

## Individual education vs. common rules

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The key expression of Lionel Jospin’s education reform in the late 80s was “to put the student in the centre of the education system”. It was a Copernican revolution in the educational world. It meant giving priority to what the student was / knew / wished and not focusing on the core of the matter (what he / she ought to acquire as knowledge). How terrible! It was going to lower the standard of education in the country. Teachers would give up on their high goals, etc. It was a bi uproar. A few years have gone and everyone in the education system is now discovering the virtue of individualized curriculum. The Dispositifs Nouvelles Chances dealing with youngsters who dropped out of schools have no choice but to take the student as he / she is and to progress with him / her according to his / her needs! Each Dispositif Nouvelles Chances has its own way to deal with the matter and we are presenting here what is done at Bobigny.

Generally speaking, the students are taking care of for a year and at the end of this year they are supposed to decide for themselves in which direction they wish to go the following year (go back to school, work). It might sound strange to use the word “taking care of” when your job is to be a teacher full stop. We are using it on purpose. You can’t possibly make the student progress if you don’t accept this global approach of him / her as a person. Why can’t he get up in the morning? Why can’t she pronounce French words correctly to be understood? Why is she unable to construct a sentence? We have to take into account each particularity and work on it.

Ok, you failed at school, so what, what’s next? What is your aim? What do you know and what do you want to know to reach your goal? Then, we build the project of the year with each of them individually.

Personalized time table:

A time table is established every week (Maths and French daily), that is part of the general tuition they receive. There might be a blank on Friday and, guess what? The student who ends up with the blank (empty space) is the first to complain and asks for something to do during that period.

Art therapy:

As educators can’t be competent in all areas, they need the support of a professional of the psyche to help solve some pathological situations. It is noticeable that the students are more and more psychologically damaged when they arrive at the Dispositif. Instead of us speculating endlessly with no result, the art therapist who conducts a workshop with the students once a week can be very helpful! She would come out with comments like: No wonder this one can’t think properly, all the modelling he is making falls apart, he can’t hold things together, so is his brain, in a complete mess! Or this one is mentally five years old, he can only make little turns with the earth, etc.

### Regular evaluation

That is something very strong, especially with students who failed at school. They need to know how they progress step by step, it creates a reassuring frame for them and allows them to project themselves in the future. It is suddenly possible to go further. In Maths, they have to validate their skills / competences at each step. Here is where you stand at the moment and here is where I can take you, according to your potential.

We practice co evaluation. The student reflects on what he has done and we give our point of view, which leads to a constructive dialogue.

### Break their presentations

Very often when the student arrives at Nouvelle Chances, he is fed up with school and doesn't want to go back to it at first. If it's a he, he wants to be a plumber, if it's a she, she wants to look after young children. Plumbers do well financially and girls are all future mothers, aren't they? Ok, you find an internship for them. Do they go to it? Not always. The plumbing business is a false dream. In fact, they much prefer to continue at school! You realize indeed at the end of the school year, that most of them wish to continue school and are quite scared of the working world (rightly enough!).

### The internship

We tried the PL model this year, two days at school, three days at the practice. We worked on their expectations. What do you expect from the internship? They have different expectations. One wants to confirm a choice. The other one wants to learn more about a trade, etc. It's their own choice according to their ambition in life.

### Common rules

When the students leaves us, they go to a vocational school or become an apprentice, a few of them join the lycée général (academic studies). We have to prepare them to this big come back to the institution they detested so much! We are scared for them. Are they going to adapt? How long would they stay without incident etc.? Funnily enough, some smart ones manage very well because they have integrated for the first time ever that they were at school on their own choice and to achieve something.

That leads us to a very serious question on our action as educators. How do we evaluate our work? We are more and more judged by our results (fair enough), but what is submitted to evaluation? Big question. Can we be considered as successful if the majority of our students get in vocational schools the next year? But hey might drop out again. And why can't it be when we manage to attract to school a very depressed 17 years old when we do language using new technology? Or when a student gets involved in a video workshop once a week after years of no project? Or more if the results of our action are visible in two years time? To conclude on the topic, if evaluation there is, the criteria must be worked out together with the educators and not decided from the top.