

# FAILURE, DROPOUT, EVASION... A MULTIFACETED DEBATE

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## Abstract

This article examines the phenomenon of school dropout from various points of view. The literature review evidences that the dropout has a multiform nature and do not always manifest at the time the student decides to abandon school. Moreover, whatever the decision is, it is strongly influenced by social factors and family characteristics, the school system and the appeal level respecting other forms of socialization outside school available to the student, as well as by characteristics of mental process. A study seeking to understand the phenomenon in order to reduce dropout rates and, more broadly, to raise the education after compulsory schooling must take into account the multiplicity and complexity of dropout, developing multidisciplinary knowledge tools and integrating the contribution that various subjects such as education, economics and sociology, can provide.

**Keywords:** school evasion, school dropout, school failure, irregular schooling, social selection, entry and permanence.

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## Introduction

This paper examines the phenomenon of evasion / dropout from various points of view and different theoretical approaches in order to discuss some aspects related to evasion or school dropout, especially in middle-level technical professional education.<sup>1</sup>

The literature review of the issue shows that the evasion (dropout) has a multifaceted nature and the choice to leave school is just the final act of a process that manifests itself in many ways, seen and unseen, along the trajectory of the individual's school. Research indicates that the choice to leave or stay in school is strongly influenced by the characteristics of the mental process that precedes it, by social factors and family characteristics, by the school system and the appeal that other forms of socialization outside school exert over the student. Research the phenomenon of abandonment at any level of education, whether to identify and understand its causes, to reduce dropout rates or raise the schooling of young people after the period of compulsory education, requiring the examination of the multiple ways in which the phenomenon manifests itself, as well as its complexity. The tools available to research evasion are necessarily multidisciplinary, integrating the contribution that the various subjects such as pedagogy, economics, sociology, statistics, can provide for the abstraction of its forms of manifestation.

## **1. School Dropout: multifaceted phenomenon**

Evasion/school dropout has been associated with situations and forms of expression highly diverse, both from a theoretical and empirical point of view. The characteristic diverse / multifaceted phenomenon hinders the construction of a concept consistently and uniformly applicable to all situations already identified as an evasion (dropout). Thus, one of the problems confronted by the researchers of the topic is the conceptualization of school dropouts due to its complexity, its multiple dimensions, both within individual, family and social group, the diversity of existing regulations in school systems. The evasion/dropout can refer to the retention and repetition of the student in school; the student's leaving of the institution; the exit of the student's from the education system;

the non-completion of a given level of education; the school dropout and later return. It covers individuals who have never gone to a determined level of education, especially compulsory education, as well as the student who completes a phase of education, but behaves as a dropout (evader) within the school context. The school level that occurs evasion is also

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<sup>1</sup>This study on school dropout is one of the search results 'Professional Education in Brazil and school evasion', performed by a team of researchers and graduate students and postgraduate of the Faculty of Education, Federal University of Minas Gerais, under Program of the National Observatory of Vocational Education of the INEP / CAPES / MEC. The research relies on the advice of Professor Roberto Fini, University of Verona, Italy.

important because it is significantly different if it occurs in primary, secondary, adult education, technical education in high school or higher education (Viadero, 2001; Finn, 1989).

For these reasons it would be a reductionist approach using the terms evasion/dropout only to characterize the student who leaves school without completing the course in which enrolled a determined moment of their school and life (Dore; Lüscher, 2008). Individuals who are performing primary education - mandatory step in Brazil - and do not follow continuously in and out of the system can fit into several of the situations outlined above. Students who dropout college education, for example, can be classified as those who did not continue the education they begun, but still, in terms of education, are in a situation very different from those who have not even completed compulsory education (Viadero, 2001).

In general, the dropout / evasion in primary education, or even in the technical training during high school, are linked to a greater or lesser level of democratization of the access to these levels of education. Here we mean by democratization of access opportunities for both entry and conditions offered by the school and the educational system to the permanence / persistence of the student until conclusion of the school level where he is.

The middle or secondary education was almost universalized in several countries, especially in Europe and the United States, even though many of them are still not compulsory. Despite the great expansion of access to education, school dropping remains at worrisome levels, especially when it occurs in late middle school it deprives young people to achieve higher qualification, in terms of education, to increase their chances of being inserted in the work world (Rumberger, 2010). Whereas the lack of compulsory middle school exerts influence on the school curriculum, some researchers distinguish three main conceptual dimensions in the analysis of dropout: 1) the levels of schooling in which it occurs; 2nd) types of evasion, such as discontinuity, the return, not definitive conclusions, among others; 3) the grounds for evasion, for example, the choice of another school, a job, the lack of interest in continuing studies, personal problems, social or at school , among others (Jonasson, Blondal, 2005). Each of these three conceptual levels can and should be unfolded in order to analyze the problem from the perspective of the education system, the school and the individual. Sometimes, what is understood by the system as a problem of evasion is not for the individual or to the school, considered separately (Dwyer, Wyn, 2001). From the viewpoint of the system, it can be a problem, for example, to readmit the student ten years after he left the schooling process, even if the school or the student doesn't think so.

In case the student does not follow the course of compulsory school at the time legally established, the system will need to adopt alternative structures to enable his return, as are the European second-chance schools or in the case of Brazil, The Youth and Adults Education (EJA). This is an important and necessary perspective, especially in countries where a significant proportion of young people and adults failed to comply with compulsory education.

However, it is a different approach which proposes that the "continuing education" as the most appropriate in the circumstances and demands of the contemporary world. If education is 'permanent', abandonment and return of the student are not necessarily perceived as a problem. The student goes back and forth. Lifelong learning, however, refers primarily to adult life and, even in this condition, stops a process of training or retraining may be considered problematic from the viewpoint of the school system or the school that makes the offer. Regardless the perspective of analysis of the dropout / school evasion, clarity is important from the perspective considered as the main reference for the study of the problem, as well as possible links between it and the others: the system, the school, the individual (Dore, Lüscher, 2008).

In the case of individuals, particularly students attending schools not compulsory, as the high school technical education in Brazil or secondary education in countries of Europe and the United States may be several factors involved in the choice of school dropout: individual or "micro" (psychological, cognitive, etc..) and social or "macro" (economic conditions and family materials, school system architecture , etc..). Whatever the reason is, leaving school at that particular moment in the life of a young man or young woman can bring a negative impact to the development of their adult lives. This aspect is emphasized by Mocetti stating that the "school failure in post-compulsory education is common, but surprisingly little investigated. The choices for the post-compulsory education (early withdrawal and choices of educational pathways) represent the first circumstance in which the individual makes a decision and probably one of the most important that he will ever make "(Mocetti, 2008, p.15).

From the perspective of the education system and / or the school, understand, guide and monitor a young man/woman in the important moment of making the first choice in the field of professional training may represent a significant reduction in dropout rates and / or other kinds of school failure. Given the complexity of evasion, which demands solutions too complex, difficult to perform and involving the participation of various social agents, most studies propose the adoption of preventive measures as the most appropriate referral to the problem. Among them are the early identification of the possibility of dropout / evasion and coaching those students considered at risk (Rumberger, 2004; Markussen, 2004). However, the dropout prevention needs from the schools and the educational system in general, necessarily, the knowledge of its most frequent causes and the ability to identify its manifestations. In case of technical education, prevention of evasion is of fundamental importance to society, because its occurrence is a major reason for the low-skill and qualifications presented by young people in their attempts to enter the labor market (European Council, in 2004).

## **2. School Dropout: some conceptual approaches**

The different situations that may be associated with school evasion, increased by the complexity to identify and understand its causes, is a problem for which there are no easy solutions. And it is the vast and intricate set of individual circumstances, present in the institutional and social phenomenon of evasion that is understood as a complex, dynamic and cumulative disengagement of the student from the school life (Newman et al., 1992; Finn, 1989). The exit of the student from school is just the culmination of this process. Despite many difficulties, the clarity of the complex situations that lead to evasion is considered a key dimension to find strategies that promote prevention (Rumberger, 2004; Markussen, 2004).

Some scholars, such as Fini (2008b) and Mocetti (2008), prefer to consider evasion as one of the manifestations or consequences of a process in nature more comprehensive and complex called "school dispersion", which takes into account the multiplicity of phenomenon and behaviors that modify, disrupt and fragment the steady development of the school career of a student. Besides the existence of a plurality of causes that can determine the dispersion, it presents, among other manifestations, such as failure in school access, evasion of compulsory school, irregular attendance; failure; repetition; abandonment. As all these factors contribute to the occurrence of early school leaving, it cannot be considered a synonym for evasion or dropout. However, school failure, especially when repeated over time, is often the cause of the voluntary withdrawal of the student from school, which means the dropout.

## **2.1 The dropout on the institutional perspective: the school and the education system**

Evasion or school dropout, as pointed out, results from a complex array of individual and institutional factors. From the institutional point of view, covering around the school and the education system, there are multiple factors that can lead to success or failure at school, a topic intensely investigated since the sixties of the twentieth century.

At the end of World War II, predominated among scholars of the learning process the concept according to which the instructional apparatus and infrastructure of schools were the main factors explaining the observed differences in academic performance of students, including early withdrawal from school. The school performance would thus result greater or lesser quantity and quality of educational facilities available in schools, such as, among others, libraries, laboratories, curriculum, floor space, training and teaching experience. Believing that the inputs (facilities) determined the outputs (results) students, many scholars, particularly economists focused on the analysis of educational issues, helped to establish equivalence between the concept of school quality and quantity of its inputs and school facilities, compared to the number of students. Especially in the United States, different forms of school failure are to be linked to economic issues, related to a possible lack of funds for education, schools and

the wide range of targets considered achievable within the school. As a consequence, the increase in costs per student could, by itself, improve their performance.<sup>2</sup>

This results in the idea that a school unable to achieve the goal of dramatically lower the demonstrations of school failure is in a situation of 'inadequacy', which must then find ways to adapt and optimize its cost with respect to such goal.<sup>3</sup>

This perspective of understanding the school is strongly questioned from the mid-sixties of last century, when they were released the results of the famous report Equality of Educational Opportunity (Equality of educational opportunity, 1966)<sup>4</sup>. Best known as the "Coleman Report", the document was based on conducting research that has produced much new information about schools, students and race relations in America. The results added new elements of understanding - and conflict - the social, political and educational in that country, affecting convictions, beliefs and myths related to education and the education system (cf. Coleman, 2008). Held in modeling survey, that survey used a lot of variables related to students and schools to measure the academic performance of students, such as, among others considered relevant to the analysis of student performance, ethnic, social class, housing, region geographical, teacher training, school equipment. Tests were conducted of standardized verbal knowledge, nonverbal, reading, mathematics, general knowledge, with students from five racial groups, the first grade of elementary school and third grade of high school.

In comparison with the hitherto prevailing paradigm, the Coleman Report shows that, regardless of quantity and / or quality of inputs and / or facilities of the schools, they showed very similar results regarding the effect on student performance when they had their socio-economic background analysis. The variation in the quantities and quality of facilities of different schools reverberated much reduced in student's performance (Coleman, 2008; Mosteller, Moynihan, 2008).

Another aspect impacting the United States, highlighted by the Coleman Report, refers to the difference in performance between white students and racial minorities, which had average scores lower than white students. Moreover, this difference reached progressively higher levels in each grade that racial minority students progressed through school. As a result, they withdrew from their white counterparts, contributing to reduce their chances of employability in a competitive and modern society. The conclusions of the Coleman Report

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<sup>2</sup>The slogan of the Alliance for Excellent Education in the United States, is "every child a graduate." The hypothesis is that the targeting of funds to schools to ensure this goal or it may be a precondition for ensuring this goal or it may be a precondition for ensuring the objective (Alliance for Excellent Education - AEE, 2002).

<sup>3</sup>Rouse (2005) defines an individual as having statement "inadequate" if it does not get the title at least ISCED 3. According to the International Standard Classification of Education 1997 (International Standard Classification of Education - ISCED97), ISCED level 3, in Brazilian education, corresponds to the high school, whose entrance is usually between 15 and 16 years (see OECD 2010, Education at a glance 2010. rating for Brazil).

<sup>4</sup> Given the demands of Congress (Civil Rights Act of 1964), Coleman led the first major survey on the characteristics of American public schools and the main differences between them in order to verify "(...) the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion or national origin (...) ». This research led to the report Equality of educational opportunity, known as the "Coleman Report" (Coleman, 2008, p. 23).

showed, finally, the inability of schools to promote the progress of students from lower classes. The initial social and cultural conditions are the main determinants of academic performance of those social groups, enclosing them, thus in a situation of circularity, repetitive, and therefore no prospect of change.

New studies also performed in the sixties and during the seventies of last century, strengthened the results of the Coleman Report (Plowden, 2008; Jencks, 2008). However, the denial of the school as a place to create educational and social opportunities for the lower classes was not restricted to the research that has founded the Coleman Report and which, in the same theoretical perspective, succeeded him. Even in the seventies, a variety of Marxist authors, unsuspected to share the beliefs of liberals, made an analysis not quite dialectical of the school, giving it the main function of reproducing the domination and class structure of capitalist society. From this perspective, is found the French current, represented by Louis Althusser (1974) and his notion of schools as ideological apparatus of the bourgeois state, for Bourdieu and Passeron (1975) and their conceptions of the school as an instance of cultural reproduction and social reproduction of structure of capitalist domination, through the work of 'inculcation' of habitus, and Baudelot and Establet (1976) and the notion of school duality, characterized by different types of school. To the French current summed to studies conducted in the United States by Bowles and Gintis (1976) and his theory of correspondence between the school and the relations of capitalist production, as well as Carnoy (1977) on formal education as part of the imperialist domination, acting in line with the interests of the colonizer.

More than undermine beliefs and expectations in the political and educational area, the Coleman Report contributed to the appearance of other studies focusing on the school environment (Brooke; Smith, 2008). The indication that the school made little difference in the lives of students, especially in the poorest and ethnic minorities, hurt the sense of observation of some researchers. The work of Coleman and his team was thoroughly evaluated in many studies aimed at identifying possible theoretical and methodological errors account for as little promising conclusions about the effects of the school in creating educational opportunities and greater social equality (Maudaus et al., 2008).

Focusing on the relationship between the functioning of schools and student performance, several investigations were performed in the United States and England, especially from the late seventies and throughout the eighties and nineties of the last century. The new results, unlike the studies led by Coleman, began to relativize, without underestimating the influence of family background, inputs, and schools infrastructure and instructional, demonstrating the great influence of inner-school processes on the performance of individuals in school. Brooke and Smith (2008) highlight the work of Maudaus, Kellaghan and Airasian (2008) as a kind of watershed among the research and views on school effectiveness in the style of Coleman and the ones that followed, from the eighties. According to new research, the best learning results are due to the least amount of inputs (status variables, according Maudaus, 2008) than to the quality of teaching and learning school

ambience (process variables). Here, quality is understood as a set of relations between different social groups living together in schools and make up their universe and cultural education: students, faculty staff, and family, among others. With the new approach, will now be a clear distinction between efficiency and effectiveness. The efficiency of the school concerns the relationship input-output and results from an economic calculation that combines academic performance to a measure of quantity. As for effectiveness, relates to the ability of each school to produce the results expected of it, being a measure that seeks to associate the student's performance to the quality of the educational institution internal processes (Maudaus; Airasian; Kellagham, 2008; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore , 2008).

The theoretical and methodological advances gained from studies of school effectiveness and efficiency, and unimaginable in the mid-sixties of the twentieth century, were debtors of the changes and technological innovations in computing. They allowed not only to research using a large number of variables, but, above all, to analyze them in different levels of aggregation. The methods of value-added (Gray, 2008) and multilevel methods and Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) (Lee, 2008), used in the nineties of the twentieth century until today, are examples of methods that allowed to investigate and refine procedures observation of everyday school life, helping to identify the processes that, in addition to the facilities and equipment, make a difference in the quality of a school. New methodologies radically distanced themselves from social modeling research macro-style survey, based on obtaining cross-sectional data to describe the contribution of school and / or education to the students' performance. The design of the researches on school effectiveness has become longitudinal. This modeling is recognized as the one that best captures the characteristics of schools and students. Moreover, with the aid of multilevel analysis methodologies, allows capture changes, positive or negative, the performance of students and schools as well as the multiple factors that promote such variations (Alves, Franco, 2008; Kipnis, 2000; Klein, 2005; Rumberger, 1995). In this type of research, follows up during a long period of time, the development of a group of students attending the same school, which measures the performance of each student individually at different times. The results achieved by a student are always compared with itself<sup>5</sup>. The importance of family background on academic achievement is recognized by most researchers, hence it is essential the establishment of a judicious control of the characteristics of each student at the time of school entry, so as to enable to distinguish, in its performance, the sole responsibility school and the consequences of family background. This is an important difference because it can provide indicators for changes in the student's performance, from the school itself.

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<sup>5</sup>The longitudinal surveys, despite their recognized quality as a research tool process of evasion and other indicators of school performance are very costly, in terms of financial and complex forms of execution because they are held for long periods of time, possibly reach up to ten years. This is a special non-negligible, which makes their use in the study of the effectiveness of schools and education systems, including Brazil.

The rapid incursion by new methodologies for assessing the performance of students and schools illustrates their importance for studies of dropout, especially when taken as a reference point of view of the school. The permanence / persistence of the student or the dropping out of school opportunities are closely related to the recognition by the school, the existence of factors present in the path of the student, whether favorable or not to his performance. This type of research allows the school, therefore, to identify the institutional factors (pedagogical, curricular, social, educational, and others) that may contribute to evasion and thus recognize students at risk and establish strategies for dropout prevention. Illustrative of this situation are the factors closely linked to the phenomenon of success and failure at school, as the ratio between the number of teachers and pupils in a determined school. It is necessary that this relationship is such that it allows the teacher to know all their students. On that point, gains evidence the precariousness of teachers as occupational dimension that contributes decisively to the school failure (Fini, 2008b). In this sense, there is a greater chance of repetition and dropout rates in schools with high percentage of temporary teachers and / or schools with high teacher turnover, or during a school year or even one year to another. The precarious situation of teaching has serious negative consequences for the educational process, such as, among others, discontinuity didactic, inefficiency in the adoption of textbooks, lack of incentive on the part of teachers to invest in their relationship with the class. In addition, signals for the absence, in the education system, mechanisms of recovery and recognition of teachers and their work, which also has negative repercussions on the educational process. However, in Fini (2008b), the number of teachers working in schools have less influence on student performance and the effectiveness of the school than, for example, the average number of students per class. This is an issue intensely debated by researchers from several countries, especially Americans and English, with emphasis on evaluation of public policies aimed at limiting the number of students in classrooms (Finn, 2010, 2006; Blatchford, 2003).

Researching the effects of school results on the dropout and transfer, Rumberger and Palardy (2005) argue that more effective schools regarding the academic results achieved by their pupils are not always effective in the control of dropout and transfer. Often schools encourage school dropouts and / or transfer students with low performance to prevent their possible negative interference on the evaluation of overall school performance. It is a type of use of the knowledge about the processes of teaching and learning that can be considered a perverse effect of school effectiveness, but not the research itself.

The study by Rumberger and Palardy (2005) reinforces the severe criticisms of the perspective of school effectiveness, precisely when its results are appropriate for policy makers and incorporated into the educational guidelines. Research on school effectiveness both encourage positive expectations about its contribution to greater understanding of teaching and learning within schools, as the criticism and skepticism about its use by schools and by the governments. As highlight Brooke and Soares (2008), incorporating results of research on

school effectiveness by public policies in the education sector is made, often in confrontation with the own paradigms of this research, arbitrarily, centralized and imported from other educational settings. The use of the results of measures student performance in the creation of quality rankings of schools is one of the consequences that cause higher rejection by education sectors. The rankings are seen as a manifestation of arbitrariness of government policy because it does not take into account the particularities of each school context. In addition, teachers, school administrators and researchers emphasize, among other problems, the fact that public policies focused on school effectiveness would entail teaching workload without additional compensation or working hours (Barroso, 2005; Cattonar, 2006, Lessard, 2006). However, while research on school effectiveness emphasize decentralization and the autonomy of school management as the most significant factors for a good performance of educational institutions, government policies and centralized processes adopt a national basis for the assessment of pupils and schools. Moreover, research on school effectiveness are important because they help to identify characteristics of the processes of interaction and teaching and learning, specific to each school, which have repercussions in classrooms and in varying levels of success and / or failure of students, and not because they offer easy to use recipes to improve the education system, undifferentiated (Brooke; Smith, 2008).

Despite the controversies related to the research on school effectiveness, their empirical findings have increased the quantity and quality of information about the school context and cannot be held responsible for misappropriation of its results and its transformation into prescriptive procedures and inadequate government policies. In particular, this type of research has drawn attention to the responsibility and participation of school, of each school, in the production of the success or school failure including dropouts. Thus, contribute to understand the school and the school context not as a place of mere reproduction of dominant social relations, but as spaces of struggle and conflict, through which the different social forces dispute the dominance of their conceptions in the field of public policy for education and the school (Gramsci, 1977 and and Soares Dore, 2000).

## **2.2 The dropout in the student perspective**

In the view of the student, family background (parents' educational level, family income and family structure) is recognized as the single most important factor for the success or failure in school. However, highlighting the link between socioeconomic status and the behavior of the evader can lead to a reductionist interpretation. Even though indubitable valid for the analysis of evasion, economic issues are not sufficient, by itself, to justify the complexity of the phenomenon in its various aspects. However, some key variables that affect the direction and success of school courses are, indeed, socio-cultural status in the family of origin, influencing heavily on educational trajectories and determining different opportunities at various levels, such as results achieved at the level of compulsory schooling, the ability to

pursue studies, on completion of compulsory schooling, access to various types of post-compulsory school, the perception or not of the importance of school education. Another factor related to the family, much emphasized by research on evasion / dropout, refers to social capital, conceptualized as the quality of relations maintained by the parents with their children, other families and the school itself (Coleman, 1988; McNeal, 1999).

Gender differences, is also an important factor to be considered in the process of evasion, because women tend, in their great majority, to continue education, achieving better average, and often in case of failure, remain however, in the circuit of the school.

The values, behaviors and attitudes of students may also be associated with the processes of school evasion / dropout. In particular, manifestations should be identified that promote a greater or lesser engagement (or membership) of the student in school life. Although there are different theories about evasion, most of which affirm the existence of two main types of school engagement: engagement or academic learning and social engagement or student interaction with peers, with teachers and other members of school community. The way the student relates to these two dimensions of school life interferes decisively on their determination to evade or stay in school (Rumberger, 2004). By emphasizing the individual's perspective in the process of evasion / dropout, scholars of the subject, even though not explicitly referring to those two types of student engagement, academic and social, incorporate, to some extent, the categories of analysis of dropout. It is to be examined in greater detail in the next section of this paper.

Morrow (1986), for example, distinguishes five categories of dropout: 1) pushout: students 'undesirable' that the school actively seeks to move away<sup>6</sup>, 2) disaffiliated: students who do not demonstrate links with the school, 3) educational mortalities: students who are not able to complete the course; 4) capable dropout: students whose skills are appropriate for the curriculum, but cannot adapt to the demands of school, 5) stop-out: students who leave school and get away for a short time to then return.

From another perspective, Solomon (1989) emphasizes that the behavior of the evader is not necessarily accompanied by the physical act of leaving school. The author refers to the category of in-school dropout (the evader inside school) to define the behavior of young students who remains physically in school, though independent and disinterested attitudes regarding school requirements. LeCompte and Dworkin (1991), distinguish between dropped out and turned out. The first term refers to students who physically abandon their course of studies, whereas the second term refers to students who continue to attend school without, however, be in tune to it, seeing it as irrelevant to their life goals, although there remain until they see in the external environment, what they consider significant alternatives to them. This latter situation is close to the category defined by Morrow (1986) as disaffiliated.

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<sup>6</sup> Some studies point to the fact that some schools seek to and / or transfer to other institutions, students who have poor performance or some kind of inappropriate behavior that may compromise their quality ranking (cf. Rumberger; Pelardy, 2005).

In the same line of interpretation of Solomon, but from a psychoanalytic point of view, Pelanda (1999) proposed to explain the term "dropout" as not only the movement that leads the student to leave school, but also all the behaviors that indicate a lack of emotional investment in relation to school and teaching. They show a kind of cultural gap between the world of school and young people.

Having conducted a literature review on different definitions of dropout, Liverta Sempio (1999) relates it to other forms of lack of frequency, whose origins can be also very divergent motivations, such as the 'escape' from compulsory school and absenteeism<sup>7</sup>. Absenteeism is also difficult to define because it appears, in general, connected or interlaced with other phenomenon, such as active refusal of the school or "school phobia" (Liverta Sempio, 1999).

The attempt to conceptually develop the phenomenon of dropout or school leaving inevitably produces an extension of the scope of its observation, to cover areas of "Disagio"<sup>8</sup>, a sort of "discomfort" potential or implicit, not yet realized in whom want to make choices about their schooling. Thus, to view the phenomenon of dropout is necessary not only extend your observation in the temporal sense, considering the precedents that have produced the abandonment, but also probe the student experience, their perception of school as a place of their education, investments (or lack of) affective and cognitive basis of his mental representation of the school and education. In this regard, as already pointed out in the previous section, it is essential to question the structural aspects of the interaction between student and school and the contents of this interaction, often marked in order asymmetric and unidirectional (teacher to student), as well as arrangements of communications intra-school.

### **2.3 The abandonment: an evolutionary process**

Studies on the evasion / dropout and multiple forms of institutional and individual expression, performed so far, show that one of its most striking features is that it is an evolutionary phenomenon and process, which understanding requires taking into account the temporal dimension in which it proceeds, as well as articulation and succession experience of the student who decides for an end to their school career. Their behavior, therefore, must be

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<sup>7</sup>Whether the student does it with the knowledge of family or hides it from them.

<sup>8</sup>There is a single word in Portuguese that translates the Italian concept of 'Disagio' school. It is a phenomenon that refers to a wide range of problematic situations involving non-adaptation to school, where this is a difficult objective to achieve a proper balance between student and school context, the relational level or didactic. It presents itself as apathy, immobility or decreased activity, lack of curiosity and interest, tend to isolate themselves, generalized fatigue, low self-esteem, poor motivation, emotional inhibition, low frustration tolerance, low level of knowledge, style little functional learning, poor school performance in relation to the capacity of young absenteeism. It is a situation of psychological malaise that manifests itself through a series of behaviors of school refusal as to prevent the use of one's own cognitive ability, emotional and rational. The disturbances in the clashes with the very formative experience, leading to problematic school outcomes such as rejection and abandonment, often representing several concentric rings of a progressive spiral. In 'Disagio' personal variables are involved (self-esteem, self-efficacy, cognitive components) and contextual and relational variables (living environment, socio-cultural context, school environment, relationship between teacher and student, between family and teacher) (cf. Grazzini, 2005).

inserted into a "history" because only in this way he acquires a complete meaning. Precisely why this phenomenon is determined by a complex of causes, these are not off-centered by analyzing only the point in time when dropout occurred.

The perception that abandonment is an evolutionary phenomenon is important to distinguish some early indicators that appear to facilitate the planning and implementation of prevention interventions. Accordingly, Kaplan and other authors (Kaplan, DS, Peck, BM, Kaplan, HB, 1997) emphasize the relationship between poor school performance and dropout, as already evidenced by empirical or theoretical research. These authors analyzed the evolutionary process through which this relationship is structured. Departed from the hypothesis that the low academic performance adversely affects the student's autonomy, which reacts weakening their bonds with the school. Mediations between low academic achievement and dropout behavior manifested by the devaluation of the school, association with fellow deviant behavior, perception of being rejected by teachers and classmates, and finally the explicit desire to leave school. However, by observing the relationship between these variables and poor performance in school examinations referred to the authors conclude that only the devaluation of the school is directly influenced by low income: this means that not the devaluation of the importance of school that leads to poor performance of students in their exams, but rather poor performance in school examinations prior to the devaluation of the school.

Two models of dropout as the evolutionary process are identified by Finn (1989): the model of frustration-esteem of itself and the model of participation-identification. Both focus on the psychological consequences of school experience, although individual differences also produce different results in school courses.

The first model, the frustration-esteem of itself, takes as its starting point the process of dropping out the low academic performance of the subject: the low performance is reflected in psychological terms, a reduction of self-esteem of the subject. At this point, the individual response will be to initiate problematic behaviors on a scale that culminates in the spontaneous abandonment or expulsion from school. In this model, therefore, the process that leads to dropout is interpreted on the basis of temporal concatenation of circumstances: the poor school performance leads to a reduced self-esteem and the beginning of problematic behaviors which, in sequence, lead to abandon.

In the second model, the participation-identification, the key variable is the level of active involvement of young people with their school experience, there is a close connection between the level of involvement and academic achievements: the level of active involvement is indicative of bonding / adhesion developed in the subject's confrontation with the school. Furthermore, a greater level of participation also ensures better school results, school success, in turn, leads to the development of processes to identify with the school, that extend the student's sense of belonging and sharing it with school goals. Thus is created a virtuous circle of active participation, educational achievement and identification with the school and its goals. In the opposite case, the lack of active participation in school life increases the likelihood of

repeated school failures which, in sequence, negatively influence the sense of identification with school, favoring thus the removal behaviors of school life.

Another possible path of interpretation of the phenomenon of dropout, in terms of evolutionary process, conjugates with a psychological focus with an economic nature (see Fini, 2008b). Also in this case, it is assumed whereby the low school performance is the cause of the dropout process, and then analyzes the successive stages of the process. Firstly, the low school performance adversely affects a student's self-esteem<sup>9</sup>. Failure at school produces immediate and direct consequences on the way in which the young person perceives as a student, which are harmful and may still have lingering effects and continuous in time. A low opinion of himself as a student may induce a perception of poor self-efficacy and a negative self-attribution, namely, the sense of not being able to change through their own efforts, the progress of school events (but also those who are outside the school). The next step consists of the weakening of ties with the school, which is the defensive aspect of the relationship established between the student and the school: a personal situation, in which school failure already produces a lowering in the way the young person perceive himself as a student, he also must defend from the consequences it can bring and even a general lowering of his own self-esteem. In this situation, the defensive behavior of the young student takes the form of a devaluation of the importance of school experience that for him becomes a source of frustration and Disagio. The installation of such behavior of devaluation of the school experience points to the stage where there is a decrease of autonomy caused by the failure, which leads to weakening of ties with the school.

The weakening of ties with the school, related to failure, can be explained by means of an interpretative hypothesis of an economic nature, using the model exit-voice (dropout-permanence), prepared by economist Hirschman (1970) to explain the behavior completely different with respect to those who were here in focus<sup>10</sup>. In the case of dropout behavior, the student who registers repeated failures and learning difficulties is, from this point of view, a subject "at risk of abandonment" of the school system: their experience of school life as a source of frustration and Disagio (malaise ) necessarily reduces his attraction to the school. The process of gradual devaluation can reach the point at which the student evaluates the possibility of choosing the option to abandon. At this point, it becomes crucial to the type of

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<sup>9</sup>In this case, it is useful to refer to the difference, widely adopted in psychology, between the concept of school itself (the representation of himself as a student) and the concept of school itself does not (the representation that the young man has of himself in relation to the fields of activities and relationships outside the school).

The model of Hirschman (1970) analyzes the behavior of the consumer market in situations that, for him, are unsatisfactory, leading him to two possible options: voice, that is, protest, or exit, i.e., noncompliance well that is not satisfactory to him. In the choice of voice, even disillusioned and dissatisfied, the consumer remains loyal to the product, in the case of choosing the exit option, it will return to its intention to purchase alternative goods to the one who leaves.

<sup>10</sup>The model of Hirschman (1970) analyzes the behavior of the consumer market in situations that, for him, are unsatisfactory, leading him to two possible options: voice, that is, protest, or exit, ie, noncompliance well that is not satisfactory to him. In the choice of voice, even disillusioned and dissatisfied, the consumer remains loyal to the product, in the case of choosing the exit option, it will return to its intention to purchase alternative goods to the one who leaves.

response of the school to the discomfort experienced by the student: if it is able to offer spaces and mechanisms to give voice to their discomfort, the student can choose the voice (stay) otherwise decide definitely the exit (dropout).

The choice between leaving and staying in school depends essentially on the alternatives offered outside the school and the student is perceived as able to take them: the more alternatives outside the school are seen as acceptable by the student and promising more easily he can choose the option to dropout. This option is more accessible to the student living in settings rich with opportunities for work and in which a security studies at tertiary level, or even a technical level, does not guarantee a return much higher than what he could without the title. This model explains quite well the minority dropout rate, but not negligible, which is in geographical areas and contexts 'rich'. However, it helps to explain the phenomenon, even more dramatic dropout in areas degraded and poor.

The path that leads to dropout can also be conceptualized within the framework of cognitive psychology, according to which the decision to leave school is defined as cessation of development activity and learning of the cognitive system (Comoglio, 1999). According to this approach, it is important to analyze the process through which system components interact in cognitive and motivational person and develop over time, as well as the progressive learning of knowledge leads to an increase and an integration of strategies that make it almost natural , spontaneous and rewarding the development and maintenance of motivation, but also the problems in a system component that can lead to slow deterioration of cognitive activity, so far as to render the student unable to perform well in school. The 'degradation of the cognitive system "(Comoglio 1999, p. 99) is a slow, probably from a predetermined long time. From this standpoint, the timing of the effective dropout is not very significant in that it is but the culmination of a situation that has become so unbearable to the point of acquiring decisive force at the time the demands on the part of the school, now be perceived as unsustainable by the student's cognitive system, which sees these requirements as insurmountable difficulties.

Accordingly, the effective disruption of studies suggest just the time when it's made the choice not to pursue them, but does not match the actual situation of abandonment, which may precede it long ago. Thus, as the cognitive approach, it is possible to have dropout the cognitive type, even when students continue to attend school. These are students who stay in school, but they do so out of obligation or even the prospect of achieving a social recognition that can be useful for other purposes and not as evidence of a range of cognitive development.

## **2.4 The abandonment: a socio-cultural process**

A further field research on the causes of dropout is constituted by the interpretive model that links the Disagio (malaise) school to the profound social and cultural changes of the contemporary world. Groppo and Locatelli (1999), for example, argue that the various ways in which they express Disagio school - as the failure and dropout, but also behavioral

manifestations emerging as the inability to focus and concentration of many students, its' excitation exaggerated - no longer seem as in the past, directly linked to generic social and cultural factors, but a more general dimension of cultural changes, probably also related to the impact of new technologies. Based on these changes, the aforementioned authors consider it possible to analyze the phenomenon of dropout from the standpoint of cultural psychology, or rather from the perspective of cultural-historical theory developed by Vygotsky (1990), and successively developed by Bruner (1986, 1977), whereby knowledge is not a phenomenon exclusively mental and abstract, but takes shape in a particular historical and cultural specific context, characterized by communicative codes that structure it.

A brief digression on the evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) shows that the transition between different cultural cycles that led to the current mode of communication, focusing on such technologies, was determined by progressively introducing a differentiated technology basically microelectronics. Its strength was imposed as a metaphorical model to determine the cultural perspective of an era, providing a kind of paradigm for interpreting the world and organize knowledge structures and society (cf. Bolter, 1984). Some important learning experiences, even at an early stage, show the ability of electronic media and virtual reality and social group work to strongly capture the senses of the students. Thus, new technologies contribute to the traditional forms of teaching - based on written text and symbolic reality - come to be perceived as something very distant from the sensory point of view, rather than the cognitive, making it more difficult - and less attractive - access to the school culture

The fact that children now start school with a bag of the media heavily structured by the interaction with ICTs, which come from very different skills from those typical of literacy (ability to organize logical abstraction / decontextualization, analysis and synthesis), can lead to Disagio school. The difficulties interposed between the interaction with ICTs and traditional school culture can be magnified exponentially extent upon impact with the upper grade levels. The requirement for acquisition of a vast body of knowledge and articulate, typical of higher levels of education, confronted with the absence of their own skills of knowledge mediated by tools of literacy. This factor may be among the causes of high rates of school failure, either in the form of repetition or avoidance, which is recorded in the first year of college in many countries, including Brazil.

In the case of adolescents and / or very young students, refusing to assume the role of pupil and the decision to leave school can, in some cases, be read as a way of claiming autonomy, the 'emancipation'. This situation appears in the stories of leaving school, conducted through qualitative research tools, such as interviews. In many cases, the symbolization of the experience of abandonment, provided by the students interviewed, is not weak in any of the views presented here. On the contrary, appears to be a channel claim than one mode rebuilds previous experience a failure. In this context, the term 'evaded' proves inadequate and ineffective descriptive point of view: the evader is not "expelled", but decide freely and actively move away and leaves the school amid a set of feelings that prevail

basically, a sense of release. The situation is radically different from those in many other cases that dropout of school seems to be the culmination of an inevitable destiny already written in the sociocultural field of the young and in their family history. However, this only confirms the multidimensionality of disjointed phenomenon that is the subject of this study.

### **Final considerations**

Despite the diversity of approaches to school dropouts, it is possible to identify a core consensus of research: it is a phenomenon that has many forms, not being reducible to a few causes.

As regards the characteristic manifold, avoidance / dropout can manifest as retention and repetition of the student in school, leaving the institution, the education system, not finding a certain level of education, or even abandonment and subsequent return. Ranges from individuals who have never gone to a determined level of education to those who stay in school and come to complete a stage of education, but behave as dropouts (dropout).

The analysis of LeCompte and Dworkin (1991) contributes to synthesize the multiplicity and heterogeneity of factors that underlie the dropout, classifying them into four distinct categories. The first refers to factors related to students, such as personality, past experience, sociocultural and socioeconomic characteristics of the family environment, peer group influence, and poor school performance, attractiveness exerted by the activities and opportunities outside the school. The second deals with, among other factors internal to the school system, the specificity of teaching and learning of inadequate teaching and mentoring; the poor sensitivity of teachers and the institution as a whole with respect to the problems of students, the ambience and the characteristics of the school culture in general. The third category encompasses the factors resulting from the interaction between the two preceding variables and also takes into account the various dimensions that contribute to the progressive disengagement of the student of this school and the ability to perceive and interact with the difficulties of the student at risk of abandonment. Finally, the fourth category covers the macro-systemic factors, such as those resulting economic, social and political systems which are part of school and changes in social, cultural and family who constitute a reference<sup>11</sup> for students.

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<sup>11</sup>There is broad consensus on the fact that the various factors that can lead to abandonment, listed here, have a different weight according to the organization of the school to which it refers. At the level of compulsory schooling are crucial sociocultural factors related to the social context of belonging, while at the post-compulsory seem to focus, above all, the individual variables related to the personality of the student. In the second case, the abandonment may be the result of a conscious path of choice, complete with carrying out a purpose that would not be achievable within the school context (Besozzi, 1993).

The student reference contexts are central to understanding the reasons for the dropout, but it finds its most direct meaning within the psychic economy of the student, although not comparable to a clinical symptom, it is nevertheless a phenomenon that can be seen as a consequence of a plurality of causes. Therefore, their proper understanding requires a careful analysis of each particular case.

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