

## CHAPTER 12

### Implementing the SAS project in France. An experience conducted in Essonne

Dr Bénédicte Halba, iriv ([www.iriv.net](http://www.iriv.net))

#### Introduction

First and foremost we would like to underline that in the framework of the SAS project, only one implementation was expected by country- the Assfam being responsible for it in France. In complement to this French implementation, an additional one was offered by the other French partner, iriv, in another part of Ile de France.

In this chapter, we mean to explain the implementation of the Success at School project in a *département* near Paris, in Essonne, in the region of the Ile de France. The implementation of the SAS project in Essonne could be conducted within the existing national programme for Early School Leavers – Success at school (*Réussite éducative*) in Essonne.

The “innovative approach” offered by the iriv concerned both the need for creating a brand new network of stakeholders for the purpose of the SAS project and the learning process offered to the mentors & youngsters. On the one hand, the role of the mentors had to be modified as they had to support young people to engage in voluntary activities. On the other hand; the training sessions were part of the volunteering to be experienced by the youngsters as these sessions were not carried out during their work at school but outside school, during their free time , on a total voluntary basis. As far as the experimentation conducted by the Assfam (the other French partner) were concerned, the voluntary activities were part of the “optional activities” offered at school – a time is dedicated to these activities in the cursus of the students.

In the first part of our article, we outline the general context of Early School Leaving (ESL) in France by focusing on the existing networks and the main stakeholders we could involve on the SAS project.

In the second part, we detail the different steps that were taken to involve both the teachers and the young people on the ground. Firstly we tried to involve as mentors professionals working with youngsters who have already dropped out. Secondly, we could involve professionals (in the City hall of Massy and in the College Blaise Pascal) to be mentors by using the partnership they had already built thanks to the “internship” to be offered to youngsters. Thanks to their support, we could get in contact together with the youngsters.

In the third part, we give more details on the content of the mentor training offered to educators and volunteer training to young people. In the last part, we offer a view of the next step of the implementation of the SAS project in Essonne outlining a plan for a sustainable implementation on the ground.

## 1. Context of the experimentation – identifying the key stakeholders

The experimentation was carried out in Essonne, a department located in the region of the Ile de France (30 minutes from Paris) thanks to the support and collaboration of two key stakeholders: the City Hall of Massy and the College Blaise Pascal in the framework of the existing “Success at school network” (*Réseau réussite éducative*) We have tried to explain in the clearest way the different administrative divisions of the territory. These divisions are meaningful as according to the belonging to some “special areas” (Urban Sensitive Areas-ZUS in French or Priority Educative Area-SEP in French) special public funding may be allocated. The criteria for being part of these areas are: high level of poverty, unemployment, single families. Massy belongs to the first division (ZUS), the College Blaise Pascal to the second division (ZEP).

### 1.1 The Success at School network in Essonne

The Success at School network (*Réussite éducative en Essonne*) is the official name given to professionals working to Struggle against early School Leaving since . It was created in Essonne in 2006 to support the educational policy. It was established thanks to the *Centre Ressources Politique de la Ville en Essonne* (CRPVE) whose main mission is to build networks of people sharing a common interest in different public policies. The main criteria are to work in specific areas called Urban Sensitive Areas (*Zones Urbaines Sensibles*). The aim of the CRPVE is to collect all the information meaningful in the field. The struggle against early school leaving has been a main issue on the agenda of the local public policies in Urban Sensitive Areas as it is considered as a main factor of exclusion.

### 1.2 The Direction for Social Cohesion at the City Hall of Massy

Massy is a town of Essonne with around 45 000 inhabitants, located at 15 kilometers in the South of Paris. It belongs to the existing in the network Success at School in Essonne. It works with all the local educators working with youngsters aged 6 to 16 years, outside school, during their free time with the agreement of their parents. The objective to create social cohesion has been especially active in Massy. This objective focuses on building links with the families, the inhabitants and all the professionals working with them (educators, teachers in colleges, associations in the different districts of the City, public services working in the neighbourhood). The City hall of Massy, and especially its Direction of Social cohesion, has played a major role for the success of the implementation of the SAS project. It doesn't exist anymore as due to institutional change, it has merged together with the Direction of Education. Fortunately all the actions implemented in the past will go on, especially the outputs of the SAS project (a guide was published for this purpose).

### 1.3 The College Blaise Pascal

The college counts 380 students, aged 11 to 16 years. They include students who don't speak French; they belong to a special department (UPEAA-

2

Pedagogical Unit for Young migrants). In 2014, a special class will be open (Specialized class for school inclusion) open to disabled students. It belongs to the Priority Educative Areas (*Zones Educatives Prioritaires*) which more or less gather the same characteristics as for the Urban Sensitive areas (high poverty rate, high unemployment rate, many single parents...), Among this educative institution, teachers are in charge of the Success at school network.

## 2. Implementation of the experimentation- different steps

The Institute for Research and Information on Volunteering (iriv), initiator and French partner of the Success at School project did not know any local stakeholder in the educational field in Essonne before the experimentation although it had already established contacts with the *Centre Ressources Politique de la Ville en Essonne* (CRPVE) since 2011. For the initiative taken by the iriv, a number of steps had to be followed to ensure the implementation of the SAS project in Essonne. The role of the mentors consisted in supporting young people to engage in voluntary activities; the training sessions offered by iriv being considered as volunteering as the youngsters would come freely during their free time in a total voluntary way. This was the crucial point to be explained to the mentors willing to join the SAS project in Essonne.

### 2.1 Step 1- a first meeting gathering all the stakeholders involved in the Success at school (*Réussite éducative*) network in Essonne

The first step involved building a partnership with CRPVE since the SAS project fit with the general mission of the organization. They organized a general meeting in October 2013 gathering almost 30 participants, all professionals belonging to the Success at school (*Réussite éducative*) network in Essonne. Among those 30 participants, considered as stakeholders for the SAS project, two representatives of the City Hall of Massy attended the meeting, the director of the Social cohesion and an educator of the City Hall of Massy. The director offered to implement the SAS project in her city.. She has been a key actor.

### 2.2 Step 2- Building a local partnership in Massy

A local meeting was held in November 2013 at the City Hall of Massy to gather the local stakeholders- educators and teachers- who might be interested in implementing the Success at School approach. Educators belonging to public services or to associations attended the meeting together with the professionals belonging to a national organisation, the *Fondation Apprentis d'Auteuil*, whose main goal is also to fight early school leaving among youngsters through the use of apprenticeship and to an individual support provided by their educators.

A second local meeting was held in January 2014 with educators working with youngsters who have already dropped out of school. Their main concern was about the time it would take to convince those youngsters who are most of the time reluctant to consider any official or institutional proposal. The stakeholders'

main challenge was how to explain to the young people why it was beneficial for them to join this project. In particular, they felt that it would have been difficult to convince the young people to attend three sessions with other youngsters they did not know and for which there was no 'material' reward. They asked for the month of February to "spread the word".

### **2.3 Step 3- Building a partnership with the College Blaise Pascal**

Since the City Hall of Massy had been working in close partnership with the College Blaise Pascal for the past years, personal relations could be built between the Director for Social Cohesion and the teacher in charge of the Success at School network in the College. Thanks to this personal and positive relationship, the iriv, could be in contact with the College Blaise Pascal. A general introductory meeting, organised together with the teacher was organised in March 2014. More than 20 youngsters joined. At the end of the meeting, 11 youngsters were interested to join the SAS approach and registered for the training sessions.

### **3. The experimentation in itself- involving the target groups- mentors & youngsters**

The SAS experimentation involved two parts: a mentor training for educators, or adults involved as mentors; and a volunteer training directed at the young people.

#### **3.1 First part - involving educators for the mentoring**

The first mentoring session of the SAS project was conducted in partnership with the City Hall of Massy with educators working directly for the City Hall or indirectly for social centres in Massy. The would-be mentors were chosen according to the following criteria:

- their interest in the SAS project and especially in any new/innovative method in non-formal education for ESLs to prevent school failure and so to contribute to the policy against social exclusion in the so-called "sensitive areas" (*Zones urbaines sensibles*);
- their availability to participate in the experimentation (on a voluntary basis) in addition to their other activities;
- any former experience in the field of school mentoring.

All the educators also held a national accreditation for working with ESL as "specialised educators". Their professional profile is social worker with a special training to support vulnerable groups such as disabled youngsters, children/youngsters at risk due to their family or social background, or because they are living in sensitive areas (reference is made to the Sensitive Urban Areas explained above).

In the first sessions (two sessions offered to "specialised educators", November 2013 & January 2014), the training consisted in explaining the aims and goals of the SAS project. They were explained that the idea was to convince youngsters to join the training sessions consisting in both a theoretical approach and

practical work (to build a project to be implemented in the future among associations). As far as the training programme offered for mentors by the SAS project is concerned (mentoring training), they were not so interested in the “general” support to be offered to youngsters as they know how to proceed. They said they had their own “professional practice”. They were much more interested in the innovative approach offered by the “detour strategy”: volunteering being presented as an alternative pedagogical approach to re-engage youngsters facing difficulties to re-engage in school. After this meeting, they tried to get in contact with the youngsters. A second session was held in January to meet them and have their feedback.

Most of the “specialised educators” said they wouldn’t have enough time to convince the youngsters they worked with, mainly already school leavers, to join the experimentation. We tried to give them more time, in February but couldn’t get more feedback. As a result, this first attempt did not reach any conclusion; the educators didn’t have enough time to convince any youngster. Nevertheless, they keep the idea in mind for the future. In partnership with their colleagues of the City hall, with the pedagogical support provided by the French guide published by the iriv, they will be able to speak about the volunteering approach with the youngsters.

Other sessions of the mentoring training were offered to other profiles of mentors, this time among the College Blaise Pascal- a teacher and a mediator for school. Once more the SAS project was conducted in partnership with the City Hall of Massy (in Essonne) but this time with the College Blaise Pascal. As already mentioned, personal contact existed already between the director in charge of social cohesion in the City Hall and the teacher coordinator of the “Success at School network in Essonne- V at the College Blaise Pascal. This partnership took the form of participation in a jury held after the compulsory internship youngsters have to follow in the French educational system, during the last year of college (youngsters aged 14 to 16 years).

The link with the internship was probably the most convincing part of the mentoring offered to the teacher and educator. Once more, the “general support” offered by the mentoring programme was not necessary as they knew how to proceed with youngsters but they were most interested in the “detour strategy” offered by the SAS project. They were both already involved in voluntary activities. It has played a major role in their interest and willing to join the SAS project.

They played a very practical role in the SAS implementation: by organising an information meeting together with the youngsters (March 2013), to answer their questions, to play the go-betweens with the City hall, to inform the parents of the training sessions offered to their children for the SAS project, asking them for their permission to join as the activities were carried out on their free time, not in the College but in a meeting room offered by the City hall for extra-school activities. This time it worked and the organisation of the training sessions among youngsters could be decided in close partnership between the City Hall, the College Blaise Pascal and the French partner of the SAS, the iriv.

As a conclusion on the mentoring training offered to the mentors, different kinds of “profiles” of mentors have been involved in Essonne. The first ones - specialised educators – would have required more time as the process was quite new for them. Nevertheless the idea is still in the air and they may come back to the SAS approach at any time. The second ones – teacher and mediators in the College- have been quite reactive and active as they had already experienced volunteering themselves and so were quite receptive to the SAS approach. The third ones – professionals involved in educational policies at the City hall of Massy- have been key actors and mentors. They have been involved in all the steps of the mentoring programme with professionals among the College

### 3.2 Second part – involving the young people

This part of the experimentation was implemented on a voluntary basis among youngsters aged 14 to 16 years. A first meeting was held in March 2014, together with the mentors involved in the College – a teacher and mediator for school. 22 youngsters attended this introductory session aged between 14 and 16 years, of which 14 were girls and 8 were boys. Three sessions were held in the following months, half a day each, this time at the City hall of Massy. 9 youngsters- all girls- aged between 14 and 16 attended the three sessions, on a Wednesday afternoon, once a month.

The first session was dedicated to the general discussion on Volunteering and Associations, on the basis of a personal experience or knowledge they could have (on both local and national levels). The link was made with the compulsory internship they had to commit to during the last year at college: the way to find an association, the way to introduce oneself among unfamiliar people and the discovery of a new social and/or professional environment with adult people they didn't know before. During the practical part of the session, they were asked to work in two groups on an associative project they would be interested to implement in their neighbourhood. They both chose to offer to work on a project to support children who were sick or with a disability. Their teacher was not present, they were shy but curious to work with an adult they did not know – the “mentors” of the SAS (a representative of iriv and representatives of the City hall of Massy, who were formerly introduced to them during the introductory session.

The second session was dedicated to the educational and professional dimensions of volunteering. A clear link was made with their internship. The mentors insisted on the tasks they had to fulfil, the assessment made by their “employer” and during the jury (composed of teachers and professionals outside the college) where they defended the work made during their intern period (one week). The idea was to show that the process to be an intern is the same as for being a volunteer in an association. A portfolio was dispatched among them as an example of tool to identify and assess the voluntary experience, they could discover that volunteering might be considered as a real professional experience under the condition that it is properly presented, with detailed information on the

association, responsibilities as a volunteer, skills and competences gained and results achieved (this portfolio was implemented in partnership between *Animafac*- an association of students and the iriv. During the practical part of the session, they described more in detail the two associative projects they had in mind. They had to work on the strategy they were to use to work with the children. The first group decided to use selected board games depending on the age of the children they will work with. The second group opted for telling tales, fairy tales or folkloric tales, selecting the tales according to the gender (girl or boy) of the children they would work with.

The third session was focused on diversity and the social inclusion volunteering should enhance. As the concepts might be more difficult to be understood, a visit on the ground was organised in order for the youngsters to meet volunteers and to discover two different associations with various aims and profiles of volunteers. The association "*Espace singulier*" was chosen as it has developed support for families with disabled children since 2008, Another association was selected '*Choeur qui mouve*', created in the past two years, whose main objective is to develop local choirs for people with different backgrounds (all ages, all genders, all social backgrounds) to sing together. The youngsters were most interested to have the opportunity to meet "real volunteers" and to be able to ask questions about voluntary involvement and the main barriers they may face, such as the issue of their age (volunteering is officially possible from the age of 16 in France, the age when individuals are permitted to work) and the insurance questions linked to it. Some of them offered to spend time for both of the associations.

The two associative projects they had worked on could be implemented in another framework; the "*Ville, vie, vacances*" (City, Life, Holidays) device meant to support children in sensitive areas (*Zones urbaines sensibles*) to spend their leisure time productively during the holidays. To summarise, the volunteering activities implemented by the youngsters included: the participation to the first meeting (March), the participation to the 3 sessions (April-May). The role of the mentors was to explain them the theoretical aspects of a volunteering (institutional framework, skills and competences acquired, requirement for being a volunteer/ a student / a worker, reasons for being a volunteering, cultural and diversity contexts) together with the practical way to implement a project among an association, so to be "useful" and "active" in an association.

A certificate of attendance was dispatched among the youngsters in July, signed by their teacher (College Blaise Pascal, their school), the Director of the Social Cohesion (city hall of Massy) and the director of the iriv (French partner of the SAS project). It may be added to their curriculum vitae as an evidence of "social activity" fulfilled.

### 3.3 Feedback – results achieved

The results of the experimentation conducted in Essonne have been quite positive. The youngsters involved in the SAS experimentation were reliable and attended the three sessions, on a voluntary basis; worked together on two

associative projects and some of them brought some material to support their work (board games). Some have faced difficulties at school, other were “at risk” to have difficulties and other succeeded at school. These “mixed” profiles were important in order to avoid any stigmatization. Moreover, some of them were interested in becoming volunteers in the associations they visited. This was the first time they discovered this part of their city as they usually stay in and around their neighbourhood.

The mentors involved in the SAS experimentation have also actively participated. The partnership with the City hall, and overall the involvement of the Direction of Social cohesion with professionals convinced by the positive impact of volunteering among youngsters, and volunteers themselves, have been a key success factor. With their institutional support, the College Blaise Pascal, and the teacher personally in charge of the RRS accepted to join and to inform the youngsters. Her personal support and the good image she had among her youngsters have definitely had a positive impact on the youngsters.

The combination of theoretical and practical content for the pedagogy (in the volunteer training) designed by the SAS project was important. Youngsters wanted both to be supported in their activities and to have concrete feedback of their voluntary work. The most difficult part was to explain that some “social” activities existed, “done for nothing”, for others you do not know who might need your support. Another crucial point was to make a link between a voluntary experience and the internship they had to do at the end of their compulsory education, considered a contact with “professional life”.

The context of the experimentation contributed to its success because of these factors:

- personal involvement of both the director for social cohesion and the teacher in charge of the RRS/SAS,
- institutional relations between the City Hall and the College Blaise Pascal,
- a support by a teacher among the youngsters (first meeting of information held at the College Blaise Pascal)
- a support by professionals of the City Hall : the training sessions were held at the City hall (a texto was sent before each session to the youngsters to remind them of the session)
- A contact between the City Hall and some associations of the City, *Espace Singulier et Choeur qui Mouve*;
- A last meeting on the ground gathering professionals of the City hall, the youngsters and the associations with the mentors in charge of the SAS approach
- A reward- a “certificate of attendance” signed by the director for social cohesion at the City hall of Massy, the teacher in charge of RRS at the College Blaise Pascal and the mentor in charge of the SAS project, dispatched among the youngsters



- A weblog implemented to support the experimentation (2). It explains the general context of the project, the European team, the team in Essonne, the French policy implemented to struggle against early school leaving, the results achieved and the useful contacts in France
- A guide published (1), reminding of the points explained in the weblog, making a summary of the experimentation

#### 4. The next step- from experimentation to the sustainability of the Success at School project in Essonne

The Success at School is repeated the year 2014-2015 with the City Hall of Massy in collaboration with the College Blaise Pascal. The teacher in charge of the RRS/SAS project has been keen to involve other youngsters. Teachers may organise “social or leisure activities” in the framework of an optional course called “Knowledge of professional life”. In this context a new “campaign for volunteering” was launched in November 2014. More than 30 youngsters attended and 15 registered. This time t 3 training sessions were offered in January 2015: before their compulsory internship and just after in order to make a closer link with this activity. They will be followed between February and June 2015 by monthly sessions.

At the same time, the City Hall of Massy has dispatched the Guide published for the SAS project in Essonne (1) among professionals working in the field of the Success at school network (*Réussite éducative en Essonne*). It offers to welcome the youngsters from the College, willing to be volunteers, in the weekly workshops they offer, each Wednesday afternoon. The guide published in Essonne (1) will be used both among the mentors (“specialised educators” or teachers) and the youngsters to explain the institutional context (struggling against early school leaving-ESL, both in France and Europe), the pedagogical approach (offering volunteering as an alternative pedagogical approach to struggle against ESL) and the example of a successful experimentation (the partnership together with the City Hall of Massy and the College Blaise Pascal).

The conditions are met to build the sustainability of the SAS pedagogy in France, inspired by the initiative implemented in Essonne: promoting volunteering among youngsters to re-engage them at school, enhancing social inclusion and allowing them to enrich formal and informal learning. The partnership built between a local authority (the City hall of Massy), a school (the College Blaise Pascal) and an organisation involved in Volunteering (the iriv ) for the SAS project to implement the SAS project in Essonne could inspire other experiences in France. The guide published may be used both a pedagogical tool and an example of good practice. It explains the pedagogical approach and gives all the steps to be followed to repeat the imitative. At the same time, the weblog designed (2) has been useful both to conduct the implementation of the SAS project in Essonne and as a dissemination tool for the future.

## Conclusion

The Success at school project has highlighted the link between Volunteering and Education. It has offered an alternative pedagogical strategy for youngsters facing difficulties at school or having already dropped up to re-engage with school on the basis of a positive experience which both improves their self-confidence but also allows them to acquire skills and competences needed at school but also for their future professional career.

The SAS project first designed a training programme in order to explain the main value of a voluntary experience and the concrete ways to promote such an involvement among youngsters, taking into account the skills and competences youngsters could be able to develop, making the link between school, association and the labour market. To complement, the SAS offered a training for mentors, understood in the broad sense of teachers, social workers, volunteers... in order to support youngsters to bridge the gap between "places" of learning (school, association...).

The next step for the Success at school project, and a crucial recommendation to be made to policy makers would be to integrate in the pedagogical strategies to combat Early School Leaving (ESL) Volunteering as an "official" alternative pedagogical approach to re-engage in education youngsters at risk of dropping out. Learning by doing has already been promoted in innovative pedagogical strategies. Learning by contributing to the Community might be tomorrow's main goal in education: being prepared to be a future worker (on the labour market) but also being an active citizen (in society).

## references

- (1) Halba Bénédicte (2014), "Guide - Réussir à l'école grâce au bénévolat – un projet européen en Essonne» published in partnership with the City hall of Massy and the College Blaise Pascal, Paris: iriv
- (2) iriv. (2014 ), Weblog implemented for the experimentation in Essonne, Paris: iriv  
Available on : <http://sas-essonne.blogspot.fr/>.