The Covid-19 pandemic and the need to transform a hierarchical education system into a democratic system with autonomous schools

ALERT EDUCATION consulting

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WELS 2021 Educational Change and the Future of Education

This presentation focuses on European best practices enabling principals to transform their schools.

It is the result of my work as a practitioner, involved in European and international professional associations of school principals since 1998.

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- Leader of 6 different schools for 22 years, 4 in France, one in Berlin and one in Zurich (2 primary, 3 lower secondary, 3 upper secondary schools)

- Also involved in the Executive Board of European associations of school heads for 20 years, such as ESHA and AEDE-France as well as a Council Member of the ICP, the International Confederation of Principals between 2004 and 2015. Working in cooperation with the European Parents Association (EPA) 2000-2017.

# CASE STUDY : THE COVID CRISIS and the French educational policy
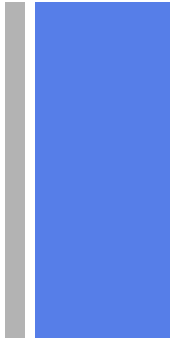
■ The French situation is a concrete background that can be used as a case study to show that **: Bureaucratic centralism is no longer the adequate response to the transformation of society.**

■ Blended learning implemented as a matter of urgency, has revealed both weaknesses **and potential**.

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- **Weaknesses**

- According to a survey conducted by the National Union of School principals (SNPDEN-Unsa), 80% of them say they are subject to periods of depression, severe even for 10%, 59% have a low opinion of themselves, 84% even say they are not psychically able to fulfill their mission.

- They have been mostly informed by their minister about their work, **on the TV and radio**. 77% say that relationships of trust with their hierarchy have deteriorated."

- Response provided by the Minister to the current situation: the "Grenelle de l'Education" launched in October 2020, as a new national consultation which was supposed to develop team spirit and to reduce administrative constraints.
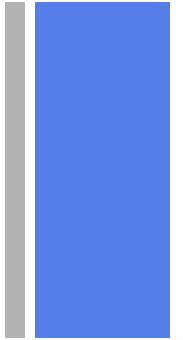
THE TOP-DOWN ANSWER OF THE MINISTRY
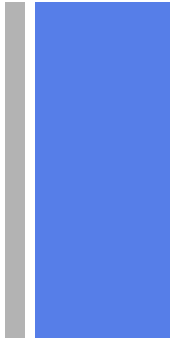
- As usual, the "Grenelle de l'Education" is based on the contribution of all stakeholders **on a national basis** through workshops with staff, parents, unions and civil society on the revaluation of staff salaries, professional training and career paths, digital education, HR, health at the working place,…

- Months later, in August 2021, the Minister takes up a large part of the proposals. The Regional authorities – called Academies (18) - must establish "a roadmap" which takes up the orientations of the Minister.

- A typically top-down process which has already proven its ineffectiveness for over 30 years in fighting the lack of equity and social justice.

- Everything seems to indicate that the French cannot imagine a reverse situation: bottom-up.

+ A BOTTOM-UP ANSWER IS NEEDED

- The covid crisis has shown us – if still needed – that **"Empowerment"** should be the common goal for educational systems.

- **School leaders** are expected to develop equity, the ability to act and to gain self-confidence.

- **Teachers and students** must acquire the capacity to make decisions, to take risks, to gain self-confidence. Therefore, they must practice teamwork, make use of leadership skills and they have to be trained with digital tools.

- **A potential, due to the pandemic, that has not been exploited.**

- The ministerial decisions imposing many changes in health protocol and the organization of half-class courses have imposed an **overload of administrative work** on the school leaders. These practices did not encourage a questioning of pedagogical practices, implementing f.e. flexible students' groups and flexible time management.

If we want :

to engage ourselves for more democracy
and more equity at school,

to prepare our youth for lifelong
learning,

to avoid violence, youth unemployment,
lack of interest in school, anxiety about
the future, lack of confidence,

we have to adopt different measures.

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5 STEPS

to transform a hierarchical education system into a democratic system with autonomous schools

- **Self evaluation of schools**

- **Distributed school leadership and autonomy**

- **Changes in teacher recruitment**

- **Competence-based training and assessment of teachers and school heads**

- **Cross collaborative activities between business and education world**

It is not possible for school principals to change the whole system from being centralized. However, it is possible for them to bring into their own school some autonomy and to run the school in a democratic way with all the stakeholders involved in creating a culture of distributed leadership.

We do not have enough time today to develop the 5 steps, so we will focus on the two essential components promoting cooperation and co-creation during the Covid-19 pandemic :

- between parents, students, teachers, other staff

- between the school community and external partners, such as companies.

First step : Self evaluation of schools

If we want to give students and parents new roles and responsibilities, the first step is to involve them in the internal evaluation of the school.

One of the successful practices in Finland is based on this method, while most of the countries still have inspection bodies.

A pilot project was launched at the end of the Nineties in several European countries by the European Commission and was called "**evaluating quality in school education**".

One of the tools was a practical guide to self-evaluation the "self evaluation profile"

The " self-evaluation profile"

Involvement of students, teachers, parents and school leaders in a collegial work

A good way to **create a new culture at school and to promote teamwork**.

- I had the opportunity to use the "**self-evaluation profile**" (John Mac Beath, Denis Meuret, Michael Schratz, Lars Jakobsen - 2000) and to put the proposed self-evaluation questionnaire into practice in my school three times. (More information on the self-evaluation profile [here](#))

- Each time the questionnaire was used, about 50 representatives/delegates of students and parents, all teachers (about 50) and 5 members of the leadership team had to answer questions concerning all the aspects of school life. Then we evaluated the weaknesses and strengths together and used the information to prepare **the school development plan for the following 3 years**.

- These results were taken into account by the staff of our school and then some teachers decided to do peer-supervision. They also agreed on flexible time management and flexible students' groups.

Please, evaluate the school in relation to each area on the following scale.

|	AERA	As we are now*				Recent evolution
Out-comes	Academic achievement	++	+	-	-	
	Personal and social development	++	+	-	-	
	Pupils destinations	++	+	-	-	
Classroom	Time as a resource for learning	++	+	-	-	
	Quality of learning and teaching	++	+	-	-	
Level	Support for learning difficulties	++	+	-	-	
School	School as a learning place	++	+	-	-	
	School as a social place	++	+	-	-	
Level	School as a professional place	++	+	-	-	
Environment	School and home	++	+	-	-	
	School and community	++	+	-	-	
	School and work	++	+	-	-	
Other area						

Legend: ++ :major strengths in this area, + : strengths outweighs weaknesses, - : weaknesses outweigh strengths, :
major weaknesses in this area .
The arrows indicate the trends since the previous evaluation two years before in the given area: upwards arrow means
improvement, etc.

Second step Distributed school leadership and autonomy are required to enable individualized learning

Some experiments – like **Slash 21** in the Netherlands – have shown that 13 years old students are able to choose what they want to learn, able to decide when and how, able to know why, connecting learning with their own future. *Source SLASH 21/Eminent :*
The first model should belong to the past. The new model of the 21st century will profoundly **change the role played by the state and the local authorities, w**hich have to assume much wider responsibilities in the areas of initial training, vocational training and lifelong learning.

Discipline

Learning community

Teacher   **Student**

Ressources   **Student**
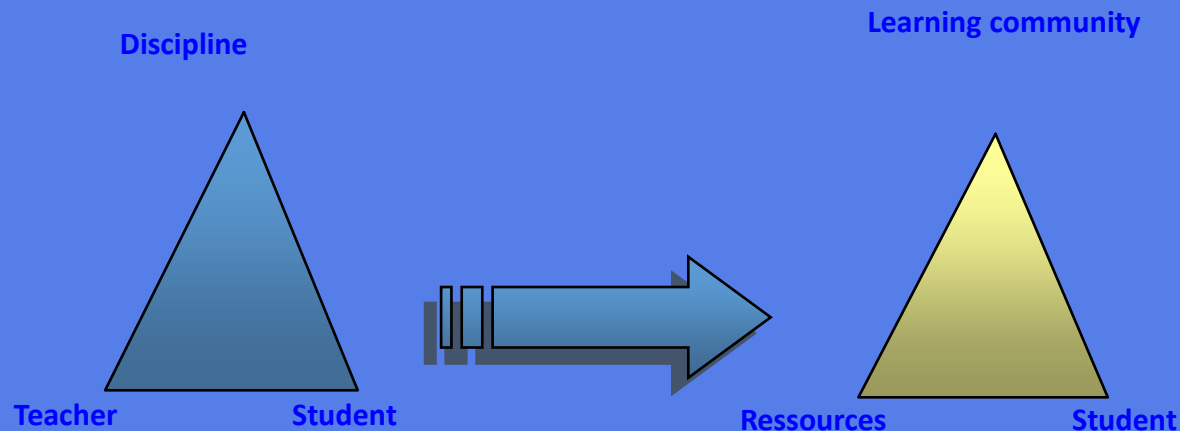
Third step : key competences for teachers

To change learning methods at my school and to remind my teachers of this fact, I posted this statement on the door of the teacher's room in our school (Joyce, B.R. & Showers, B. 1983):

5% of learners will transfer a new skill into their practice as a result of theory.

10% will transfer a new skill into their practice as a result of theory and demonstration.

20% will transfer a new skill into their practice as a result of theory, demonstration and practice.

25% will transfer a new skill into their practice as a result of theory, demonstration, practice and feedback.

90% will transfer a new skill into their practice as a result of theory, demonstration, practice, feedback and coaching.

Third step

A reminder of the 8 key competences

Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning. The framework describes the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to each of these 8 key competences:

- **communication in the mother tongue**,

- **communication in foreign languages**,

- **mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology**,.

- **digital competence**,

- **learning to learn**,

- **social and civic competences**,

- **sense of initiative and entrepreneurship**,

- **cultural awareness and expression**.

Fourth step
Competence-based training and assessment of teachers and school leaders
The covid crisis has highlighted that :

A school needs teachers with professional skills and personal commitment. They also have to be facilitators, team members, researchers, lifelong learners, reflective practitioners.

School leaders and teachers have to recognize that "**co-construction**" is at the basis of knowledge and to be aware of the necessity to integrate the influence of **non-formal and informal education.**

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Fifth step
Collaboration Schools / Companies

We should consider the company as "a developer of talent" primarily in the field of **entrepreneurship education, financial education and STEM** and promote all these new skills **by a School-Business collaboration from an early age.**

To let students develop awareness, autonomy, the ability to make choices and take responsibility, discover their own motivations and potential, we have to involve companies in the daily life of the schools, to influence the design of student learning methods and/or of school buildings, adapted to the 21st century, enabling teachers to work with assistants, external partners thus practicing teamwork.

Companies should be allowed to provide **training content** and to be more involved in the **assessment of skills** when training periods are set up.**.**

Fifth step
Collaboration between schools and companies

We should take into account some successful and inspiring practices :

The "Entrepreneurial Skills Pass" proposed by the Austrian Chamber of Commerce of Vienna - WKÖ in Austria and Junior Achievement
http://entrepreneurialskillspass.eu/

Developing financial literacy through private-public partnerships, training teachers and students **: CYFI Child and Youth Finance International** is an NGO, working worldwide
http://childfinanceinternational.org

STEM education

If we want :
- an environmentally sustainable society
- gender equality in STEM
- digital skills to be integrated in the curriculum as well in primary as in secondary schools

We should take into account the support of successful and inspiring practices by the European Commission.

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The objectives of the EU STEM Coalition
http://www.stemcoalition.eu/ are to support member states in the
development of new STEM strategies based on the triple helix
approach (Government/Region – Companies – Schools).
The EU STEM Coalition provides direct support in the
development of new initiatives, organizations and strategies based
on existing best-practices.

The KICS – Knowledge & Innovation Communities - of the EIT
European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) on Climate,
Digital, Food, Health, InnoEnergy, Manufacturing, Raw materials,
Urban mobility, based on the Knowledge triangle : Business,
Education, Research, show how to approach the initial training of
teachers, which has necessarily become holistic and
transdisciplinary.

**This transdisciplinary work promoted by the EU STEM
Coalition and the EIT could be articulated at school and
transform the continuous training of teachers.**

Conclusion

- The pandemic has shown us , in case it was still needed, that bureaucratic centralism is no longer the adequate response to the situation.

- Instead of being directed by a "command and control policy" from the center, school principals have to organize a competence-based learning, integrating initiative and responsibility for the learner and for all the partners working inside and outside the school.

- School leaders can change the school's autonomy at their level, but some other decisions depend on the will of the ministers.

- School leaders have the responsibility to engage their governments in the necessary reforms.

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Member of a working group on women entrepreneurship at the EIT   European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) (2016-2017)

and involved in the activities of the OECD on financial education (2012-2017) http://www.financial-education.org/home.html