PRACTICE BRIEFS

Scientific Abstracts on Early School Leaving

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Preface

The Practice briefs[1] emerge from the idea that science and practice (researchers and practitioners) should work closer together in order to solve contemporary social problems. One such problem facing the EU today is early school leaving (ESL).

When a young person leaves school this represents the culmination of a long process constituted by a series of events and circumstances unfolding in their history and environment. The school is not and cannot be held solely responsible for young people leaving school, yet the school and other institutions around the school can do much to prevent or constructively deal with it for the individual involved (if it happens).

Practitioners encounter the ESL problem in their everyday professional life and are thus seen as the agents of positive change. Although sometimes working amid difficult policy circumstances, they have the potential to significantly improve the educational practices of the individuals involved, develop innovative bottom-up approaches and thereby reduce ESL and contribute to a better future for their students and society as a whole. The research community shares the responsibility for creating a better world and provide considerable support for practitioners in their efforts. Moreover, practitioners and researchers are recognised as important policymaking actors and thus have a potential impact on the system itself.

The main aim of the TITA practice briefs is to, by building on a solid scientific background, raise awareness and knowledge about different aspects of ESL while providing (scientific-based) recommendations to improve educational practices so as to prevent or address ESL. The focus is on cooperation within multi-professional teams working in and around schools. Namely, to work effectively on ESL together with other professionals and establish student-centred measures, to respond to the need for education staff and other professionals involved to understand ESL, the basic principles of multi-professional cooperation as well as develop or strengthen special skills. The comprehensive TITA scientific base as well as the related practice briefs provide a detailed evidence-based understanding of: a) **early school leaving** (the core policy problem the TITA project addresses); b) **cooperation** (as a promising way to reducing ESL); and c) **training** (as a tool for arriving at solutions).

The briefs are structured to reflect these three sections; each section is divided into relevant subsections. **Each brief introduces the main findings based on a review of scientific literature while outlining implications and recommendations for practice**. The briefs are written in an easy-to-read-and-understand format. Readers especially interested in the topic of a particular brief(s) are invited to follow the link to the whole scientific review article(s) upon which that brief(s) is based.

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[1] Practitioners is a general term that covers a wide range of different professionals working in and around school who are in regular contact with students and/or have a leadership, consultative or educative role for those working with students.

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EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

What & why should we as professionals/practitioners working in and around school know about early school leaving?

Early school leaving (ESL) is one of the terms used to describe similar phenomena; others also in use include early leaving from education and training (ELET), school attrition, school dropout, withdrawing from school. The most recent EU definition defines early leavers as **young people aged 18 to 24 who have at most completed lower secondary education and are not currently involved in further education or training**.

Despite this very outcome-oriented definition, it is important to acknowledge that ESL is **a process** rather than a one-off event, and the route to ESL frequently **begins before the child goes to school, or early in primary school**. Leaving school early is a complex phenomenon and its causes vary from student to student, thus early school leavers are a **very heterogeneous group**. Discerning these subgroups poses a challenge and several different taxonomies exist (e.g. based on education level achieved prior to leaving; reasons for students to leave – academic failure and reasons other than academic failure).

ESL is linked to many factors at multiple levels (i.e. individual/family, school, system) that typically interact. Where a number of risk factors co-exist, the incidence of ESL is greater.

Understanding the problem and consequences of ESL: Why is ESL a problem? Why should it matter to us practitioners?

Early school leavers in later (adult) life and social consequences

Data show that upon reaching adulthood early school leavers (ESLers) are often jobless or paid less than those who successfully completed upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education, are less motivated for further education and training, achieve lower literacy levels at adult literacy tests, are funded less by their employees to obtain additional education or training if the level of their initial education is lower, and are at a greater risk of a range of adverse outcomes (e.g. pregnancy, crime, violence, alcohol, drug abuse, suicide). They have a shorter life expectancy and are less likely to become active citizens. It is thus obvious that **ESL is a pressing issue with long-term social consequences**.

It is therefore important to note that: school management and practitioners are aware of ESL's long-term consequences and the important need to identify and intervene in it early on. It is clear that **ESL is a problem *for* the young people involved**, and this must always be borne in mind, especially given the tendency to see the young people themselves *as* the problem. Understanding this will help practitioners see the rationale of their efforts to prevent students from ESL and thereby **improve the quality of their life in adulthood**.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article139

Why are ESLers a problem for modern (EU) society?

Participating in high-quality education benefits the individual, society and the economy. Documents produced by European institutions very convincingly describe the problems that arise when students leave school early. In the medium term, **ESL is strongly associated with 'social' costs** (social breakdown, increased demands on the health system, and less social cohesion) and **'economic' costs** (lower productivity, decreased tax revenues and higher welfare payments). In the long term, ESL constitutes a tremendous waste of potential regarding the EU's social and economic development.

On one hand, it is important for practitioners to become acquainted with and aware of these long-term consequences of ESL in order to recognise the importance of their practices and efforts in tackling ESL. On the other, it is necessary for practitioners to not only accept the already defined policy problems but to become proactive actors in defining them. Teachers and other educational staff are crucial in identifying actual problems facing students (potential and actual school leavers) in contemporary society. Is it correct to define ESL as a problem of further social and economic development or is it the current state of the economy and society that causes it? All of these implications call for **practitioners (teachers and other educational staff) to play a more proactive role in defining policy problems and forming policy solutions in their local, regional, national and EU environment**.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article34

EU and national contexts: Do all practitioners in Europe face the same problem?

The ESL situation in France, Luxembourg, Spain and Switzerland

Even though ESL is acknowledged as an issue at the European level, the situation of ESL and the strategies, policies and measures used to counter it vary across countries. The latest data from Eurostat show that in 2014 ESL rates from education and training were: 21.9% in Spain, 9.0% in France, 6.1% in Luxembourg and 5.4% in Switzerland (the overall EU headline target is 10%, national targets may differ slightly). In all of these countries, the trends show a drop in ESL rates in the last 5 years (the biggest fall in Spain). In Spain and France, large regional differences in the level of ESL can be observed. **In recent years, all countries have introduced several relevant reforms which, although not necessarily directly linked to ESL, hold implications for addressing and preventing ESL.** Spain and France have in place a national comprehensive strategy to tackle ESL containing many measures, strategies, laws. In contrast, in Switzerland early leavers are not even officially defined (ESL is dealt with as part of the national programme against poverty). **Each country has developed its own set of measures aligned with national characteristics (e.g. education system, demographics), traditions and needs**; perhaps some common themes can be detected, i.e. a focus on vocational education/training, second-chance education, early identification and also prevention activities (e.g. early childhood education and care, education and career guidance). According to a Eurydice report (2014), **multi-agency teams at the local/institutional level are well established** in these countries. The teams involve several different professionals (e.g. school heads, teachers, psychologists, social workers, youth workers, therapists and education/career counsellors).

It is important to acknowledge these differences and similarities across countries. The current exchange of good practices in tackling ESL is generally limited to one country or perhaps to neighbouring countries or countries speaking the same language. However, a deeper insight into other countries (considering their national context) **provides a larger pool of good practices and improves the opportunities for mutual learning**.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?rubrique76

In the Lisbon Strategy from the year 2000, the European Commission introduced the open method of cooperation (OMC) as a method for facilitating common EU cooperation in the education field. The aim of creating the OMC was twofold: a) to help member states improve their educational policies and practices and attain common EU goals; and b) to improve/democratise policymaking by involving a wide range of actors at all levels of multilevel governance in the policy learning process (sharing good practices and thus finding solutions to common problems). In the formal OMC framework, **practitioners are thus recognised as very important actors in the European educational policymaking process**. Empirical evidence shows their **actual involvement varies across member states but overall is quite limited** due to them lacking knowledge about EU educational processes and the weaknesses of national institutions. Translating EU agendas for them (top-down learning) and transferring their knowledge to the EU level (bottom-up learning) depends heavily on national policymakers.

Taking the OMC's two primary aims into consideration, it is crucial that practitioners play a proactive and independent role in EU educational policymaking. Differences found in national education systems across the EU are seen here as creating a lucky situation. The various national contexts provide conditions in which innovative practices can develop differently. It is thus critical for practitioners to become active actors in the policy learning process (identifying and sharing good practices) at both the grassroots and EU levels. **Different OMC opportunities (networks, working groups, stakeholder forums, platforms, financial grants for small- and large-scale projects)** are just waiting to be exploited and to trigger practitioners' active and innovative contribution to the agreed EU goal "of reducing ESL to below 10% by 2020".

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?rubrique76

Origin and interplay of ESL-related factors: Who are ESLers and why do they leave school? How to recognise ESL?

The interplay of factors contributing to ESL at the levels of the individual, family and social background

At the **individual level,** a student's **low socio-economic background** (i.e. low household income) is most unequivocally seen as a strong risk factor for ESL, while the link with others (e.g. gender, immigrant background, disability) is less straightforward. High rates of mobility and living in particular (disadvantaged) areas are risk factors. Moreover, other individual differences among students relating to ESL include

personal traits and learning-related competencies, i.e. **low social skills, poor motivation, low academic achievement, low cognitive abilities, behavioural problems and parental role/family characteristics** (all discussed in separate sections).

At this level, some factors are unmodifiable or less amenable to policy or practice responses. However, it is important to remember that these experiences do not completely determine young people's school trajectories. At the same time, **some of the highlighted individual and family factors are amenable to change** or intervention and attention should be paid to them.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article28

The interplay of factors contributing to ESL at the school

Research indicates the school environment (school culture, climate) is central to whether a young person will complete school or not. Early school experience strongly influences one's later school career and the classroom setting is important for establishing and maintaining these patterns – thus a **positive, encouraging early school experience is vital**. ESLers themselves identify school-level factors as the most prominent reason for leaving school, including a negative and unrewarding school environment (e.g. poor relationships with teachers, bullying, a feeling of rejection from the school and teachers), the lack of a relevant curriculum and retentions/suspensions. Incompatibility between how a young person learns and the 'school norms' are another risk factor. **The effects of school composition/conditions are also particularly important** (school SES, ethnic composition, share of immigrants, different tracks available at school). However, other more amenable factors at the **classroom level include the classroom climate, instructional practices (direct versus student-centred instruction)** and, **at the school level, the school climate, as well as cooperation between the school and family**. Moreover, schools need to adapt to the constant change and growth occurring within the students (e.g. increasing maturity, the need for autonomy).

Most characteristics of the school and class environment are subject to change, but the **process is slow and much more successful when the entire school is involved** – students, education staff, the leadership, auxiliary staff, and parents. Developing a student-centred approach to learning and teaching is needed.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article129

ESL factors at the system level may involve characteristics of the (early) education system, but also characteristics of the labour market and wider macro-economic policies. Some of the education system's *negative* aspects related to ESL are **grade retention**, the **socio-economic segregation** of schools, **early tracking** based on academic criteria (institutional differentiation), whereas *positive* aspects include high-quality and accessible **early childhood education and care**, well-managed **transition processes** between different school levels (primary to lower secondary, lower to upper secondary), **flexible pathways** in upper secondary education (alternatives to mainstream education), the role of education and **career guidance**, **early warning systems**, the quality of **vocational education and training** (VET programmes), **key agencies** working with schools, professional development and support for **teachers**. A relevant and flexible **curriculum** as well as formative **assessment** are also highlighted. Very recently, well-balanced education systems (i.e. consistent education systems) have emerged as a highly relevant system attribute. This denotes the situation where **all parts of the education system from preschool to tertiary education fit together well and function in synergy**. The education system should be diverse, but not fragmented.

Practitioners have the least direct impact on factors at the system level. Yet **understanding the existence and role of these factors is nevertheless important**.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article130

PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is a worldwide study co-ordinated by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). It aims to evaluate education systems by testing 15-year-old school students' performance in mathematics, science and reading every 3 years. Studies that have assessed ESL through a longitudinal survey of PISA student cohorts clearly show the powerful impact of students' achievement in the PISA test on their ESL propensity. Students' achievement remained important even after considering the students' socio-economic status (SES). In other words, the impact of **low socio-economic background on ESL can be reduced by paying extra attention to developing strong competencies among disadvantaged students**.

Moreover, the PISA studies have generally found that certain student-level variables are associated with (the risk of) ESL, i.e. gender, parental education, immigrant status, previous schooling. At the same time, some findings also indicate a school-

level impact (e.g. average socio-economic status in the school), albeit such evidence is scarce.

The PISA results point to the strong need to support low SES students' achievement in order to prevent their ESL. Further, **attention to school processes and developing students' positive attitudes to school** may help reduce the odds of ESL.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article131

Selected ESL factors: The basis for prevention activities, promising areas for prevention and intervention

The relationship between teachers' teaching styles, students' engagement in school and ESL

Empirical evidence shows the teacher's **teaching style significantly affects different outcomes of the teaching–learning process in school**. It has been shown that the authoritarian teaching style (especially the teacher's lack of warmth in their attitude to the students and the students' low autonomy regarding schoolwork) is related to students' negative emotions about learning and avoidance behaviour in their attitude to schoolwork and the tendency for ESL. On the other hand, students taught by an authoritative teacher (warm attitude, high level of student autonomy and activity regarding schoolwork) express a greater readiness for schoolwork and higher self-efficacy.

It is important for teachers to realise that their teaching style affects students' perception of school and school work. Just as the right **approach to teaching may increase students' engagement in school and thus prevent ESL**, the wrong one can create an unpleasant experience that might lead to ESL. Moreover, it is important for teachers to understand that to build a working and supportive teacher-student relationship it is also **necessary to adapt the teaching style to each student and their developmental needs.** To help teachers become aware of their role in ESL prevention and assist them in building supportive teacher-student relationships additional trainings should be organised by school ESL-prevention teams.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article132

Teacher-teacher and teacher-student cooperation: The link with achievement (evidence from international studies)

International comparative assessment studies indicate that individual student factors are more significant for predicting achievement than teacher and school factors. Yet the research literature suggests ways in which teacher and school factors may be important for student learning and achievement. **Students in schools in which (mathematics) teachers collaborate as professional communities** (as defined by engaging in reflective dialogue, collaborative activities, sharing a sense of purpose and, most importantly, a focus on student learning) **on average have higher achievement**. There is greater collaboration when professional development activities afford teachers the opportunity to network with other teachers and provide mentoring and coaching. Examples of collaborative practices are observing other teachers' classes and providing feedback or teaching as a team in the same class. When school leaders introduce more flexible timetables to allow for team teaching, for example, the benefits are likely to outweigh any burden. However, cooperation should not come at the expense of the content and its complexity. Practices that promote collaboration among teachers and students hold the potential to **foster communication, interaction and engagement among students in classrooms**.

International data show that **teachers differ regarding their propensity to exhibit collaboration and cooperation behaviour** to a greater extent within the school than between schools. Therefore, the focus of change and training should be on the teacher as an individual, and not so much on the school. Evidence also shows that teachers benefit from even minimal amounts of collaboration with colleagues; participating in collaborative professional development or engaging in collaborative practices several times a year correlates positively with both teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article133

Students' social and civic competencies: A predictor of student academic achievement and ESL

Social and civic competencies include a wide range of personal, interpersonal and intercultural abilities that enable individuals to constructively participate in social and school/working life. The importance of these competencies for ESL is shown by the fact the **competence profile of underachievers and ESLers among others includes poor social skills** (lack of communication skills and constructive conflict

management) as well as **being too disruptive** (aggressive, oppositional) or **too quiet, isolated** (inhibited, anxious) in class.

Particularly disruptive behaviour has been linked to later low academic achievement (a strong ESL risk factor), but also vice versa – early learning problems have been shown to contribute to subsequent negative social behaviour (although the relation in this direction is somewhat weaker). Interestingly, students themselves cite difficulties in teacher and peer relationships, a feeling of unsafety or not belonging at school, and having friends who had already left school as the prime reasons for dropping out. On the other hand, positive social behaviour is a protective factor and has a strong positive impact on later achievement.

Social and civic competencies are often **overlooked when addressing ESL**, but have been gaining in scientific and policy attention in recent years. In order to prevent ESL, it seems warranted to help build social adjustment within students from the start of school (and earlier), using programmes/curricula rooted in **social and emotional learning** (SEL, see the separate section). The provision of adequate **teacher training on social-emotional development** is also critical (see the separate section).

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article31

Mental health as an ESL risk factor: Diagnostics, prevention, intervention

Mental health problems (e.g. anxiety, depression) are a risk factor for ESL and mental health prevention and intervention programmes help to reduce the possibility of the many negative consequences low mental health brings to both the individual and the community.

Anxiety is defined as a cognitive, emotional, behavioural and physiological response with a feeling of danger that interferes significantly with overall and school functioning and can thus play a significant role in ESL. **Anxiety as an internationalisation problem is often overlooked in the school setting**. For instance, high anxiety levels interfere significantly with a child's adaptive functioning, social competence, peer relations and social adjustment, and also influence their cognitive functioning. The need to clearly establish the relationship between mental health (especially anxiety) and ESL is particularly relevant since research shows that anxiety levels are on the increase in school-aged populations.

Early recognition (by school counsellors and classroom teachers) and high quality diagnostic tools (e.g. screening tools) as well as continuous observations are essential. In the classroom, knowing some of the characteristics of anxious students

can help identify students with anxiety problems. For instance, anxious students: (i) can be **worried most of the time**, (ii) are usually tense (**unable to relax**), (iii) will try to avoid school work due to a **fear it will not be perfect**, (iv) can be **extremely well behaved** (always follow the rules), (v) can get **lost in the details** and therefore not finish school work on time, and (vi) can **often look for constant reassurance** from their peers or teachers. On the school level, higher levels of anxiety are significantly associated with a negative school climate, negative attitudes to school, frequent aggressive behaviour at school, lower educational achievement in both clinical and non-clinical samples and in various age groups, i.e. among primary school pupils and upper secondary school students. This implies that attention to these aspects at the school level is required.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article134

Expanding the prevention of ESL to the home environment: The relationship between parenting styles and school performance

The opinions and background of parents are important for preventing ESL. The children of parents who are more educated, attend events for parents organised by the school, talk about school at home, and are more convinced that a high level of education is important are much less likely to drop out of school. Moreover, a parenting style which supports autonomy and critical thinking promotes the adolescent's orientation towards learning achievements.

One way to boost parental interest and involvement in school may entail a **form of training organised by the school in combination with social support**, particularly for problematic, low-income households. It would also be helpful to improve (in terms of both quality and quantity) the communication between schools, teachers, students and parents by organising a higher number of parental evenings and events (given their positive impact on reducing dropout rates). At these events, parents could also be presented with evidence of their role in ESL and be helped to develop a good relationship with the school and a supportive parenting style at home that will help their adolescent children remain at school. Such educational meetings can help parents understand how they can support their child's academic achievements, their perception of self-efficacy and help them become more engaged in school and less prone to leaving school.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article135

Learning difficulties and ESL

ESLers are a heterogeneous group and ESL is associated with a wide range of disadvantages, including learning difficulties. **Learning difficulties is a term often used as a synonym for learning disabilities and learning disorder** while different conceptualisations of these terms also exist. Generally, learning difficulties are considered to be **difficulties in information processing**, such as reading disorders (i.e. dyslexia), writing disorders (i.e. dysgraphia) and maths disabilities (i.e. dyscalculia). Since these students have specific difficulties with learning (and learning is one of the basic concepts of education and schools), the level of ESL among this group of students is higher than among students who do not have these difficulties.

Several factors influence the tendency of children with learning difficulties to leave school early, such as their personal attitudes concerning their learning difficulty, family support provided with regard to the learning difficulty, the school culture and school climate in relation to the learning difficulties, educational programmes and teachers (their attitudes to learning difficulties, subjective perceptions of learning difficulties, methods of teaching that consider students' learning difficulties, a social and emotional approach etc.). **Students are less likely to drop out of school when teachers manage to meet their needs also related to their learning difficulty** and when they view their relationship positively. Therefore, improving competencies through the professional development of teachers to ensure they recognise and meet the needs of students with learning disabilities is the key to successfully reducing ESL.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article136

The role of career guidance in ESL

Research exposes the **lack of work and life relevance of schooling as an important factor in dropping out**. Young people with uncertain occupational aspirations or ones misaligned with their educational expectations are considerably more likely to become ESLers. **Equipping students with career management skills** can be the right way to prevent students from dropping out from school. These skills can help to encourage students at risk of dropping out to look beyond their immediate limitations, create a higher level of meaningfulness on their current and future educational paths and view their educational paths in terms of their lifelong personal, social and career development. Career guidance can have an influence on retention, achievement, transitions, career and life success. At the aggregate system level, career management skills lead to better educational, social and

employment outcomes. Nevertheless, recent surveys show a **persistent gap in the provision of guidance in EU member states**. The result is that the full potential of career guidance could be better exploited as a mechanism for preventing ESL.

Practitioners (especially those in daily contact with students and representing important adults in students' life) should be **equipped with the right knowledge to enable them to impart the importance of career management skills and apply career management approaches and programmes** to this special group of students, the development of whose career aspirations is overlooked.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article137

The role of physical activity in ESL

Physical activity is important for preventing ESL. It is typically investigated with regard to individual psychosocial characteristics, student achievement and health promotion. As shown by currently available projects and studies, it is an area worth developing. Not only do healthy students tend to achieve better, are absent and on sick leave from work less, and choose healthier lifestyles, but partaking in physical activities after and outside school keeps socially disadvantaged students off the streets.

For this to happen, schools and teachers **should rethink physical education activities to ensure that, besides fulfilling the aim of physical activity per se, they more explicitly include body language expression, self-awareness techniques** (e.g. for self-focused mindfulness attention, being able to concentrate for longer periods) **and interpersonal bonding** (e.g. by encouraging affiliation through group sports). In this way, they can support students' learning processes and help bring about improvements in their motivation, self-esteem, social skills and interpersonal relationships.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article138

COOPERATION

How to prevent and address ESL? The potential of cooperation for ESL

In the policy experiments conducted as part of the TITA project, the focus has been on the cooperation of multi-professional ESL teams that work in and around schools. However, cooperation/collaboration must happen over multiple levels if it is to become part of the solution to ESL, i.e. among policy sectors, the school and local community/local institutions/family, school professionals, and school professionals and students. This approach is ambitious and difficult, yet very important.

Cooperation at the system level: How can practitioners influence it?

The importance of a cross-sectorial approach to ESL

ESL should be seen as a global, horizontal and cross-cutting issue. Effective policies and practices that work against ESL should therefore be cross-sectoral and entail the sustained long-term effort of stakeholders from different policy areas and decision and implementation levels to ensure comprehensive, coherent and continuous support is provided that addresses the overall personality of a potential and actual ESLer. The way in which a cross-sectoral approach to ESL at the system level is implemented varies among EU member states in terms of which policy sectors are involved in dealing with it and how developed their cooperation is.

It is important to note that practitioners are not only critical for putting the existing public policies into practice, but also for evaluating and refining them. **It is only** p**ractitioners who know how policy can(not) be implemented in practice so they** should play an important role in **evaluating current institutional cross-sectoral approaches by actively exposing the pros and cons of the existing institutional structure and proactively suggesting improvements**. In addition to evaluating the cross-sectoral approaches already in place, by acknowledging the basic principles of cross-sectoral cooperation practitioners can become a **bottom-up proliferator of the cross-sectoral approach to ESL** by recognising relevant actors in the struggle against ESL and inviting them to cooperate even in situations where cross-sectoral cooperation is not institutionalised at the system level. It is particularly important for **cooperation to arise from the needs of the individual actor and not be artificially imposed from the outside**. Such practices developed from the bottom up have greater chances of success than approaches imposed on below from the top.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?rubrique91

Cooperation at the community level: Is its full potential truly recognised and exploited?

How does community learning work and how does it help reduce ESL?

Students with a lower socio-economic status are those at greater risk of ESL. Research shows that students from low SES families frequently receive less support for their educational goals and achievement than students from higher SES families. One way to intervene and provide **additional support for such students is community learning**. By definition, community learning is learning related to the exercise of civic responsibility in the public interest through a community political structure, although the reality shows a considerably broader understanding of it; community learning takes many forms, it is connected with strong traditions, networks, norms and trust, it builds community spirit and is often recognised as a powerful tool for use in disadvantageous socio-economic conditions. Learning outside the conventional educational and learning frameworks sometimes brings about less restriction and more freedom and incentive than school learning. **Community learning is an opportunity to share ideas, knowledge and support, an opportunity for intergenerational cooperation** and – with the goal to prevent ESL – an opportunity to provide support to vulnerable young people at particularly high risk of ESL, to make them understand they are accepted and welcome, to make them feel connected and that they belong to a community, thereby encouraging them to follow their path to success.

Understanding and practising community learning are important tools in the fight against ESL. If the school recognises and appreciates community learning and establishes connections with the local community, the chances of all their students (including vulnerable ones) achieving success are bigger.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?rubrique94

Developing healthy social and cultural capital, and their effects on education

The individual's persistence in education has an important relationship with their social and cultural capital. The greater one's social capital, the more they feel connected to the community, and there is a bigger chance of them staying in school and achieving success. The key characteristic of social capital is the positive relationships the individual maintains with their closest (family, friends) and more distant environment (school, local community) in which they live. Social capital is

characterised by common values and rules, a wide social network, a high level of trust, interdependence and mutuality, together with voluntariness and active participation in the community. Cultural capital, on the other hand, involves demographic characteristics of the individual such as family tradition, values, language, upbringing, and the possession of cultural goods (e.g. books, paintings). Cultural capital highlights the significance of SES for individuals' educational path.

Although social and cultural capital is somewhat determined, **it is important for teachers to be aware that individuals' social capital in particular can be built and strengthened**. Further, it has been shown that social capital in terms of supportive relationships in the family, peer group and school can often help overcome the effects of individuals' poor cultural capital for their educational path and ESL.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article140

Local community involvement and the individual's self-concept relative to educational attainment

One's self-concept reflects one's actual abilities in a specific domain and the internalisations of the feedback they receive from significant others. Self-concept is socially constructed and, as such, plays a significant role in preventing ESL. What is crucial when investigating the role of self-concept in ESL is that **self-concept (e.g. academic self-concept) moderates the effort and motivation to be active in a certain field (e.g. school attendance, learning)**.

The feedback given by significant others is very important for building one's self-concept. Such feedback must be grounded on their actual abilities. In cases where the parent and/or teacher for different reasons are unable to provide enough positive feedback, the **community can also step in by providing various community-based learning opportunities**. Collaboration with the community has been shown to have beneficial effects by way of increasing skill and talent levels through enriched curricular and extracurricular activities and school attendance. Since one's self-concept becomes more stable throughout one's development, early intervention is warranted.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article141

Positive and ongoing school–community collaboration may help fulfil students' need for autonomy, competence and relatedness which, in turn, prevent ESL. It has so far been established that when such psychological needs of students are met their well-being rises significantly, the knowledge they acquire is conceptual, both of which can lead to decreased levels of ESL. Schools that practise extensive community–school collaboration see improved reading and maths performances, better attendance rates, fewer suspensions and a drop in the level of ESL.

Our underlying assumption is that **positive and ongoing school–community collaboration fosters students' autonomy (e.g. by providing autonomy-developing opportunities through project work), competence (e.g. putting knowledge and competencies into practice in the form of school–community collaboration) and relatedness (e.g. building social networks that extend beyond the school community and are sustainable even after school years**), which consequently helps prevent ESL.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article142

Cooperation at the level of multi-professional teams: Which competencies do practitioners need? Which factors to consider to ensure effective cooperation?

Lessons from introducing multi-professional teams in healthcare show that attention to team development, management, training as well as ongoing support brings a series of benefits for team functioning. Conversely, workload, increased bureaucracy, inter-professional and interpersonal conflicts were the biggest problems identified in community mental health teams. Findings in the areas of health and social care as well as education show that **considerable time and effort must go into developing other partners' knowledge and understanding** (institutional culture, language, practices etc.) **and into building trust to help overcome barriers to cooperation** (e.g. role conflict between different professions). The **primary challenges facing a multi-professional service in the school setting are ensuring student/family privacy and confidentiality** (clear protocols for the disclosure of

information to be given to specific members of the school are needed**)**. Moreover, **institutional resistance to external teams working on-site in schools has been observed**.

Empirical evidence highlights **the need for ESL multi-professional teams to intervene at the individual (child, family) and school level (group, class, school)**; e.g. activities relating to mental health support, family outreach approaches and school systemic changes (including alternatives to suspension, developing teachers' conflict resolution and bullying prevention skills). Strong strategic guidance for such teams on these issues is needed from the policy level. This prevention should mostly be selective, with some general application to the whole class/school. It is recommended to develop and implement a **comprehensive regional policy** coupled with a **resource coordination strategy** and **support for its implementation**.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article44

Theoretical and empirical insight into team cooperation from the perspective of group processes

All team members must be aware that teams are highly complex and dynamic systems that affect and are affected by several factors. Team functioning is neither linear, consecutive nor static. Teams operate at multiple levels (i.e. individual, team, organisation(s), region) and these levels interact. The life of a team is cyclical and teams are often engaged in multiple tasks that vary in duration and are at different stages. Team members are interdependent on each other – they need to **align their actions** to achieve the **common goal**.

Scientific research on teams and small groups informs us that **team training** fosters team cognitive outcomes, affective outcomes, teamwork processes, and performances outcome. It also shows that a combination of relevant competencies among members is very important (what each member brings relative to other members). The leaders/coordinators of multi-professional teams should place attention on the **composition of the team**, because this can help anticipate problems and take preventive actions. **Leadership matters** for team outcomes and for supporting a range of team processes (e.g. establishing a collective team climate).

From the practice point of view, these findings imply that members must always keep their **common goal** in mind (i.e. to support (potential) ESLers). In addition to competencies related to members' profession (e.g. teaching), team members also need to possess **specific ESL-related competencies** (e.g. knowledge and

understanding of ESL) and **team-related competencies** (e.g. knowledge of teamwork skills, assertiveness, preference for teamwork). This reinforces the need for them to actively seek professional opportunities (training) in this direction.

Relational expertise as a prerequisite for effective multi-professional collaboration on ESL

Professionals working in inter-professional teams require relational expertise. This is 'extra expertise' (on top of what underpins one's profession) and enables professionals to acknowledge and work with the expertise of others. The multi-professional composition of the team helps the participants recognise the complexity of youngsters' trajectory and align their actions accordingly, resulting in potentially more beneficial practices. Namely, a young person's trajectory away from the risk of ESL may be interpreted differently by different professionals, making them wish to work on it in different ways.

The essence of relational expertise is **recognising and responding to other professionals' standpoints, but also to utilise the knowledge that underpins one's own practice.** Further, relational expertise involves a process of attuning one's own responses to the responses offered by other professionals. Moreover, the incorporation of relational expertise leads to the **coordinated response of different practices**; e.g. the teacher downplays demands made in the curriculum so as to accommodate a social worker's support.

The **capacity for relational agency can be learnt**; in a series of sessions professionals question contradictions (tensions between professionals) in current practice and together model and implement new forms of practice. Moreover, when first forming a multi-professional team it is important **to talk about the prejudice pertaining to each profession** (that may or may not be true) and **expectations** (that might be unrealistic and unfulfillable). Allowing time for these processes in the start helps to build confidence among team members.

The relational turn in expertise involves some profound changes occurring in how professionals think about self and agency in professional work. Thus, the notion of relational expertise **is not an easy task** and working in this way places demands on professionals. **External experts (intervention, supervision, researcher) need to be involved in building multi-professional teams**; this support should be provided later in the working process.

TRAINING

What can we do to promote cooperation? Which competencies to develop and which trainings to attend to become more effective in preventing ESL?

Although the cooperation of stakeholders from/within different policy areas and also from/within different levels may offer a promising and efficient approach to tackle ESL, it is not very likely such cooperation will happen naturally and without people raising awareness of it and getting additional training to develop related competencies.

Training for cooperation in multi-professional teams: How can I become better at working with other practitioners?

The importance of the social and emotional competencies of educational staff

In the last decade, ever more attention has been paid to the promotion of students' social and emotional competencies, with studies showing that fostering these aspects bolsters students' academic performance and other domains. It was recently suggested that **teachers' own social and emotional competencies** (e.g. emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills) **are crucial to developing students' social and emotional competencies and their learning and development in general in addition to teachers' own well-being**. Relational competence can be placed within the general framework of teachers' SEC – teachers must (apart from substantive knowledge and knowledge about child development and teaching methods) **possess knowledge about relationships** and develop competencies in this field (**how to establish and maintain positive teacher–student relationships**). Indeed, in recent years the teacher–student relationship has started to emerge as the primary element influencing students' functioning and adjustment. In the past decade, relational competence has become part of professional development interventions and initial teacher education training, while related scientific evidence has been growing.

In the process of working with a student who is (potentially) leaving school, relational competence helps teachers and other educational staff to establish contact with the young person. For example, a relationally competent professional (teacher, nurse) might say to a student: "*I can imagine you've often thought about your life and your school and I haven't, so I understand your doubts about how I can help*

you; and I'm not certain if I can, but you can be sure I'm interested in listening about what's important to you". This helps professionals **meet the young individual as a person, rather than a problem different professionals feel they should do something about**.

Team members' and teachers' understanding of their own unpleasant emotions in the process of teamwork or teaching

Emotions play an important role in regulating a person's relationship with their environment. Teamwork or the class or school environment represent even bigger challenges and acts as stimuli that may trigger emotions. **Being able to understand the nature of one's own emotions and trying to appropriately regulate them is considered emotionally intelligent and socially desirable**. Moreover, different studies show that emotionally more competent team members contribute to team effectiveness, whereas emotionally more competent teachers develop better relationships with their students, in turn also affecting students' general attitude to the school and helping to prevent ESL.

All things considered, the issue of developing emotional competencies should be seen as a priority for all school professionals. **When practitioners understand that it is their own valorisation of the situation that triggers their anger or frustration in the relationship with a student/other practitioner, they start to feel in control of their own emotions and less hopeless and dependent on others' behaviour**. It is also important for a teacher or a team member to analyse their beliefs and values concerning teaching and the teacher–student relationship or teamwork so as to become aware of potential dysfunctional beliefs that could unnecessarily trigger their unpleasant emotions like anger or frustration. Such understanding can be achieved via **emotional trainings** that can be organised for teachers and other school professionals.

Professional development covers all activities that develop a teacher's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics. Researchers as well as teachers themselves have identified the following competencies of the teacher as being very important for preventing ESL: **teaching special learning needs students, ICT teaching skills, new technologies in the workplace, student discipline and behavioural problems, self-reflection and collaborative work.** These competencies enable the teacher to spend more time on planning, monitoring and providing effective teaching (and an individualised approach) and thus to react in due time to improve students' pattern of academic performance and catch their disengagement early on (i.e. their ESL intention).

According to research evidence and teachers' self-reports, it is becoming clear that greater emphasis is needed on developing these competencies in existing and new professional teacher development programmes. Of course, that should be in addition to and in interplay with existing programmes that strengthen the didactic dimension of the teacher's competence.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article146

Teacher self-reflection

Teaching should not only be seen in the traditional sense of knowledge transfer but as a process oriented to the progress of students that considers their achievements in all areas of development and their well-being at school since, as patterns of academic performance and self-perceptions, these are the objectives that can prevent ESL. Teacher self-reflection is recognised as a valuable tool for improving such teaching practice. Teacher self-reflection should be treated as a process of learning in practice (i.e. learning in the moment) and from practice (i.e. retrospectively analysing, self-evaluating). The self-reflection consists of both formal and informal processes and should **involve reflections on their work as well as reflections on their competencies and personality**. Namely, the professional identity of teachers consists of both personal and occupational concepts that should be related to each other. Only when they are related do they enable teachers to make use of all their knowledge and expertise in order to successfully implement their teaching. Self-reflection is a concept that **improves teachers' awareness of different objectives and allows them to analyse and evaluate their existing subjective perceptions, competencies, work-related facts and personal feelings and plan their future development**.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article147

Training for cooperation with students: How can I become better at working with students?

Social and emotional learning as a tool for preventing ESL

Recent studies show that social and emotional learning plays an important role in preventing ESL through several mechanisms. When implemented in schools, social and emotional learning prevents ESL *directly* by promoting school connectedness, commitment and positive attitudes to the school, teachers and peers and *indirectly* by enhancing educational success.

At the school level, we can bring about SEL either **through the creation of a safe and encouraging learning** environment or the **administration of already developed SEL programmes**. Establishing a safe and encouraging classroom environment includes the integration of peers and parents in the creating of a positive classroom and social climate by developing students' social and emotional skills. Through systematic teaching in SEL programmes (in which the development of social and emotional skills is structured), students can learn social and emotional competencies in such a way that allows them to easily apply them in different situations and use them in everyday life. For instance, teachers could run structured SEL programmes during their regular class activities or integrate them into their curriculum. For the purpose of fostering students' comprehensive development (cognitive and non-cognitive), it is advisable to **integrate efficient SEL programmes into all schools at primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education (and preschool) levels**. Since it has already been pointed out that upper secondary schools are the most problematic, implementing such programmes there is strongly advised. But, in the long run, the earlier we start, the bigger the benefit. When using SEL as a ESL prevention tool, it is important to stress that SEL does not deter schools from their fundamental teaching and learning purposes and acquisition of basic knowledge, but enables better quality and more efficient teaching and learning within schools.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article50

Developing students' emotional intelligence to help prevent ESL

Teaching and learning in schools have strong social, emotional and academic components. Students usually learn in collaboration with their teachers, in the company of their schoolmates, and with the encouragement and support of their family environment. Developing emotional intelligence in students may be seen as one specific aspect of social and emotional learning. It is particularly important because emotions can facilitate or block children's academic engagement,

attitude to school work, commitment, and ultimate academic success. Relationships and emotional processes strongly affect how and what we learn. Therefore, schools should effectively address these aspects of the educational process to the benefit of all students. Studies show that students with greater emotional intelligence show higher social competencies, have better grades at school and are more engaged at school. All of these factors also negatively correlate with ESL.

Findings about how social and emotional competencies influence students' academic performance led to the development of different programmes that support the building of emotional competencies at school. Most of such programmes can be used by schools and applied by teachers themselves. Teachers can also influence the way students' emotional intelligence and social skills develops by **taking time during instruction to address the emotions students feel and discuss why they feel them, what their purpose is and what one can do to regulate one's own emotional reactions**.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article148

Student's self-concept and its association with ESL

There is theoretical and empirical evidence that the student's self-concept/self-image, especially their academic self-image, correlates with their engagement in school and ESL. Different studies reveal **the importance of a positive self-concept in order to achieve good results at school**. It is also shown that students with varying degrees of self-conception exhibit different cognitive, social and emotional behaviour in schools, including ESL. Self-image is made up of a student's experience and learning history and is particularly influenced by important people close to the child. Some researchers argue it is the parents who have the primary influence over development of the child's self-concept, while others argue that teachers have a greater impact, especially on development of the student's academic self-image.

Accordingly, it is very important for teachers to pay attention to the kind of messages they send students when communicating with them about schoolwork, their abilities, skills, achievements etc. Teachers' **communication should therefore be very clear, with criticism only directed at the child's behaviour,** not the child as a person, and the **teacher should always double-check if a student has made certain incorrect assumption**s based on the teacher's criticism or praise. Teachers can also include different topics on self-image in their instruction hours and help children explore their self-image and reflect on it.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article149

Preventing ESL by enhancing resiliency

Resiliency is a result of the interaction between the individual and their context (it is not a characteristic of either the individual or environment). In this context, resiliency reflects the fact that the interaction between an individual and their context holds adaptive significance. **Resiliency** reflects individual well-being at a certain point in time and **positive adaptation in the light of environmental disadvantages**.

Changes supporting resiliency and adaptive functioning (including remaining at in school) can therefore be fostered within the individual and their environment. In order to promote positive youth development that reflects resiliency, we must focus on the individual (relative plasticity) and their context (the presence of resources or developmental assets). Developmental assets found in the environment are: **social support from peers, social support from adults** (e.g. parents, teachers), **involvement in institutions** (school and outside of schools). On the school level, we can put special focus on: (i) building effective schools through a positive climate development; (ii) positive attachment relationships, e.g. close relationships with competent, prosocial and supportive adults; (iii) authoritative parenting (through parent-teacher meetings); and (iv) connections with prosocial and rule-abiding peers. On the individual level, the crucial characteristic of the individual linked to adaptive functioning is **self-regulation**. The individual's capacity for intentional self-regulation is a critical strength enabling individuals to access the resources they need to achieve positive goals (such as finishing school) and to compensate in situations of adversity.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article150

Neuroscientific findings in education and what they imply for ESL

Reviews of neuroeducation in recent times highlight the growing body of scientific research that can also have an impact on education. For example, brain imaging enables researchers to map the anatomy of reading and mathematics and to correlate individual differences in how these skills are acquired with differences in brain structure and function. Such research provides a scientific context within which to understand student learning and, in the not-too-distant future, might enhance the assessment of readiness to learn or special needs.

As tasks and problems in school become more complex, students face bigger demands to retain and manipulate many types of information in their working memory. The burden placed on working memory (i.e., cognitive load) in these situations can significantly impact students' abilities to perform learning tasks and

benefit from them because working memory capacity is limited. Given the increasing consolidation of job functions within the workforce, the reality is that students will be assuming more responsibility for learning and decision-making in the future, and will be increasingly confronted by data/information overload.

Throughout education, there is a wide gap in translating the findings made by cognitive neuroscientists into everyday educational practice. Nevertheless, better comprehension of the human brain can help teachers understand and develop new teaching strategies that will be more individualised and differentiated to suit an individual student's personal and neurological characteristics.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article151

Non-formal motivational focuses for potential ESLers

Strengthening the motivation to learn and be active in school is one of the key factors for keeping potential ESLers in education. In order to do this, it is important to identify what interests students since interest is a vital element of intrinsic learning motivation. It is evident that students, also those at risk for ESL, may have many interests outside school: they attend activities of their choice and enjoy them. Accordingly, it is suggested that **connections between school/formal education and young people's non-formal interests be used to (re)motivate youth for school work**.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary for schools to be able to organise appropriate activities that connect both aspects mentioned (e.g. project weeks and workshops where students introduce their skills) and **teachers are trained in the area of the basic principles of non-formal and informal learning** and in transferring such knowledge into their classrooms. This also means that: teachers recognise students' non-formal activities (e.g. hobbies, sport activities, family activities, students' culture, peer-group activities) as sources of their motivation to learn, consider and include their opinion, experience and knowledge arising from their non-formal activities in the process of planning learning topics, and affectively use active learning methods that include students' interests (e.g. experiental learning, project work) and different sources of knowledge outside school in order to strengthen their motivation to learn and remain at school.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article152

One of the most common reasons for leaving school identified by ESLers themselves is that school is boring and irrelevant to their needs. This is important since the data show that some teaching methods in mainstream education are inappropriate, especially for people with low achievement and educational qualifications, which are often characteristics of ESLers.

Originating from the reasons for leaving school stated by ESLers, **teachers could employ some andragogical methods** to help reduce ESL in mainstream education. One way to achieve the greater involvement of ESLers in the educational process is to implement the andragogical cycle (identification of educational needs, curriculum planning, planning programme formats, programme implementation, evaluation), methods and tools (e.g. experiential learning, self-directed learning, learning projects etc.) in educational planning and teaching processes.

Some of the specific approaches suggested and deriving from basic andragogical methods and principles are: leaving the participants with **greater freedom to decide where and when to learn**, allowing for participants' natural curiosity to lead their learning, **explaining to participants that they are in charge of their own education**, **adjusting work methods to every individual** in small groups if possible, using different dynamic methods of teaching, and including students in learning projects to expand their interest. However, it has to be noted that when implementing these principles teachers and other practitioners are constrained by the demands and regulations the education system imposes. Thus, some levers to ensure that changes to the system occur in the proposed direction are necessary.

Further reading: http://titaproject.eu/spip.php?article153

Innovative trainings for teachers and other educational staff: What kind of trainings to attend to become more effective in preventing ESL?

Overview of innovative online trainings

ESL has recently been regarded as an urgent policy problem and teachers and other educational staff are increasingly under pressure to effectively prevent and tackle it; thus practitioners need professional development in this field. Virtual platforms and supporting online networks can make implementation of the

development of teachers' competencies more effective regarding the aspects of time, effort and scarce resources compared with traditional professional development forms. Innovative online trainings offer a great opportunity for all educators to participate in a professional development programme that is relevant to their particular interests and needs as well as for their institutions. **Online professional development (but only when combined with face-to-face training)** provides several essential elements of effective professional development; it gives the participating teachers opportunities to: (a) **become acquainted with innovative teaching approaches**; (b) **practise what they learn in their own educational settings; and (c) return to share their experience**, **discuss new theoretical and practical insights** and **ask for support or further information** in an ideal environment for interaction with other participants.

Therefore, participating in online trainings such as those offered by *__Aula Mentor (Mentor Classroom)__*, *__Neopass@ction__*, *__Glow Connect__*, *__SecondChanceEducation.eu__*, *__MyTeachingPartner™__*, etc. may prove to be an effective approach for all educators to improve their professional development (including in areas of teachers' competencies relevant to ESL prevention). The competencies that need to be enhanced can be identified by teachers themselves or by scientific findings.

What can we learn from second-chance education programmes for adults to prevent ESL in younger generations?

A review of good-practice examples from second-chance programmes shows that **teaching practices in mainstream programmes can benefit from them**. There are following main points should be considered when seeking to prevent ESL based on second-chance education programmes: second-chance programmes are more effective in **applying an individual-based approach to learning** to the teacher-student relationship and in **encouraging the individual's non-formal motivational resources**, while teaching approaches are derived from the theoretical presumption that anticipates the **cooperation of teachers/mentors with other professional associates**, mentor groups, and experts from the local environment and wider community. Still, besides these advantages, different practices show that second-chance programmes are very successful, but not completely sufficient for combating ESL since they fail to attract ESLers from the most disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, with more problematic school careers, those weary of school, those redoing a year and having personal problems. Again, the early intervention of mainstream education to prevent ESL is inevitable and can benefit considerably from the experiences arising from second-chance programmes.