequently elided, and this creates confusion. In terms of the first question, the very designation "early", meaning premature, immediately places it within an assumed "normal" life course. It implies a failure to make a key transition properly. In fact, it is the wider circumstances of the "failed" transition that render it socially as well as individually problematic. Here, we can see the value of combining seeing ESL as part of the life course -as the culmination of a series of processes rather than as a single event- with the idea of "transition regime", the political, social and economic conditions in which individual life courses are followed.

These ideas are nicely graphically represented by Walther and Pohl:
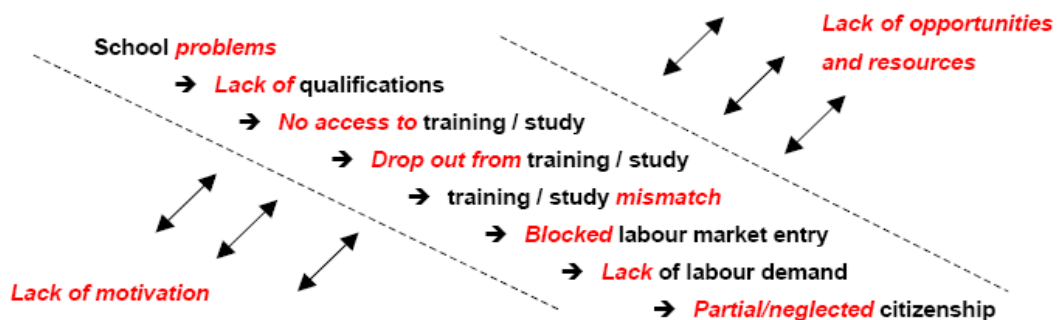
Figure 4. 1: Thwarted Trajectories (from Walther and Pohl, 2005, p. 35.

This shows clearly how ESL is shaped by, and a consequence of, combinations of personal experiences and societal conditions -especially in this case, labour market conditions- and the opportunities, resources and motivations that are assembled. In the case of ESL, the wider conditions cause blocked pathways and partial, thwarted and neglected transitions. It is clear in this representation that ESL is a problem *for* the young people involved, and that must always be borne in mind, especially given the tendency to see the young people themselves *as* the problem.

3.2   Consequences of ESL

Individual consequences

Some of the consequences of ESL as far as the young people themselves are concerned are:

- Young people that leave school early are more likely to be unemployed as those that complete their education.

- They are more likely to be in blue collar jobs with less employment security and more part-time work

- Pregnancy, crime, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide have been found to be significantly higher among early school leavers. Most of these issues are also found to be causes of early school leaving.

- Early school leavers are more likely than other citizens to draw on welfare and other social programs throughout their lives

- Early school leavers have a shorter life expectancy

- They are less likely to be 'active citizens'

- ESL is associated with a much lower propensity to become involved in lifelong learning.
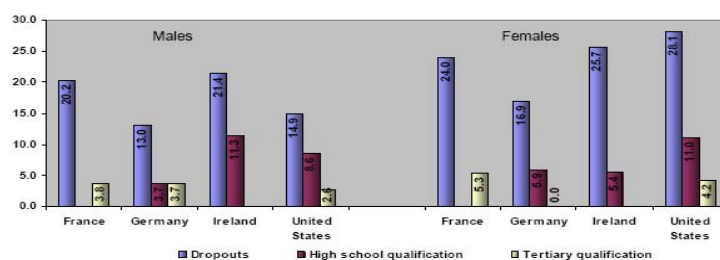
(European Youth Forum 2007, GHK)

In financial terms, it has been calculated that the additional lifetime income for a student who stayed at school for an extra year was more than €70.000 (European Youth Forum, 2007).

Unemployment

Figure 4.2: Unemployment rates 5 years after leaving initial education by educational attainment and gender

Source: OECD, 1998

The effects of ESL are greater in some countries than others. But in general it might be concluded that ESLers earn less than the non-ESL (GHK, 2005:106). The clear general view is that ESL strongly curtails labour market opportunities. However, we need to ask how far this clear disadvantage is due to poor academic skills, irrespective of school completion

status. Evidence based on a major longitudinal study (Caspi et al 1998) of adolescent predictors of adult unemployment found that such predictors (roughly similar to personal and family components of the AFF) started to effect labour market outcomes well before they entered the workforce. Moreover, "…these effects remained significant after controlling for the duration of education and educational attainment" (Caspi et al, 1998: 424). This suggests that the factors affecting ESL also have an independent direct effect on labour market behaviours and outcomes, and not just because they lead to early leaving.

Finally, it is important to register that ESL could *benefit* some young people, to say nothing of the schools they attend. "Some students are not able or willing to get anything out of school; others choose other alternatives over going to school, alternatives that in some cases can be more fulfilling and rewarding. And some students who remain in school can be very disruptive to those students who want to be there and to learn" (Rumberger, 1987:112).

Social and macroeconomic consequences

ESL also carries very high costs for national economies. One calculation based the assumption that ESL have 6% lower productivity than qualified leavers, and using the 2005 figure of 23% unqualified leavers, suggests that ESL cost the European economy a productivity loss of 1.4% (European Commission, 2006, Staff Working Paper).

In an early but very influential study of the effects of school dropout in the US, Levin (1972:10) identified seven social consequences of the failure to complete high school:

- forgone national income
- forgone tax revenues for the support of government services
- increased demand for social services
- increased crime
- reduced political participation
- reduced intergenerational mobility and
- poorer levels of health.

An American study estimated that each new high school graduate would generate more than $200,000 in government savings, and that cutting the dropout rate in half from a single cohort of dropouts would generate more than $45 billion in savings to society at large (Belfield & Levin, 2007).

ESL also generates major social costs. It has been estimated that high school dropouts in the US having a life expectancy that is 9.2 years shorter than high school graduates. They also have higher rates of cardiovascular illnesses, diabetes and other ailments. While the very different costs of health and social care in the USA make accurate calculations of the financial consequences of these problems very difficult, the calculation that health-related losses for the estimated 600,000 high school dropouts in the US amounted to nearly $100,000 per student gives real pause for thought about the costs of ESL in Europe.

Combining these costs from the US (including income tax losses, increased demand for health-care and public assistance, and higher rates of crime and delinquency), we obtain a global estimate for the average gross cost over the life time of one 18-year-old who does not complete high school of approximately $450,000 (or 350,000 €)[7]. 2009 research[8] shows that, in Canada, the cost of early school leaving is estimated to be more than $37.1 billion per year.

In the short-term, ESL can be associated with immediate unemployment, precarious and low-paid jobs and difficulties in gaining a place in vocational training *(Wößmann and Schütz, 2006*).

In the medium-term, ESL is strongly associated with 'social' costs (social breakdown, increased demand on the health system, and lower social cohesion) and 'economic' costs (lower productivity, lower tax revenues and higher welfare payments) *(SWP European Commission, 2008b; Psacharopoulos, 2007)*.

In the long-term, ESL constitutes a tremendous waste of potential for social and economic development.

As a result of demographic change in Europe, "young people are becoming a rare and yet undervalued resource" (CEC, 2005). From 2000 European population enters "negative momentum", with the likely consequence that by 2065 the 'support ratio' (working age to post-65) would shift from around 4:1 to around 2:1 *(Lutz et al 2003).*

One consequence of this may be that availability of employment may increase for ESLers, but they may not be equipped to take it up.

Against this, it should not be forgotten that education generates wider social benefits in terms of crime reduction or higher civic participation. It is suggested that this occurs "because it mainly improves the non-cognitive abilities of individuals for example motivation and discipline" (EC 2008, 64).

ESL also perpetuates its own cycle of failure, as under-educated parents continue to produce children who we know will themselves be at greater risk of ESL. ESL, when associated with an extended period of inactivity and disengagement from education and training and the labour market, amounts to a wasted opportunity for society to invest in its own future.

ESL as part of a wasted opportunity for individuals and society is clearly central to the significance of early school leaving as a failure of schooling, the labour market and social policy more generally. Given the sums of money which societies give to education and social policies, outcomes which produce disengagement and disadvantage can clearly be termed failures of investment and as both school and societal failures. It is clearly significant too because of what it represents as a sign of societies' failure to look after their most disadvantaged (European Commission, 2008).

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[7] European Commission, 2006.

[8] http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/LessonsInLearning/49-02_04_09E.pdf

CHAPTER 4: SOME POSSIBLE RESPONSES

What forms of intervention might be effective?

Based on the account given in Chapters 2 and 3, key factors in tackling ESL are taking into account both individual and institutional factors, addressing academic and social behaviour and recognising the effects of students' school careers. One effective way of approaching these issues is to recognise that ESL can be seen as a result of a *cumulative* process in many cases. This means that a valuable strategic response may lie in designing policies to *interrupt* the processes that could culminate in ESL**.** This chapter looks at three key stages in that strategy: *pre-emption*, *prevention* and *rescue*.

4.1 Pre-emptive Interventions

We have already discussed the studies that identify early predictors of ESL. Pre-emptive support and remedial responses for keeping children in school should take these studies as a guide.

An Example of Successful Pre-Emption

One example of a successful large scale programme that has developed the findings of research on the effects of early childhood education and experiences with considerable success, not least in reducing levels of high school dropout, is the Chicago Child-Parent Center initiative. This has been extensively evaluated through a series of large-scale longitudinal studies carried out by Reynolds and groups of co-investigators. The evaluations of the programme very largely agree that higher participation in school activities during grades 1-6 increased the odds of completing high school (Barnard, 2004; Reynolds et al, 2004; Rumberger and Lin, 2005).

The children in the study were born in 1980, and entered kindergarten in 1985. More than 80 percent of the children have been followed successfully into adulthood. The evaluators have identified mechanisms through which the effects of participation in preschool intervention come about.

Their major findings were that (a) preschool participation in the federally funded Child-Parent Centres was associated with significantly higher rates of high school completion and lower rates of juvenile delinquency, (b) the cognitive boost at the end of the program and the school support and family support experiences during the intervening years were most responsible for the transmission of long-term effects, and (c) the model that included all five hypotheses of mediation fit the data better than the tested alternatives.

These findings were consistent across a range of analyses. The school support hypothesis, primarily school quality, accounted for the largest share of the mediated effects, especially for juvenile arrest.

The family support, school support, and cognitive advantage hypotheses contributed about equally to high school completion.

These studies have also made it possible to isolate the mechanisms linking early educational experiences and subsequent positive outcomes such as a reduction in ESL. Reynolds et al (2004) emphasise the value of *knowing the mechanism at work.* This delivers three key benefits:

- it increases the generalisability of the findings;

- it points to key elements in the mechanism that enable refinement of the design of the intervention; and

- it increases confidence that the estimated effects are due to participation and not to co-occurring factors

Further, Reynolds et al (2004) point out that as an established school-based program, which is federally financed, Child-Parent Centres shares many features with other government-funded early childhood programs. This means that "findings are thus more likely to be generalisable to existing programs than many previous studies. Like Head Start and state programs, the CPC program provides comprehensive services, emphasizes school readiness, encourages parental involvement, and is administered through existing educational and social organizations" -all of which may be seen as crucial elements in its logic of intervention.

Participation in the preschool program reduced the risk of early school dropout from 29% to 22%, a 24% difference in dropout probabilities. Temple et al (2004) suggest that it is not enrolment in the CPC programme as such that brings about these improvements, but the effects of the early intervention on reducing the need for grade retention and school mobility (two well established correlates of ESL in the USA) and increasing the likelihood of parental involvement in children's education.

The Child-Parent Centres (CPC) are established through a large-scale programme that provides inner-city children the opportunity to participate in extended intervention from preschool to Grade 3. The CPC programme enrols students in pre-school, kindergarten, and in the primary grades through Grade 3 for a total of up to 6 years of intervention. The programme at each centre is coordinated by the Head teacher, the Parent Resource Teacher and a School-Community representative.

To promote continuity, the programme sites are in wings of the elementary school or in separate buildings across the street. Unlike with most other early childhood interventions, the Parent Resource Teachers implement a comprehensive parent involvement component in a centre-located parent resource room. Activities include parent education and training, social support activities for parents, classroom volunteering, assisting classroom teachers in reading groups and attending field trips. The School-Community representative conducts outreach activities (i.e., resource mobilization) for families as well as home visits. In the child-education component, staff-to-child ratios are 1 to 8.5 in preschool and 1 to 12 in kindergarten through Grade 3. The instructional activities are diverse but generally structured around the development of spoken and written language using small- and large-group activities.

(Reynolds et.al, 2004, pp.34-35)

4.2. What kinds of Preventative Interventions have been attempted?

However, pre-emption is not sufficient to overcome the problem of later ESL. This is certainly the case in the short to medium term, where the time for pre-emptive interventions is limited. And it seems likely that for governments it is more difficult to 'sell' policies whose benefits will not be fully felt for at least a decade. This means that interventions at the level of the school—especially the secondary school—aimed at preventing ESL are especially important.

Structural reforms of Schooling

One set of school wide preventative factors relates to the school effects discussed above. In countries with large compositional effects, there are two, potentially complementary, strategies for altering the relationship between SES and school achievement. One addresses the problem by attempting to change the composition of low SES schools through more "structural" reforms aimed at decreasing socioeconomic segregation between schools. The aim would be to provide better access for children from low SES backgrounds to schools with higher SES composition, where their achievements might be "lifted" rather than "depressed" by the composition effect. Essentially, this entails controlling the conditions of entrance to the school, as a means of ensuring a broader social class "balance" in its population (Thrupp, Lauder and Robinson, 2002). However, as research has shown (eg Ball et al, 1996) this presents a range of political difficulties, for instance with middle class families' strategies for defending their privileges. The other approach is to introduce reforms aimed at bolstering the achievement levels of low SES schools. Here, though, the solution runs up against the fact that this has been shown to be difficult to achieve when low SES or low ability students are concentrated in particular schools. It is also the case that the reforms which have proved most effective for low SES children are those that have proved effective for all students (Dynarski and Gleason, 1998: Rumberger and Lin, 2008).

School based Interventions

Lamb and Rice (2008) suggest a dual approach to school based interventions—"student focussed" interventions, targeted on particular at risk students, or groups of students, and "school-wide" interventions, that affect all students, but also improve the engagement of potential ESLers. They also put forward a set of conditions that can increase the effectiveness of any school-based intervention. These are:

- "Fostering connectedness", making at risk students, and also their families, feel less 'out of place' in school

- Increasing trust in students, as part of raising their expectations

- Providing tasks with immediate and tangible outcomes

Student Focused Interventions

Building resilience

A more student focussed set of "preventative" strategies have in common an aim to 'build resistance', especially at an individual level, to factors known to affect ESL. These strategies are most commonly expressed through the term "resilience", or referred to as 'protective factors'. "Educational resilience" refers to 'the maintenance of positive adaptation by individuals despite experiences of significant adversity' (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker 2000:543). It alerts us to the possibility that prior academic performance does not necessarily determine young people's later school careers. There has also been a shift from an individual approach to a focus on social buffers and enabling mechanisms (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker 2000). They refer to such positive adaptation to adversity as 'resilience' which, they say, 'is not a personality attribute, but *describes a dynamic process of positive adaptation in the face of significant adversity or trauma* (Rutter, 1990, 1999; Masten *et al.*, 1999, 2004; Schoon 2006; Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000 emphasis added). Numerous protective factors may be encountered along the way, resulting in substantial proportions of young people graduating from high school and participating in PSE despite weak earlier academic performance. For example, Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson (2004:1197) conclude that "dropouts who return possess a resilience ... that enables them to overcome their earlier academic failures". Schoon and Bynner suggest that poor early family experiences are not only damaging in themselves at the time but make it increasingly difficult to develop potential later (Schoon and Bynner, 2003: 23). Adversity is cumulative, and the risk young people experience derives from *continuing disadvantaged circumstances* rather from any irreversible effect in early childhood. We cannot make children immune to challenges they may be exposed to later. Consequently, investing in early childhood is necessary but not sufficient to protect children from later risk (Schoon and Bynner, 2003:28; Machin, 2006).

Knowing how these factors work can directly inform policies directed at improving the well being of high risk children. Schoon and Bynner highlight the importance of three sets of "protective factors that may impede or halt the impact of adverse experiences" though even resilient young people who show high competences and aspirations despite experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage do not succeed to the same extent as young people from more privileged backgrounds (Schoon and Bynner, 2003:26):

Protective factors

- attributes of the children themselves. Resilient children perform better in the school tests, show fewer persistent behaviour problems, and have more hobbies and social contacts than their more vulnerable peers. They enjoy school, show a strong belief in their own ability and have aspirations to continue in education;

- characteristics of their families. A stable and supportive family environment, where parents showed interest in their child's education and wanted an extended school career for them; parents who read to their child, who had visited the school and talked to the teacher, and who took the children out for joint activities; a supportive father who helped the mother with the household chores; and

- aspects of the wider social context, such as availability of external support, supportive teachers.

The resilience approach also stresses the importance of positive outcomes, rather than the traditional focus on negative outcomes. This includes an emphasis on feelings of confidence, for instance as well as academic competences. From a policy perspective, this implies a shift of emphasis from crisis intervention to primary prevention before serious maladjustment has already manifested itself. It would also involve:

- a shift from preventing youth problems to the promotion of youth development and youth engagement in their communities and societies (Pittman et al., 2001; Schoon and Bynner, 2003:27)

- and harnessing notable strengths of "vulnerable populations" to derive a significant momentum for positive change (Luthar & Ciccetti, 2000)

- and integrating interventions into the cultural context, the educational programme, and personal behavioural repertoire of the developing individual (Pianta & Walsh, 1998).

Mentoring

A key feature of several effective prevention programs is mentoring, with some programmes based solely on the use of mentoring, with key personnel working directly with students, usually in a one-to-one situation. While this role may be undertaken by a teacher, programs now often involve other community members, including business and community volunteers.

One, *Project RAISE*, found mentoring had positive effects on school attendance and grades in English but not on promotion rates or standardised test scores (McPartland and Nettles, 1991). Positive effects were much more likely when one-on one mentoring was strongly implemented. Cave and Quint (1990) found participants in various mentoring programs had

higher levels of university enrolment and higher educational aspirations than non-participants receiving comparable amounts of education and job-related services. The programme, *ASPIRE (advice, support, prepare, inform, respect, encourage*), involved employees working in one-to-one relationships with students identified as likely dropouts. In its first year only one of the 95 students dropped out, compared with 11 per cent for the rest of the student body. In addition, 95 per cent of the mentored students were promoted by comparison with 50 per cent of the control group (Evans, 1992). The key element in all these programmes appears to be the one-to-one relationship between mentor and student (Lamb et al, 2004: 63-4).

Newburn and Shiner (2006) point out that it is impossible to answer the question of whether mentoring "works", because of the different meanings, populations and programmes that fall under a "mentoring" rubric. They do, however, point to evidence of the impact of a programme called Mentoring Plus on the "at risk" participants' engagement with education, training and work Key elements of the programme, including literacy and numeracy classes, were specifically aimed at increasing participation in education or training. The main practical message they drew from their evaluation was that it highlighted the importance of what they call "programme integrity", where the main elements of the programme were implemented as planned. They also emphasise the importance of rigorous implementation and linking of aims and methods.

What has been the effect of Maintenance Allowances?

Perhaps the kind of policy most directly targeted at preventing ESL is one that recognises and responds to the *financial* difficulties that cause young people to leave school early. While some Nordic countries have traditionally provided such allowances as part of "citizen entitlement" (Walther and Pohl, 2005: 68), the most fully developed and evaluated (Ashworth et al 2001, 2002; Middleton et al, 2003, 2005) example of a scheme that targets young people at risk of leaving for economic reasons is the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme in the UK. EMA is a scheme to pay an allowance to young people between the ages of 16 and 19 from lower-income groups to support their participation, retention and achievement in full-time education (Maguire and Rennison, 2005). EMA was developed and implemented with a clear definition of the problem it was intended to address: resource constraints as a reason for ESL. The benefits of the scheme are: improved punctuality, attendance, retention and levels of achievement for the potential early school leavers (Knight and White, 2003). The scheme has certainly been successful with the exception of the NEETs (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) (Maguire and Rennison, 2005). EMA works to prevent early school leaving but not to re-engage those who had already dropped out. The policy was conceived as a question of financial incentives and constraints and clearly aimed at those young people for whom this was a major factor in leaving school. Young people were retained and were no longer early school leavers.

Another form of financial incentive for young people staying at school is making their families' social benefits dependent on their doing so. However, as Walther and Pohl (2005: 56) put it, it is debatable whether any potential positive effects on school attendance can be seen as a success in terms of inclusion in so far as they result from turning ethnic or social disadvantage into a moral issue based upon the stigmatising distinction between the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor (cf. EC, 2004).

What makes student focussed programmes work?

On the basis of a review of largely Australian studies, Lamb et al (2004) identified key features of effective preventative programmes:

- the provision of comprehensive support services to meet individual academic, social, emotional, financial and pastoral needs
- programme delivery through an experienced case manager with whom the student has a relationship of trust

- continuity of programme personnel

- (especially) students having primary contact with a case manager with whom they build a relationship of trust (ibid: 59).

Overall, the main messages from the student focussed interventions are that they need to be supportive (providing intensive, one-on-one support through a case manager to individuals, drawing on a range of government and community services in addition to education). They also need to:

- be structurally flexible (for young people — reforming curriculum, teaching and assessment practices to create a more inclusive learning environment within schools;

- have low student-teacher ratios and small class sizes to promote student engagement;

- employ cooperative learning instructional processes that encourage help when needed from classmates; and

- provide non-threatening learning environments, and school culture that encouraged staff risk-taking, self-governance and professional collegiality (Lamb et al, 2004: 69).

Does changing the Curriculum reduce ESL?

Curricular reforms advanced to reduce the possibility of ESL both relate to increasing the subjective relevance of education for young people, and respond to needs for external recognition by employers and further education and training institutions. Such reforms are found both in new EU Member States (BG, PL, RO, SI, SK), where they reflect changing labour market demands, and in other countries in response to the results of the recent PISA studies (Walther and Pohl, 2004:67-8).

Because traditional high school courses were designed for a minority of students, most countries have already developed alternative courses and qualifications to enable an increasing number of young people, with a wider range of abilities, to participate in high school courses and graduate with a relevant qualification. However, it is clear that these have had only limited success in slowing down the rate of ESL, and more 'radical' responses may be needed.

Curriculum reform has been aimed at increasing the relevance of curriculum and qualification. In terms of the first, it calls for policies which address the individual and diverse needs of early school leavers; their individual learning styles and paces; and the diverse contexts in which they work and their differing accreditation needs. It aims to work with the grain of young people's motivations and needs in terms of their social and employment aspirations. One key element that has emerged in this response is the need to shift from subject-based to skills-based curricula, together with an emphasis on the recognition of key competences *(ReStart, 2007) and* shifts to outcome focused accreditation; One particular example is curriculum reform working with frameworks of individualised learning pathways as developed in the Netherlands *(Kendall and Kinder, 2005).*

Summarising (mainly Australian) research literature on completing school and on differential achievement Lamb et al (2004) suggest that curriculum has an important role to play in engaging young people in education. They emphasise the importance of greater breadth of curriculum choice, a more appropriate instructional environment for the curriculum, and better cooperation between school and other educational agencies to provide alternatives to young people (Lamb et al, 2004, 55).

Does vocational education and training (VET) have a role in reducing ESL?

Extension of vocational education and training (VET) is the commonest policy response to the need for curricular reform aimed at reducing ESL.

VET has the potential to respond to factors of ESL such as lack of relevance of the curriculum, lack of flexibility, inappropriate pedagogy and the labour market aspirations of young people. However, dropping out is more common in vocational routes (Walther and Pohl, 2005:14), partly because students on VET pathways are usually academically weaker and more socially disadvantaged. VET options often recruit more of the 'discouraged workers' who remain in education and training as a "holding" pattern for want of better options. Norway, for instance, has high numbers of drop outs from vocational schools because students did not choose to attend them. In Austria, and Switzerland where the vocational route has a higher status and is fully integrated with specific enterprises, the close links between the training provider and the enterprise help to retain more young people (Kendall and Kinder, 2005). The degree of flexibility of post compulsory education and training opportunities is cited as an important factor in the ability of education and

training systems to retain young people beyond the age when compulsory education ends (Kendall and Kinder (2005). The variety of vocational schools, intermediate and technical vocational colleges, pre-vocational schools, transition and access courses leading to apprentice training, is identified as a key factor in helping young people find appropriate opportunities to stay in education and training in Austria, Switzerland, Flanders and the Netherlands. (ibid)

Those vocational approaches which come with a more robust status and pathways, such as those with an apprenticeship model, are more successful. Unemployment rates for apprentices are far below those with only lower secondary education (GHK, 2005). While the apprenticeship model is successful, it should be noted that it developed historically within particular national economies and cultures and the conditions for its success are often not easily transferable (Walther and Pohl, 2005: 13).

VET remains a promising policy approach. Aggregate studies continue to find strong correlations between provision of high status vocational education and training and lower levels of ESL (Leney et al, 2004). However, it must be of high quality and high status, and lead to recognisable qualifications. It should offer extended and meaningful work experience and match labour market opportunities. And it should be noted that it takes time, funding and long-term commitment to establish these conditions (Lasonen and Young, 1998; CEDEFOP, 2004).

4.3. Can Recovery (Compensation) programmes make up for ESL?

Essentially, recovery programmes involve opportunities for those who left school early to gain the *qualifications* they missed. This can, and typically does, mean participating in organisations other than 'conventional' schools.

The highest profile "Recovery" programme in the EU is "Second Chance Education", which has had positive impacts (GHK, 2005). The aim is to reintegrate young people in danger of social exclusion by offering a range of tailor-made education and training opportunities (E+T 2008: 128), (where the methods of Second Chance education are recommended for those at risk of ESL while they are still in school).

Whether young people can benefit from the Second Chance depends on why they dropped out of the "first chance system". For Raymond (2008), those who considered dropping out as a short term move for personal and life- course reasons (relationships, caring and parental responsibilities) are more likely to return and succeed in second chance options. In Canada, significant numbers of dropouts take advantage of the system (29% of 20-24 dropouts returned to school in 2004/2005) (ibid, p. 24). For other groups of early school leavers, the second chance option is likely to be of limited importance. For Chisholm (2008), the notion of second chance assumes that there was a first chance to begin with. If the second chance option is conceived and delivered as another opportunity to run the same kind of race it is unlikely to succeed. On its own, then, the second chance option is specific to particular kinds of early school leavers.

Second Chance schools need to be alternative schools rather than alternatives to school: smaller in size, more teachers per pupil, more personalised teaching and offering more elements of vocational training so as to increase the subjective sense of relevance for young people (GHK, 2005;European Commission, 2008a). Alternative schools need to combine alternative pedagogy and accreditation of formal, non-formal and informal learning. They need to pass the crucial test of providing students who are successful within them with accreditation which is recognised on the labour market and in connection with other education and training pathways (Evans, 2003; Nind et al, 2003).

The experience in Greece where 6% of 14-24 year olds are enrolled in evening education is important here since the shift of education and training into contexts which meet the needs of those working in the tourism sector or in other forms of seasonal work, is an example of how provision can be constructed in terms of the needs of young people in relation to the local labour market.

Constructing opportunities for second and further chances has to recognise that dropout becomes more likely the higher number of previous attempts have failed. Loss of motivation has an exponential quality which decreases the chances of successful return. The second chance route therefore needs to be an option but with a recognition that success the first time round is the better outcome. Policy which increases the chances of success first time and which prevents ESL need to be the priority, not least because of the costs and diminishing rates of return associated with later intervention.

While the evidence is that there is not a great scope for obtaining an upper-secondary qualification later in life, "well organised and easily accessible systems of second chance education might have a positive impact on ESL returning to education at secondary level" (GHK 118).

Lamb's main focus is what he calls 'external diversification strategies' to provide alternative opportunities for young people, driven by employer needs and governed under vocational training rather than education rules. These could include:

- extended opportunities for school graduation through recovery programs or study in alternative settings,

- availability of alternative qualifications and study opportunities

- provision of work-based training contracts such as apprenticeships, and

- new combinations of work, training and study (Lamb 2008, 2-3).

The skills provided in such programmes would be closer to what employers needs, labor market needs and current occupational practice (see Iannelli and Raffe, 2007; Shavit and Mueller, 1998). However, such programmes could limit opportunities in the 'conventional' education field, including university (ibid 25).

4.4. Policy for Migrant Early School Leavers

We discussed briefly earlier how, socio-economic, home, cultural, school process and wider societal issues might impinge on, or explain, the difference in rates of ESL between migrant and "local" students. As in the case of all students, the first three in that list are not highly amenable to policy intervention. One major exception to this is early childhood intervention programmes, which have been shown to be as effective with migrant children as with local children (NESSE/Heckmann, 2008).

NESSE/Heckmann demonstrates that higher levels of completion of schooling and educational attainment are associated with:

- Low levels of socio-economic inequality
- High levels of investment in child-care
- Well-developed systems of pre-school education

Heckmann emphasises that early and generous funding pays off for both the general population and for the migrant population. In terms of migrant children, child-care, pre-school and early-years interventions should address the need for their socialisation by supporting general development and learning the language of the immigration country (NESSE/Heckmann, 2008, p. 8). In addition, Heckmann's study concurs with the findings of Woesmann and Schutz with a shared emphasis that the impact of socio-economic status and migrant status on educational achievement is reduced in systems which delay selection of students to ability tracks (see also Woesmann and Schutz, 2006).

Interventions at school level are more feasible and effective than at the level of "home" factors. At the level of the school, Heckmann finds justification for an optimistic approach to policy formation. There is no trade-off between school quality and provision for migrant young people because "schools of good general quality are also good for migrant children and their educational opportunities" (NESSE/Heckmann, 2008, p. 7). Schools which have high and realistic expectations, which provide appropriate role models, which work hard to foster parental involvement and which are pro-active in seeking to mentor young people through the challenges of the transitions through the education system are effective in reducing early school leaving for all children. It is, though, important for schools to recognise the needs of young people from minority groups so that the conditions for the reproduction of prejudice and discrimination are addressed by providing non-distorted presentations of migrant children in the curriculum, text books and in school life.

At the same time, it is important to be realistic about the hard political choices involved in developing policy to reduce the early school leaving of migrant young people. One of the clearest lessons from research for policy is that the concentration of migrant young people in schools which already have high levels of socio-economic and multiple-disadvantage, produces heightened risks of early school leaving. This clustering, concentration or "ghettoisation" of migrant young people needs therefore to be a major focus for policy approaches and it requires brave decisions to address the school admissions arrangements which produce the ghettoisation. To the extent that particular schools continue to have high concentrations of migrant young people, this comes with a cost. For Heckmann, in order to strengthen the ability of schools to prevent the early school leaving of migrant children, extra financial resources are the unavoidable cost.

4.5.   Universal or Targeted Policies?

One final issue raised by this chapter concerns the issue of whether, how, and how far, the kinds of policies discussed here should be universally available, or targeted—or, to put it another way, whether their availability should be determined by supply or demand. The case for targeting is made by writers who have focused on the importance of pre-school factors for ESL, such as Alexander et al, Jimerson et al and Pagani et al. It has also been put powerfully by Janosz et al (2008) on the basis of their work in Quebec. They argue that 'By seventh grade, a substantial proportion of potential dropouts already show personal, social, or family difficulties that eventually interfere with their schooling development. Focused and specialized resources that support the academic and socio-emotional development of this at-risk student population would need to be allocated'. Such interventions would need to be specified by student needs, rather than across the board.

However, while it is possible to identify antecedents and correlates of ESL, a very large proportion of those with those characteristics do not leave school early. In addition, we have pointed to the heterogeneity of the ESL population, which might suggest both the importance and the difficulty of some degree of targeting. However, this raises the further problem of the basis and the organisation of a targeted programme. What is the basis of

inclusion in such programmes? At the one end, we have locality based programmes, such as priority areas, where we know in advance that a considerable proportion of young people included in the area will not be at serious risk of early leaving. At the other end, there may be a need to design specific screening procedures to identify the population most likely to benefit from an intervention—but screening procedures can be expensive and intrusive. In between, there are 'off the shelf' mechanisms, relying on data already collected, possibly for other purposes—but these run the danger of falling between the Scylla of a potentially wasteful and inefficient universalism, and the Charybdis of a precisely targeted but expensive targeting. Furthermore, there is little reason to believe that the middle way, of using existing information, will deliver benefits rather than costs.

CONCLUSIONS

In this report we have looked at what kind of problem ESL is, and for whom. We have attempted to show its causes and antecedents, and to draw attention to the kinds of efforts that have been made to overcome it.

The EU definition and measurement of ESL is pragmatic, given the range of national definitions, but the focus on the duration of formal schooling rather than qualification makes it more difficult to identify policy priorities.

The individual factors associated with ESL are largely rooted in very poor family and community backgrounds and experiences. However, many ESLs have none of these characteristics, and many with these kinds of characteristics also successfully complete schooling. Regarding the whole problem of ESL as one of individual vulnerability frames policy responses in unhelpful ways. It is possible to identify and respond to the kinds of experiences and circumstances that promote or retard the likelihood of young people from similar backgrounds becoming ESLers.

Parenting practices affect the likelihood of ESL in a range of ways. This seems to offer good possibilities for remedial policy. However, this may not be as straightforward as it appears, due to very different conceptions of the appropriate relationships between parents and schools.

The nature and experience of schooling is highly influential in eventual ESL. The socio-economic composition of the school student body appears to be highly influential in determining outcomes such as ESL, and it is clearly susceptible to policy responses. School organisation that recognises the particular needs of potential ESLers can be successful in reducing the incidence of early leaving. It is possible to identify key elements of disengagement from school, and devise appropriate responses to them.

ESL occurs in wider social and political contexts, such as employment opportunities, opportunities for vocational education, the availability of alternative routes. It is also shaped by the relevant policy making frameworks and by broader policies for secondary education and lifelong learning.

ESLers are more likely to be unemployed, to earn less, to be more found in blue collar jobs with less employment security and more part-time work than the non-ESL. They are less likely to be involved in lifelong learning. However, the factors that lead to young people being vulnerable to ESL also have an independent direct effect on labour market behaviours and outcomes, and not just because they lead to early leaving. This has implications for the importance of all young people obtaining the necessary competences for lifelong learning.

ESL has enormous financial implications, generating major social and economic costs. Each reduction in the number of ESLers can reduce those social and economic costs.

Since ESL is conceived as a process rather than an event, we should seek policy responses appropriate to each of the key stages of the process.

The recognition that the process towards ESL begins very early means that the first set of policy responses should be aimed at pre-empting it. There is a recognised set of family and community risk factors (see chapter 2). Successful pre-emption depends on establishing the relative importance of these factors, especially where individuals suffer from combinations of them. It also depends on properly structured responses. Providing comprehensive services and working through existing educational and social organizations were crucial, and replicable, success conditions for the Child-Parent Centre pre-school programme.

However, early intervention is necessary but not sufficient. A range of preventative responses is needed to address the problems of those still at risk in secondary school. This implies a policy of primary prevention rather than crisis intervention.

Such problems should be amenable to policy responses at both individual school and education system levels.

In terms of addressing the school composition problem, reforms aimed at bolstering the achievement levels of low SES schools may be insufficient in schools with concentrations of low SES or low ability students. In these cases, the remedy would be found in reforms aimed at mitigating such concentrations.

Reducing the impact of adverse family and community experiences is another key preventative strategy that has proved valuable in secondary schools. This may involve programmes such as mentoring, or curricular changes to make learning more accessible to potential ESLers. This may involve going outside the school, both to draw on the experience and expertise of employment and training agencies, and to ensure a 'joining up' of the efforts of the multiple agencies often involved in 'at risk' young people's lives. What is crucial in such programmes is close monitoring and individual attention.

Compensatory schemes for those who have already dropped out of school, such as Second Chance schools (see European Commission, 2001) have proved successful with some ESLers, though unless it offers a different kind of experience from school, it is unlikely to succeed. On both educational and financial grounds it appears to be not just second chance but second best, when compared with effective strategies "first time round".

The issue of screening and targeting is difficult. It can, for instance, lead to stigmatisation. On the other hand, where there are known risk factors occurring in combination, there is a strong case for screening and targeting. Identifying those individuals at greatest risk, devising suitable interventions, and ensuring that there is effective follow-up may be seen as a valuable formula in such cases.

The main question that probably strikes most readers of this report, and that certainly remains in our minds, is why decades of time, effort, money, ingenuity, passion and care have produced such disappointing results—why, indeed, ESL is still as much of a problem as it has ever been. One reason may be the nature of the ESL population, and the ways it reflects patterns of social inequality. It is a part of that section of the school population that has consistently been seen as a problem to be dealt with, and that has been frequently neglected and excluded. It is part of a population that represents a source of continuing social problems. What this may mean is that there is a widespread reluctance to make the level of investment necessary to address the problem satisfactorily. This would explain the lack of success so far on the grounds that the level of investment has been quite inadequate for the magnitude of the problem, and the changes necessary to overcome it. In this respect, the findings of cost benefit studies of investment in intervening in ESL may be especially interesting and important to policy makers.

The complexity of ESL as a multi-faceted problem may also limit the nature and impact of means of addressing it. On the one hand, it crosses several governmental borders; it is an issue not just for Education but for Employment and wider Social Policy, which may make it easier for it to slip between the cracks as an issue. On the other hand, the payoff to any investment is both longer term and relatively intangible, in so far as it is based of future savings, as the cost benefit analyses make clear.

Two other features of the "ESL industry" might also be related to its relative failure. One is that most of the efforts have been relatively small scale, and specific to the localities where they took place. This, at least as much as the comparative paucity of rigorously evaluated interventions, has meant that there has been little sense of accumulation of a body of knowledge. There is little sense that more recent work builds on and develops earlier work, and there have been few attempts to link programmes. The other reason is that there has been similarly little effort expended on determining *why* and *how* interventions work, and the processes through which they bring about the hoped-for changes. This greatly limits the possibility of their being replicated.

The time may, then, be ripe for such issues to be addressed. Concerted efforts to "join up" previously separated and isolated interventions may bear considerable fruit at relatively low cost. Similarly, the analysis of why and how interventions work, possibly adopting Pawson's (2002) strategy of "realist synthesis", which is based on the idea that it is not programmes that work, but the theory of change that they employ. One organisational model for this kind of work is the California Dropout Research Project. This was set up in 2006 under the leadership of Russell Rumberger, himself a leading scholar in the field. Its purpose is to

synthesise research to inform policy and policy makers about how to tackle California's dropout crisis.

Finally, it may be worth speculating about the effect of impending crises on the nature of and response to ESL. In particular, "Europe's demographic time bomb", which will see a major shift in the ratio of earners/taxpayers to pensioners, may force the kind of rethinking of ESL as a problem that seems to be necessary for it to be taken more seriously.

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