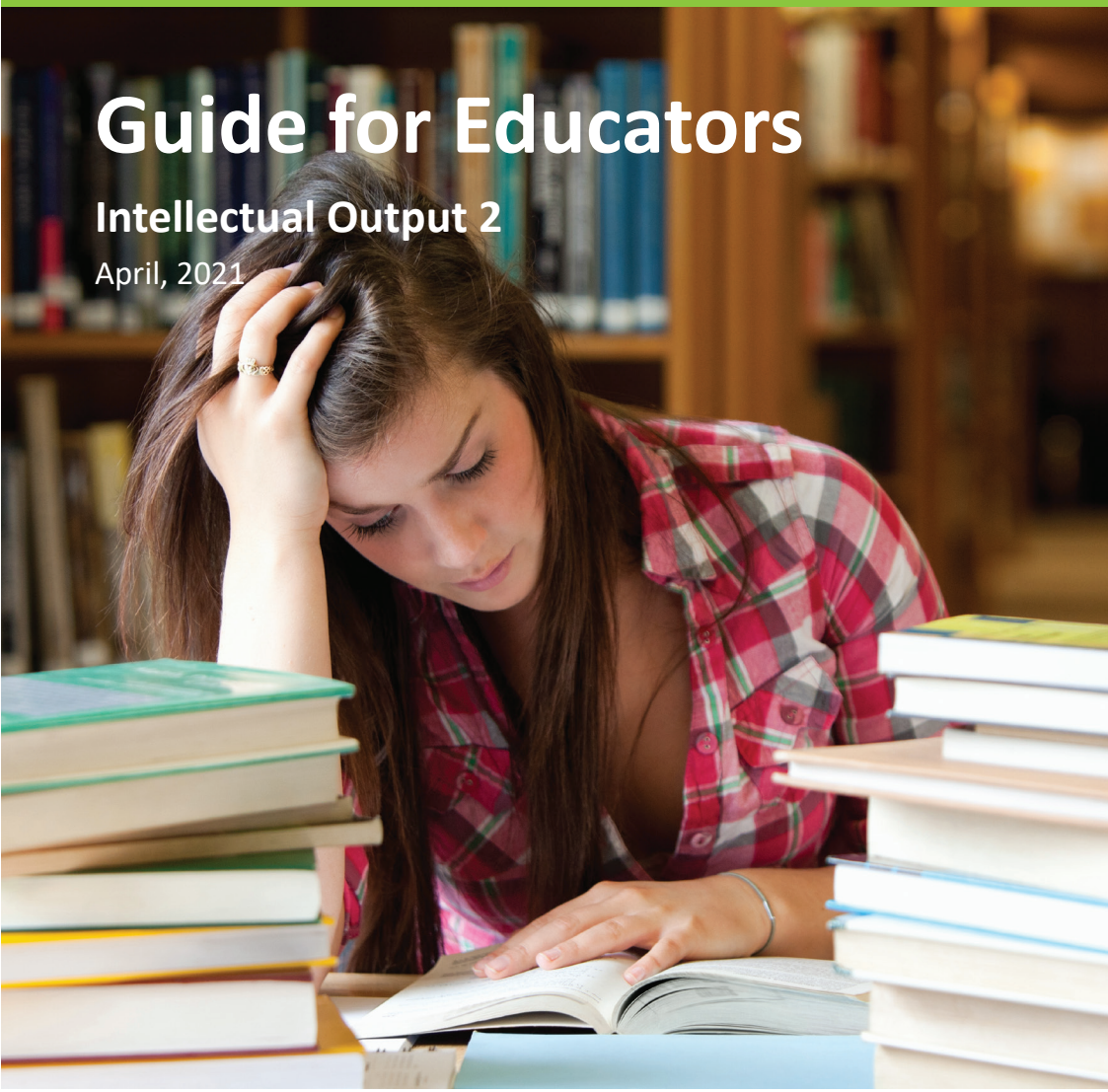
APPLE
eArly warning Platform to Prevent youth from dropping out of schooL Education

Guide for Educators

Intellectual Output 2

April, 2021



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Introduction: the APPLE Project

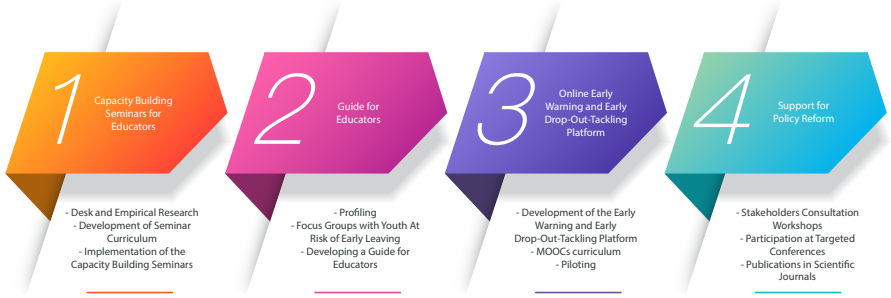
Early School Leaving remains a challenge for many EU member states, despite the significant developments that have been made regarding school integration of young people with vulnerable background. The necessity to implement APPLE project emerged from the high levels of Early School Leaving in EU Member States and other Associated Countries. According to datasets released by Eurostat, 10.6% of young people (18-24) in the EU in 2017 did not complete their studies at upper-secondary level for a variety of social, economic and family-related reasons.

APPLE aims at tackling the issue of early school leaving by developing an innovating guide for educators as well as an early warning platform, which will enable them to identify youth at risk of dropping out and take preventive action against early school leaving.

APPLE aims at:

- Developing a guide for educators as well as an online platform, which will consist of key material (research papers, fact-based/experiences-based practices, tools etc.).
- Enabling educators to apply innovative pedagogical methods and to easier identify youth at risk of dropping out.
- Identifying ways of preventing early school leaving as well as the necessary reforms at political and institutional level.
- Raising awareness among the educational community regarding the importance of halting early school leaving.

What are the main activities of the project?



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By developing a guide for educators and an online early warning platform, consisting of key scientific material and tools, APPLE aims to equip educators, schools, educational organizations and authorities with the necessary tools to identify youth at risk of dropping-out and halt early school leaving. Early identification of children and young people at risk of early school leaving will enable educators to take action and reduce the risk of dropping-out.

For more information about this project visit: https://www.appleproject.eu/

The purpose of this guide

This guide is intended to be a useful tool for educators, school boards, as well as policymakers by drawing attention to the early school dropping phenomenon, focusing on the profiles of young people at risk as well as on the drivers on early-dropping-out. The guide includes specific recommendations and provides practical tips to create solutions to tackle some of the drivers of dropout, in a precautionary manner, as well to make education more attractive to youngsters.

1. Early School Dropout Context

1.1. How can we define School Dropout?

According to Eurostat' Glossary, **early leaver from education and training** previously named early school leaver, refers to a person aged 18 to 24 who has completed at most lower secondary education and is not involved in further education or training. The indicator 'early leavers from education and training' is expressed as a percentage of the people aged 18 to 24 with such criteria out of the total population aged 18 to 24. 1.2.

1.1. Early School Dropout at EU level

The right to education for children and young people contributes to their overall development and consequently lays the foundations for success later in life in terms of employability, social integration, health and well-being. Education and training have the potential to play a crucial role in counteracting the negative effects of poverty and social exclusion. The European Union (EU) therefore promotes policies that seek to ensure

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that all children and young people are able to access and benefit from high-quality education and training. Each EU Member State is responsible for its own system of education and training, while the EU's role consists of coordinating and supporting the actions of the Member States as well as addressing common challenges. By so doing, the EU offers a forum for exchange of best practices, gathers and disseminates information and statistics, while providing advice and support for education and training policy reforms.

Early school leaving is an obstacle to economic growth and employment. It hampers productivity and competitiveness, and fuels poverty and social exclusion. With its shrinking workforce, Europe has to make full use of its human resources. Young people who leave education and training prematurely are bound to lack skills and qualifications. They face a higher risk of unemployment, social exclusion and poverty.

The Europe 2020 strategy has set the goal of reducing the proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds leaving education and training early to below 10%. In 2016 there were still more than 4 million early school leavers across Europe. Only around 45% of them are employed.

Young people with a migrant background face a higher risk of leaving school early. The risk is especially high for Roma and other disadvantaged minorities. The recent steep rise in the inflow of refugees and migrants has heightened the challenge of integrating pupils from a mi-grant background and so helping them to acquire the necessary skills and competences.

The 2011 Recommendation of the Council of the European Union on policies to reduce early school leaving proposed that Member States implement cross-sectoral policy approaches. These should focus, at all levels of education, on prevention and intervention measures, as well as 'compensation' measures to re-engage students who drop out.

The 2013 Youth Guarantee Council Recommendation commits Member States to ensure that everyone under 25 years old receives a good-quality offer of employment, training, traineeship or apprenticeship within 4 months of leaving education or becoming unemployed. It recommends that Member States offer education and training opportunities to young people with insufficient qualifications.

The European Commission launched the 'New skills agenda for Europe' in June 2016. It provided the context for an initiative on 'Upskilling pathways', adopted by the Council

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of the EU in December 2016. The latter recommends Member States to provide adults aged 25 or over with flexible 'pathways' giving them options to re-enter education and/or obtain qualifications equivalent to upper secondary education. This could involve recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning, for example skills acquired on the job.

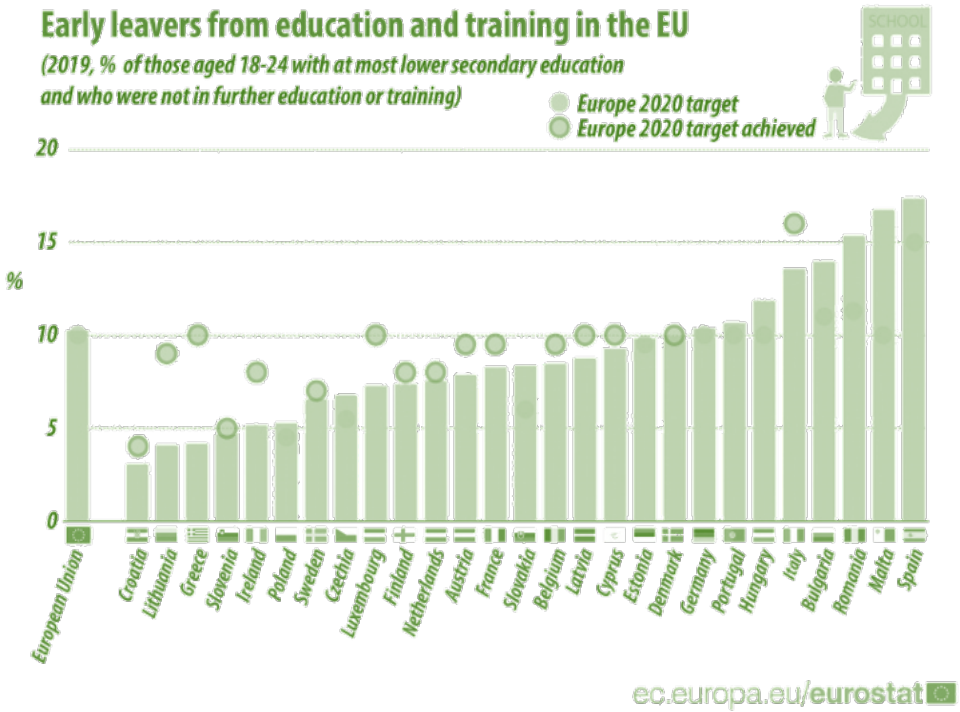

Figure 1 - Early leavers from education and training in the EU (Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Early_leavers_2019-01.jpg

1.3. Partner country level

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, a dropout is classed as anyone who leaves school, college, or university without either completing their course of study or transferring to another educational institution. Dropping out of school is not allowed. Attendance at a school is mandatory until age 16 (GCSE exams) and students must be in some form of education or training (either full-time or part-time) until age 18. Dropout rate benchmarks are set only for each higher education institution and monitored by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). Dropout rates are often one of the factors assessed when ranking UK universities in league tables. In November 2014, a report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that students from poorer home backgrounds were 8.4 percentage points more likely to drop out of university in the first two years of an undergraduate course than those from the richest homes; they were also 22.9 percentage points less likely to obtain a 2:1 or first degree. For students studying on the same course and who arrived at university with similar grades, the differences fell, but remained significant. The report concluded that more should be done both to raise the attainment levels of poorer students prior to their arrival at university and to provide them with additional support at university.

Greece

According to the EC report on Early School Leaving (2018) in all educational levels, in Greece, students who are born abroad, tend to record higher ESL rates in comparison to students born in the country of residence (35.7% compared to the 7.5% of leavers). ESL rates in secondary education are lower in urban areas than suburban and rural areas. Boys in lower secondary, general upper secondary and in VET, throughout all geographical areas present higher ESL rates compared to girls (Hellenic Pedagogical Institute, 2006). Overall, the highest ESL rates appear in regions with special socio-economic features, e.g., with large population groups that are more likely to present drop-out incidents like Roma students, minority and immigrant students, and students from rural areas (Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Cedefop, 2018; Rousseas Vretakou/Hellenic Pedagogical Institute, 2006)

Spain

Based on the Economically Active Population Survey, early drop-out from education and training is the percentage of persons aged 18-24 years old who have not completed the second stage secondary education and have not followed any type of education and

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training in the four weeks prior to the interview. Their highest level of education is the level (0-2) of the CNED-2014 and they do not receive any education or training. In the year 2018 in Spain, the early drop-out rate from education and training reached 21.7% for men and 14.0% for women. Early dropout from education and training has always been higher among men. In recent years, this figure has decreased, with a value of 24.0% for men in the year 2015, 22.7% in the year 2016 and 21.8% in 2017. For women, it reached a value of 15.8% in the year 2015, 15.1% in the year 2016 and 14.5% in the year 2017.

Romania

In Romania early school leaving remains a high phenomenon, with repercussions for the labour market and the economy. In 2018, the rate of early leavers from education and training (age group 18-24) decreased for the second consecutive year to 16.4%. Although well below its peak of 19.1% in 2016, the rate remains one of the highest in the EU (EU average: 10.6%). Therefore, reaching the national target of 11.3% by 2020 is unlikely. Early school leaving persists due to a combination of factors, including socio-economic aspects and gaps in the provision of quality education. In rural areas - where poverty is highest, and the quality of education tends to be lower - one in four people aged 18-24 has left school too early. By contrast, the rate is 15% in towns and only 4.2% in cities.

Apart from socioeconomic background, equity challenges disproportionally affect Roma and students from rural areas, who tend to have lower educational outcomes. The percentage of Roma children attending kindergarten is less than half the national average. Taking account of these challenges, the 2019 European Semester country-specific recommendations call on Romania to 'improve the quality and inclusiveness of education, in particular for Roma and other disadvantaged groups' (Council of the European Union, 2019).

Portugal

The number of young people leaving education or training early in Portugal has decreased from 12.6% (in 2017) to 11.8% (in 2018), approaching the EU average (10.6%). Early school drop-out in Portugal is now close to the EU average, although there are still considerable differences. In 2017, more than one third of Portuguese students who started high school did not finish it in five years (when the standard is three years) and ended up dropping out of school without obtaining a compulsory education diploma (OCDE, 2017). However, in 2019, the rate of early school drop-out reached the lowest numbers ever. According to data recently revealed by the National Institute of Statistics (INE), in Portugal the early school drop-out was 10.6% (10.1% in the continent) In terms of gender, the INE data shows that there is a considerable disparity between girls and boys: 14.7% for males and 8.7% for females. There are also very significant regional differences: 28.3% in the Autonomous Region of the Azores and 11.2% on the continent (INE, 2019). The same source shows that the mean age of school (or other education with school equivalence) dropout is 17 years old.

North Macedonia

At national level, according to the State Statistical Office, in primary schools, at the beginning of the school year 2019/2020 the number of students in regular primary schools was 187,240, a decrease of 0.5% compared to the previous school year. Meanwhile, the number of students in regular secondary schools, at the beginning of the school year 2019/2020 was 69,980, a decrease of 2.3% compared to the previous school year. According to the report conducted by the Ombudsman in 2016, out of the total number of students with disabilities in primary education on local level in the city of Skopje from the total number of 2,333, 175 students dropped out of the educational process. Among the Roma students, a higher rate of dropout has been identified in the transition from primary to secondary education, as only 70 to 75% finishing primary education continues in secondary school. The remaining 25 to 30% drop-out and do not complete secondary education. Meanwhile, in secondary education, the data show that in 2013/2014 the percentage of drop-outs was 16% which continues to increase until the school year 2015/2016 when the percentage raised to 23%. According to the analysis the largest numbers of drop-outs occur among Roma population.

2. Profiling exercise

2.1. Profiles of youth at risk of early leaving of education

One of the main project activities, as mentioned above, and a part of Intellectual Output 2

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was to build a profile of students at risk of dropping out in the partners countries. The main aim of building the profile is to provide a **wide perspective on "who are these students?" and to support teachers in understanding the predominance of the phenomenon at a national and European level.**

For the purpose of building the profile at the national level, each of the partners used the information gathered during the Intellectual Output 1 (Capacity Building Seminars for Educators) specifically based on the results obtained during the national literature review (desk research) as well as the results obtained from the questionnaires that were answered by stakeholders and educators in the 6 partners countries.

The profile developed by the partnership of the youngsters at risk of early leaving was build employing a **step-by-step** approach using common guidelines described below that can serve as a basis for building a customized profile in your class or school.

Step 1. Analysis of the National Reports focusing on useful information gathered during the interviews with educators and stakeholders and qualitative results obtained in the questionnaires answered by educators and stakeholders relevant to the profile of students at risk of dropping out.

Step 2. Analysis of the information gathered during the Literature Review (desk research) conducted for the National Reports (IO1) to understand the statistical data in terms of dropout as well as empirical evidence on the dropout situation at the national level.

Step 3. Comparing the information in terms of similarities and disparities and merging the data obtained both in the desk research and in the interviews & questionnaires (e.g., age, gender, general factors that contribute to early leaving, etc.)

The final profile of the youth at risk of dropping out school and training, including the predominant gender, age gap, problematic school years as well as the minority groups that are more affected by this phenomenon is depicted in the table below.

COUNTRY	PREDOMINANT GENDER	AGE (YEARS)	PROBLEMATIC SCHOOL YEARS	MINORITY GROUPS
UK	Male	14-16	Early years of secondary school	Roma students, Students from families in need in rural areas, Migrants and refugees
GREECE	Male	14-16	Secondary education	Roma students, Migrants, Refugees
SPAIN	Male	14-16	Secondary and post-secondary non-higher education	Roma students, Migrants. Students with learning disabilities
ROMANIA	Female	13-15	Transition to secondary education	Roma students and students from disadvantaged rural areas
PORTUGAL	Male	11-17	3rd cycle: 10th, 11th and 12th years of schooling (equivalent to secondary education)	Roma students, Ethnic and Racial Minorities, Migrants
NORTH MACEDONIA	Female	14-16	Transition to secondary education; Transition from 2nd to 3rd cycle	Roma students, students from low-income families, students with learning difficulties and emotional or behavioural disorders

Table 1 - Profile of students at risk of dropping out build my APPLE partnership (in the context of Intellectual Output 2)

2.2. How to build a profile in my classroom?

The profile depicted in Table 1 can help you identify the students at risk in time to implement preventive measures and provides you with a simple example on how to build your own customized profile in your school or class.

To build a profile of students at risk of dropping out in your school or classroom first gather information on the current situation by exploring:

- School documents;
- Previous class/school records on dropout rates;
- Predominant gender of youngsters that dropout;
- Predominant minority groups linked to dropout;

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- Family information;
- Personal, educational, family and social factors associated with dropout in your school (in the next section you can learn more about the main factors linked to early school dropout, that can be useful to build a profile in your classroom).

As an educator you can also build the classroom profile document as a classroom project and promote a conversation to help you more about your students. Therefore, you can go beyond and include in your profile your students' main skills, strengths, interests/hobbies, aspirations for the future and passions, likes and dislikes, life experiences, how the student likes to learn, struggles or potential barriers to learning, or any type of information that you find useful.

This profile will not only help you identify students at risk but also build effective relationships, develop an inclusive and cohesive classroom where students know each other. Additionally, it can give you a wider picture to understand what kind of technology, differentiations, or adaptations may be needed for the students at risk.

An easy way to build this profile and simultaneously involve your students, is to have the students create their own profile or build a classroom profile in groups. Invite them to provide some of their family history and background, their strengths and weaknesses, the major challenges they face in school, etc.

They can use PowerPoint presentations, videos, research documents, consult school archives, develop infographics, or any platform they prefer. To keep the overall purpose of the profile and to guide the task, you may provide students with different choices or a list of questions, explaining that they can respond to the questions using different tools, including: PowerPoint, Google Slides, Prezi, Piktochart, Windows Movie Maker, etc. Or, in alternative you can choose a common tool where students can add the needed information on the classroom profile.

After the profile is developed, provide feedback to your students and show them their overall strengths, weaknesses, learning styles, different backgrounds & family composition, and other relevant information. This activity can be beneficial to boost your students' motivation and involvement in the classroom activities.

The final objectives of the profile are to use it when planning your lessons, when grouping students in classroom activities, to identify students that can potentially dropout or even to design an intervention programme or project in your school to prevent this

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phenomenon or to solve other problems that were revealed to be prominent in your school from the information that the profile provided.

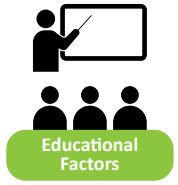
3. Evaluation the Risk of Dropping Out School

3.1. Drivers of drop-out

To effectively prevent early school dropout, first it is necessary to identify, recognize and understand the factors associated with students at risk. In this section we provide some of the most common factors encountered in the literature that constitute drivers of school dropout and we discuss the associations between some of them. Nevertheless, it is important to reinforce that no single factor alone is responsible for dropout; rather, the combination of different student risk factors and protective factors is what ultimately determines which students remain in school and which ones drop out. The main influencers of school dropout are depicted in the following figure:

Educational Factors

A. Educational leadership



- School climate & Learning Environment
- Differential learning
- Class size & Student-teacher ratio
- School policies & resources
- Teachers' motivation

- Attendance
- Behaviour & Antisocial behaviour
- Academic success & grade retention
- Engagement
- Disability
- Ethnicity & Diversity
- Bullying

- Household
- Literacy & educational level
- Family structure
- Child-parent relationship

- Social & socioeconomic status
- Settlement & living area
- Peer influence

Successful leadership can play a substantial role in enhancing student learning and school success. The definitions of leadership usually englobe two functions: providing direction and exercising influence. Leadership influences the way that people involved in the school community think, act and interpret events, the choice of the main educational objectives, the organization of work activities to accomplish objectives, the motivation of the educational community to achieve the objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationships and teamwork and the enlistment of support and cooperation from people outside the group or organization (Yukl, 1994).

The role of educational leadership

Leaders have to be able to find out and highlight new areas of development and improvement in the school community. A leader's job must inspire the teaching staff to think about how to create the best conditions for effective teaching by:

- Having the knowledge to inspire teachers to set expectations for their work at school;
- Providing support for the teachers to meet their expectations;
- Organizing instructional days for teachers and inspiring them to work together creatively;
- Assisting teachers to collaborate and participate on designing school curricula, and monitor students' progress;

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- Trying to guarantee coherence and consistency of the school program within the academic program;
- Provide several entry points for learning for all teachers (such as shared reading, peer observations or mentoring).

B. School climate & Learning Environment

Highly associated with educational leadership, is research showing that a 'good school climate' is one of the most important aspects for the effectiveness of a school and consequentially the learning process. The climate englobes the perceptions of individuals who belong to an organisation in terms of its activities and environmental characteristics. These perceptions represent positive or negative behavioural patterns and influence the organization's performance. Climate can be considered as the organizational "personality" as seen by its members (Chernyak-Hai & Tzinet, 2013).

A good work climate is linked to several factors in the school organization, such as the principal's managing skills and leadership, positive behaviours displayed by teachers, learners and staff, efficient learning facilities and infrastructure (Razavipour & Yousef, 2017). Research shows that school climate significantly influences teachers' job satisfaction and work motivation in performing tasks and that improvement of school climate by only 1% can increase teacher work motivation by 58% The school climate has also a positive relationship with the spirit and morale of teacher work (Sinay, 2017).

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Positive School Climate	Negative School Climate
✓ Institutional integrity ✓ Teachers are protected from disruptive outside forces ✓ The principal has influence over superiors, gets needed resources, and has an integrated leadership style ✓ The principal is concerned with both the task and the social well-being of teachers ✓ Morale is high ✓ General push for academic achievement by teachers, parents, and students ✓ Open school climate • Teacher relations are professional, collegial, friendly, and committed to the education of students. • The principal is supportive and does not restrict or direct teachers with orders.	✓ Vulnerable to disruptive outside forces ✓ The principal has little influence over superiors ✓ Resources are scarce ✓ The principal neither sets direction nor supports teachers ✓ Morale is poor ✓ Limited attention to academic matters ✓ The teachers give up on pushing for students' achievement ✓ Closed school climate • Teacher relations are disengaged, distant, suspicious, and not professional • The principal is directive, restrictive, and not supportive

Table 1 - Adapted from Hoy (2006)

C. Differentiated learning

Students vary in terms of how they learn best, their strengths and weaknesses, their cultural and family backgrounds, their personal characteristics and what they are interested in learning about. Therefore, it is important to take into consideration the varying backgrounds and experiences in the teaching and learning process and to react in appropriate manners to those differences (Hall, 2002). Differentiated instruction does not change what is taught, but changes how it is taught (Hall, 2009).

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Research shows that models of education based on the different learning styles and bearing in mind how students learn best, have provided teachers with the ability to adjust their lessons and curriculum. Considering students' different learning styles, has many benefits for both the student and the teacher. Some of the examples, found in literature are (Fine, 2003):

- Identifying a student's learning style and adapting the teaching strategies can help students to accomplish better outcomes academically and enhance their attitudes toward school and learning;
- Identifying learning styles allows teachers to capitalise on students' strong points and to familiarise them with concepts they may find challenging;
- It is associated with significant gains in the test scores;
- In special education programs where the learning style rather than traditional teaching methods are considered, students' performance is significantly better;
- The attitudes of students in differentiated teaching programmes where teaching styles are incorporated towards learning , improve significantly.

Principles and benefits of differentiating learning can be summed as follows (Tomlinson, 2005):

- It emerges within the context of increasingly diverse student populations;
- It is not just an instructional strategy, nor is it a recipe for teaching;
- It is an innovative way of thinking about teaching and learning that can benefit the learner in terms of school success;
- To differentiate is to acknowledge various student backgrounds, readiness levels, languages, interests and learning profiles;
- It sees the learning experience as social and collaborative;
- The responsibility of what happens in the classroom belongs first to the teacher, but also to the learner;
- In the differentiated instruction model, teachers, support staff and professionals collaborate to create an optimal learning experience for students;
- Each student is valued for his or her unique strengths, while being offered opportunities to demonstrate skills through a variety of assessment techniques;

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- It presents an effective means to address learner variance and avoids the downsides of the one-size-fits-all curriculum;
- It respects the multiple intelligences and varying learning styles;
- It provides a platform for all teachers of inclusive classrooms, to create opportunities for success for all students;
- The differentiated classroom balances learning needs common to all students, with more specific needs tagged to individual learners;

D. Class size & Student-teacher ratio

Research points out to the fact that smaller classes allow teachers to focus more on the needs of individual students and reduce the amount of class time needed to deal with disruptions. In this sense, the student-teacher ratio and the class size seem to affect the learning process and the working conditions and therefore have an impact on teaching quality. There is wide agreement in literature that younger children need more time and interaction with teachers for a quality education, which supports the lower student-teacher ratio. Research also indicates a positive association between smaller class size and higher teacher satisfaction (OECD, 2018). Across OECD countries there are on average 15 students for every teacher at the primary level and the number of students per class tends to increase between primary and lower secondary education. According to OECD (2018), lower child-staff ratios normally enhance quality in early childhood education and help create conditions facilitating better developmental outcomes.

On average across OECD countries and economies participating in TALIS 2018, when teachers teach larger classes, they tend to spend less classroom time on actual teaching and learning. Besides child-staff ratios, small group size is considered a predictor for more individualized attention and more frequent interactions in early childhood education settings. The classroom environment's quality in early childhood education improves with every additional adult in the room, while adequate group size and student-teacher ratio contribute to better working conditions (OECD, 2018). Logically, with more children in class there is more potential for distraction, and more possibility of

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being off task. On the other hand, in small classes there are more opportunities to engage children and keep them on task. Students in small classes are more engaged in learning behaviours and display less disruptive behaviour than students in larger classes (Finn et al., 2003).

- **Academic Performance.** Research shows that students in smaller classes perform better when compared to their peers in larger classes, scoring higher on assessments. These positive effects of small class sizes are stronger and endure the longer students are in smaller classes (Bruhwiler & Blatchford, 2011). In particular in case of minority/at-risk students, smaller classes seem to enhance academic performance. Class size also influences the quality of writing since smaller classes are essential for students to get feedback (Blatchford et al., 2002).
- **Student Engagement.** Findings show that students talk and participate more in smaller classes and are more likely to interact with the teacher rather than listen passively during class. In smaller classes students report better relationships with their teachers and evaluate classes and their teachers more positively than their peers in larger classes. Teachers in smaller classes can diagnose and track student learning and differentiate their teaching strategies in response to student needs. Research also indicates that smaller class sizes can support students to develop the ability to adapt to educational challenges (Dee & West, 2011).

E. School policies & resources

School policies have also been demonstrated to have an impact on dropout rates, namely, policies such as Zero Tolerance that include suspension and grade retention. Research conducted on zero tolerance shows that out-of-school suspension can severely disrupt a student's academic progress in ways that have lasting negative consequences, namely, a single suspension or expulsion doubles the risk that a student will repeat a grade (Jimerson, et al., 2002). Research also showed that youth with a prior suspension were 68 % more likely to drop out of school (Jimerson et al., 2002). Out-of-school suspension is also associated with involvement in the juvenile justice system. For example, literature suggests that a single suspension or expulsion for a discretion-

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ary offense almost tripled a student's likelihood of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system in the following academic year (Fabelo et al., 2011).

Studies examining factors associated with dropping out of high school suggest that grade retention is one of the most important predictors of school dropout. Research revealed the consistent finding that students retained are at an elevated risk for dropping out of high school, being between 2 and 11 times more likely to drop out during high school than non-retained students. (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). The poor academic achievement of retained students is another result of the retention policy. Research demonstrates that, in the long run, retention offers very little academic achievement and that retained students had lower achievement scores than the equally low but promoted group. Aggression also seemed to be lower in the promoted groups as compared to the retained groups and students were 5-9 times more likely to drop out by eleventh grade due to retention (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007).

Lack of resources in school also have adverse effects on learning (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008), and consequently on school dropout. Studies show that what influences student achievement and other education outcomes is not necessarily the amount of resources but rather the quality of those resources, how effectively they are used, and how equitably they are distributed across schools (OECD, 2016). The educational resources of schools play an important role specially for minorities since they can diminish the effect of socioeconomic characteristics on academic achievement and create equal opportunities for students (Tomul & Savasci, 2012).

F. Teachers' motivation

Research has demonstrated that teachers are influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. In fact, studies on teaching motivation point out to intrinsic, extrinsic and altruistic reasons for choosing the profession (Moran, Kilpatrick, Abbott, Dallat, & McClune, 2001). Intrinsically motivated teachers are focused on teaching and the activity related to the job itself, i.e., the joy of teaching is considered as the focus of the motivation. The extrinsically motivated teachers focus on the benefits of teaching, such as salary, vacations or other external incentives linked to the job. Altruistically motivated teachers

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view teaching as a socially important job and as part of children's and young people's development. In general, studies show that teachers' motivation is influenced less by external factors such as salary than by those linked to intrinsic factors (Barmby, 2006). In general, employees with feelings of resentment and exhaustion may have low productivity and lack motivation which affects job performance. On the other hand, employees who are highly motivated to work are more likely to be productive than those who are forced to do their jobs. In the case of teachers, motivation plays an important role in the promotion of teaching and learning since motivated teachers are more likely to motivate students to learn in the classroom which is a major determinant of students' performance in national examinations. Therefore, teachers' motivation must be one of the management's main objectives in any educational institution since it is one of the biggest contributors in maximizing teachers' performance (Filak, 2003). Research shows indeed a strong relationship between teachers' motivation and students' achievements and the lack of teachers' motivation emerges as one of the major obstacles in achieving teaching quality and retaining students in school (Davidson, 2005).

Personal Factors

A. Attendance

Students missing too many days of school report having difficulty catching up, leading to school unsuccess and dropout. Indeed, research indicates that attendance is related to dropout at all levels - elementary, middle, and high school (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007). Nevertheless, one of the first steps is to understand the reason for the student's absence in order to implement an appropriate intervention for the student. Some authors suggest that this factor occurs for three reasons (Balfanz & Chang, 2013), namely, discretion, aversion, and barriers:

- Discretion - attributed to students' and parents' lack of understanding on the importance of school attendance;
- Aversion - when students avoid school due to bullying, academic issues or other reasons that make the student have negative attitudes towards school;

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• Barriers – due to the lack of health care or transportation that prevent the student from going to school consistently.

The literature gives numerous examples on the importance of early educational engagement and school attendance. Regular attendance in the primary school years, for example, has been shown to offer children the basic skills for learning and educational achievement and supports the development of social skills (e.g., communication, self-esteem, teamwork and friendship building; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2009). In fact, poor participation is linked to unfavourable outcomes throughout the life course. More specifically, poor school attendance is associated with a greater chance of dropping out of school for both native and ethnic minority groups and it is linked to the tendency of rebellion against authority and to negative consequences in terms of employment, risky health behaviours (e.g., substance abuse) (Marsh, 2000).

B. Behaviour & Antisocial behaviour

Behaviour problems in school settings can involve truancy, drug or alcohol abuse, suspensions, office discipline referrals, etc. Research shows that when problematic behaviour increases, the risk for dropout increases as well (Frazelle & Barton, 2013).

However, disciplinary infractions per se do not cause drop out. Research shows students with problematic behaviour with heightened risk of dropping out and that had been suspended at least once were related to 16 distinct risk factors. Apart from the factors related to poor behaviour, in cases when their peers were not planning on graduating and when the students had a negative attitude towards teachers, their chances of graduating were also lower (Suh et al.,2007). This shows that students with poor behaviour can face increased or decreased risk of dropping out, depending as well on other social and personal factors.

• **Antisocial behaviour.** Research shows that poor academic performance is related to frequency, persistence, and seriousness of delinquent offending in both boys and girls. Poor academic performance also seems to predict delinquency independent of other factor such as socioeconomic status. Also, cognitive deficits and attention problems also correlate with both academic performance and delinquency. Research supports the conclusion that the greater the academic quality of the school, the lower the level of school crime and violence, while higher academic performance is associated with refraining from offending (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). This supports the notion that interventions aimed at improving academic performance among students will decrease antisocial behaviour and delinquency. Research also shows that students who exhibit under-controlled or aggressive behaviours establish relationships with teachers characterized by lower levels of support and acceptance and higher levels of conflict (Silver, Measelle, Armstrong, & Essex, 2005).

C. Academic success and grade retention

Academic success has been considered as a primary factor in predicting students' drop out from all levels- elementary, middle, and high school (Hammond et al., 2007). Students with math and reading skills below grade level are at increased risk of dropping out. Currently with the standardized academic achievement tests, the scores may also be used as predictors of dropout tendency. Tests and respective scores might track student progress and provide comparison with other peers, causing however issues linked to self-worth and self-esteem (Bruce, Bridgeland, Fox, & Balfanz, 2011).

Linked to academic success, retention is often mentioned as one of the reasons behind drop out and, as mentioned previously, it is viewed as a school policy that enhances the possibility of school dropout. Indeed, grade retention is constantly mentioned in literature as a factor that increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school (Allensworth, 2005). Research also shows that after two retentions, the chances of the student dropping out increase to almost 100% and that early grade retention has a negative impact on students' academic success and on psychological and behavioural engagement. Unless positive measures are developed in the following year, students who are retained often suffer from low self-esteem. Besides lowering self-esteem, retention may also lay the foundation for negative attitudes toward school and may create expectations that could increase the risk for early school withdrawal. Also, students who experience retention are likely to be overage as compared to the rest of the students in their grade, which may stigmatize them (Ou & Reynolds, 2008).

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D. Engagement

The student engagement is viewed as one of the most important factors in student dropout (Fall & Roberts, 2012). In fact, students who drop out differ from those who do not in terms of academic satisfaction. Engagement allocates emphasis on personal desire to learn and teachers who provide students with interesting activities and autonomy in the classroom help develop motivation and desire to complete school rather than to drop out (Appleton et al., 2008).

According to the Self-Determination Theory, developed by Ryan and Deci (2000), people are motivated by two strands: extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation:

- **Intrinsic motivation** - is in evidence whenever natural curiosity and students' interest energize their learning. When the educational environment provides challenges, rich sources of stimulus, and a context of autonomy, this motivational source of learning is likely to flourish.
- **Extrinsic motivation** - is characterized as a type of motivation that is governed by reasons of external sources. The action is guided not by the genuine interest of the learner, but by reasons relating to the achievement of results, considered as means to an end. The learner's reasons for learning may be the possibility of achieving better grades, wanting to please parents and teachers, or intending to invest in his/her future, in a professional career.

Several studies indicate that there is a relationship between learning and motivation, revealing a reciprocal relationship between both these constructs. For example, research in classroom environments has established a strong positive relationship between motivation and learning. Higher levels of interest, intrinsic motivation or engagement are related to higher and deeper level learning indicators. Deep involvement occurs when the student experiences the challenges of the activity according to their competencies (i.e., the challenges are not very difficult or easy in relation to their competence level) (Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993).

E. Disability

Disabilities and emotional disorders have been linked to drop-out at the middle and high school levels (Hammond et al., 2007). Performance assessments and standardized tests indicate that academic achievement of children with learning disabilities does not match their distinct abilities. Since learning disabilities relate particularly to classroom performance, they are rarely identified before a child enters school and participates in the process of academic instruction. Research shows that dropout rate for students with disabilities is approximately double when compared to general education students. Special education students are a heterogeneous group, including those with sensory disabilities, physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, behavioural disabilities and other disabilities such as autism, learning disabilities, speech impairments etc. (Johnson et al, 2009).

Students with disabilities are more likely to be chronically absent when compared with students without disabilities and there are many factors related to higher rates of absences among students with disabilities (e.g., health conditions, side effects from medication, anxiety, bullying and harassment, inadequate special education, trauma, etc.). Some students with disabilities are medically vulnerable or may have emotional or behavioural disabilities that might affect attendance, motivation or participation in school and ultimately lead them to dropout (NCEO, 2018). Gottfried and colleagues (2017) for example analysed absenteeism rates between students with disabilities in classrooms that had mostly general education students versus classrooms that had mostly special education students. Students with disabilities in classrooms with mostly special education students were 16.7% more likely to be absent than general education students in those same classrooms. This analysis also found that among students with disabilities, those with emotional disturbance who attended settings that were composed mostly of special education students were the most likely to be chronically absent, namely 24 % more likely than general education students.

F. Ethnicity & Diversity

Studies indicate that race and ethnicity do not have a direct role in dropout, instead, the Social Economic Status (SES) of students is a better indicator Cratty (2012). Ethnic origin strongly relates with other individual student factors, especially with students'

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socio-economic background and gender (Reisel & Brekke, 2010). Nevertheless, research demonstrates that retention rates are higher for members of minority groups (Hauser et al., 2000) and for those students who are low achievers and already showing signs of disengagement in school, the instant effect felt by retention may be a decisive factor in their decision to drop out of school (Allensworth, 2005).

When talking about school dropout one ethnicity seems to stand out in Europe – Roma students. The FRA Roma survey on education analysing the situation in 11 EU Member States from 2016 shows that Roma face four major interrelated education problems: low preschool attendance; a high risk of segregated schooling compounded by prejudice and discrimination; high dropout rates before completing secondary education and low literacy rates. The results show that on average, only half of Roma children aged up to compulsory school age attended preschool or kindergarten; nine out of 10 Roma children aged 7–15 reported not to attend school; only 15 % of Roma adults aged 20–24 had completed upper-secondary general or vocational education; about 20 % of Roma aged 16 and above said that they cannot read and write compared to less than 1 % of the non-Roma living close by. The share of illiterate Roma is lower among the youngest age group (16 to 24 years) in most of the EU Member States that participated in the study. The main reason for not attending school is a late start and irregular attendance resulting in early drop out, delayed start of schooling, leaving education early and non-attendance (FRA, 2016).

G. Bullying

Bullying and student dropout have recently been linked due to the interest of media. Despite the media attention, data show that 4% of students across OECD countries are hit or pushed around by other students at least a few times per month; 11% of students reported that other students make fun of them at least a few times per month; girls are less likely than boys to be victims of physical aggression but are more likely to be the objects of rumours. Low-performing students are more likely to become victims of bullying and students who are frequently bullied are also more likely to be absentees.

Literature also shows that bullying contributes to student dropout and that victims of bullying are faced with an increased risk of dropping out of school (Gastic, 2008).

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Victims of bullying are at higher risk of engaging in violent behaviours as a result of their victimization and exhibit signs of disengagement, which in turn increases their risk dropping out of school. Bullying victimization has indeed been related to poor psychosocial adjustment, difficulty making and maintaining friendships, poor relationships with peers, and a sense of loneliness. Students who are bullied experience a range of psychological, psychosomatic and behavioural symptoms such as increased anxiety levels, insecurity, low self-esteem and self-worth, eating disorders, and aggressive-impulsive behaviours (O'Brennan, Bradshaw & Sawyer, 2009). For that reasons, involvement in bullying can have long-lasting impacts on students which affect their level of engagement in school and consequently, lead to dropout.

- Sexual identity

One group of students that may be more likely to drop out of school are students from the LGBTQ community, who are frequently targets of bullying. Many LGBTQ students feel unsafe at school and are more than three times as likely as other students to have missed class or an entire day of school because of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable. LGBTQ students are at risk of truancy and dropping out of school and are more frequently socially isolated, depressed, and suicidal; and compared to their peers, a smaller proportion of LGBTQ students plan to complete high school or attend college (D'Augelli, 2002).

Bullying prevention through student engagement can be validated as a strategy in promoting an anti-bullying culture in schools, as well as a school climate that protects students from victimisation and dropout. Becoming aware and understanding the phenomenon of bullying is crucial for school leaders and counsellors to effectively foster an anti-bullying culture.

Family Influences

A. Household

The family environment, as well as parental economic status and socio-educational status influence children's school retention. Empirical research indicates that children

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from positive households are more likely to remain in school, whilst those from more negative ones are more likely to dropout (Hunt, 2008). Evidence shows that school dropout has a significant negative correlation with family environment, namely, family type and size, monthly income, parental education and mother's education in particular, place of residence and educational infrastructure (Brown & Park, 2002).

- **Literacy and educational level** – Parents' literacy level and education status are important factors that affects children's schooling and successful completion, since when the former's literacy level is low it creates the risk of an intergenerational cycle of illiteracy. Additionally, educated parents are more aware of education's importance and of educational needs. Thus, they are more successful in creating a positive environment for facilitating a quality education for their children. Mother's education level often influences the length of girls' education, i.e., girls whose mothers have some sort of formal schooling are less likely to drop-out of school. On the other hand, fathers' education has a greater influence on boy's primary schooling (Lloyd, Mete & Grant, 2009). Duryea and Ersado (2003) stated that parental education is one of the most consistent determinants of students' education, since higher parental education is associated with increased access to education, higher attendance rates and lower dropout rates (Chugh, 2011). Parents, who have attained a certain educational level, might want their children to achieve at least the same level. Children of parents with low educational levels are more likely not to attend school and tend to drop out more and engage more in income generating activities than children of parents with high educational levels (Duryea & Ersado, 2003).
- **Family structure** - The type of family and its structure are also essential factors. Divorce, separation, or death in the family/parents signifies change in the family structure, which can be disruptive for the child. Studies have concluded that children from single-parent households are more likely to drop out than children who live in two-parent families. Single-mother families, for example, frequently suffer financially. Children living with stepparents are also more likely to drop out of school than children in a two-parent family household. Parental separation or divorce may change family structure in a way that is detrimental to a child, increasing the child's chances of dropping out of school, since the former are also linked to the loss of parental income. Family size is another factor that influences students' schooling, for example, compared to students with fewer siblings, students with more siblings tend to enrol at school late and drop out early. Enyegue's (2000) study for example shows that the larger the family size, the greater the financial burden and workload, making children less likely to attend school and more likely to drop out. Big family size often signifies a lack of adequate monthly income to retain children at school.
- **Child-parent relationship** - The child-parent relationship can affect children's chances of dropping out of high school, since the relationship may be strained by the physical absence of adults in the household, the limited amount of time parents and children spend together, and limited parental attention to children's activities such as monitoring school performance or inculcating educational values (Pong & Ju, 2000). Studies suggest that the major family factor of dropout is parents who are not interested in studies, unable to make ends meet, working for wages and salaries, participating in other economic activities, attending domestic duties and facing financial constraints. Also, the number of children in the family is an important determinant of school dropout, as families with multiple children can struggle socially and financially, and do not often have the opportunity to spend quality time with their children. Motivation and emotional support from family members, especially from parents are also essential factors that spark engagement and interest in the child to continue in school (Chugh, 2011). Indeed, when parents monitor and regulate their children's activities, provide emotional support, encourage independent decision-making and are generally involved in their schooling, children are less likely to drop out of school (Liu, 2004).

Community and Social Factors

A. Social and socioeconomical status

Poverty remains one of the most significant causes of children's school dropout. Family's social and demographic characteristics are among the central community factors that have an impact on school dropout. Among these factors and related to the family

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factors explored above, social class or socioeconomic status (SES) is the most frequently cited in literature. Students from low-income families present a high rate of drop out, which points out to the family's social-economic background as a major factor affecting students' continuation in school (Chugh, 2011). Studies show that high parental income means more resources to sustain children's education, including access to better quality schools, ability to pay for tuition, and more learning support at home. Students from low SES families drop out more often than students from high SES families (Christle et al., 2007), since in some cases the former may be called to improve household income by working or by taking on other household responsibilities to free up time for other household members to work (Chugh, 2011). Lack of money to buy essential school materials may cause non-enrolment and potentially higher dropout.

Linked to the SES another factor that must be mentioned is unemployment. Parental job loss has long-term harmful effects on children's future income and human capital, and it affects children's education outcomes in the short-term (Hilger, 2016). Research shows that children exposed to parental job loss have a higher probability of grade repetition, lower grade-point average and lower likelihood of enrolling at the university (Ost & Pan, 2014).

B. Settlement and the living area

Settlement and living area size have a strong impact on school dropout tendency and research shows that the most vulnerable children in this regard are those living in rural areas, particularly in small and remote localities. This is due to the fact that in rural areas families have limited employment opportunities, (e.g., long-term unemployment), inadequate social, living and housing conditions, limited cultural and educational opportunities, as well as lack convenient transport options, social capital, social services, and community resources (Bayer & McMillian, 2005).

Disadvantaged and poor neighbourhoods located in unfavourable locations associated with social problems such as high crime rates also are linked to high levels of dropout. Children from these neighbourhoods often have fewer resources and are exposed to a combination of risk factors at the individual, institutional, family and social levels. Studies have found that students in rural areas have lower levels of educational achievement and higher levels of dropout than those in urban areas. The lack of resources

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and subsequent economic distress may be further aggravated by rural youth's greater risk to be involved in substance abuse and criminal behaviour because of poverty and psychological issues. Indeed, there is increased risk of poor mental health because of limited access to services (Collins et al., 2008), which also has a negative effect on educational outcomes and performance.

In low-income neighbourhoods, children may be attending schools with lack of adequate funding and resources and be exposed to violence. Gottfried (2014) for example showed that higher levels of neighbourhood poverty, larger average neighbourhood household size and neighbourhood home ownership are strong predictors of student dropout. Students exposed to areas with high levels of poverty may have difficulty seeing the value of education, resulting in low academic expectations and achievement. On other hand, students from affluent communities have greater access to support systems and resources. For example, increased homeownership may directly decrease neighbourhood crime rates, leading to improved school outcomes (Sharkey, 2010).

C. Peer influence

Peer influence has been demonstrated to directly and indirectly affect school attendance and performance, since peers have a significant influence on a child's behaviour. Li and colleagues (2011) studied the role of peer support, relationship with problematic friends, and bullying on school engagement and found that peer support positively predicted both behavioural and emotional engagement in school. Also, association with problematic friends and involvement in bullying were negatively associated with both the aforementioned. As a consequence of negative peer influence, students may experience academic failure, school alienation and loss of self-esteem. Uninterested and alienated students are likely to be viewed negatively by teachers and other students and be further immersed into other alienated and antisocial students' peer groups which can sometimes lead to delinquent antisocial behaviour.

- **Academic tracking.** School is a setting that can provide a lot of opportunities for contact with deviant peers. Due to academic difficulties, schools sometimes use a method in which teachers group together students with similar abilities to create more homogeneous groups of students. Alienated students, minorities and low SES

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students are often disproportionately placed in lower tracks. In this way, schools that track students based on academic abilities may find themselves grouping together anti-social peers, providing opportunity for delinquent peer grouping, making these students 60% more likely to drop out than others (Weblow, Urick & Duesbery, 2013).

• **Peer rejection.** Another factor that affects school engagement and attendance, particularly in low SES students is peer rejection. Studies show for example that 82% of students in high family SES who were peer-rejected graduated, while only 55% of those in low family SES who were peer-rejected graduated. These data suggest that students from more advantaged families are better equipped to cope with negative social interactions, such as peer rejection (French & Conrad, 2001).

4. Creating Solutions...

After becoming aware of the European and national context of school dropout, as well as of the profile of students at risk and the main drivers of this phenomenon, it is time to think about solutions and **precautionary measures on how to timely address the problems linked to this phenomenon.** In this section you can find some strategies to deal with the problems of segregation vs inclusion of minorities and additional support tips to help the groups that are most at risk of school leaving.

4.1. Problem-Based Learning

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is a method used in teaching settings that consists of using complex real-world problems as a tool to promote student learning of concepts and principles as opposed to direct presentation of concepts, results and facts. While implementing PBL methods, the teaching role shifts away from the traditional model characterized by a sequential and linear pattern where the teacher presents the main concepts, gives students assignments and provides the needed information for students to apply their knowledge to a given problem. PBL can promote the development of communication skills, critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities and it can also provide opportunities for working in groups (Duch et al, 2001).

Additionally, PBL allows students to (Kurt, 2020):

• Become more involved in open-ended situations that are similar and replicate the

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ones encountered in the workplace or in real-world situations;

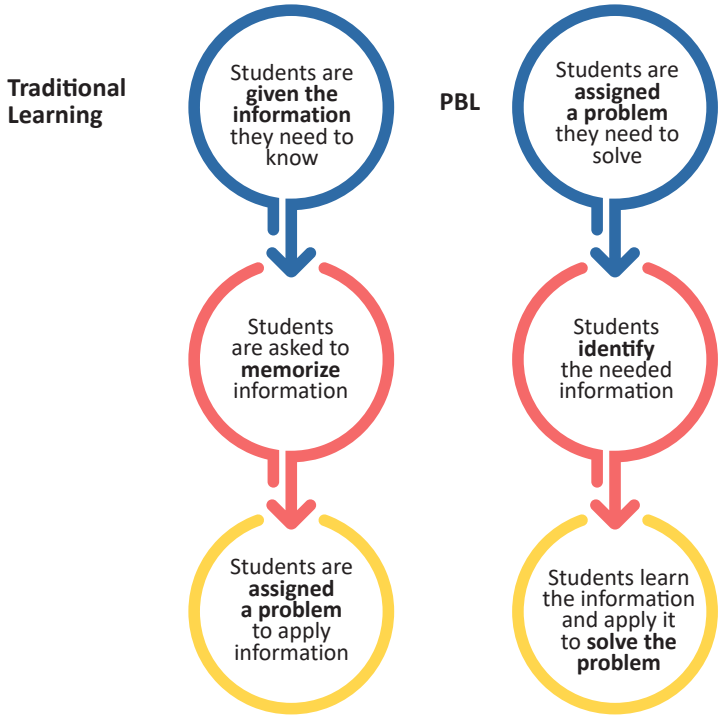
• Take part in group work and conduct research on what is known or unknown as well as identify the methods of searching for information in order to solve problems;

• Investigate a problem using critical thinking as well as problem solving and brainstorming about possible different solutions.

This method can be incorporated into any learning situation and has the potential to become part of the solution to prevent and deal with the phenomenon of early school leaving.

The next figure depicts the **main components of PBL vs traditional learning:**

Figura 2 - Aprendizagem tradicional vs ABP



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Even if the core problems vary from subject to subject, PBL can be adapted to any context, since some characteristics of good PBL **problems transcend fields. The problem must** (Duch, Groh, and Allen, 2001):

- ✓ Motivate students to seek out a deeper understanding of the learning concepts;
- ✓ Compel students to make reasoned decisions and to construct arguments to defend them;
- ✓ Integrate the content objectives in such a way so as to connect it with previous knowledge;
- ✓ Have a certain level of complexity to ensure that the students must work together to solve it (in case it involves group work);
- ✓ Have open-ended and engaging initial steps to draw students into the problem.

Steps to use Problem-Based Learning (Duch et al, 2001):

1. Choose a central concept, idea, or principle that you plan to include in your lessons and imagine a problem or assignment that can help students learn that specific concept (role-play, case study, simulations). To create the initial problem, you can use a variety of sources such as newspapers, magazines, journals, books, textbooks, and movies;
2. Start by listing the learning objectives that students should meet when working on the problem (i.e., what is it that students really need to learn and be able to do after completing the learning project);
3. Explain Problem-Based Learning to students and what is expected of them in this process;
4. Create a storytelling, a real-world problem that is relevant to students, or research a real case that can be adapted to the concept you are teaching, to motivate and intrigue your students to solve the problem and go beyond the initial learning objectives. Ponder to create a problem that students may encounter in their own life or future career;
5. Discuss relevant rules for working in groups to maximize learning success and practice group processes such as empathetic listening, involving others, peer support;

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6. Introduce the problem in stages to allow students to identify learning outcomes that will take them to research the concepts;
7. Explore different roles for students to accomplish the work according to the specific problem (e.g., for a problem about pollution, explore different roles and perspectives such as a business owner, a student, government officials, etc.). Place students in groups in a strategic way based on diversity and skill level.
8. Provide a guide describing the instructions based on the problem (e.g., learning outcomes, structure of the problem, timeline, resources that students can use, format to communicate the learning materials, evaluation).
9. Consider promoting a whole-class discussion and provide feedback to each group after they share the solution.

4.2. Providing feedback

Feedback can be defined as information provided by an agent such as a teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience, regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Research agrees that providing effective feedback has a great influence on the learning process and a very powerful influence on student achievement (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). Teachers give their students feedback in class consciously or unconsciously, in the form of facial expressions, gestures, or comments as spontaneous responses to students' performance. The type of feedback, its timing and the way it is used can have a positive impact on students. Students frequently expect immediate feedback from their teachers when they complete a task and its lack may make them feel that their efforts were not recognized, causing demotivation.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) state **four task levels of feedback:**

- •1st level - feedback can be about a task or product and can include directions on how to improve (e.g.: when a teacher hands back a paper with written notes on how to improve). It can also be considered as "corrective feedback" since it focuses on correcting behaviour or other factors regarding task accomplishment. Written feedback comments in conjunction with grades have shown to be more effective.
- •2nd level - feedback can be directed to assist the learning process in order to help students better understand a task (e.g.: such as by answering a question)

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•3rd level - can be seen as personal feedback and it can increase students' self-efficacy and boost self-esteem (e.g.: a self-evaluation part of an assignment to see if students can work through a task by themselves).

• 4th level - unrelated to a task and in the form of general praise (e.g.: saying "you are a very good student!").

Given the importance of feedback, it is very important to ensure that it is constructive and to observe how students react to classroom feedback since it contributes to learning only when the learner reflects on it and works to improve accordingly.

Positive feedback: enables students to build self-awareness, self-confidence, and eagerness for learning. In order to instil students with a sense of achievement and let them know about their potential for improvement, so that they can take the necessary corrective measures and be motivated to progress further, it is important to give them feedback regularly. Positive feedback can be given in class right after the completion of a task, verbally or non-verbally (e.g., gestures) and as frequently as possible in a positive way to improve students' motivation and self-esteem.

Negative feedback: Contrary to common perception, negative feedback can have beneficial effects on learning depending on commitment to goals, performance orientation and sense of self-efficacy of learners. In specific, high proficiency learners are more likely to benefit from negative feedback because they tend to use this feedback for self-verification since they seek this type of feedback to improve their present performance. Nevertheless, negative feedback can have an unfavourable impact on low proficiency learners, namely on their motivation and performance. Low proficiency learners who most of the time are students at risk of dropping out, are more likely to react negatively to negative feedback and subsequently show less motivation on a task, attribute negative feedback to their lack of competencies and abilities and less to the amount of effort put into the task (Brunit, Huguet, & Monteil, 2000).

Peer feedback: training your students to be peer assessors can be very beneficial since it highlights the importance of involving them in the feedback and evaluation process and promotes students' role as active classroom agents. Student to student feedback can be an essential aspect of the classroom learning process and promotes a more student-centred model. Additionally, peer feedback empowers students to give and receive feedback from their equals about current tasks and it works as a method of collaboration, helping them develop strategies, proofread and revise others' work more effectively and improve their own. Feedback when coming from a peer instead of a teacher can also be better received, specifically for these students that do not have a close or positive relationship with the teacher. Assessing peers' work helps students understand and apply the evaluating criteria and get a better understanding of what exactly is expected of them.

How to promote peer feedback in your classroom?

•Ask students to give each other feedback in the form of brief comments on classroom presentations;

• Create short assessment forms or checklists to facilitate and structure feedback;

•Make time for an open discussion in class to share peer feedback;

• Show students that peer feedback helps them understand what distinguishes a good presentation from a poor one and how providing feedback is useful;

•Adjust the feedback criteria that you normally use because students can have difficulty understanding them and apply them inappropriately (Nilson 2003). Instead, create a simple peer review template with clear instructions on how to provide feedback on each other's work in a constructive way. Peer review can help students improve both their writing and reading skills, work their competencies such as attention to detail and integrate the recommendations given by colleagues;

•Model effective feedback strategies in class so that students can train to become more effective when providing their feedback (e.g., role play).

4.3. Cooperative and Peer learning

Peer learning is defined as a teaching and learning approach that includes groups of students working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product, where each of the members is responsible not only for learning but also for helping their peers to learn. Peer learning strategies can be beneficial since peer learning

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(Johnston & NCE-MSTL, 2009):

- Promotes student academic achievement;
- Increases student retention;
- Enhances student satisfaction with their learning experience;
- Helps develop communication skills and social skills;
- Promotes student self-esteem;
- Facilitates positive relationships between different social groups with different backgrounds.

Cooperative Learning (CL)is the instructive use of small groups for students to work together to maximise their own learning and the learning of others. It contrasts with traditional competitiveness-based teaching methods (students work against each other to achieve an academic goal) and individualistic learning (students work alone to achieve learning goals) (Johnson & Johnson, 2017). CL settings can promote students' involvement and motivation for school and learning, as well as facilitate integration and prevent discrimination, as students are able to connect with each other and learn from each other's skills and competencies (Hijzen, Boekaerts & Vedder, 2006). **Some of the benefits include:**

- Positive effect on student learning when compared to individual or competitive conditions (Johnson & Johnson, 1999) from the traditional competitiveness-based teaching methods (Johnson & Johnson, 2017);
- The interpersonal and collaboration skills that can be learned in cooperative learning activities teach skills that are critical for later personal and professional success;
- Fourth, it has the potential to promote a high level of engagement that other forms of learning do not (Slavin, Hurley & Chamberlain, 2003);
- It can be a powerful tool toward several transformative goals, including building communal bonds, learning conflict resolution skills, learning to consider others' needs, and learning to be an effective team member (Watson & Battistich, 2006);
- Research in the area of neuroscience indicates that students are more involved during cooperative learning. Scans reveal that students' brains are much more activated and engaged when explaining ideas to a partner than when they are just

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listening or simply answering teacher questions (Carter, 1999).

Simply putting students in groups and telling them to work together does not mean they know how to work cooperatively. Working cooperatively is much more than just being physically near other students. Johnson et al (1990) state that **five elements** must be included for a lesson to be cooperative:

1. Positive interdependence. Team members are required to trust each other to achieve the goal.
2. Individual responsibility. Students in the same group are responsible for specific tasks and play their part in accomplishing the goal.
3. Interaction. Although some of the group work can be done individually, some activities or tasks should be done interactively. This means that group members must provide feedback to each other. In addition, they should draw conclusions together and, more importantly, teach and encourage all members.
4. Proper use of collaborative skills. Students are encouraged to develop and practice skills such as trust building, leadership, decision making, communication and conflict management.
5. Group processes. Team members set group goals, make an assessment of what they are doing as a team on a regular basis and plan the next steps, which they will complete in the future (Johnson & Johnson, 2017).

Why is cooperative and peer learning important to prevent dropout?

Classrooms represent a challenging context for students with behavioural problems. Cooperative learning invites students to establish closer links with other students and peers. It promotes competencies in terms of tolerance or resolution of differences, helping students understand and accept that everyone has a voice in a group (Brock & Carter, 2015). In this approach, students tend to show (Jonhson & Jonhson 2017):

- Greater academic achievement;
- Deeper understanding of learning materials;
- Increased performance in terms of time needed for tasks;
- Less disruptive behaviour;
- Lower levels of anxiety and stress;

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- Increased intrinsic motivation to learn;
- Greater ability to see situations from others' perspectives;
- More positive and supportive relationships with peers;
- Higher self-esteem;

When implementing a cooperative learning approach, it is important that teachers:

1. Form teams themselves instead of allowing students to choose their own teammates;
2. Take into account the importance of making teams heterogeneous in terms of pupils' ability;
3. Form teams whose members have time to meet if assignments require work outside the classroom;
4. Do not isolate members at risk of dropout;
5. Make an interim evaluation to learn how students feel about teamwork.

How to start the process?

Cooperative learning groups are formed by the teacher who (Johnson & Johnson, 2017):

1. Specifies the task objectives;
2. Makes a number of decisions on how to structure learning groups (size, functions, materials, how to organize the room);
3. Teaches the academic concepts, principles and strategies that students have to apply: positive interdependence, individual accountability, expected student behaviours and success criteria;
4. Monitors the functioning of learning groups and intervenes to teach collaborative skills and assist academic learning when needed;
5. Assesses student performance in line with excellence criteria and ensures that groups process the effectiveness of the members who worked together.

4.4. Develop Autonomous Learners

The way teachers support students' needs for autonomy has a major impact on the quality of student motivation. **Autonomy-supportive styles** include building a teacher-student relationship that foster students' intrinsic motivation instead of controlling or pressuring them to think, feel or behave in a certain way. Indeed, when the learning environment is characterized by pressure and control, intrinsic motivation and feelings of self-determination diminish. Autonomy-supportive teachers have students that display more positive learning behaviours and have the potential to accomplish better learning and relational outcomes than the students of more controlling teachers (Reeve & Cheon, 2014).

Students of autonomy-supportive teachers can benefit in several ways and in several areas such as well-being, motivation and learning, namely (Furtak & Kunter, 2012):

- Increased perception of control (i.e., increased perception that he/she has the ability, resources, or opportunities to get positive outcomes or avoid negative effects through one's own actions);
- Greater levels of intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, positive emotions and psychological well-being;
- Greater curiosity, persistence and self-regulation strategies;
- Better theoretical understanding as well as better learning outcomes;
- More capable to process materials and school contents on a deeper level.

An autonomy-supportive teacher:

- Has a motivational style and listens to students' perspectives, integrating these into instruction (instead of ignoring, criticising or dismissing them);
- Welcomes and seeks students' input into the lesson and supports their initiatives (actively requesting input through conversation or soliciting anonymous suggestions);
- Appreciates and understands students' feelings and different ways of thinking;
- Knows students' interests, preferences and psychological needs which may be used in turn to increase their motivation;
- Shares his/her perspective by providing information and strategies on a given learning activity or task;
- Takes time to listen, provides support and helpful hints;
- Provides praise for signs of progress.

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How to build an autonomy-supportive classroom?

Try to avoid controlling language or behaviour by identifying the factors that lead you to adopt a controlling style. By first recognizing them you will become more mindful of these behaviours and subsequently you will be better able to replace them with more adaptive and flexible ones. The following instructional behaviours can help you internalise a more autonomy-supportive motivating style, and therefore better support your students' autonomy (Reeve, 2009):

- Ask for students' points of view in relevant classroom decisions and incorporate students' perspectives;
- Promote a welcoming climate where students can share their thoughts and feelings;
- Explore the motivational potential of your students, namely their interests, psychological needs for autonomy, connection with others, intrinsic motivation, preferences, personal goals and values;
- Take notes on students' negative behaviour or performance and use them as constructive information that can help you restore students' inner motivation;
- Provide ongoing support for autonomy during tasks by promoting students' independence in problem solving, inviting them to examine and evaluate their own performance, and encouraging them to work together, ask questions and share ideas.
- Provide information, strategies and rationale behind the tasks using adaptable messages and encouragement rather than providing students with solutions or direct instructions on how to perform a specific task.

4.5. Communicate assertively

Assertive communication is the ability to convey thoughts, feelings, needs while simultaneously paying attention to the rights of others. Research suggests that parents and schools are important agents that stimulate assertive communication skills in adolescents (Yuliani, Etika, Suharto & Nurseskasatmata, 2020). Communicating assertively is when you say what you want to say firmly, spontaneously, honestly and directly, keeping your dignity and rights, while at the same time not insulting others, or attacking them, but referring strictly to their behaviour (Pipas & Jaradat, 2010). Assertive

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communication means first of all knowing what your needs are and how to get them covered. Therefore, this communication's style objective is not to win the discussion, but rather to solve problems and to achieve maximum results. Assertiveness is a compromise between passive communication, where you agree with everything the other person says, and an aggressive one, where you counterreply and desire to impose yourself (Pipas & Jaradat, 2010). Assertiveness includes being able to express your opinions and viewpoints; to say no without feeling guilty; to ask for what you want; to choose how to live your life without guilt and to take risks when you feel the need to do so (Pipas & Jaradat, 2010).

The main principles of assertive communication are (Pipas & Jaradat, 2010):

- It requires fairness and strength and is characterized by people fighting for their rights while remaining sensitive to the rights of others;
- It requires balancing between what the person wants and what others want;
- Open attitude towards oneself and others;
- Openness to hearing other points of view and respect for others;
- Best suited for positive long-term relationships;
- It allows one to argue their opinion without being aggressive or feeling humiliated.

Some people confuse assertiveness with aggression, considering that both behaviours entail the expression of needs and rights. The major difference between them is respect for other people which is characteristic of the assertive style. Assertive people respect themselves and others and always think in terms of "win-win." Aggressive people use tactics of manipulation, abuse and have no respect for others. They think negatively about others and do not take into account their views. Passive people on the other hand do not know how to communicate their feelings and needs. Their fear of conflict is so great that they prefer hiding their true feelings and needs and maintaining peace with others instead. They let others always come out as winners in any conflict and this leads to a total loss of self-esteem. People who acquire assertive communication skills experience less conflict and stress. Therefore, they meet their needs and help others

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meet their own as well and as a result they have strong relationships that they can rely on. All these lead to a better mental state and substantially improved health (Pipas & Jaradat, 2010).

Benefits of assertive communication in managing disruptive behaviour

The concept of assertiveness was introduced by experts in the behavioural therapy context and is based on the assumption that it has the potential to inhibit anxiety and reduce depression. It has been suggested as well that assertive communication leads to improved self-image (Pipas & Jaradat, 2010). The behavioural components of assertiveness include a series of non-verbal elements such as:

- Eye contact: an assertive person will look their interlocutor in the eye. The absence of eye contact can send unwanted messages, such as: "I'm not sure what to say" or "I am very afraid";
- Tone of voice: even the most assertive message will lose its significance if it is expressed with a hushed voice (this will give the impression of uncertainty) or too loud, which could activate aggressive behaviour on the interlocutor;
- Stance: assertive posture varies from situation to situation. However, it is estimated that in most cases, the person must stand straight: not too stiff, because it communicates a state of tension, not too relaxed, because others could interpret such a position as disrespectful;
- Facial expressions: for the message to be genuinely assertive, social mimicry must be appropriate and congruent with the message content. Otherwise, if for example, someone smiles when he/she says that something bothers him/her, then he/she provides ambiguous information, which alters the intent of communication;
- Timing: the most effective assertive message loses its effectiveness when received in the wrong time. Thus, for example, no boss will respond favourably to a request for wage increase, no matter how well it is made, if an employee approaches them when preparing to appear before a committee;
- Content: even when all other conditions are met, the message cannot achieve its purpose if it is too aggressive, with the intention of blaming the other or, conversely, expressed in a very shy and passive way.

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4.6. Promote Positive Relationship in Classroom

There is considerable evidence indicating a positive association between teacher-pupil relationships and pupil social competence (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Positive interactions with significant adults within school can promote improved pupil adjustment to school. Pupils who experience positive interactions with teachers display fewer behavioural problems than pupils who experience poor or coercive interactions with teachers (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Murray & Greenberg, 2000).

According to Monroe (2006) teachers can initiate and sustain positive relationships with pupils by:

- Expressing warmth, care and trust;
- Directing positive attention towards the pupil;
- Providing encouragement and emotional support;
- Recognising pupil strengths;
- Showing interest in the pupils' activities and life;
- Being sensitive to pupil needs;
- Recognising that setting events or antecedents influence behaviour.

Positive classroom environment strategies:

Cultivating a classroom culture in which students feel safe and free to be involved, is important for a comfortable and positive classroom environment. A positive classroom culture empowers students to be part of their own learning experience and to take responsibility. Below are presented some strategies that could help teachers build a safe and respectful learning environment in classroom:

- ✓ Set rules together: A positive classroom is a place where children are free to be themselves and feel safe and respected, providing a framework that helps them to do so. Ask children about what kind of rules should be set, including rules regarding communication; in this way, children will understand, recognize and internalize the rules defined by them and the colleagues.
- ✓ Promote diversity and multiculturalism: Multicultural education is a progressive approach for transforming education based on educational equality and social

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justice. For example, identifying students' learning styles, encouraging them to be proud of their culture, becoming aware of their own bias (cultural beliefs, values, biases) and celebrating diversity and multiculturalism will help students feel included in the group;

✓ Turn problems into teachable moments: when problems happen, try to take a positive spin and get students interested in taking the steps to solve them This develops not only problem-solving skills, but also teamworking skills that are vital in classroom;

✓ Change the set up: when possible, try to change the classroom setting, there is no rule on how your classroom should be set up as this will vary depending on the age group, subject, space available and type of project being worked on. However, students should not feel segregated and should be able to work with others easily;

✓ Give individual responsibilities and share the power in classroom: give students responsibilities in the classroom is part of the day-to-day running but it also helps children build self-esteem and self-concept because they know that they have been trusted with a specific task. Change the responsibilities periodically (e.g., every week);

✓ Make use of innovation and technology resources.

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Do's	Don'ts
• Get to know and connect with each student in your classroom, calling them by their names, find out information about their interests. • Spend time individually with each student, especially those who are more challenging or introverted. • Be mindful of the explicit and implicit messages you are giving your students (verbal and nonverbal communication) • Promote positive classroom climate by focusing not only on improving your relationships with your students but also on enhancing the relationships among them. • Be aware that you are modelling behaviour for your students and that the way you behave and speak has an influence on them. Remember that students notice your interaction style (e.g., warmth, respect, interaction with other adults) and model it. Students learn to manage strong emotions using your methods (e.g., taking a deep breath, talking about your frustrations). Likewise, they also notice negative strategies (e.g., yelling at students, making disrespectful jokes).	• Don't give up too quickly on your efforts to develop a positive climate and positive relationships with difficult students. Developing relationships takes time and patience. • Challenging students will benefit from a good teacher-student relationship comparing to students that are easier to get along and that have a positive relationship with their peers. • Don't assume that respectful and sensitive interactions are only important when interacting with younger students; a positive relationship is essential regardless the age of the student. • Don't assume that relationships that you build with your students are irrelevant. As it has already been covered in this guide, relationship quality can have both positive and negative effects. • Don't wait for negative behaviours and interactions to occur in the classroom, rather try to be proactive and prevent them by promoting a positive climate.

4.7. Democratic Practices in Classroom

EUDEC (European Democratic Education Community) defines Democratic Education, based on the 2005 Resolution of the 13th International Democratic Education Conference by stating that in any educational institution, students have the right to:

✓ Make their own choices concerning learning and all other areas of everyday life (e.g., individually determine what to do, when, where, how and with whom), as long as their decisions do not infringe on the liberty of others to do the same;

✓ Have an equal share in the decision making as to how their organisations (in this case their schools) operate, and which rules and sanctions are needed.

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Indeed, the literature in the educational field give support to democratic education, showing that educational environments that engage students as active participants in their own learning are linked with higher student attendance and achievement, greater creativity and conceptual learning, and increased intrinsic motivation (Gray & Feldman, 2004). According to the EUDEC, democratic education meets the needs of the learner, the community and society, through developing reflective individuals who are collaborative problem-solvers and creative flexible thinkers. It also affirms that democratic education can be valid to learners of all ages and in any learning environment, that share the following elements:

- ✓ Firm foundations in a values culture of equality and shared responsibility
- ✓ "Respect breeds respect", "Trust breeds trust", "Compassion breeds compassion", "Tolerance breeds tolerance" and so on
- ✓ Collective decision-making where all parts of the community, regardless of age or social status, have an equal say over important decisions (e.g.: school rules, curricula, projects, hiring of staff, budgetary matters)
- ✓ Self-directed discovery, where learners select what they learn, when, how and with whom they learn it (through play as well as conventional classes)
- ✓ The learning process is influenced by student's intrinsic motivation and their individual interests.

The democratic classroom notion relies on the premise that the principles of democracy are not only a government concept but also a lifestyle one, being associated to common decision-making processes in any organization (Garrison, Neubert & Reich, 2004).

Some of the **main principles underpinning the notion of democratic classrooms** can be condensed as follows:

1. Democratic classrooms enable student perspectives to be heard and acknowledged, which empowers students to uphold their own rights and personal freedoms as human beings (Apple & Beane, 2007).
2. Democratic education promotes students' autonomy and critical thinking (Veugelers, 2007).
3. Students and main stakeholders (family, other institutions) are encouraged to participate in important discussions that address community interests and issues (Apple & Beane, 2007).
4. In democratic schools, decision-making is not only for the parties in charge but for everyone involved in school (Apple & Beane, 2007).

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Indeed, the **main elements of democracy** can be applied to classes, creating a classroom where students develop as active, participatory democratic individuals through experiences that are essential to learning (Wraga, 1998; Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2018):

1. Power of Public: Teachers give the opportunity to students to get involved in decisions that affect themselves (e.g., classroom rules);
2. Freedom: students' ideas are given weight and they are presented with the opportunity to bring to classroom problematic situations that require decision-making;
3. Equity: each student has the right to participate in classroom discussions and decisions; teachers show an equal amount of effort and attention for each student towards improvement of the learning process;
4. Individualism: the classroom environment is open to all kinds of political and moral values and set in a way to sustain and develop students' self-control, self-discipline and positive behaviour. In the education process, the interests of all students are taken into consideration. Students' critical thinking is promoted;
5. Social responsibility: teachers help students appreciate their own participation and how such participation impacts the world in which they live in, using participative democratic activities within classrooms and communities. Students take part in the process of decision-making or problem-solving in the classroom increasing the social responsibilities of the students. Students learn how to act in group environment and handle social actions beyond school and classroom.

How can democratic education be practiced by teachers?

Democratic education can take numerous forms, influenced by yourself as a teacher, but also by parents and young people in your community or your particular classroom setting. The Institute of Democratic Education in America (IDEA, n.d.) provides some

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tips to practice the principles of democratic education in your school and classroom:

- ✓ Creatively engaging students. Even if you work in a more traditional school setting, you can still provide students with a chance to have a choice over their learning, going beyond the conventional curriculum to build a more significant and engaging experience that has a practical connection to the day-to-day life of students.
- ✓ Implementing democratic education techniques on a day-to-day basis. Examples: self-directing learning, shared decision-making, individualized project-based work, and student-chosen internships in the community.
- ✓ Start using the terminology "democratic school/classroom" and others that practice the values of democratic education.
- ✓ Promote voice forums for students. Promote students' engagement in student councils and student-teacher-administrator committees. Give your students the opportunity to be part of the educational planning and decision-making in the school/classroom.
- ✓Encourage your students to take the lead in reform efforts in their classroom, schools and communities.
- ✓ Take a leading role in your school to disseminate and raise awareness to the need of educational reform efforts to personalize learning, drift from conventional structures and curriculums towards a democratic school label.
- ✓ Encourage the school and your students to participate in non-profit and after-school programs empowering them to explore their interests and create networks with the outside community.
- ✓ Participate in teacher education programs focusing on democratic and progressive education.

4.8. Restorative Practices to deal with problematic behaviour

According to the International Institute for Restorative Practices , Restorative practices are processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing. Restorative Practices promote the developing of relationships within the community, as well as repair community when harm is done. When successfully integrated throughout the school culture and climate, Restorative Practices create safe and productive learning spaces where students develop social and emotional skills and strong relationships with peers and adults.

Restorative Practices provide a way of thinking about conflict or harm, responding to issues and problems by inviting all participants to (Chicago Public Schools Office of Social & Emotional Learning, 2017):

- ✓ Discuss their feelings and opinions;
- ✓ Identify what happened;
- ✓ Describe how it affected everyone;
- ✓ Find solutions to make things better;

Restorative mindset

A restorative mindset describes how a person understands community and one's role in it. The values and concepts that underlie a restorative mindset include:

- Relationships and trust are at the centre of community;
- All members of the community are responsible to and for each other;
- Multiple perspectives are welcomed, and all voices are equally important;
- Healing is a process essential to restoring community;
- Harm-doers should be held accountable for and take an active role in repairing harm;
- Conflict is resolved through honest dialogue and collaborative problem-solving that addresses the root cause and the needs of those involved.

Why Restorative Practices?

Since the late 1990s, the Restorative Justice principles have been adapted for use in schools in response to the inefficacy of traditional punitive discipline in order to effectively deal with disruptive behaviour. Restorative practices are being increasingly applied in individual schools and school districts to address behaviour, rule violations, and to improve school climate and culture.

Restorative practices can improve relationships between students, between students and educators, and even between educators, **whose behaviour often serves as a role model for students.** They allow each member of the school community to develop and

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implement school's adopted core values. Restorative practices allow individuals who may have committed harm to take full responsibility for their behaviour by addressing the individual(s) affected by the behaviour (Schiff, 2013).

Specialists have been emphasizing that traditional school-based disciplinary interventions, such as zero-tolerance disciplinary approaches that exclude students from their schools through out-of-school suspensions and expulsions are not effective. **Research shows that removing youth from their learning environment for extended periods of time is not an effective way to manage student behaviour.**

The American Psychological Association (APA) for example, concluded that zero-tolerance policies fail to make schools safer since schools with higher rates of suspension and expulsion have less satisfactory ratings of school climate, less satisfactory school governance structures, and spend a disproportionate amount of time on disciplinary matters (APA, 2008). Additionally, zero-tolerance hurts the relationship between teachers and students and does not help students address their issues.

The effects of these zero tolerance policies include (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, 2009; APA, 2008):

- Academic Difficulties - Students subjected to harsh disciplinary measures that exclude them from school tend to fall behind academically and spend less time learning.
- Truancy - Students who face harsh discipline often feel alienated from their schools, resulting in more absenteeism.
- Behavioural problems - Students punished by zero-tolerance measures often fall behind their peers due to lost learning time and often become frustrated or embarrassed and proceed to disrupting class.
- Mental Health Issues - Unjust disciplinary consequences are frequently traumatizing for young people, diminished self-worth, and distrust of school officials.
- Lack of motivation - Punitive policies trigger a cycle of disengagement from schools, where students become less trusting and more resentful of their teachers, losing the connectedness that is such a critical component of academic success.
- Substance abuse - As youth become more alienated, they also become more likely to engage in risky behaviours, violence, alcohol and substance abuse.
- Dropping Out - Zero-tolerance discipline sends a clear message to students that they are not valued, and the previously mentioned issues can lead to drop-out.

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Evidence of positive impact of Restorative Practices

These practices involve conflict resolution using methods by which the offender, the victim, and other interested parties participate in the process of resolving the conflict), highlighting the values of reparation (psychological and/or material), relationships and the community (United Nations, 2000; Pranis, 2011).

The expansion of Restorative Practices in school has been widely recognized as a beneficial technique to deal with disruptive behaviour since this approach has been linked to development of positive behaviour, reduction of negative conduct, and prevention of future conflicts in school (Gonzalez, 2012; González, Sattler & Buth, 2018). In specific, evidence shows that in schools where these kinds of policies are implemented, it is possible to accomplish increased attendance, better grades, less victimization, and overall incidents of conflict (Armour, 2014; Kokotsaki, 2013). Also, the implementation of these practices shows a positive impact on student engagement, mental health and well-being (Croxford, 2010). Other studies point out to the potential of restorative practices in creating better teacher-student relationships, improving schools, and reducing racial inequities in discipline referrals (Gregory, Clawson, Davis & Gerewitz, 2016).

Traditional & Punitive approach vs Restorative approach:

	Traditional & Punitive approach	**Restorative approach**
Misbehaviour is viewed as:	Breaking school rules, disobeying authority	Harm done to one person/ group by another
Process focus on:	Authority figure, establishing what rules are broken, and who's to blame	Everyone working to solve the problem, build relationships and achieve a mutually-desired outcome

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Accountability is:	Receiving punishment	Understanding the impact of actions, taking responsibility for choices, suggesting ways to repair harm and restore community
Goal of the response is:	Pain or unpleasantness to prevent future conflict situations	Meaningful restitution to reconcile and acknowledge responsibility for choices
Effects of the response:	Short term - behaviours often stop in the moment but return once the punishment is over	Long term - students learn critical social and emotional skills that serve to understand and repair the harm

Some practical examples of using restorative practices are:

1. Talking circles

A Talking Circle is a Restorative Practice that helps to build trusting relationships between all members of the classroom and creates the opportunity for each student to feel accepted and important within the group. A Talking Circle can last 10 minutes or up to a full period, depending on the goal.

- Before your first Talking Circle, explain to your students that the purpose is to get to know each other, share experiences and ideas. When we participate in a Talking Circle, we are taking the time to pay attention to what is going on in our own head and in the heads of our classmates, and this helps us know each other, focus, and learn better.
- If it is not possible to rearrange chairs or desks in your classroom, stand in a circle or oval surrounding the desks, or ask students to move their chairs so they are facing the center of the room. A circle sets a different tone and encourages participation and interaction. It is important that students are comfortable and that everyone participates by sitting in the circle. Verbal participation is always optional.
- Use an object that can be peacefully held and passed around the circle as a "talking peace". The talking piece is passed around the circle to ensure equality of voice. That will ensure that only one person speaks at a time and that all focus is on that person, as well as it can be used to pass if students do not want to speak. Take the time to explain to participants how to use and pass the talking piece, even if it already is a familiar concept.
- As a facilitator, you will also be sitting in the Circle at the same level as students. You are not there to teach a lesson or moral but as an equal participant. The facilitator welcomes what is said without trying to influence or give advice.
- Create a ceremony or a pattern to follow each time the Circle is convened. This separates the Circle from the rest of the class period. It can include a brief introductory activity every time, reading a quote or poem, playing music.
- The use of a familiar ceremony sets the tone and helps students know what to expect while it normalizes a practice that may at first feel unusual.
- Include in the opening ritual a reminder of norms and values (regarding speaking, listening, and demonstrating respect and care; Reinforce these norms with positive feedback), topics or questions that participants are invited to respond to and a closing ritual.
- Use topis or questions that address social and academic challenges. Give think time before passing the talking piece.

2. Peace circles

A Peace Circle is a structured and planed meeting between a person who caused harm, the person who was harmed, and both parties' family and friends, in which they discuss the consequences of the behaviour and decide how to repair harm. Participation in a Peace Circle is always voluntary.

This practice is an easy problem-solving method that helps students in resolving their own problems by providing the party or parties who were harmed with an opportunity to confront the person who caused harm, express their feelings, ask questions and have a say in what happens next.

- **student who caused harm** - hold them accountable while providing them with an opportunity to be reintegrated into the school/classroom; provide them with a chance to understand how their behaviour has affected others; an opportunity to start repairing the harm they have caused by apologizing, making amends and agreeing to restitution or personal or community service work.

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3. Peer Conference

A Peer Conference, also known as **peer mediation,** peer council, or peer jury, is a voluntary process led by students in which a small group of trained students provide positive peer influence as they work to empower referred students to understand the impact of their actions and find ways to repair the harm they have caused. These students are trained to be neutral and encouraging and help the referred student to come up with his/her own solution instead of telling him/her what to do, assisting the referred student to create an agreement to repair harm.

- Students are referred for a Peer Conference after engaging in conflict with others or violating the school norms.
- If the objective of the Peer Conference is to mediate between individuals who have been involved in conflict, the person harmed is present; In case of bullying, the person harmed is not usually present, except when requested by the person harmed.
- An adult advisor that also has training in Restorative Practices models and promotes the program within the school, recruits the students for Peer Conference observes the Peer Conference session and is available to support if needed.
- The agreements made in the Peer Conferences are monitored.

Restorative language and communication

Implementing restorative practices is important to apply a restorative language that encourages positive interactions between the parts involved. Some examples of strategies of restorative language and communication are the following:

1) Restorative questions: help the respondent learn from the incident and problem-solve. They are non-judgmental ways of encouraging someone to consider the feelings of others, the impact of his/her actions, and what can be done to make things right.

- What happened?
- What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
- Who do you think has been affected by your actions?
- What do you think you can do to make things right/better?

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2) "I" statements: or affective statements help to remain non-judgmental, give participants positive feedback through empathetic listening, and encourage them to speak using restorative questions. These statements help express feelings and communicate how one person's actions affect the larger community.

- When I heard you speaking to John in the way that you did, I felt frustrated because I value the respect we have built in the classroom.

3) Empathetic listening: follows when one person truly considers the thoughts, feelings, and needs of another person, and makes a sincere effort to understand the other person's point of view, ensuring that the person speaking feels that he/she is understood, and that his/her perception is valued free of judgment. There are many ways that we can communicate to the speaker that we are listening empathetically.

- I hear you saying that you are still very upset about what happened. Although I am upset too, I want to hear your side.

Empathetic listening: What to avoid?

While Listening….	While Responding…
- "Multitasking" while attempting to listen - Thinking about what we are going to say next while someone else is speaking - Thinking about how what the speaker is saying relates to our experiences when the speaker is talking about his/her own experience - Judging the speaker or what the speaker is saying	- Letting the speaker know whether or not we agree with him/her - Asking too many probing questions when the speaker is not ready to share - Giving advice -Providing interpretations of the speaker's motives or behaviour - Relating the speaker's experience to our own experience

4.9. Focus on social-emotional development

According to Durlak, Domitrovich, Weissberg, and Gullotta (2015) Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) involves improving social and emotional skills through explicit instruction and student-centered learning approaches, helping them in the learning process and in the development of analytical, communication and collaboration skills. Social and emotional skills consist of the ability to express emotions such as happiness, sadness, nervousness, and anger; helping children determine how to act when they feel

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these emotions. Children can learn about their own feelings and identities by practicing social and emotional skills with their peers and teachers. Social and emotional competence are essential to socialize with others and to provide positive interaction (Alzahrani et.al, 2019).

In 1994, the Collaborative Consortium for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was founded to establish high-quality socio-emotional learning based on empirical evidence, and to promote the inclusion of SEL as an integral part of school-based education from preschool through secondary. SEL has become a key reference for research and intervention. Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2016) postulates that socio-emotional skills are:

- *Cognitive*
- *Affective*
- *Behavioural*

Today's schools are increasingly multicultural and multilingual with students from various social and economic backgrounds. SEL provides a foundation for safe and positive learning, and enhances students' ability to succeed in school, careers, and life.

***Five main Domains of SEL** (CASEL, 2013):*

- ✓ *Self-Awareness: involves understanding one's own emotions, personal goals, and values. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations, having positive mindsets, and possessing a well-grounded sense of self-efficacy and optimism. High levels of self-awareness require the ability to recognize how thoughts, feelings, and actions are interconnected.*
- ✓ *Self-Management: requires skills and attitudes that facilitate the ability to regulate one's own emotions and behaviours. This includes the ability to delay gratification, manage stress, control impulses, and persevere through challenges in order to achieve personal and educational goals.*
- ✓ *Social Awareness: involves the ability to understand, empathize, and feel compassion for those with different backgrounds or cultures. It also involves understanding social norms for behaviour and recognizing family, school, and community resources and supports.*
- ✓ *Relationship Skills: help students establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships, and to act in accordance with social norms. These skills involve communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking help when it is needed.*
- ✓ *Responsible Decision Making: involves learning how to make constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions across diverse settings. It requires the ability to consider ethical standards, safety concerns, accurate behavioural norms for risky behaviours, the health and well-being of self and others, and to make realistic evaluation of various actions' consequences.*

Importance of SEL development in schools

Support from adults in the development of socio-emotional skills in children is important to ensure that they have a healthy and safe life, filled with good education (Alzahrani et.al, 2019). Children and adults with high levels of SEL have an increased ability to perform tasks they are given more easily and show better involvement in their relationships, compared to those who operate at lower levels of SEL who demonstrate less capacity for productive involvement in tasks and relationships, elements that are essential for learning (Simões & Alarcão, 2011).

Sutherland et al. (2018) state that children with problematic behaviours are more likely to experience developmental difficulties in childhood and adulthood. In addition, they found that behavioural problems at a young age are strongly linked to certain maladaptive types of behaviour in adolescence (such as drug use, violence, and school dropout). Thus, interventions (for example, classroom activities) to develop socio-emotional skills are essential when it comes to changing children's behaviour in childhood. Research also concludes that children without social skills, behavioural or emotional skills are at disadvantage in the classroom (Alzahrani et.al, 2019).

Preschool and kindergarten are particularly important for child development, due to equipping children with a good base of social, emotional, and behavioural skills. From early childhood, teachers collaborate in supporting children and developing their social, emotional, and cognitive skills, always considering their students' characteristics

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and using various activities to help them become healthy teenagers. (Alzahrani et.al, 2019). The contribution of social and emotional learning include:

- ✓ *The development of SEL in educational settings is fundamental since school is one of the primary places where students learn social and emotional skills.*
- ✓ *In a long-term perspective, greater social and emotional competence can increase the likelihood of high school graduation, readiness for postsecondary education, career success, positive family and work relationships, better mental health, reduced criminal behaviour, and engaged citizenship (Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015).*
- ✓ *Teaching and learning in schools have a strong social, emotional and academic component.*
- ✓*The relationship between teachers and students is of utmost importance. Results from one large body of research have indicated that the presence of positive and supportive relationships between students and teachers promote long-term development of better school outcomes and reduced instances of problem behaviours (Williford & Wolcott, 2015).*

Some of the ***main benefits*** *SEL that can influence the retention of students are (Durlak et al., 2011):*

- *Improves achievement;*
- *Increases prosocial behaviours (such as kindness, sharing, and empathy);*
- *Improves student attitudes toward school;*
- *Reduces depression and stress among students;*
- *More positive attitudes toward oneself, others, and tasks including enhanced self-efficacy, confidence, persistence, empathy, connection and commitment to school, and a sense of purpose;*
- *More positive social behaviours and relationships with peers and adults;*
- *Reduced conduct problems and risk-taking behaviour;*
- *Decreased emotional distress;*
- *Improved test scores, grades, and attendance;*

Some key points of this section….

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Build strong personal relationships at school between students and adults.

✓ *Create caring, long-term, personal relationships between students and adults in school so that each student has an adult they can turn to and rely on.*

✓ *Use advisory, advocacy, and counselling systems to meet students' academic and personal needs.*

✓ *Make strong and effective connections with students' families through regular communication, school and community events, and home visits.*

Create an early warning system to identify students at risk of dropping out.

✓*Make sure schools use data on student attendance, behaviour, and academic performance to identify students who are at greater risk of dropping out.*

✓ *Argue that data monitoring should begin in the upper elementary grades.*

✓*Urge schools to monitor students' sense of belonging and engagement in school.*

✓ *Pay close attention to students who have been retained within grade level, including retention in elementary and middle school.*

✓ *Solve the problems identified by an early warning system as they occur.*

Prevent students from falling behind and failing academically.

✓ *Let others know that academic failure is often a major reason for student drop out.*

✓ *Increase instructional time in core subjects during the school day.*

✓ *Reduce class size in all grades and create small learning communities.*

✓ *Provide one-on-one tutoring and intense support before school, after school, in the evenings (high school students), in summer school, and in the first quarter of each school year.*

✓ *Provide extra courses in core subjects for students who need to catch up academically.*

✓ *Provide time for teachers to collaborate on how to best help students who are struggling academically.*

✓ *Make sure schools are staffed by skilled and knowledgeable teachers who are experts in what they teach and in how to teach.*

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Focus on reducing high dropout rates among minorities.

✓*Recruit and retain minority teachers at all levels.*

✓ *Encourage community members with multicultural background to serve as mentors or mediators for minority students.*

✓ *Partner with state and local organizations that work to improve the educational outcomes of minorities.*

✓ *Change policies and procedures that contribute to disproportionate placement of minorities in special education.*

Implement interventions that actually increase graduation rates.

✓ *Look for evidence that strategies and programs have been effective with students like yours.*

✓*See if the developer, or some other agency, provides on-site technical assistance and training to support implementation.*

✓ *Evaluate: Collect outcome information about the effectiveness of strategies and programs in your setting.*

Promote successful transitions at key points in schooling.

✓ *Help students be successful in middle school by keeping daily attendance high, focusing on academics, and addressing behaviour issues as those arise.*

✓*Work for on-time promotion from grade-to-grade with extra support for students who need to catch up with their peers.*

✓*Give students an active voice: Collect information from students who do not complete high school about why they dropped out to inform future prevention efforts.*

Offer students options for how to prepare for college and the job market.

✓ *Offer students career and technical education as well as a college preparatory curriculum.*

✓ *Provide community-based, service-learning, and work-related opportunities that help students see the relevance of what they learn in school to their lives and interests outside school.*

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✓ *Offer students effective alternative programs within schools and the option of attending alternative schools.*

Involve the community.

✓ *Recognize that improving graduation rates at these schools may as well involve community development and school transformation.*

✓ *Reach out to stakeholders who will benefit from dropout reduction, including groups interested in educational excellence, economic growth, youth development, and crime reduction.*

✓ *Involve local institutions that bear the costs of high dropout rates including businesses, civic groups, law enforcement, health care, social services, and neighbourhood organizations.*

Review the current policies in your school.

✓ *Identify how decisions to retain students are made.*

✓ *Identify students who are likely to be retained early in the school year so interventions to prevent retention can be implemented.*

✓*Advocate for policies that promote students to the next grade and provide intense support so that they catch up academically.*

✓*Promote holistic approaches, considering all the actors in the school community while creating solutions to the school problems.*

5. Tips to make school more attractive to youngsters

1. Use Technology: Technology is what students live and breathe every day. If you want to make your class the most interesting class that everyone loves to go to, then you must incorporate some kind of technology. Instead of lecturing and having students take notes, use a smart board and have students come up to the board and interact. Instead of giving students a quiz on paper, use a computer or a tablet. Instead of having students work on a project together, have them video conference with another class

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from another country and work with them on the project. Utilize technology in the classroom and your students will be interested and engaged in what they are learning.

2. Classroom Games as Teaching Strategies: It doesn't matter if you are eight years old or 18 years old, everybody loves to play games. Games are a great way to keep people engaged, and it doesn't hurt that they are fun. A lot of the time students do not even notice they are learning because they are so into the game. If students need to learn important vocabulary words for science, play Jeopardy! If they need to remember specific dates in social studies, play a memory game. Any kind of game will help to make your class more interesting as well as keep them engaged.

3. Make it Interactive: A traditional classroom setting where the teacher is standing in the front of the classroom lecturing students as they take notes is boring. If you want your students to be interested in what you are teaching them, you must make it interactive. Get them involved in everything that you are teaching. Try the jigsaw cooperative learning method, where students work together as a team to learn and complete a task. Each student is responsible for their own part but must work as a group in order to complete the task. By involving students and making it hands-on, you are increasing student engagement and making them interested in the content that they need to learn.

4. Give Them Choices: Choice menus aren't just for elementary and middle school students. High school students will be just as happy when they get the opportunity to choose what, and how, they will learn content. Choice board menu options are endless. You can create a menu for any subject, topic, or concept that you want. You can create different choice boards based on the student. Struggling students can work on one board while more advanced students can work on another. It's not only a great way to differentiate learning, but it keeps students interested and engaged as well.

5.Relate Class Content to Students' Lives: When you create a real-world connection to what students are learning, it will give them a greater understanding of why they need to learn it:

- **Choose culturally relevant materials.** Students who do not find representations of their own cultures in texts are likely to lose interest in school-based literacies. Have your students complete a short survey on their outside interests and use that information to assist in building your lesson plans. This will help your students see the connections between what they're learning inside and outside the classroom.
- **Use specific everyday examples:** An easy way to help students feel personally connected to what they are being taught is to talk about how they can apply the material in real life. In Systematic Instruction for Students with Moderate and Severe Disabilities, Collins suggests teachers demonstrate how students can apply math concepts to help them manage their personal finances, nutrition, and daily schedule.
- **Link routines to learning.** You can also promote learning through classroom routines. For instance, a child learning to wash hands during bathroom breaks can also be taught science concepts (body parts, hygiene and disease prevention, water conservation), reading (bathroom signage), antonyms (hot/cold, left/right), and math (counting).
- **Use students' interests and fascinations.** Find out what your students are passionate about and then use those interests as natural motivators to increase engagement. Whether a child is fixated on one thing or has a few areas of intense interest, there are many simple strategies you can use to work those fascinations into your instruction.

6. Group students. Breaking the class up in groups increases the likelihood that everyone will contribute to class discussion and problem solving. Poll your students about their working preference, or experiment with breaking them up in different ways. Divide the class in half, group students in small teams of three or four, or put them in pairs.

7. Try homework menus. Instead of having all of your students complete the same homework assignment, why not offer a menu of options that tie in with your lesson plan? A little variety and choice go a long way toward relieving the sense of drudgery some students experience when completing their homework.

8. Teach students self-monitoring skills: An advanced way of involving children so they stay engaged in their learning is to help them develop greater self-regulation skills. Children sometimes struggle with self-awareness, so they may not even realize when they are straying off task or acting in disruptive ways. When children are taught to regulate

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their behaviour and work independently, they develop habits to help them succeed and you are freed to operate more flexibly in the classroom. Example: Self-monitoring of performance. Students log on a chart or graph whether they have been able to complete a pre-defined problem or task. Viewing an explicit graphical representation of their performance can have a highly motivating effect on students.

9. Stimulate Curiosity

- **Use questions.** Being told an answer crushes curiosity before it can even be stimulated. Begin by impersonating for yourself and your students a genuinely interesting question that opens an information gap.
- **Assume that curiosity takes previous knowledge.** Youngsters' curiosity often cannot be stimulated on something they know absolutely nothing about. As soon as they know even a little bit, their curiosity can be intrigued and want to learn more.
- **Use communication.** Open an information gap and then involve students to communicate with each other in order to fill the information in it. Example: give a student a series of pictures illustrating the beginning of the story, and to the student's partner a series of pictures showing how that same story ends. By communicating with each other students fill in each other's information gaps.

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