



A view to drop out phenomenon - a desk research of the SMILE partners' cases

Authors: Liisa Ilomäki, University of Helsinki & Roberto Righi, Steps

Case descriptions: Teachers in the participating schools



Introduction

This report presents a summary of selected national cases of dropout phenomenon. In all, there are 14 cases representing various types of problems behind school problems and risks for drop outs. The descriptions of the cases are in the attachment. The original descriptions are somewhat shortened and edited.

The aim of this paper is, first, to clarify to partners the phenomenon of drop outs in the participating countries through concrete cases; second, to share solutions and best practices to the problems encountered, and third, to support the SMILE project in its work. For clarifying the conclusions and lessons learnt we have included in the text some "lessons learnt" in boxes

The cases are collected by the SMILE partners from Spain, Italy, The Netherlands and Turkey. The summarizing analysis and the writing of the report is done by University of Helsinki and Steps. The first version of the report is launched January, 2017. A second version of the report will be included in a survey on drop out, conducted by the IES Albayzin, which will be finalised in Autumn 2017.

Method and analysis

The cases were selected based on national interests, and thus their content and context varies but in all cases, students are either in the danger to leave the school or they have left the school and the school tries



to get the student back to school. In order to describe the cases in the same way we decided to use a template which consisted of the following issues:

- the problem (the key question of the case)
- the context of the problem
- the solution
- the benefits of the solution used
- the possible (new) problems based on the solution used

Seven of the cases focus in an individual student, and similarly seven cases in a general problems within a student group or a solution for a group (like a musical activity for a bigger group). However, solving serious drop out problems of students, an individual approach is certainly needed although group level activities are used. Some of the cases give also nice examples of using a group as a resource to support enculturation and the feeling of belonging to a (school or student) group.

The problems of the students in the selected cases can be divided in the following groups:

1. Students with cultural conflict with school (and the society), including the attitude of neglecting the value of education. In addition, the families of these students have also other kind of problems, such as poverty or unstable conditions. The majority of the cases represent this.
2. Students with problems in the family, e.g., poverty, single parent or drugs and alcoholism
3. Disabled students (elective mutism or other kind of disabilities)

Of course the categorization is artificial and it might not be valid enough but it gives a picture of the severe problems of the students.

Results and conclusions

First of all, the data (the cases) show that the background reasons for a student to drop out are serious, deep and complicated. The aim of this report is not to analyse the reasons – that is all too difficult – but it is necessary to recognize the background to make plans to support the student's schooling. The case descriptions show that usually there are also other organisations and institutions involved in the case; not necessary to help the student but to help e.g., the family. School and teachers are only one of the several players. Even this small amount of data (cases) show a network of actors who work usually with the same family or student, but from different angles.

LESSON LEARNT 1:

If a student is in risk of dropping out, there are never only one reason for that but a group of reasons, and the situations vary but they are always complicated. School can take responsibility of only a few of the reasons. It helps the school staff if they understand the limitations of their work.

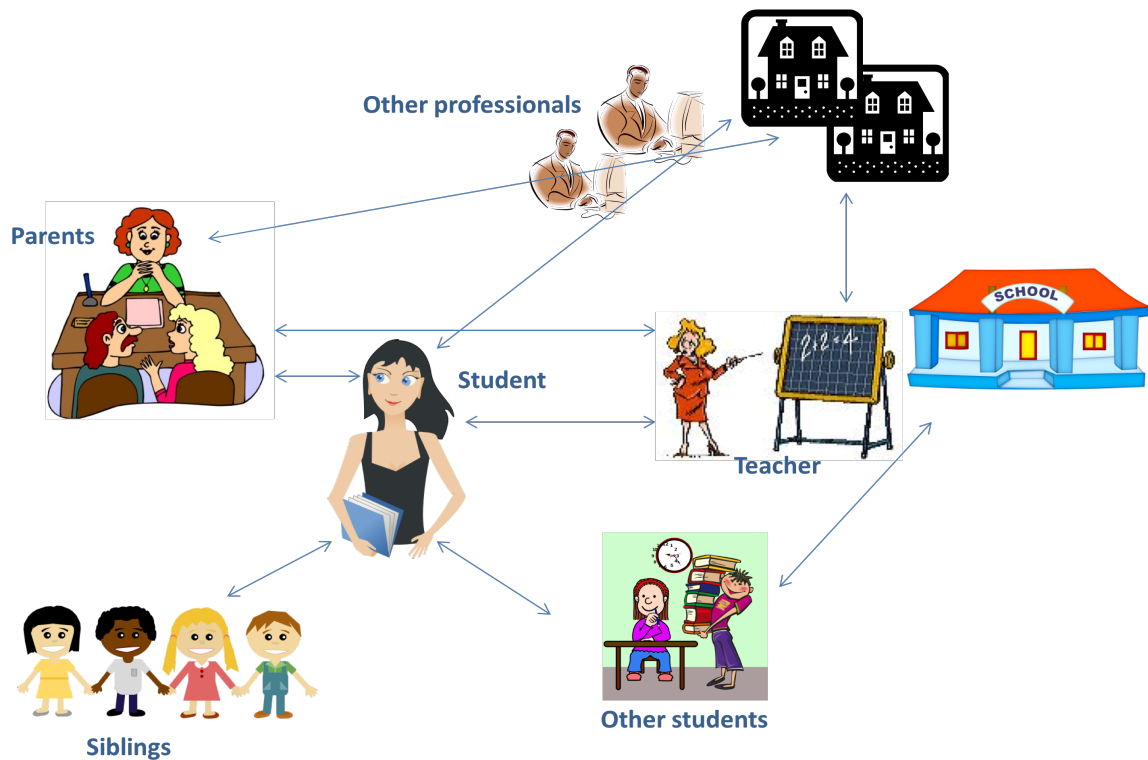


Figure 1. Network of “players” for supporting a student and/or the family.

➡ LESSON LEARNT 2:

All the actors should be taken into account and their mutual collaboration should be effective and have goals of the same direction

Continuing from the previous: we should consider what are the specific means for school and teachers to prevent dropping out. This can be expressed also in another way: is there something in school that does not help students with problems and even enhance students to leave school?

The solutions in the selected cases can be divided into three types:

1. Support to individual student

- psychological help in school
- tailored pedagogical support and special arrangements (disabled students)
- looking the strengths and good in the student and building on that instead of focusing on standard academic requirements; starting with small steps instead of a rigid approach
- many types of support for achieving the academic level, such as “help desk”, tutoring by a teacher etc., peer tutoring
- other activities and courses in school besides the ordinary school activities and courses
- alternative paths

These means build on positive support. In the cases there were also two means with a negative starting point: attendance sheet which teachers fill of every lesson and isolation: disruptive students sent to a hall where someone watches them and were they should do the school work.



2. Support to family

- active school – home collaboration
- also other ways of supporting a family was described but these were not activities of a school but social workers etc. (financial support, family work)
- discussions and negotiations of the importance of education

3. Group level activities

- collaborative music activities and e.g. singing in a choir or a band
- dividing the student group into smaller groups
- advanced students tutoring their peers.

The solutions were certainly approved in practice and many of them are typical and ordinary in various types of special education. That does not mean that they are not good anymore, e.g. studying in a small group is useful and usual. Some solutions are worth emphasizing: the collaborative music activities, the active home – school collaboration and support for starting with small steps. The last one is a kind of small victory: a student starts to go to school although unregularly.

It is important that students at risk are not left alone but the teacher should not either be left alone with difficult problems of their students. In school, a teacher team should be responsible for finding and creating the best possible ways to support students. It is often needed to tailor the activities for each individual students but the power of a group should not be forgotten: in a group of other students it is possible to create a feeling of belonging which might lead to a more positive attitude to school and learning.

➡ LESSON LEARNT 3:

The list of the solutions gives new ideas even to experienced teachers for working with students with problems

We also collected experiences of the solutions: the advantages and the possible new problems. It is unfortunate to notice that many of the solutions either fail or they bring only a limited help. Some of the solutions are structural and demand funding. If the funding is closed down, the improvements become impossible, such are e.g. the possibilities to divide the groups into smaller ones. Teachers need more training for supporting “difficult” students and schools need more resources if these practices should be disseminated. School is often too rigid for the changes which the students with several and deep problems need. However, the cases show also engaged teachers and other staff who voluntarily, and probably with limited financial support, support and scaffold students at risk.

➡ LESSON LEARNT 4:

The changes are slow and the steps taken are small. However, even a small step might become important to a students



Appendix 1 Table of the case descriptions

Case & title	Problem	Context	Solution	Benefits	→ Problems
1. A combination of internship and home learning Individual student	Not able to concentrate in class or in group meetings	The student does not have a positive home situation, one parent and a few siblings, financially and emotionally not a steady situation. Problems with drugs/alcohol.	Looking for the talents of the student: good in practical work. Instead of 1 day internship a 4 day internship. The theory part to be done at home with individual coaching of a teacher.	The student can do what he/she likes to do. Motivated do work (practical), and the theory can be studied without distraction at home.	The individual coaching takes a lot of time and a lot of organization and time. The structure of the school is not flexible.
2. It's my life and school is not part of it! Individual student	A teenage female student in a class of two years younger students. Lack of integration in the class and numerous school failures. Difficult relationship with her classmates due to different age group; as a consequence, lack of sense of belonging in the class and lack of interest in school subjects and activities. Problems at home and the student is needed at home.	Student originally from eastern Europe. Family problems: divorced parents, single parent and single income; and a little sister to look after.	Various skills remedial courses at school, "help desk", individual support, "peer education" based on support by students of the same age. National language courses. Alternation of school activities and internship (60 hrs)	Momentary school reintegration, improved interest in the working experience and motivation in non-formal learning activities.	The family need of support and care by the student herself makes it difficult for the student to attend school regularly. In addition, the social context generates mistrust in the possibility of getting better job opportunities with a high school diploma
3. Cultural integration is part of school success Individual student	Lower secondary school female student drop out.	Poor family origin context. A family, of Romany origin lives in public housing. The Social Service is managing the situation on mandate of the Judicial Authority. The low level of education of parents and their lack of awareness to recognize the importance of education, have inevitably had negative effects on the education and growth of their children. The	Psychological Service at school; collaboration with school-family - services; inclusion in the afternoon school support, voluntary charity (third sector).	The support of the institutions has produced just a temporary benefit. The young girl has started to go to school just for short periods. The whole family, though supported morally and financially by a family network, has an economic precariousness.	The afternoon educational support organized on purpose has not had the desired result because of the persistent and deliberate refusal by the girl to attend school regularly, probably also influenced by a cultural background; the attitude did not allow the child to attend the next class.



Case & title	Problem	Context	Solution	Benefits	→ Problems
<p>4. A whole family in need of support Individual student</p>	<p>Primary school child's drop out due to economic and social difficulties of the family and because of relational problems of integration in the community.</p>	<p>Poor family background with various problems. The family lives in a public housing accommodation; it has numerous children. They are in charge of the Social Service after a request of investigation by the local Judiciary Authorities for children.</p> <p>The institutions involved are Social Services, School, Third Sector, Training Organisations, Health Services.</p>	<p>Economic contribution for the purchase of basic things, educational intervention aimed at guiding education, support to mothering and to economic management of everyday life. Facilitation of relations with the school, with the Health Service and among the members of the family; inclusion of the child in an afternoon educational support project; psychological support aimed at strengthening the parenting role, and evaluation of the motivations relating to the refusal of schooling (primary school).</p>	<p>The support of the institutions has produced a temporary benefit. The child started to go to school for short periods.</p>	<p>The intervention, even if organized by a multi-professional team and analyzed in all its dynamics, has not produced the desired results up to now, especially because the parents are not able to fulfill the suggested actions because of objective limitations in skills, culture and parental responsibilities.</p>
<p>5. Student with special educational needs Individual student</p>	<p>Student suffering from elective mutism.</p>	<p>The student belongs to an average middle class family. The context in which the problem is evident in the class.</p>	<p>Personalized educational strategies, enhancing nonverbal interaction with the student. Educational practices that enhance the written display, graphics, stimulating bodily-kinesthetic, visual and auditory intelligence.</p>	<p>The student is able to communicate using writing. A non-verbal interaction with the pupil is privileged and getting, in this way, a chance to check the learning progress</p>	<p>The absence of verbal interaction still causes difficulties, especially when studying languages: Italian, English, Latin</p>



Case & title	Problem	Context	Solution	Benefits	→ Problems
<p>6. Mentoring via extracurricular activities Individual student</p>	<p>Social integration; students have problems such as communication, behaviour problems, academic difficulties, etc.</p>	<p>Students come from disadvantaged regions and from poor households, asylum seekers, refugees and foreign migrants.</p>	<p>A few volunteer teachers lead students to use different entertaining extracurricular activities with the support of the school family union. With the financial support of the school family union, the volunteer teachers help these students by mentoring them via different activities such as taking them to the cinema, painting the walls of the school, giving them more responsibility to make them feel important in school, giving them a role in a drama, doing sport, dancing and creating a music group, etc.</p>	<p>Students will learn time management and prioritizing; allows students to get involved in diverse interests; they learn long term commitment; allows to make a contribution in some way; helps to raise the self esteem; benefit of building solid relationship skills</p>	<p>Putting children in extracurricular activities too early can cause burn out. Scholastic states parents might think that an early start in anything will lead to a career. Students might be frustrated that they do not have time to grow their talents. If children put too much focus on a few, specific abilities, they might not develop into well-rounded people.</p>
<p>7. Family Engagement Individual student</p>	<p>Absenteeism. Many Roma students are forced to work illegally in the streets, older children often have to go to work in order to supply the family with much-needed funds for basic family needs or need to stay home to take care of younger siblings so that their parents can work.</p>	<p>There is often a clash between the family values and those of the school. Frequently, their parents have dropped out of school themselves; families of low socio-economic backgrounds. Many children have divorced parents, separation or family violence. They are not being raised by parents, but rather by aunts, uncles and grandparents. Families are not meeting some children's basic needs of food, clothing and shelter.</p>	<p>Guidance teacher consults the parents about the importance of education. They are also informed that if they insist on this behaviour, they will be fined by the government. An agreement is signed with these parents. The school administrators get in contact with the District Governorate and provides them get some financial support via Foundation of the District Governorate.</p>	<p>The method provides these families a regular income so that they do not force their children to work in streets. So, the students attend school regularly.</p>	<p>We have some communication problems with families. It is difficult to reach them because their home address is not certain.</p>



Case nr & title	Problem	Context	Solution	Benefits	→ Problems
<p>8. A world of music – music from the world.</p> <p>The activity involved groups of students with and without problems of integration.</p>	<p>Isolation of students perceived as "different", lack of cooperation among pupils and creation of closed groups with feelings of discrimination towards pupils coming from from foreign families emigrated to Italy: from Romany families, from economically and socially disadvantaged groups. Medium term effect: frequent school failures in the first two years of Secondary High school, with some dropping by less integrated pupils.</p>	<p>The school, pupils in primary and secondary junior schools, located in an area that has characteristics of isolation and rurality, has pupils from heterogeneous social backgrounds: the agricultural areas of the village, from foreign families emigrated to Italy, from Romany families. In many of these cases the economic disadvantage and the difficulty of reaching a full social integration are evident. Several students also have a mental and physical disadvantage.</p>	<p>The solution focused on sharing musical experience, in order to arise the desire and the pleasure of making music, e.g., of singing in a choir. The collaborative activities, fun and rich of ideas for a general musical growth, are based on a collective perspective and positively and constructively competition; learning and practicing music through workshops in small groups. The work was shared with the whole school through a final stage show where the work of the different groups was appreciated and enhanced.</p>	<p>The musical ideas have had a musical and intercultural growth for the students. Active collaboration among pupils who normally had difficulty in sharing activities. The families from different cultures have contributed, with testimonies, sources and musical cues to define the repertoire referable to the different cultural roots.</p>	<p>Difficult staying (extra time) at school for some students living in far rural areas.</p>
<p>9. Music activities</p> <p>The activity involved groups of students with and without problems of integration.</p>	<p>Withdrawn students. Especially at the 9th grade classes, some students withdraw because they have communication problems with their peers and teachers. Therefore they may drop out of school because of the absenteeism and academic problems.</p>	<p>Many students experience at social adjustment problems when they change schools or classes e.g., at the first grade of the high school; Social anxiety as an ongoing reaction to repeated failure, mistreatment, or rejection from adults or peers; Missing conversational skills because of family background or missing opportunity to interact with peers; Symptoms of shyness or withdrawal.</p>	<p>After the f2f-meetings with the students and their parents, the guidance teacher and the administration have decided to create a School Band with the participation of these students because their common trait was music. With the financial support of the Family Union Of the school, a few musical instruments were bought and the students started to work with the guidance of the music teacher of the school in their free time after school.</p>	<p>Making music raised young people's aspirations and achievements at school, and provided wider personal and life skills and benefits. The students made new friends, developed their instrumental and musical skills, their confidence and skills in performing in front of others, their skills in team work and co-operation, listening, concentration, and much more leading to greater self-esteem and learned from each other. At the end of the first year,</p>	<p>Some students who have other responsibilities at home or outside, had some difficulties to work with the group after school time.</p>



				they gave a great concert to the school students, teachers and parents. At the second and third year, they joined in different music competitions in Izmir and they won several prizes.	
<p>10. Behaviour contract The activity involved groups of students</p>	<p>Compulsory Secondary Education, from 12 to 16 years old: Disruptive students who have been told off and are in risk of being expelled temporarily from the school</p>	<p>Students have very different backgrounds (small mountain villages, residents in the historic borough, students living in social institutions, students whose families live in caves, hippy families) and some of them have difficulties in accepting behaviour rules.</p>	<p>The school counselor prepares an attendance sheet that has to be signed every hour by the teachers. This sheet goes home with the student to make known to the parents the commitment and working in school. Benefits are to be achieved from the commitment sheet, changes in behaviour but also benefits at home (going out, cinema etc.) or at the school (participating in extracurricular activities).</p>	<p>The surveillance of the student in behaviour and in academic tasks.</p>	<p>Sometimes this measure is effective only during a short period of time. It is hard to fulfill it without blanks, some teachers forget to sign, the student when has had a bad behaviour doesn't present the sheet to be signed, some families don't collaborate.</p>
<p>11. PMAR- Programa de Mejora del Aprendizaje The activity involved groups of students</p>	<p>The program is aimed at students who have been in one of the first three years of Compulsory Secondary Education but they have failed. There are also two more requirements to accomplish to be a PMAR candidate: 1) having repeated at least one year through the whole educational process and 2) being a student who wishes to learn but has social, individual or educational handicaps.</p>	<p>Students have very different backgrounds (small mountain villages, residents in the historic borough, students living in social institutions, students whose families live in caves, hippy families), learning styles and also different learning disabilities.</p>	<p>The Spanish law of PMAR allows schools to create an alternative path for some students of 7 and 8 years. The main features of this path are: selected pupils, smaller groups with integrated subjects (math, technology and science, on one hand, and Language and Social Science, on the other hand), and adapted objectives to the group.</p>	<p>Smaller groups are better for teaching, fewer teachers for a reduced number of students for more time will ensure better results and the achieving of academic goals.</p>	<p>The program has to be approved by the Education Authorities. The cut offs in Education in Spain are mainly in these types of measures.</p>



Case nr & title	Problem	Context	Solution	Benefits	→ Problems
12. Grupos flexibles - Flexible Groups The activity involved groups of students	This measure is mainly adopted to improve the nurturing learning environment of groups belonging to the first three years of Compulsory Secondary Education (students of 6, 7 and 8 years which means from 12 to 15 years old): Two wide groups of 25-30 students with very heterogeneous teenagers in every level	Students have very different backgrounds (small mountain villages, residents in the historic borough, students living in social institutions, students whose families live in caves, hippy families) and some of them have difficulties in accepting behaviour rules.	Splitting two groups in to three will enhance a better teaching and will reduce the academic failure	Smaller groups are better for teaching, the students receive individual attention from the teachers	The division criteria of the students must be well done, otherwise we can reinforce bad attitudes or behaviour among the students
13. Living together hall The activity involved groups of students	Compulsory Secondary Education, from 12 to 16 years old: Disruptive student who have been told off and are in risk of being expelled temporarily from the school	These students have behaviour problems and, usually academic difficulties, too.	A little hall where the student stays isolated from other students under the surveillance of some teachers. In this hall the school work has to be done.	It breaks the reinforcement of the group	The teachers in charge have other responsibilities and if there are absence of teachers during the day the surveillance is not as good as it should be.
14. Second Tutor The activity involved groups of students	Compulsory Secondary Education, from 12 to 16 years old: Disruptive students who are not achieving academic objectives	These students have a wide range of problems (families not involved in education, unstructured families, behaviour problems, academic difficulties)	One of the teachers, freely, tutorise a student individually	It provides the student's affection, it also gives a reference person for any trouble in the school.	Some coordination and training is needed. There is not fixed time to do it with the students, it depends on every teacher.