

Proposition for the ESREA Conference

Title: Second-chance measures: an opportunity for new training models? An example of French second-chance schools

Key words: *Second-chance school, NEET, empowerment, review, action research*

Introduction

The multiple crises facing Europe (economic, social, financial, ecological, health crises, etc.) are a sign that there is an urgent need to implement political measures that consider social priorities. As in many other countries in Europe, the integration of youth in France has been viewed as a “national priority” since 1981 (Schwartz, 1981). What, then, are the long-term prospects for the integration measures targeting youth described as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)? “Second chance” policies propose a social component to take charge of “dropouts” from the school system and from the world of work. What is the objective of giving a second chance to those who have been left behind? Should they be integrated into yesterday's world, knowing fully well that neoliberal orientations generate crises that jeopardize the chances of a world that is livable and more just? Or, on the contrary, does a second chance offer a possibility for another world, of modes of development that respect people and the environment, of a world that is more just? Lastly, under what conditions may it be considered that second-chance measures implemented at the European level promote a development model based on new foundations (democratic, empowering, environmental, etc.)? Reflecting on the integration of youth in “economic precarity” (Castel, 2009) with a sense of urgency is to run the risk of limiting their integration to a logic of adaptation to the available jobs, meaning the most precarious and the least socially valued jobs. How may second-chance projects be perceived as an opportunity for empowerment (individual, collective, regional...)? Is the second chance given to so-called “vulnerable” youth aligned with policies aimed at helping individuals to adapt to economic constraints or does it help renew the values of public education?

Based on the results of an action research conducted around the implementation of a skills-based approach within the Network of Second Chance Schools in France, this contribution questions the citizen dimension of integration measures such as the second-chance school (E2C) from a critical perspective.

1. Second chance measures

1.1. The second chance: a European concept at the crossroads of the challenges associated with starting work and educational supervision

The concept of a second chanceⁱ widely promoted by European policies is part of a strategy aimed at increasing the competitiveness of European countries through the development of a knowledge-based economy, increasing the skills of European workers, and reducing early school leaving, boosted particularly by Edith Cresson and the White Paper of the European Commissionⁱⁱ (1995).

Employment-related tensions are higher in times of economic crisis, leading to a greater risk of relegating issues of citizens' rights to the background. Given that second-chance measures are at the crossroads of employment and educational support policies, political decisions are made regarding the ultimate aims of these measures, insofar as they crystallize tensions between the aims of emancipation and the adaptation to the jobs available. Put differently, the manner in which these measures are developed across national territories condition the balance (or imbalance) between supporting citizen development and "putting people to work". Let us take two examples: Greece and France (we will refer specifically to E2Cs in France in the next section). In Greece, E2Cs run for two years and candidates receive a leaving certificate on completion. In France, there are wide variations in the duration of training because candidates can constantly join and quit the system. Moreover, no certificates are offered on completion but one receives a document proving that they have acquired specific skills (we will also come back to this point in the next section). While the E2C in Greece is aligned with the modes of functioning of the "first chance" school with certification and the requirement to diligently follow a two-year course, the French model is more hybrid. Indeed, the latter fuels tensions between adaptation to the immediate market needs and a shift away from the social and economic world to allow the candidates enrolled to construct their pathways, at the professional as well as at the individual and personal level.

The implementation of second-chance measures takes place in a political context that seeks to empower individuals with regard to the management of their skills development plan while encouraging them to take control of part of the risks and funding that allow real access to training.

1.2. The Second Chance School in France

The mission of E2Csⁱⁱⁱ is to promote the professional and social integration of young people aged 16 to 25 (except for special exemptions if one is receiving RSA, a French form of income support, or has a dependent family, etc.) who dropped out of school without any certificates (or whose poor results do not allow them to find a job).^{iv}

Over a flexible period (which can exceed seven months), the training offer is focused on the development of a professional career plan, individual monitoring, work-study internships and refresher courses. Training is structured around four axes, the first three of which are mandatory:

- group sessions on the professional project^v, the formalization of skills, refresher courses (in English, mathematics, French), arts, sports, etc.
- internships in companies (almost half of the period of training),
- individual monitoring around the construction of the personal and professional project,
- and lastly, on a voluntary basis, collective projects on the creation of a mini-enterprise, artistic (stone sculptures, visual arts, participation in national competitions...), cultural, or sport performances. These projects can give rise to debates with citizens, the creation of a shared garden, theatre workshops, etc. These initiatives often lie outside of, but are connected to, the project and are bearers of new individual and collective hopes. Both the training team and the youth themselves are expected to "quit" the "traditional" system and promote the growth of a different world, which sometimes conflicts with the expectations of the system of

integration (for example, E2C are financed based on the number of “positive exits” toward employment or on vocational training).

1.2. Action Research, E2Cs and the Competency-based Approach

Seeking to consolidate the competency-based approach (CBA) considered as “the core of the educational approach” of E2Cs, and based on the observation that the applicable frames of reference are not sufficiently adapted to the needs of trainees or to the educational approach implemented within schools, there was a call for national action-research projects in 2015 around two main objectives:

- first, “to provide the schools with clear principles defining trainees’ training objectives, inducing educational approaches and tools specific to the competency-based approach, and proposing an approach and assessment tools arising from this approach”;
- second, “to strengthen the pedagogical identity of the E2C Network, establish a common culture, and equip the network with the means to disseminate this identity in order to explain and strengthen the E2C label”.

For the E2C network, it is therefore a question of proposing an approach to redesign the educational approach implemented in second-chance schools^{vi}.

2. Citizen rights and Second Chance: an arranged marriage?

2.1. Institutional logics under tension

Second-chance policies fall within a competitive and fragmented field, raising questions as to the support trainees receive throughout their trajectories. The integration market has stirred up competition between organizations and promoted a “system logic”, focused on highlighting the added value of structures of integration, paradoxically relegating the “logics of supporting pathways”, despite the fact that these are driven by financial sponsors. Indeed, the methods for evaluating actions seeking individuals’ integration remain dependent on criteria such as “positive exits”, meaning exiting the system to join training or to work. For example, E2Cs justify their action by showing that approximately 60% of the young people who enroll in their programs find a job or enroll in vocational training at the end of their E2C journey. Nevertheless, as an indicator, the “positive exit” measures the flows associated with unique uses, rather than what plays out at the regional level with regards to the development of pathways. More specifically, this is reflected, for instance, by the fact that several measures are used to support similar trainees, raising questions once again about how the different initiatives are interlinked rather than about the fragmentary management of these pathways.

Referring to integration policies “à la française”, Santelmann (date) mentions an “organ pipes” type of functioning, i.e., a functioning mode that does not allow connections between different professional orientations and where the injunctions to create courses are stronger now than they were yesterday (Loquais, 2022). These “positive exits” refer *de facto* to a quantitative logic linked to the labor market that cares little about the qualitative impacts of training on individuals enrolled in the so-called “second chance” programs. Moreover, it questions what the individual receiving training has gained, not only in terms of the

conditions of training but also in relation to the aims of training (in terms of skills or training objectives).

In relation to the second chance school, one of the challenges is the recognition of the attestation of acquired skills issued at the end of the training (which lasts for approximately 7 months) at the national level, compared to the certificates available for people with “low education qualifications”, such as the certificate of professional knowledge and skills. From an educational point of view, the training offer in E2Cs is less focused on disciplinary content than on the global support of the young person: refresher courses in French, mathematics, computer science or even English; support for the professional project, valorization of acquired knowledge through, for example, the skills portfolio, cultural and sport activities. The CBA privileged in E2Cs is based on a number of principles and feedback is considered essential. For youth enrolled in these schools, it is a question of developing one’s learning level but also of becoming aware of one’s achievements prior to training and if necessary, promoting them depending on one’s future plans. Indeed, the recognition of the achievements of a career path is a cross-cutting issue in any integration plan. The aim is to enable young people to overcome the stigma of marginality in order to promote the knowledge acquired over one’s life course.

2.2. Citizen rights and training practices

The action research undertaken highlighted, in part, “traditional” practices in the world of adult education, namely attachment to democratic and collective values, but which are at odds with individualistic and fragmentary working practices. Teamwork remains the exception, making the support to collective and interdisciplinary projects more difficult. Moreover, the absence of reflective feedback on their actual practices prevents trainers from becoming aware of this situation. In this sense, action research revealed a need for teamwork and the need to focus on different forms of analysis of practices in order to discuss, rethink and analyze the training proposed. These difficulties, which are associated with cooperative work, make the implementation of the CBA approach problematic, as it is counter-cultural.

The studies undertaken with the E2C teams also reached the conclusion of the need for a broader approach to skills, one capable of finding a balance between the level of knowledge, efficiency at work and openness to the cultural, social and ecological world. Indeed, given the profiles of the youth enrolled in E2Cs, it appeared essential to go beyond a definition of skills that focused solely on the need to work and the imperatives of employment. Without neglecting these skills, the reference frame produced takes into account other dimensions that may be described as “social skills” necessary for both the integration and empowerment of youth. Thus, this framework is structured around nine areas of expertise that touch on basic knowledge and skills, group work, and on the professional project and its environment. Three other skills fall within the empowering dimension and are focused on developing lifelong learning, openness to cultural, social and civic life, the use of a foreign language (English). This broader approach to skills makes it possible to avoid a utilitarian view and the (often fantasized) demands of work — which are present behind the notion of a “positive exit” — and to prepare young people for a multidimensional integration.

Our study also provided an opportunity to reflect on the adult education model mobilized, and it found that few trainers had received training in this regard. Until then, the dominant model implemented by trainers was the schooling model. It was therefore necessary to identify, alongside the trainers, five initiatives to facilitate the organization of the APC approach and to promote the empowerment of the trainees. The objective of the first initiative was to promote lateral training in the sense of breaking down the divides between theoretical and methodological contributions and practices, as well as between interdisciplinarity and complementarity in regard to the educational projects shared by the youth and reference trainers. The second initiative sought to take into account the actual activities that structure trainees' learning by obtaining a better understanding of the skills that they need to enable them to transfer skills acquired in other fields of expertise. The third initiative was aimed at encouraging trainers to engage and reinforce moments of reflection around the activities conducted in order to allow those undergoing training to take ownership of the knowledge and skills acquired or in the process of being acquired. The last two initiatives sought to question the adult education models. The aim is to strengthen group work as a cooperative process, both between trainers and trainees, in order to facilitate group dynamics and promote a sense of solidarity. Lastly, the fifth and last principle required a “total shift” for many trainers by encouraging them to develop a facilitative and non-directive position in the sense of Carl Rogers in order to better structure learning and to transform the traditional educational relationship into a relationship of trust. In parallel, rather than privilege teacher-centered and normative instruction, it promotes active and cooperative educational approaches based on a socio-constructivist approach. Active teaching also requires trainers to radically rethink the evaluation process and to shift away from a classical and often summative assessment to a formative assessment driven by self-assessment and co-evaluation practices.

In short, the action research largely questioned the adult education model adopted spontaneously by many trainers, perhaps because of the phrase “Second Chance School”, a model that is often, if not always, imbued with the unconscious reproduction of the effects of learning processes. This explains why the network needs to undertake an in-depth study on the training of trainers not only to strengthen the identity of schools but also to enable young people to develop the critical thinking skills that guarantee their empowerment and emancipation. These challenges mean that there is a need to rethink training pathways and to cease to consider them as an exogenous construction that is not always aligned with the concerns of youth, and begin to view them as an endogenous construction, meaning one that is developed within the framework of a co-construction approach (Lenoir 1998).

In conclusion, one may argue that in the face of an “unconsidered adult education models” (Lenoir, 2015), the education practices of young adults are in need of an overhaul. In the long term, this could allow E2Cs to become, in their own way, a new component of an education aimed at making subjects autonomous and aware that they are part of a group, and one concerned with individual and collective empowerment. Without referring to empowerment explicitly, E2Cs and the teams that manage them would therefore adopt a humanist approach initiated by Condorcet, then by Paul Robin, Célestin Freinet and many others who shared

Sébastien Faure's desire to produce: no brain without a hand and no hand without a brain. In other words, this movement can help E2Cs to promote the emergence of well-adjusted individuals, satisfied on all levels and endowed with fine critical thinking skills. E2Cs, which were an innovation in 1995 when they were first created, could be part of a long educationist, emancipatory and popular tradition.

2.3. Citizen rights and youth activity (participation)?

Focusing on the citizen dimension of integration goals can help shed light on the actual integration models in E2Cs. Defining what "citizen activity" means is a rather complex affair and attempting to do so would undoubtedly be pretentious. It is, however, possible to consider that citizen activity must meet several criteria and must be clarified through questioning, analysis and critical thinking. The manner in which this activity affects one, the other and the environment must also be defined prior to its implementation. Nevertheless, the CBA aims to give everyone the tools that allow them to take conscious action in their social world. Beyond social and professional integration, it is a question of allowing trainees to undertake actions and lead their lives as enlightened adults who are allowed to choose for themselves and manage their project conscientiously, i.e., by ridding them of stereotypes (gender, color, etc.), allowing them to develop a critical view of the social and political world, etc.

As mentioned above, the CBA project therefore seeks to mobilize the potential of young trainees by improving their capacity to define for themselves a social and professional life project while strengthening their self-image and their sense of self-efficacy, as defined by Albert Bandura. Put differently, it allows young people, who are often victims of a certain form of instrumentalization, to pass from the status of "object" (or "target audience") to that – constantly under construction – of actor and author of their own future. In this sense, only an empowering, emancipatory and humanist adult education model may promote this aim, but it must be associated with concern for the group and with cooperation. It is not a question of promoting the development of young people in an individualistic and narrow perspective of competence, but rather of strengthening empowerment models that have a collective expectation of social justice (Eneau, 2016)^{vii}.

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ANNEX

Integration: a "French exception"?

In France, second-chance schools are in keeping with integration policies for "vulnerable" youth. Since the 1970s, integration policies in France have targeted groups "facing marginalization because of the economic situation" (Castel, 1995). There have been several approaches targeting "vulnerable" youth ever since the Schwartz report of 1981 on the professional and social integration of youth and the establishment of Local Missions in 1982. However, none of these measures have succeeded in creating profound changes in the social situation of the most vulnerable youth.

The national debates that have guided training and research professionals highlight tensions between the goals of empowerment (self-actualization on the long-term, appropriation of collective issues, development of citizen rights) and the "adequacy" objectives (adaptation to

the available job offers, responding to the needs of businesses, offers focused on matching training with professions “under tension”.) (Frétigné, 2011). Around these issues, the studies undertaken by Tanguy (1984) on the missing relationship between training and employment was quite notable. While there is consensus on remediation policies for the most vulnerable groups, their implementation varies depending on the model privileged. Indeed, integration as an approach that seeks to manage non-employment, has given rise to multiple forms of support which by no means enjoy a consensus. This means reverting to the initial questions: what does successful integration mean? What added value can training provide to individuals “without certification”? Regarding actions of integration, several levels of analysis come into play. First, it is legitimate to question the conditions under which such an approach makes it possible to influence the pathways of young people and to lead them to construct a genuinely “chosen” career path, if we refer, for instance, to the 2018 vocational training law on the freedom to choose one's professional path. In accordance with the law, it is about giving everyone a chance to receive support to build their pathway. In reality, for youth with a “low level of education” to move from one system to another, from an integration structure to employment, from an internship to vocational training, etc... that path must first exist. This assumes the existence of partnerships between training and integration organizations, between financial sponsors and training stakeholders, between the structures of integration and companies... The logics of competition and the increased commodification of training therefore bear the risk of a fragmented offer that acts as an obstacle to partnership dynamics.

However, the “à la française” lifelong learning system brings together two models that are poorly aligned: the first is centered on the schooling model and covers what is commonly referred to as “initial training”; it is managed by the Ministry of National Education and Youth. The second, whose mission is to guide all adults going back to school to develop their career paths, is led by both the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Integration and by the regional authorities. In France, EC2s fall under the responsibility of the latter. There are, however, many “drop-out” programs such as the DAIP (Support for Professional Integration) which also aim at supporting young people leaving the school system without certificates, but these are under the Ministry of National Education and Youth. This political fragmentation relating to the support that “dropouts” from the school system receive raises issues at various levels. On the one hand, this support is problematic as it proposes a fragmentary management of pathways. While individuals who find themselves without a certificate at the end of their schooling regularly change their status and experience precarious situations, they lack clear information about the offers intended for them. By changing their situation, they can find that they are no longer eligible for funding that would enable them to receive training, because of random criteria that are difficult to access for people “distanced from training”. On the other hand, access to certification poses a crucial problem with regard to the offer of integration: what is the real added value of a training program that does not lead to a certificate recognized at the national level, but which on the contrary bears an attestation of acquired skills, as is the case with E2Cs? Lastly, citizen rights appears to be the poor relation of French integration insofar as political and social concerns remain broadly centered on professional integration.

ⁱ In a context of increased competition, the objective is to increase the flexibility of companies and individuals given the fluctuations in the labor market while ensuring that people can make their careers more secure thanks to the funding or the support they receive for their project. “Flexicurity”, which European employment and training policies consider as essential, can be defined as “an integrated strategy for enhancing, at the same time, flexibility and security in the labor market” (Council of the European Union, 2008, p. 9). The intention is to make the market more competitive with a view to growth that is expected to guarantee employment and to offer greater and fuller rights to workers, especially during periods of transition. In a context of uncertainty, even concern for workers, this political project consists in “securing” fragmented career paths, in order to leverage access to employment and resources – the obvious risk being that the flexibility of career paths will take precedence over the dynamics of protection.

Four main themes characterize the flexicurity policy (Council of the European Union, 2008):

- “Flexibility and protection of contractual measures”: here, protection is directly associated with contractual arrangements;
- “Comprehensive lifelong learning strategies”. Continuous learning revolves around adapting individuals to the perpetual obsolescence of knowledge (and even more so skills), with a view to adapting them to the market — whereas the idea of lifelong learning, for instance, echoes the possibility of individual and collective emancipation through training;
- “active labor market policies”: their function is to decrease transition periods and to make them easier for workers. These refer to proactive policies that seek to put people to work, and in which all social assistance is conditioned on some form of reciprocity (through work or training);
- “modern social security systems”, covering social rights in the form of financial aid during transition periods.

ⁱⁱ Second chance schools were set up following a European initiative proposed in the White Paper “Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society” and presented by Edith Cresson, European Commissioner for Research, Education and Training, at a Summit of Heads of State held in Madrid in December 1995. This approach falls within an incentive-based logic. The bottom-line is that each person is considered to be a stakeholder in their training insofar as they must contribute to maintaining or developing their “employability” and “protecting their career path”. However, this view masks the considerable inequalities between individuals who already have a significant amount of training and so-called “weak” or “unqualified” individuals who risk being definitively pushed aside if they do not obtain training. While some professional categories can benefit from this approach in terms of professional development, training is an essential (and risky) phase for the most precarious groups.

ⁱⁱⁱ In 2004, these schools signed a “Charter of Fundamental Principles” which summarizes the foundations of the educational action of the E2C and created the “Réseau des Écoles de la 2^e Chance” (Network of second-chance schools) association.

Each E2C is an establishment that receives the support of regional, local and/or consular authorities who, working closely with the business world and aim to ensure the professional and social integration of vulnerable young people. While it does not award certificates, it seeks to accredit skills and to support candidates’ personal and professional projects, while working within a network with all the stakeholders involved.

Thus, in accordance with the provisions of Article D 214-10 of the Education Code, the “École de la 2^e Chance” label is issued for a period of four years by the “Réseau E2C France” association to training institutions and organizations which comply with the criteria clearly defined by this association, in agreement with the ministries responsible for education and

vocational training.

Today, there are 51 schools spread over 118 sites, 12 regions, and 56 departments in metropolitan France, and four in the overseas departments and territories. Each year, they receive approximately 15,000 young people who have left the school system without qualifications. The network of Second Chance Schools is organized around four main areas of expertise: management of the accreditation process, assessment and validation of the career path of the youth (delivery and monitoring of the attestation of skills acquired by trainees), sharing of acquired experiences and structuring partnerships.

- iv E2C are funded first by Regional Councils, whose competences relate particularly to the training of “vulnerable groups” (notably the youth), then by the European Social Fund and by the State: at the national level, these three financial sponsors cover up to approximately three-quarters of the expenditure (source: DARES, 2014). In addition, the sustainability of these structures is reinforced by the participation of companies (through sponsorship and apprenticeship tax), and certain local authorities (such as departmental councils). The partnership network around the E2C is marked, in particular, by the institutions in charge of the so-called “vulnerable” groups. As such, local missions are the main recommenders insofar as they orient youth aged between 18 and 25 toward E2C according to the perceived training needs. Today, there are approximately 50 E2Cs, spread over 107 sites across France (metropolitan area and overseas departments and territories). They are structured as a network (the Second Chance Schools Network) and their actions are guided by a charter of fundamental principles that they signed in 2004.
- v The courses relating to the professional project, generally provided by the reference trainers, are essential because of how they relate to the other courses. Internship is organized according to a regular rhythm (for instance, two weeks in a training center, two weeks in a company). Trainees choose their own place of internship according to their project, with the objective of allowing them to formalize a project by capitalizing on their experiences. However, the reference trainer discusses the choice of the place of internship with the trainee, in close collaboration with the management, the different teams and occupational psychologists, in order to assess the relevance of the project and the trainee's abilities. Company visits take place regularly; the reference trainers monitor the trainees' commitment and the smooth running of the course. The internship is evaluated by the internship tutor (a manager at the place of internship) in coordination with the reference trainer. Trainees are also required to carry out a self-assessment or even co-assessment (with the help of the trainer) of their internship experience as well as of their achievements. The individual monitoring provided by the reference trainer is aimed at helping youth develop their paths (training path, life path, etc.). Concretely, interviews, at the request of the youth or the trainer, take place throughout the duration of the training. These discussions occasionally influence the decision to continue training when expectations, in terms of behavior and compliance with the rules, are not met.
- vi The competency-based approach (CBA) in E2Cs in France is the result of studies that have been carried out since 2016 through action research conducted by the ATIP team of the Lisec laboratory. The French Network of Second Chance Schools called on LISEC to conduct an action-research study on the implementation of an approach based on shared competence by all the teams, around different issues:
 - promotion of the paths and of the courses undertaken by the trainees;
 - transformation of educational practices (strengthening of active approaches, formalization of practices, tools, etc.);
 - professionalization and expertise of E2C teams;
 - consolidation of the E2C identity;
 - connecting a competency-based approach with institutional issues (State Education and employment policies - foundation of knowledge and professional skills);
 - reflection on the assessment of learning and certification (proof of acquired skills).

The research position adopted by Lisec consisted in supporting the processes of transformation of current practices as part of an approach associated with the co-production of knowledge. The research was based on the principles of:

- the co-development of conditions allowing the formalization and transformation of educational practices (co-validation and co-construction of approaches and tools);
- actors' ownership of the approach, according to their specific challenges and contexts,
- collaborative participation, in a dynamic of collective consultation,
- volunteer activities in experimental sites.

This study was undertaken in different phases:

Phase 1: undertaking educational experiments centered on the competency-based approach in 10 schools across the national territory, mobilizing more than 60 volunteer trainers. These trainers were asked to design and implement training sessions and based on this, feedback, including from trainees, was obtained and used as a basis for the first questions on the concept of competence. These questions were disseminated and addressed at each level of the network during a one-day seminar.

Phase 2: identification of the different documents that serve as references for training practices and an analysis of how they are used in these schools with a group composed of a representative of each of the 10 schools in order to develop proposals for the development of a standardized reference framework of competences. Concretely, 9 focus groups were organized and their members conducted interviews within their own schools; these served as points of support for the development of proposals. This contribution focuses on this phase.

Phase 3: Development of a training plan and a plan to deploy the reference framework to all 118 member school sites of the network.

Based on the results of this action research, we now return to how the issue of citizens' rights influences E2C actors.

vii The present contribution leads us to two different reflections: the first revolves around the prospects for the development of EC2s that seek empowerment; the second concerns the role that research can play with regard to the deployment of such approaches. The action research shows that a narrow approach to skills, irrespective of whether it is centered on the schooling model or on adaptation to available employment, can have counterproductive effects in supporting so-called "vulnerable" youth. Conversely, integrating pathways' support with a view to the emancipation of citizens can guarantee openness for these youth by allowing them to reflect critically on their training, their lives, their career paths, and so on, by providing the conditions that allow them to take a reflective look at the actions underway. This explains why the training and integration approaches that seek to promote empowerment are not so different from the aims of research: action research can act as a catalyst to (re) think the approaches at work in EC2s by re-analyzing the conditions for a possible (and genuine) empowerment.