

FROM INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON TO THE FRENCH IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RPL DEVICES

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Introduction

- The RPL device can both represent **new opportunities for an access to certification and a recognition of non formal and informal learnings**, and be a vector of protest against the predominance of the formal educational system.
- **Structural barriers** may appear as tending to reduce the generalized and instituted implementation of the RPL devices, at national level, even of impairing them by including them into a formal educational system.
- Using the data issued by the 2010 Cedefop (European Center for the Development of Vocational Training), it is possible to **put countries in various groups according to their level of development and to define the approach** they have adopted.
- The practioners–researchers' posture has enabled us to **apprehend the evolutions that have marked our practices of tutoring, assessment and transfer**, as concerns the RPL, during the past ten years.

European context of the Validation of Prior Learning

- The process of **Recognition of Prior Learning** is recognised as an important **tool** in the pursuit of economic and social goals at European level.
- *Strategic Framework for Cooperation in Education and Training until 2020* (adopted in 2009) identified ‘**making lifelong learning a reality**’ as one of its strategic objectives
- The Europe 2020 Strategy acknowledges the role of validation **in supporting young people**, particularly those with fewer opportunities and / or at risk of social exclusion, **to access the labor market**.
- The most important changes would be in **the social construction** of his/her life experience, characterized by the multiplication of such formal and informal events as profession, training and social, family and cultural experiences.

Level of development about the RPL

- This categorization by 'level of development' is useful to obtain a view of the state of the art in RPL. However, it is important to note that the categorization provides only an overall assessment **in a dynamic consideration**.
- In contrast, some countries may not have a clear **national legal or policy framework** but have bottom-up initiatives with very high levels of take-up.
- Indeed, the comparative reasoning on which the operations of classification are based is **a pragmatic way of thinking**.
- Therefore, the societal approach aims at going beyond those two pitfalls by considering **universalist traits as much as particularisms**, to « *questions of representations, meaning and values rooted in the personal history* » of the individuals registering in a process of RVPL, and the reference to the institutions directly or indirectly involved in the implementation of the devices(Iribarne,, 1989).

High	Medium-high	Medium-low	Low
Finland, France , Netherlands, Norway, Portugal	Denmark, Germany, Romania, Spain , Sweden, UK (England, Wales, Northern Ireland), UK (Scotland)	Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Belgium (Wallonia), Czech Republic, Estonia, Iceland, Italy , Ireland, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia,	Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Turkey

Source: 2010 update of the European Inventory on Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning Executive summary of Final Report

Countries with a high degree of development

- They have established practices for validation, encompassing all or most sectors of learning,
- They also have a national legislative framework or national policy in place, which might be one national policy relating to validation in all sectors, or a set of policies / laws relating to different sectors which together form an overall framework.
- **In France**, the Validation of Prior Learning has been established as a right for every citizen. The current system (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*, VAE), which was established in January 2002 (Social Modernization Act), is used to deliver whole or partial qualifications.
- Since 2002 a significant investment has been made in the higher education sector in particular to produce standards (*référentiels*) described in **terms of learning outcomes** in order to facilitate VAE (all vocational training diplomas included in the national qualifications directory (RNCP) must be described in terms of learning outcomes).

Countries with a medium-high degree of development

- Countries where **there is a national system, or a framework of systems**, for validation but take-up remains relatively low or countries where there is a particularly well-established system of validation in a certain sector with a high level of take-up, but not a national framework in place.
- **In Spain**, there are **some opportunities** for validation in relation to Higher Education (HE) and also professional competences.
- In 2009, the Royal Decree on the recognition of professional competences acquired through work experience opened up for modules of formal Vocational Education Training (VET) or full qualifications at levels 1 to 5, according to the criteria specified in the National Catalogue of Professional Qualifications.

Countries with a medium-low degree of development

- They have established validation systems in one or more sectors, but not amounting to an overall framework for all types of learning.
- **In Italy**, some of the most recent **Government initiatives** towards the introduction of a validation system appear : The document “*Italia 2020*”, an action plan for the employability of young people through the integration of jobs and learning, signed by **the Minister of Labour and Social Policies and the Minister of Education, Universities and Research**.
- Introduce and ensure a match between workers’ knowledge and labour market needs, with priority focusing on “assessment and validation” of learning and the updating of the training processes;
- streamlining **the governance of training systems**, with specific regard to the involvement of social partners;
- improving **the quality of educational activities**, by introducing new systems and approaches to assure the quality of accreditation and certification procedures.

Countries with a low degree of development

- This category includes countries which may be in the process of developing,
- or approving legislation
- or policy relating to validation,
- or tools which might support the introduction of a process of validation

Types of approach of the Validation and Recognition of Prior Learning

- Countries can be divided into two main categories :
 - those with a centrally designed and managed system of validation
 - those with initiatives based on local projects.
- In countries with a centrally regulated approach, validation is driven by a national law, policy or strategy, a national framework with institutional responsibilities, or is based on centrally-defined qualifications.
- In countries where local or project-based initiatives are prominent, these may emerge in response to an identified need to support specific target groups, or from employers' specific requirements in a certain sector.

Countries with a centrally regulated approach

- *A national law, policy or strategy to establish a right for individuals to undergo, under certain conditions, a validation process, or an obligation on learning or validation providers to develop and implement validation processes*
- For example, **in France**, the 2002 Social Modernization Act made access to validation of knowledge gained through experience a right for everyone with at least three years of paid or voluntary experience.
- The main changes are generally made to integrate the outcomes of social partners' negotiations in the field of lifelong learning (LLL). The last change was made in 2009 and concerns the process to increase the number of individuals accessing the VAE process, in particular private sector workers. Laws from 1984, 1992, 2002 and 2009 are collected in the Labour Code and the Education Code.

Countries with local, project-based or sectorial initiatives

- Less centralised approaches are evident where local project based or sectorial initiatives emerge in response to an identified need to support specific target groups, or demand from employers in a certain sector
- **In Italy**, numerous local experiences have been implemented applying to various sectors/ levels of education. In recent years, some Italian regions have introduced tools for the VRPL, making it an individual right, linking it to the recognition of credits for access to formal training or education
- Or using it to promote the employability of jobseekers.
- In terms of Higher Education (HE), A Ministerial Decree (No. 270/2004) asserted the possibility for the Universities to recognize "*the knowledge and professional skills certified according to the existing legislation as well as the other knowledge and skills gained in training courses at a post-secondary level in which the university contributed in design and delivery*".

An RPL device in constant evolution

A RPL device which is set in a historical and social perspective

- Most degrees are accessible through the validation of acquired experience (Recognition of Prior Learning).
- A social phenomenon which calls for various questionings : political, on the place of diplomas in society ; sociological, on the equal opportunities of access to training ; social, on the promotion of individuals ; economical, on the recognition of their skills and qualification ; educational, on the various forms of learnings.
- Procedures demanding self insight ; in that sense, they can prove most enriching and constructive, but also destabilizing and disturbing.
- The experience has a formative value and it most particularly deserves social recognition (Honneth, 2008).

- RPL is not a new phenomenon : it is an extension of long-existing devices.
- RPL has developed in a parallel evolution at a time when today's careers appear to be less and less linear (Castel, 1995).
- RPL is part of the new institutional devices aiming at individualizing people's routes, whether it is in their careers or in their life training routes.
- The paradox between the obvious acquisition of knowledge through experience and the problematic side of its objective recognition has always existed.
- RPL was first conceived as a means to allow access to continuous training for individuals who did not possess the pre-required diplomas.

A recognition of experience which enables taking into account an articulation between professional, social and personal life

- Working hours have kept shortening and have been replaced by other activities that do not find any social recognition.
- The injunction to become performing and socially valorized individuals more and more orients education and training (Boltanski, Chiapello, 1999).
- Isn't this individualisation doubled by a fractioning of the collective frameworks of labour ?
- The institutionalisation of doubt for individuals also encourages them to increase their capacity at insight.

What is the contribution of RPL to renewed landmarks in adult life?

- A bridge between continuous training and permanent education, (Pinte, 2002), but also, and more specifically, a way to provide schooling to companies and to professionalize education (Dubar, 1996).
- This biographical recognition is reflected by a strong incitation towards people in training to accomplish a real reflexive work on themselves by taking stock of their careers and skills (Delory, 2003).
- However, other researchers evoke the risks of a « technologization » of the processes of the tutoring of suffering adults. By sending individuals back to their personal history and prompting them to become the entrepreneurs of their own lives, it would make them the sole actors of their mistakes and failures (Ehrenberg, 1991, 1996).
- A means to recognize and credit the experience of domestic, family or associative work, since it results from learning based on experience, giving value to knowledge, a know-how and a way of existing.

Could the RPL device give a new meaning to education and training?

- Allowing individuals to transform their life into experience and their experience into knowledge and know-how.
- Giving thought to the candidates' tutoring by starting not only from a listing of the learnings coming from their experience but rather as a genuine formative process (Lafont, 2010).
- The possibilities and practices of individual and collective self-training emerge outside training organisms. The candidates come from the dysfunctioning of our school system and have been confronted to dropping out, truancy and illiteracy.
- Five major concerns :
 - existential : learning how to be
 - social : learning within a group
 - educational : learning within the framework of an alternative education
 - cognitive : learning how to learn
 - integral : learning how to articulate the various frameworks of learning.

A philosophical tradition which conditions the representations of the status attributed to experience

- The tradition of classical philosophy and 18th century rationalism lead to oppose common sense to the essence of things.
- The virtues of empirism are generated by the knowledge gained through experience (John Locke).
- Experience as a means to acquire self-control and to become a permanent learner (Socrates).
- Knowledge acquired through science can also be the result of individual or social relationship of power (Khun ou Feuerabend). Experience would be the result of the interiorization of exteriority. (Bourdieu).
- The prescribed work induces a reflexive activity in and on action, the synonym of the production of new skills, and leads to consider RPL within the framework of a training career.
- The most socially useful learning is the learning of the processes of learning. It is also learning to remain constantly open to one's own experience and to integrate the very process of change.

Data on the flows of beneficiaries

- In France, in 2010, nearly 75 000 files have been considered admissible by the whole of the ministries delivering certifications through the VAE, and about 53 000 candidates have been heard by a jury.
- These numbers have varied very little since 2007, after a big increase between 2005 and 2007. In 2010, about 30 000 candidates were awarded a certification by the VAE, i.e. 7 % less than in 2009.
- The yearly number of certified students had largely increased between 2003 and 2005, before they became stable at about 30 000.
- Since 2002, which is the date the device was implemented, the number of certified candidates has risen to practically 200 000.

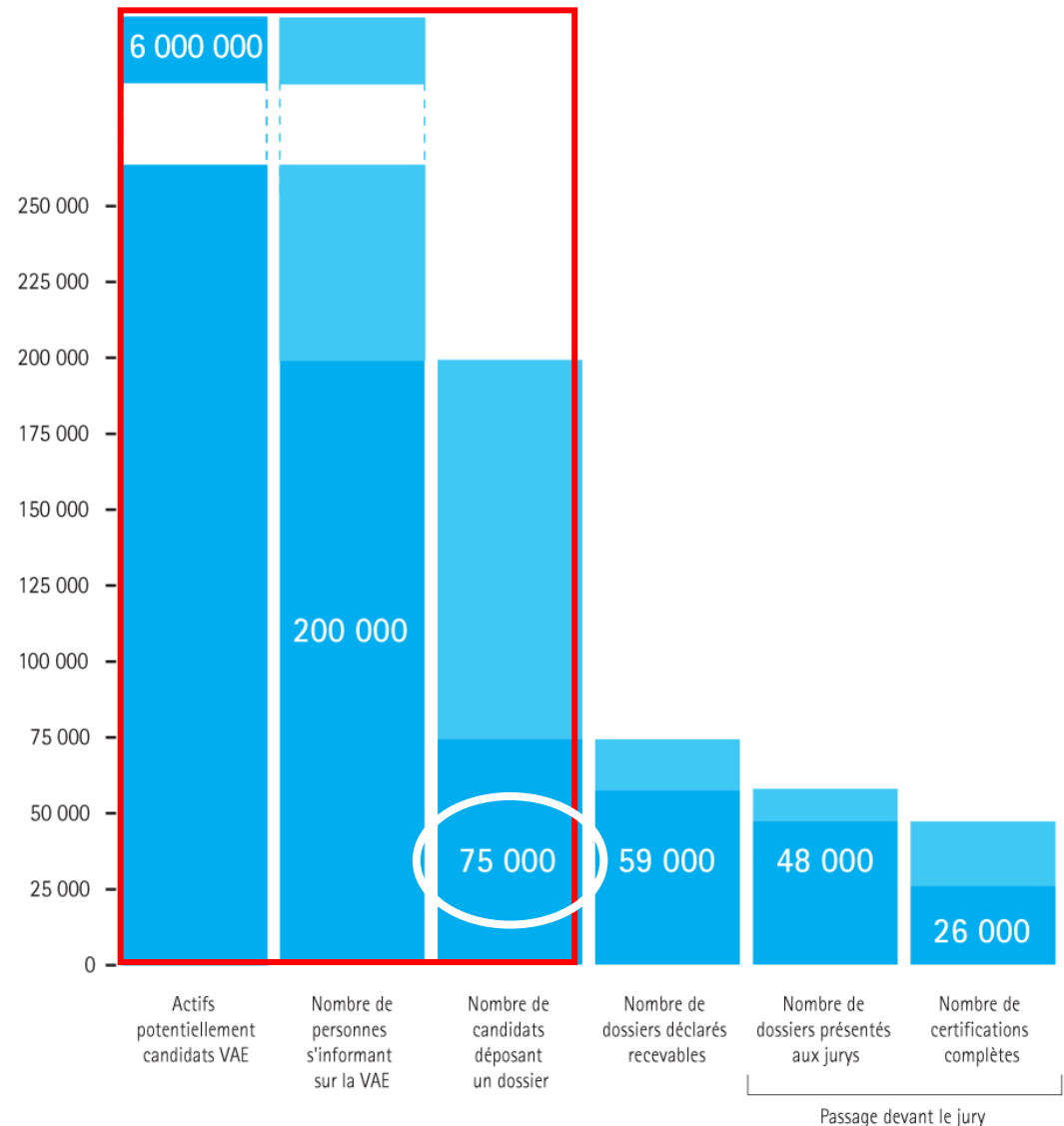
Flows of beneficiaries, in France, for the period 2004-2010

	Total number of candidate applications							Total number of candidates who were assessed						
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
National Ministry of Education			23 148	25 594	28692	32460	31 160	19 136	21 379	22284	21967	22013	22290	20 030
Ministry of Higher Education and Research	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available	6909	6764	6 656	4 563	4 146	3935	4529	4309	4476	4 282
Ministry of Agriculture	930	828	839	799	961	1043	927	263	351	365	371	446	522	511
Ministry of Social Affairs and Health	Data not available	25 663	16 235	29 720	22065	19675	17 854	Data not available	9 219	10400	16111	13899	19504	17 741
Ministry of Employment	5 200			10 178	10659	10863	8 948	4 764	7 426	9360	8983	8632	8743	7 847
Ministry of Youth and Sports	3 480	3 025	2 503	Data not available	Data not available	Data not Av.		1 535	1 780	1407	Data not av.	Data not available	Data not available	
Ministry of Army		Data not available	151	155	413	591	496		53	86	78	210	331	456
Ministry of Culture			1 193	1 201	1221		187			26	1108	1125		106
Ministry of Maritime Affairs			nd	nd		82	122			74	64	68	82	73
Total of ministries awarding qualifications	Data not available	Between 60 000 and 63 000	Between 56 000 and 59 000	Between 75 000 and 80 000	Between 72 000 and 75 000	Between 72 000 and 75 000	Between 70 000 and 75 000	Approx. 30000	44 354	47 937	approx. 55 000	approx. 53 000	approx. 58 000.	approx. 53 000

Loss between the candidates potentially interested and those who are assessed within the framework of the RPL (Besson Report, 2008)

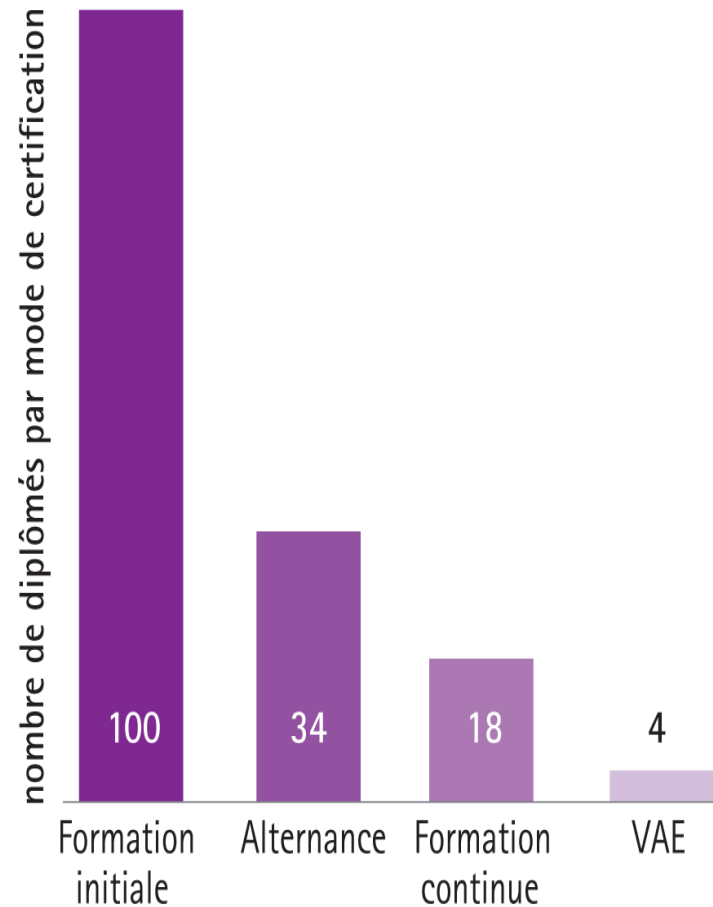
In quantitative terms the RPL has not kept its promises yet, only 26 000 diplomas were delivered by this process.

The graph shows that the candidatures for the RPL, estimated at 75 000 each year, are too few compared to the 6 million potential recipients.



Estimation du nombre de diplômés en 2005 par mode de certification,
pour 100 diplômés de formation initiale

While RPL is quite well-known – 60% of the active population have heard of it –, the initially targeted audience, i.e. the one with the least number of diplomas, is the least aware of its existence.



Source : INSEE, DEPP, DARES, estimations des auteurs.

Two RPL devices

1985 Decree:

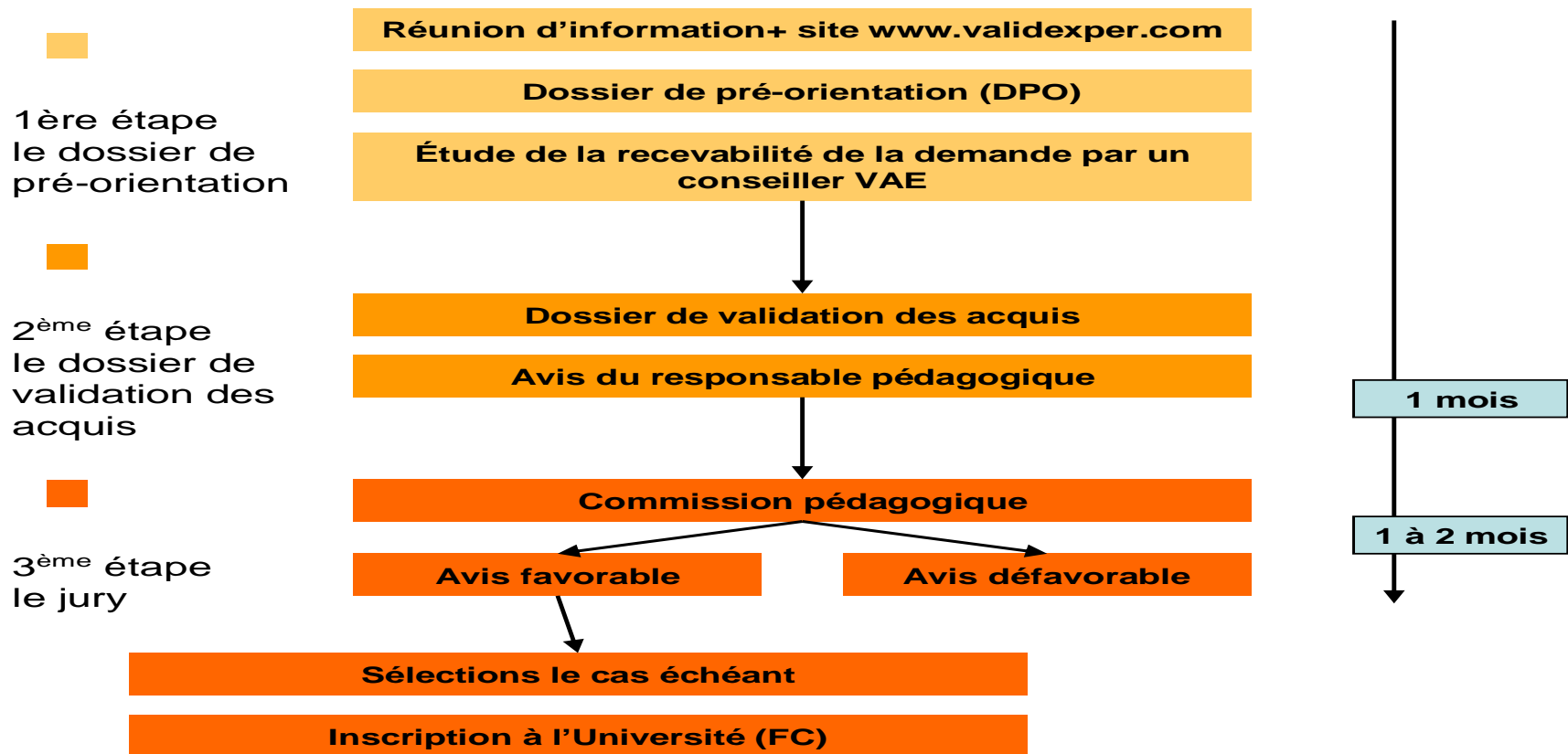
- Whatever their status, any potential candidate may benefit from the Validation of Vocational Acquisitions in order to have access to training without the required title.

2002 Decree:

- RPL is an individual right that is registred in the labour and ecucation codes. It enables the deliverance of all or part of a diploma in the light of a candidate's professional and/or personal experience.

La validation pour l'accès à une formation

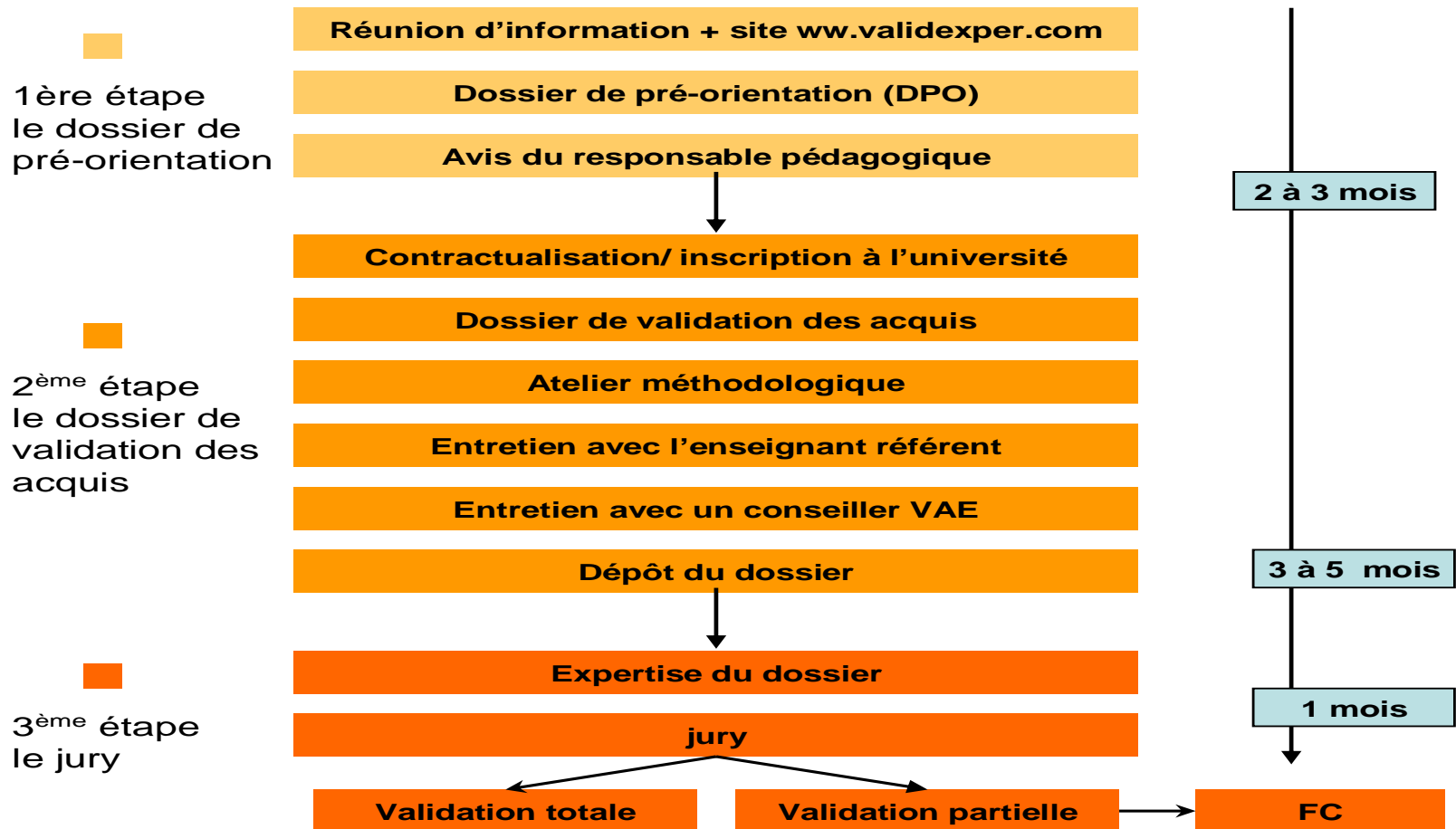
La procédure



Décret 2002

La validation diplômante

La procédure



Conclusion

- A recomposition of social relations, whose issue is that of a transition towards a post-industrial society and of the redistribution of the part played by the productive sector and academic institutions in the production of social positions.
- Another definition of the notion of the individual, through the important changes in the social construction of his/her life experience.
- In France, the 4 tendencies that have influenced the RPL model :
 - More and more individualized requests
 - More and more contextualized institutional requests
 - Requests at the three European levels of certification (LMD)
 - More and more internationalized requests.
- The clarification of the conditions of the production of knowledge and of the process making awareness and formalization possible with a view to social validation.

Thank you for your attention

