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Pascale Haag and Marlène Martin

Lab School Paris: An educational living lab

1 Introduction

Education and school institutions are currently undergoing rapid and unprecedented changes worldwide. Under the influence of different factors such as the growing influence of digital technologies, comparisons between countries – PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS –, and more generally societal developments that redefine educational needs as well as the respective roles and places of adults and children (Renaut, 2002; Singly, 2009), new proposals of all kinds are made. The idea that we are in a phase of “educational transition” (*transition éducative*) is sometimes put forward (Germain, 2020; Jamet & Vincent, 2016), which needs to be accompanied in order to better train young people for the challenges of the world to come. It is to participate in this movement that Lab School Paris was created in 2017. In this chapter, we introduce Lab School Paris, the first lab school in France. After a general presentation of the university school context in France, we present the history of the foundation of Lab School Paris, the main theoretical principles upon which our pedagogical approach is grounded, and the wider network of research that aims at contributing to strengthen the links between scientific research in education and actual practices in the classrooms.

2 The French school system and university schools in France

Complexity and variations on institution names constitute a distinguishing feature of the history of education and teacher training in France. The creation of a national system designed to ensure public education for children has been the subject of many historical studies. They reflect the system’s institutional complexity (Prost, 1968; Jacquet-Francillon et al., 2010) and the evolution of teacher training (Prost, 2014). This system has long existed independently from the universities, which have been established since the Middle Ages: teacher training was not officially attached to the universities until the creation of University Institutes for Teacher Training in 1989 [*Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres*]. For a century and a half, teachers built their professional skills in special training schools called “*Écoles normales*”, whose organisation and curricula were defined by the Ministry, under the control of inspectors, in a highly hierarchical structure.

Training included preparation for the *brevet supérieur* [advanced certificate] and then the *baccalauréat* [baccalaureate], which were the required qualifications to become a teacher. The practical part of the training took place partly in specialised schools, created in 1887 and affiliated to the *Écoles normales*: they were referred to as “*annexes*”, when they were located on the same premises as the *Écoles normales*, and as “*écoles d’application*” [training schools], when they were located within an ordinary public primary school. In both cases, they were primary schools in which pre-service teachers practised teaching under the supervision of a teacher specially appointed for that purpose. The teachers of these *écoles annexes* or *d’application*, who were responsible for handing down their pedagogical practices and their way of teaching, following a transmissive model, were recruited according to specific criteria, in particular their age, their experience and their previous position (Buisson, ed., 1911).

After the period of the Vichy regime, during the Second World War, and its temporary reform of teacher training (Prost, 2014), the *écoles d’application* were re-established. An official circular of 7 March 1946 (Ministère de l’Éducation nationale, 1946) stated that “it is obvious that the teachers [of those schools] must be excellent educators”, and emphasised their “technical value”, without, however, specifying the criteria for this value, which were left to the inspectors’ appreciation.

The model of *écoles d’application* thus clearly differs from the concept of lab schools as theorised and put into practice by John Dewey (Cucchiara, 2010; Durst, 2010): it is only concerned with the practical training of new teachers and not with research, and it is rather conservative. The *écoles d’application* aim is to transmit practices considered best by headmasters and inspectors, the teachers’ hierarchical superiors, on the basis of empirical criteria; those practices are to be implemented in an identical manner, or at least as close as possible to the original. This model is thus not linked to research or university, it is based on the replication of an ideal model. The application-oriented and pragmatic dimension of this model could offer a reassuring aspect to the student-teachers who received it, providing them with professional behavioural schemes and ready-to-use pedagogical tools (Chartier, 2016), but it may also be conducive to a culture that is not very supportive of bottom-up pedagogical innovation and is not open to other inspirations. In this respect it is also quite different from the concept of lab schools as described in the introduction chapter of this book.

Teacher training institutes underwent various name changes: First the creation of University Institutes for Teacher Training in 1989, then, as a result of the Bologna Process standardising university curricula in Europe and instituting the *Licence-Master-Doctorat* system (2007), that of the Higher School of Teacher Training and Education (*Écoles Supérieures du Professorat et de l’Éducation*), from 2013 onwards, and finally the National Higher Institutes for Teacher Training

and Education (*Instituts Nationaux Supérieurs du Professorat et de l'Éducation*), since 2019. In this process, the *écoles d'application* have gradually been abolished. Theoretical training is now clearly provided in university settings, while practical training takes place in mainstream schools: through several internship periods during the first year of the Master's degree, and then with a part-time teaching assignment during the second year of the Master's degree. Pedagogical advisers and tutors formally guide trainee teachers, while regular teachers in schools often provide informal mentoring through discussions with their colleagues during recess or the sharing of pedagogical material.

More precisely, during the second year of training, a young trainee teacher is in a so-called “in-charge” placement, i.e., he or she must provide certain lessons alone, while benefiting from supervision by a tutor. However, this supervision varies greatly and there is little research on this subject (Chaliès, 2016). In addition, the tutor is not present with the trainee teacher on a daily basis; instead, the latter is part of the team of the school in which he or she works, and benefits from the presence of other teachers, some of whom may be very experienced. In the same way, trainee teachers can adopt a very sustained attitude of observation of the “tricks of the trade”, which are not transmitted during university training, and even more so when certain practices implemented by colleagues differ from the prescriptions issued during training (Dubois et al., 2006).

Apart from the increasingly rare training schools, the links between the National Higher Institutes for Teacher Training and Education and the schools to which the trainees are assigned take the form of their presence and the visits of their tutors. These links do not formally extend to other teachers in the schools.

The French teacher education system does not currently offer the possibility for teaching, training and research to take place in the same location on a permanent basis. Other ways to link research and practice do however exist. For example, there are on-site initiatives such as the *Lieux d'Éducation Associés* (LéA), launched in 2011, which are designed to encourage researchers and teachers to work together on collaborative and applied research projects (Carosin & Monod-Ansaldi, 2018). They aim to respond to teachers' practical concerns, but only for a limited duration, since these projects are scheduled to last three years.

More recently, in 2018, the concept of laboratory schools inspired Frédérique Alexandre-Bailly, the Rectrice of the Académie of Dijon (regional schooling district), in the Burgundy region. Unfortunately, it was not possible to create a new school based on this model ex nihilo in the public system, but she did identify a high school in the small town of Montceau-les-Mines, the Lycée Parriat, in which various experiments were already being carried out – tablet classrooms, cogni-classes project (which offers a training to teachers about neuroeducation, in order to make them aware of cognitive processes which occur during learning, such as formation of memories, creative processes, social and emotional cogni-

tion), interdisciplinary 10th grade class, no-grade classrooms, etc. She proposed to the lycée's headmaster that her school participated in a pilot project: a temporary status for three years allowed to receive additional resources and carry out research projects with various institutions, like the Institute for Research on Education of the University of Burgundy, the Dijon teacher training institute (called at that time ESPE), and the Dijon academy board of education (*rectorat*). Thanks to the leadership of its head, the Rectrice Frédérique Alexandre-Bailly, to the commitment of enthusiastic teachers and to the support of school heads, a school-wide transformation could take place. More broadly, Frédérique Alexandre-Bailly's goal was to transform the Académie of Dijon into a "learning Académie". The aim was not only to develop pedagogical innovation with the support of researchers and to weave a network of learning establishments in the Académie with the "lab school label", there again for three year periods, but also to develop a culture of lifelong learning, based on the latest developments in research. The example of the Lycée Parriat has inspired other schools and several projects are currently underway in the Académie of Dijon, both at the middle school and elementary school levels (Haag, 2018).

Such arrangements differ from the lab school model as conceived by Dewey because of the temporary nature of the "lab school label", which is institutionally necessary in order to grant the same funding opportunities and connections with scientists to all the schools that might apply for them (even if, for different reasons, Dewey's laboratory school did not last more than a few years, established lab schools are not conceived as temporary). They also differ in that not all teachers within the same institution may wish to be involved in a project with researchers. This can create tensions within an educational team and can make it difficult to conduct investigations on a school-wide scale: interesting observations can be made in a single classroom, suitable for qualitative research, but a small sample size does not allow for generalisable results.

However, the French system of education in the 21st century is not comparable to that of the United States at the end of the 19th century and it is therefore necessary to reflect on how the concept of laboratory school can be adapted to a different historical, social, cultural and political context. Nevertheless, all attempts to encourage teachers to take research results into account, benefit more from it, and to promote encounters between education and research professionals should be encouraged, as they contribute to the transformation of professional cultures.

3 History of the foundation of Lab School Paris

Lab School Paris is part of a wider network founded in 2015 at the initiative of the first author of this chapter, Pascale Haag. This community, the French Lab School Network (<https://en.labschool.fr>), is made up of a number of social actors from different backgrounds (teachers, researchers, parents, association members, etc.). Its main goal is to promote the use of research for educational success by strengthening the links between research and teaching practices. Managed by a non-profit association, the Lab School Network seeks to contribute to the educational transition in various ways:

1. by creating opportunities for exchange, mutual training and awareness-raising through events for different target groups (e.g. via open forums, seminars, conferences)
2. by promoting the lab school concept across France through the foundation of the first school based on this model
3. by carrying out collaborative action research projects with teachers who are interested to work with researchers

The initial plan was to run a project within the French national education system, but this did not come to fruition despite the interest shown by representatives of public authorities such as the Education advisor to the French President and the Cabinet officer to the Minister of Education, with whom several meetings took place in 2015 and 2016. Lab School Paris has therefore been created as a private school (*école privée hors contrat*), run by a non-profit association. However, close links have been and are still cultivated with representatives of the public education system who share our vision of education and there are regular collaborations between the Lab School Network and public schools. Two years of preparatory work were necessary before Lab School Paris' opening, to set up the network, develop the educational project, find premises suitable for a school, set up a team and, finally, identify families willing to commit to an adventure that was unprecedented in France, and therefore a little risky. Indeed, for any alternative school project that is created, the first year constitutes a complex stage (Viaud, 2017). At the same time, the network has endeavoured to make different educational research better known to the non-specialist public, through seminars, conferences and participatory events. The links with this network are a way of affirming and enriching the research dimension of the school's project.

Lab School Paris was established at the beginning of the 2017/2018 school year with a team of two teachers and a multi-grade class from grades 3 to 5 (called CE2 to CM2 in French, 8 to 11 years old). Lab School Paris' mission is to be an innovative, multi-level, bilingual (French-English), solidary, secular and eco-responsible school. With these values, its aim is to accompany children both in

the acquisition of knowledge and in the overall learning process, enabling them to become responsible, enlightened, autonomous, supportive and blooming citizens. Its goal is also to welcome children from diverse backgrounds in order to build a real social mix, by proposing a system of scholarships according to a fee scale indexed to family income. Another goal is to create an inclusive school, integrating some children with special educational needs.

Initially located in a small room of about 80 square metres in the centre of Paris, and with additional space in an associated structure, the Liberté Living Lab (a place dedicated to creativity and social innovation, where independent workers share offices), the school has welcomed nearly 30 children over its first year, with departures and arrivals. Two teachers were permanently present, one Anglophone and one Francophone. The team was able to open the 6th grade (6e, the first level of the secondary school, called *collège* in France) for its second year. For its third year, at the start of the 2019 school year, the school kept on expanding, by opening first and second grades, also hiring three new teachers. With a move to larger premises in the spring of 2020, the school continued to grow: at the start of the 2021/2022 school year, it offered all levels of elementary and middle school, for around 85 children from CP to 3e (i.e. grades 1 to 9; 6 to 15 years old) and in 2022/2023, the first year of High school opened (grade 10) and a total of 120 students were enrolled. They are accompanied on a daily basis by an educational team consisting of 15 teachers, one curriculum director and three other staff members, as well as interns, volunteers and young people doing a service civique [civil service, a voluntary commitment to the service of the State or an association for 16-25 year old, supervised by a state agency], who also benefit from a training and first professional experience at the school.

4 Project-based collaboration with research institutions

Even if Lab School Paris is not officially attached to a higher education institution, the Lab School Network has a privileged relationship with the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS), the institution where Pascale Haag, the first author of this chapter, works. Indeed, at the time of the creation of the Lab School Network, the President of the EHESS accepted that the head office be located in the premises of the EHESS and many meetings and events have taken place there. EHESS was founded in 1947 as a section of the *École pratique des hautes études*, from which it became independent in 1975. With the privileged status of “grand établissement,” it functions like a doctoral or graduate school covering the whole spectrum of humanities and social sciences. Its 250 full professors (*directeurs d'études*) and associate professors (*maîtres de conférences*) are in charge of the supervision of Master and Doctoral students and conduct graduate-level seminars

on topics directly linked to their own research. Hundreds of seminars, guest speakers, and conferences are being held at the EHESS every year, with a focus on interdisciplinarity. Approximately half of the students enrolled are international students.

Students from EHESS can choose Lab School Paris to do an internship or as a field of research. For instance, in 2019-2020, an EHESS student in sociology did his Master thesis on Lab School Paris's student councils (Duval-Valachs, 2020); in 2021-2022 another EHESS Master student in Gender Studies contributed to a study on Identity formation during adolescence involving middle school students as co-researchers (Haag et al., 2022). Each year, one or two students come to Lab School Paris for an internship or to do research. There could hardly be more, taking into account the size of the school and the fact that education research is not central at EHESS.

Moreover, Lab School Paris also has links with other universities, both in France and abroad, through agreements to host university students for research projects or internships, most often in the fields of psychology, education or sociology.

5 Scientific approach: from lab to classroom

5.1 Evidence-based education

Evidence-based education, which is essentially Anglo-Saxon in origin and refers to the approach of the same name developed in medicine from the 1970s onwards by Archie Cochrane, took off in the 1990s, following severe criticism of the usefulness and quality of the research carried out in education: “a lack of cumulative character, [...], ideological biases [...], confused and not very explicit approaches, [...], methodologies that give pride of place to qualitative aspects and theory to the detriment of rigorous empirical bases; – studies that are not widely disseminated, not well known by practitioners and not very productive” (Rey, 2006).

In response to these shortcomings, the evidence-based education movement has defined the following objectives:

- to improve the scientific quality of educational research and in particular its capacity to provide convincing results of a causal nature on educational activities
- to favour methodologies that meet this objective, in particular experimental (or quasi-experimental) approaches as well as “systematic reviews of research” (or meta-analyses) (id.)

While much work on various issues has been conducted with reference to the field of evidence-based education by authors who promote it (Davies, 1999; Oakley, 2000; Slavin, 2002; Pring & Thomas, 2004; Sprenger-Charolles, 2016), this new

paradigm, which is part of the epistemological turn, continues to be the subject of significant controversy, as to the very possibility of its existence, for example by questioning the validity or feasibility of randomised controlled trials in education or the scientific method of choice (Hammersley, 1997; 2005). Lessard (2006) points out that evidence-based education is just as ideological as other approaches, but that it is “a particular ideology that refuses to name itself as such” (*une idéologie particulière qui refuse de se nommer comme telle*) (p. 30).

More generally, as Rey (2006) notes, “the transition from scientific findings to the possibility of their incorporation into practice is often questioned” (p. 4). This suspicion is reinforced by work carried out in the economics of education, which shows that certain positive results obtained in an experimental context are not found when one tries to implement the very same practices on a larger scale in schools. Gurgand (2018) accounts for these limitations by noting that “caught up in the complexity of the classroom, previously experimentally validated approaches fail”. He does point out some of the causes of these failures: the design of experiments in laboratory conditions far removed from real conditions, less training, in terms of quality and duration, of the teachers who are subsequently responsible for applying the methods, less commitment to the approaches, especially when they are imposed. Bianco (2018) also points out that it is by relying on institutional mediation between researchers and teachers, in a professional training and development approach, that the gradual adjustment of practices is most likely to produce positive effects.

Despite all the questions and limitations we have just mentioned, there is no doubt that evidence-based education is a growing trend.

In France, despite the interest shown by policymakers in evidence-based education since the late 2010s, research has had little influence on training systems (Gaussel, 2020). Indeed, the “appetite for evidence” cannot be improvised or decreed (Quéré, 2017). In the absence of procedures aiming at facilitating the appropriation of research knowledge by teachers, the lack of a link between research and pedagogical practices remains, as does the mistrust of teachers towards researchers (Gaussel, 2020; Marchive, 2008; Rey & Gaussel, 2016). Indeed, in France, researchers are often criticised for not communicating the results of their work to education practitioners (Marchive, 2008; Rey & Gaussel, 2016). The latter sometimes have the feeling that they are considered as providers of data, without benefiting in return from information that enables them to change their practices in the classroom.

Another aspect relating to the use of research work in the classroom is the relationship between researchers and teachers; Barrère, a sociologist, refers to the “double disappointment” that often characterises the relationship between researchers and practitioners, because even if research knowledge circulates, its status is rarely di-

rectly operational and it needs to be carefully recontextualised each time (Barrère, 2006, p. i).

In addition, especially in France, the issues of preserving autonomy and professional identity are at stake, as noted by Garcia (2013) and by Schuller and al. (2006). Rey and Gaussel (2016) expand on this idea by noting that “the fundamental problem of the relationship between research and the field (in France at least) lies in its degree of acceptability (and use) by practitioners, or on the contrary, in its rejection when research is seen primarily by teachers as a means of controlling their activities rather than improving them” (p. 5).

Zadina (2015) points to the lack of a shared professional culture between teachers and researchers, practical constraints and objectives that are not convergent, making encounters between the two worlds difficult and frustrating. Draelants, a sociologist of education, insists on the lack of understanding towards teachers that researchers would show, because they “focus on the moral and cognitive legitimacy of the reforms, largely ignoring or underestimating another form of legitimacy that is decisive for the reception and success of cultural change: functional or pragmatic legitimacy” (2018, p. 111). For him, “new pedagogical prescriptions are tested and accepted as long as they do not overburden the daily practice of an already complicated profession” (p. 130), a view that leads to optimistic perspectives for the encounter between research and education, within the framework of mutual consideration between the actors.

In the context of the Lab School Network, we refer to the continuum proposed by Schlesinger-Devlin, Elicker and Anderson (2017), which ranges from experimental laboratory research led by academics to research conducted autonomously by teachers in their classrooms (teacher as researcher), and which has already been addressed in the introduction to this volume.

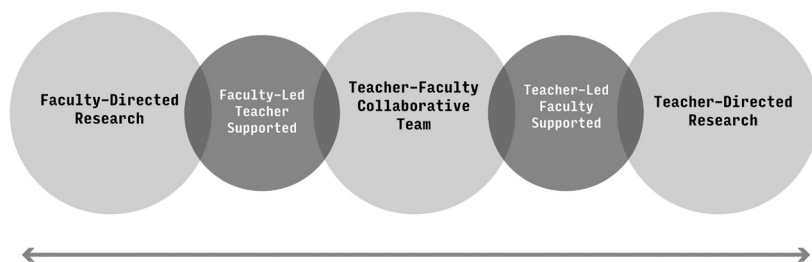


Fig. 1: Continuum of research designs according to Schlesinger-Devlin, Elicker et Anderson (2017)

Faculty-directed research is “classical” experimental research where the role of teachers is limited to selecting student subjects according to certain criteria. For such research to be useful to teachers as well, it is important that the objectives

of the study and the research protocol be presented to them in advance and that feedback on the results be provided. In a *Faculty-led supported by teacher* academic research, teachers are involved in the collection of data or the interpretation of results, but have no say in defining the protocol.

In *collaborative research*, a team of teachers and researchers share the conceptualisation and conduct of the research project equally – developing the research question, the method and the protocol – so that the research benefits both.

Another form of action research consists in asking a researcher to accompany a *research project led by one or more teachers* to solve a problem raised by the teaching staff.

Finally, the teacher may engage autonomously in action research, controlling the process from the elaboration of the research question to the analysis of the results. This is sometimes referred to as “*teacher as researcher*”.

This categorisation is useful for facilitating dialogue between teachers and researchers because it is by getting to know each other better that researchers and teachers will be able to develop their relationships and build protocols that meet the expectations of all.

5.2 Research at Lab School Paris

The research projects carried out at Lab School Paris or in connection with the Lab School Network are developed on the basis of consultation between the teachers and the school’s pedagogical and scientific management team. Projects are mainly (but not exclusively) focused on collaborative action research, aiming at making research results usable in the classroom in order to meet students’ requirements in the best possible way.

Some research projects are conducted in Lab School Paris itself, and others in the wider context of the French public education system. They are conducted in collaboration with colleagues from various institutions, or by PhD or Master students working under their supervision, from EHESS and other institutions (Paris University, Caen University, Aarhus University in Denmark, North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the United States, etc.).

The topics are defined in close collaboration with the teachers, in order to make them useful to teachers and students, and to make scientific research progress at the same time. Here is the process, starting from the needs identified by the teachers and the school leadership team in order to meet students’ requirements in the best possible way. Once they’re agreed upon, we start looking for partners to conduct the research in our environment, most often, colleagues who supervise Master or PhD students; sometimes, although less frequently, it is the other way round: researchers or university students apply for an internship in the school and, if we find their research topic useful and inspiring for the team, their proposal is submitted to the teachers. After that, the research protocol is designed by a team

composed of the research partners and the Lab School curriculum and scientific directors, in strict compliance with the ethical conditions validated by the laboratories to which the researchers belong. The study is implemented during the school year and, once the results are analysed, a public restitution is offered to the teachers, the students and the parents, either in the form of a video or during our yearly event “*Fête de la science et de la recherche du Lab School Network*” [Lab School Network Science and Research Day].

Research approach

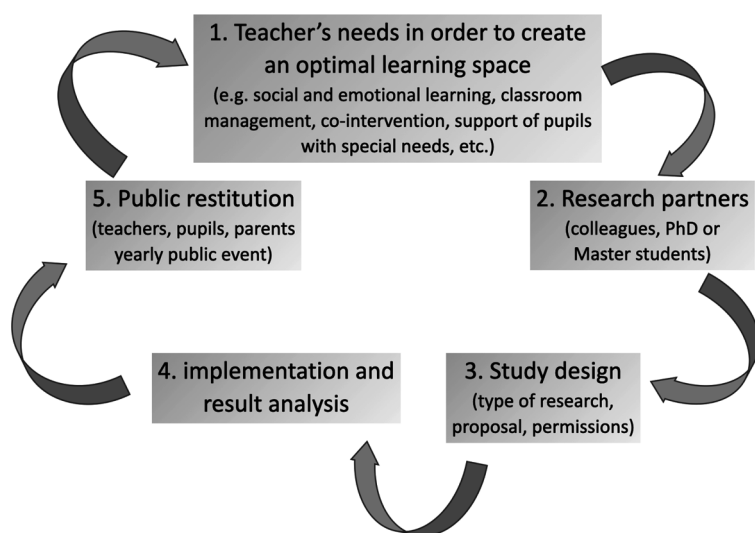


Fig. 2: Cycle of research projects at Lab School Paris

Our current research projects are mainly focussing on three domains: Social and emotional learning (SEL) and inclusion; School democracy; and how we can create an optimal and efficient learning space. Examples include:

1) SEL and inclusion

- *Links between students' well-being and socio-emotional skills (age: 9-13 yrs)* – Master thesis in psychology¹
- *Critical Disability Studies Informed “Inclusive” Education: A Participatory Action-research* – PhD thesis in psychology²

1 <https://en.labschool.fr/post/quelles-recherches-au-lsn-1-les-comp%C3%A9tences-socio-%C3%A9motionnelles-en-cycle-3-audrey-bauwens>

2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33e9aVyFQs8&list=PLA8xWBsZoGAtpbfEYG4DKAuSxLA-SONEjA&index=4>

- Help me to learn with my emotions (in Kindergarten)³
- 2) School democracy
 - *A Child's Game. Ethnography of deliberative democratic practices in an alternative school* – Master thesis in sociology⁴
 - *Pupils' expressive engagement in primary school* – PhD thesis in sociology
 - *Emotions, soft skill and democracy: how to embed them into the common core of key lessons* – Lab School Network research group (forthcoming, academic year 2021-2022)
- 3) Creation of an optimal and efficient learning space
 - *Reflexive practitioners: How and why? A Participatory Action-research* – Lab School Network research group
 - *Co-intervention in the classroom: evolving models of teaching professionalism and training for teachers and educational staff* – PhD thesis in education (forthcoming, academic year 2021-2024)

To highlight Lab School Paris approach to creating transdisciplinary, collaborative and transformative research projects that are based on experimentation, we outline three research projects in the following in more detail.

6 Pedagogical concept

The fundamental principles of lab schools are a) to implement the concrete recommendations that can be drawn from research results in real classroom situations, in educational and pedagogical practices, and b) to experiment with innovative pedagogical practices in order to evaluate their effectiveness.

This two-fold link to both already consolidated and ongoing research is intended to be applied across all aspects of the everyday life at the Lab School Paris:

- in the material organisation – ergonomics of facilities, making spaces consistent with the activities carried out (Adé et al., 2006; Gal-Petitfaux & Roche, 2015)⁵
- in the choice of school rhythms – distribute teaching time over five mornings and three afternoons, whereas the majority of French public schools concentrate classes over four long days, despite the data gathered by chronobiologists against this model (Leconte, 2014); organisation of the day taking into account attentional variations: fundamentals topics (maths, science, languages) mostly

3 For a presentation of this project: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhrMzJK8a-zQ&list=PLA8xWBsZoGAtpbffEYG4DKAuSxlASONEjA8&index=2>

4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pu_Ucbibve4&t=7s

5 These two short videos give a concrete idea of the classroom settings in Paris Lab School: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rx_OrAe_oRqw for the youngest group (6-9 years old) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fty95azxIr4&t=5s> for the elder students (9-12 years old)

taught in the morning, over rather long study time (one hour), in order to allow concepts to be worked on in greater depth, quiet time or PE at the time of the drop in vigilance peak in the beginning of the afternoon, resumption of activities at the end of the afternoon, when attentional capacities recover (Challamel et al., 2001)

- in the relational approach (Bissonnette et al., 2017), which aims to promote the development of social-emotional skills, relying in particular on tools derived from Freinet pedagogy, such as student councils, attribution of 'jobs' (Connac et al., 2019); students thus learn to express themselves calmly, to debate, to assert their point of view and to respect that of others, they are initiated into various social roles, they vote and learn to accept decisions taken by a majority of students...
- in the construction of psychological attitudes conducive to learning, such as self-confidence (Marsh & O'Mara-Eves, 2008), sense of self-efficacy (Bandura & Schunk, 1981), growth mindset (Dweck, 2012); similarly, given the proven harmfulness of the usual grading practices, as highlighted by converging sociological studies (Merle, 2018), students are not subjected to any numerically graded assessment[3], assessment being thought of as a permanent process of adjustment of the activities proposed by the teachers (formative assessment vs summative assessment), so as to provide the most immediate feedback possible to the students, a guarantee of its pedagogical usefulness (Hattie & Yates, 2014).
- finally, in the overall pedagogical design themselves, they thus integrate the contributions of cognitive psychology (Willingham 2010; Hattie & Yates, 2014): teaching according to the principles of explicit pedagogy (Richard et al., 2016), attention paid to memorization and the reactivation of knowledge (Masson, 2020).

Studies evaluating explicit pedagogy approaches tend to show its effectiveness in reducing inequalities in school results linked to social origin (Guilmois, 2019). With reference to the theory of cognitive load (Chanquoy et al., 2007; Mottint, 2018; Tricot, 2017), one of the explanatory hypotheses of this effectiveness is that this approach provides all students with prior knowledge (Tricot & Sweller, 2016), and avoids situations of overload linked in particular to the double task (Chanquoy et al., 2007). Thus, it also allows for the use of project-based teaching, which is appreciated by students but which, unless specific conditions are met here, tends to increase the achievement gaps (Tricot, 2017).

The teaching tools proposed for writing (Dumont, 2016), reading (Dehaene, 2007) and mathematics (Neagoy et al., 2019) are derived directly from research or are designed on the basis of it. All the practices and tools are regularly evaluated within the team, and benefit from the comments of the trainees who see them implemented.

A specificity of the Lab School Paris consists of implementing reciprocal immersion (Fialais, 2019) regarding the mastering of both French and English languages by the students. Although the issue is still being debated, research seems to show the value of early second language learning (Munoz, 2011), in order to benefit from the peculiar cognitive window (DeKeyser, 2000).

Generally speaking, the school thus combines diverse pedagogical approaches, depending on the learning objectives targeted. This is why the school's approach is described as "hybrid pedagogy", without exclusive reference to any one current or approach, but with the aim of combining them in a coherent and well thought-out manner, supported by confirmed research work. Of course, on a day-to-day basis, the articulation of these different principles and these different points of support derived from research presents significant challenges: for example, the organisation of school time over 5 days is not the one preferred by some teachers; the appropriation of pedagogical methods that are not those taught during the usual teacher training requires time; maintaining the coherence of practices with a team that is regularly growing demands a significant amount of reflection and training⁶.

7 Concept of democratic education

In the following section, we present various dimensions of democratic education that are fostered in Lab School Paris: diversity, participation, collaborative practices, and school councils.

7.1 Student diversity

To enable the dissemination of the lab school model and teaching practices in public education systems, it is essential that they be tested in ecological conditions, i.e. relatively comparable to those prevailing in public schools, particularly from the point of view of the socio-economic characteristics of the students enrolled. Indeed, since the creation of the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago by Dewey, and in the majority of current American lab schools, the students enrolled belong mainly to privileged categories, which constitutes a limit to the extension of the model (Cucchiara, 2010). Given the particular situation in France, where the gaps in educational success linked to the social origin of students are particularly large (OECD, 2019), it was essential for the team behind the Lab School Paris project to have a socially mixed recruitment.

As the school does not receive any public subsidy, the mix is made possible by adapting the school fees to the parents' income: the fee paid by the most privileged is higher than the real fee and allows the least advantaged families to benefit from

6 For a better understanding of how research is put into practice at Lab School Paris, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0UFOj7UMX7w&t=3s>

lower fees. Various actions (teacher training courses, events, fundraising) also help to increase the association's income and foster social diversity as much as possible, although it cannot be denied that families who are interested in the approach proposed by progressive schools are often socially and culturally privileged people. However, a survey conducted in 2019-2020 (Duval-Valachs, 2020) showed that 21% of the fathers and 19% of the mothers of students at the Lab School Paris had a diploma at or below the French baccalaureate, which is the case for 55% of the general French population. Even though parents at Lab School Paris certainly did attend college or French "grandes écoles" much more than French average, a significant portion of them do not have any higher education degree.

Students who attend the school have also had diverse educational backgrounds, since they come from privileged public schools, from public schools located in the *Réseau d'Education Prioritaire* (REP, disadvantaged areas), from Montessori schools, from various schools abroad, or even from being educated at home.

Finally, the enrollment of students with special educational needs is an essential dimension of opening up to cognitive diversity: the enrollment of these students in ordinary schools has increased sharply in France since the laws of 2005 (*law for equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of people with disabilities*) and 2013 (*orientation and programming law for the refoundation of the French Republic School*), constituting a break with previous segregated schooling models. The aim is therefore to reconstitute, at the school level, a small community representative of today's socially and culturally diverse society in France.

7.2 Fostering participation and involvement

Sociology of education studies show important differences depending on the social background with regard to relational and communication skills, such as ease of expression, feeling of legitimacy in expressing one's opinion (Millet & Croizet, 2016; Lahire, 2019) as well as the effect of gender on speaking out (Gleyse, 2015). The teachers' awareness of these dimensions allows them to ensure the regulation of speaking out, which makes it possible to involve all the students, while taking into account their own personalities. Teachers strive to empower the children with the linguistic and behavioural tools that are needed to become confident and active citizens. This approach is in line with contemporary ideas on the transition from a representative democracy to a truly participatory democracy. The limits of representative democracy can be observed through the civic disengagement manifested by citizens in several Western countries, in contrast with a truly participatory democracy, in which the involvement of all is sought (Albertini, 2014; Callon et al., 2001). It should be noted in this respect that participatory democracy requires citizens to master the scientific and technical issues of contemporary problems, and that the thinkers of participatory democracy, following Latour (2004;

2006), agree with Dewey (Hatzfeld, 2011) on the need for equal acquisition of knowledge enabling informed decision-making (Pestre, 2011).

7.3 Modelling collaborative practices

Originally implemented in order to ensure bilingualism in the classrooms and to manage multi-levels and mixed-ages teaching, the presence of two teachers in each class – both of them having a very good command of English and French, but one being a French native speaker, and the other one being an English native speaker –, co-teaching practices (Friend & Cook, 2013) also appear to be likely to model collaboration between adults, on a day-to-day implicit basis. Contrary to the classic schooling model (Vincent, 1994), which reproduces a hierarchical system, the teacher standing symbolically above the students and being the only one in charge, we are currently investigating if being exposed to a co-teaching model could also stimulate actual teamwork between students.

7.4 Researching the effects of student councils

Introducing student councils, their possible benefits, but also their limitations, are the subject of much work. However, it should be noted that the real effects of this tool, whether on students, teachers or the functioning of the classroom, have not been clearly demonstrated, as highlighted by the meta-analysis of Mager and Nowak (2012). Such reservations obviously do not justify abandoning the practice of student councils, but may suggest ways of monitoring or improving them in order to implement them as efficiently as possible for the students, from a reflective and critical perspective on the part of teachers.

8 Outlook: Development efforts

8.1 Past projects

Following on from previous projects designed to encourage the sharing of practices within the framework of the French national education system – such as support for an action research project to develop the management of a district into a “learning district” in 2017-2019 with 22 schools, or the “Help me to learn with my emotions” project with a preschool (2019-2020) –, the Lab School Network keeps embarking on new projects along with the French national education system.

Lab School Paris continues to grow at the same rhythm as its students and will open an Advanced Placement 10th grade in September 2023. The school is currently a candidate for the IB diploma. Training sessions for school creators who would be interested to open a school are also organised twice a year. Until this date, over 40 persons have attended these sessions. However, so far, no new lab

school – whether private or public – has been created in France. Several factors hinder their development: 1) the creation of private schools is subject to increasingly strict controls from the French State, which may discourage project bearers, the majority of whom have no connection with the research world to begin with ; 2) the support that can be offered by the small Lab School Network team, in the absence of financial subsidies, is limited: 3) in the public system of education in France, any deviation from the norm – even when it is a question of giving more resources to institutions serving a disadvantaged public – is perceived as presenting a risk of breaking the constitutional principle of equality (Demeuse et al., 2005). This constitutes a potential barrier to any form of innovation.

Since the Lab School Network has so far not succeeded in promoting the creation of new public schools based on the lab school model, its members have opted for other ways of collaborating with the public system in order to achieve its fundamental objective of strengthening links between researchers and practitioners, aiming to contribute to the transformation of the education system and to help it face contemporary challenges.

8.2 MotivAction project

One of the most important projects so far involves research and training of around 200 1st grand public school teachers in two French Académies. This four years project (2020-2023) has been launched by educational economists (Paris-Dauphine University, Sciences Po Paris) in order to test the effectiveness of teacher training to develop socio-behavioural skills of students, such as a sense of self-efficacy, cooperation, and a growth mindset. The trainings, conceived in the framework of a partnership between the French Éducation nationale, the École Normale Supérieure and the Lab School Network, will be evaluated by an experimental design with a control group; they have been tested within the Lab School Paris, thus responding to its vocation as a place of experimentation of innovative practices based on research. The Lab School Network team also took part in designing the assessment approach of the effects of the training which includes the use of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS, Pianta et al., 2008).

8.3 Emotions, soft skills and democracy

This project takes as its starting point the genre of the fable, in particular the Fables of the French author Jean de La Fontaine, in order to foster democratic education through the development of critical thinking, social-emotional skills and creativity. One of the aims of this project is to create pedagogical resources that can be shared with teachers from other schools. Another aim is to see how democratic education – understood in the broad sense – can be incorporated into all subjects in the school curriculum, so that teachers can teach skills that support

pro-democracy behaviours without adding activities to an already overloaded curriculum.

The Lab School Paris team drew inspiration from the baroque music group Faenza who had already produced a show based on La Fontaine's Fables. Throughout the school year 2021-2022, all the students of the school, from 1st to 9th grade, produced, with the help of teachers, researchers and artists, an original stage performance. Its preparation involved all the school teachers and all subjects, from language to study fables and to write new ones, to art in order to design the costumes and sets, history to understand the purpose of this genre (to avoid censorship) and its evolution through time, science to study the animals involved, etc. The outcome of this project was a show entitled *The animal comedy, a rebellion in three acts* – a title chosen by the students –, which was performed in a beautiful theatre in Paris, the Théâtre de l'Atelier in June 2022⁷.

9 Conclusion

In the French context, the creation of Lab School Paris could take place thanks to the benevolent interest of institutions, notably the French Education nationale, the EHESS, and others, but also thanks to the active support of the EdTech community and the social innovation space Liberté Living Lab, which acted as a sort of incubator. Without all the “good fairies” who bent over the cradle of this project, given the financial constraints that weigh on any new school foundation initiative, it is quite likely that Lab School Paris would never have seen the light of day.

Navigating the challenges we have faced while staying true to our values during these first six years has not always been easy for the educational team, for the students and for the parents. The involvement of all stakeholders has been essential, the trust of families, the unfailing support and the constructive criticism of the members of our scientific committee have enabled us to constantly adapt, especially in the recent context of the COVID-19 health crisis.

Moreover, if it was only a question of creating a small school, the project would not have met its goal, which is to contribute, more broadly, to transforming education to meet the challenges of a globalised and changing world, where education and school institutions are undergoing unprecedented and rapid changes, leading teachers to constantly make their practices evolve. The Lab School Network aims to be a “learning community” where researchers and teachers collaborate to find answers to their questions, share experiences, innovate, produce resources and

7 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SOaxU62GeAs&list=PLA8xWBsZoGAtOhh_WhwMaGvY-cZ7fnniR4&index=10

support each other, in order to “break down the walls of solitary practice and create safe spaces where teachers share and learn from each other” (Bryk, 2017).

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