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# Volunteering – an alternative pedagogical strategy to combat Early School Leaving and to enhance Success at School

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Since the International Year of volunteering celebrated in 2001, the European Year of Volunteering of 2011 (YEV 2011) provided a new step in the recognition of volunteering as a non-formal and informal learning. In its communication on EU Policies and Volunteering (European Commission, 2011a), the EC states in its introduction that

“Volunteering is a creator of human and social capital. It is a pathway to integration and employment and a key factor for improving social cohesion. Above all, volunteering translates the fundamental values of justice, solidarity, inclusion and citizenship upon which Europe is founded into action”.

Volunteering was officially recognized on a European level thanks to the YEV 2011, since the Copenhagen process (2002), several European projects have enhanced this innovative approach in the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). The idea is to combine formal, non-formal and informal learning in order to enhance the Valuing Prior Learning process (VPL). In this perspective, a voluntary experience has been set forward as a main example of non-formal and informal learning and as a cornerstone in the VPL process.

We intend to show in our article that volunteering may also be considered as an alternative pedagogical strategy amongst pupils who face difficulties at school or who have already dropped out.

We will first present the European strategy to struggle against Early School Leaving (ESL) implemented in the past years on a European level by the European Commission and its impact on the French educative system meant to enhance an approach focused on skills and competences (first part).

We will then explain in which perspective volunteering may tackle the issue of struggling against ESL by enhancing social inclusion and by taking into account informal and non-formal learning, on the basis of the competences gained thanks to a voluntary experience (second part).

Lastly, we will illustrate this pedagogical approach by presenting a European project, the Success at School thanks to a volunteering (SAS) project, implemented in six EU countries (UK, France, Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal and Slovenia). The SAS aims at building a bridge between competences required at school and the ones implemented thanks to a voluntary initiative by the means of training offered to youngsters facing difficulties at school together with mentoring for their educators. We will present the first results achieved in France (third part).

### **Fighting against Early School Leaving and enhancing Success at School**

European education and training systems lose too many young people each year. They are not equipped with adequate skills for later life. Fighting against Early school leaving (ESL) has been recognised as one of the main challenges faced by European societies. For the majority of young people, leaving education and training prematurely is both a result of educational, psychological and social problems and a cause of continuous social insecurity (European Commission, 2011b). After outlining the European framework and the hypothesis of work of EU experts, we will present its impact on the French national educative system, emphasizing the competence approach.

#### **The European framework to struggle against ESL**

Early School Leaving (ESL) is defined as a “failure to complete upper secondary school or a compulsory schooling or to gain qualifications or school leaving certificates. At EU level, ESL rates are defined by the proportion of the population aged between 18 and 24 with only lower secondary education or less and who are no longer in education or training”. (European Commission, 2011c).

Early school leavers are therefore “those who have only achieved pre-primary, primary, lower secondary or a short upper secondary education of less than 2 years, and include those who have only a pre-vocational or vocational education which did not lead to an upper secondary certification”. While the term “early school leaving” includes “all forms of leaving education and training before completing upper secondary education or equivalents in vocational education and training”, the term “school drop-out” is used with a more restricted meaning as it refers to “discontin-

uing an on-going course in general or vocational education and training” (European Commission, 2011c).

Reducing ESL to less than 10 % by 2020 is a crucial target for achieving key objectives in the Europe 2020 strategy and one of the five benchmarks of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (European Commission, 2011b). The European strategy highlights three mutually reinforcing priorities: ‘smart growth’ based on knowledge and innovation, ‘sustainable growth’ promoting a greener economy and ‘inclusive growth’ fostering high employment and social cohesion. (European Commission, 2011c).

High rates of ESL are detrimental to the objective of making life-long learning a reality and a constraint to smart and inclusive growth in Europe as they increase the risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. As a consequence, ESL represents a waste of individual life opportunities and a waste of social and economic potential (European Commission, 2011c).

While the number of lesser qualified jobs is shrinking, European economies need highly skilled employees. Skill mismatches are of growing concern in most Member States as it may damage Europe’s future competitiveness. The European Agenda for New Skills and Jobs’ underlined the need to raise overall skill levels and to give priority to the education and training of those at the risk of economic and social exclusion (European Commission, 2011c). Fighting against Early school leaving is a main issue in this perspective.

At the moment, the objective given to EU countries - reducing the share of early school leavers to less than 10% Europe-wide by 2020 – has not been reached. In June 2011, the Education Council proposed a “framework for coherent, comprehensive and evidence based policies against early school leaving” to work together and to facilitate an exchange of practices and knowledge. Since 2010, with the Working programme Education and Training 2010, ESL has been defined as one of the five benchmarks and nearly all EU Member States plus Norway, Iceland, Croatia and Turkey have been working together (Education Council, 2011).

Policies to reduce early school leaving must combine education and social policy, youth work and health related aspects such as substance abuse, mental or emotional problems. Different levels of policies must be addressed, combining local, regional and national conditions. Most of the time, public policies do not address all obstacles to school success, focusing on compensatory measures such as second chance schools and investing insufficiently in the prevention of dropping out of school. (European Commission, 2011c).

As underlined by the EU experts in their working paper, the reasons for early school leaving are highly individual (EC, 2011c). Even though it is impossible to establish a single 'profile' of early school leavers or a comprehensive list of causes leading to a school failure, as a social phenomenon, ESL follows certain patterns (EC, 2011c). The EU experts have identified 7 main characteristics amongst early school leavers. They are in general more likely to: come from poor, socially disadvantaged and/or low educational backgrounds; come from disadvantaged minorities (such as Roma or other minority ethnic groups) or migrant backgrounds; belong to vulnerable groups, such as youth from a public care background, teenage mothers and those with physical and mental disabilities or other special educational needs (SEN); have to contribute to the family income or take adult responsibilities, such as parenthood or caring for family members; have had a history of disengagement from school, long-term absenteeism, truancy or expulsion; have achieved poorly in school and lack sufficient educational resilience; have often changed their place of residence or schools.

A central point underlined by the European Commission is an obvious relationship between socio-economic status and the risk of ESL. Nevertheless the mechanisms linking various kinds of disadvantage to ESL are not clearly recognized. EU experts concluded that ESL is a result of the interaction between home/family/community-based factors, school-based and systemic factors (EC, 2011c).

It is important to understand why some pupils might be excluded from school in order to offer appropriate public policies to enhance Success at School for all and not just for a minority. Since 2000, the main question which has been asked to policy makers in the field of education is "What is important for pupils to know to become educated citizens?"

### The French strategy to enhance Success at School

Both the European framework to struggle against Early School Leaving and the International programme to measure performance of pupils (PISA) have had an impact on the French educative system to enhance Success at School in the past ten years. A report (Thelot, 2004) was published focused on skills and competences pupils might gain in order to become future citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century after a national debate on the future of school in France.

It sets forward five main principles for the educative system (Thelot, 2004, pp. 38-39): preparing all pupils to knowledge, skills & competences and "social" rules in order to know how to behave in social and professional life; addressing all individuals, in order to enhance "diversity of excel-

lences”, there shouldn’t be any single “national” partner enhancing success factors combining educative, psychological and moral components; including equality of chances; being able to rationally use the pupils’ own resources.

To achieve these principles, three main requirements are underlined (Thelot, 2004, pp. 31-32). The first is that school participates to the overall education of youngsters and has to offer the material and theoretical conditions to enhance an appropriate pedagogical practice. The second is to make sure that pupils master common knowledge and competences. The third is that school must be fair enough to enhance an efficient pedagogy favouring diversity. Three main missions are assigned to school accordingly (Thelot, 2004, p. 34). Firstly, educating which means to set some agreed “codes” to prevent any inappropriate behaviour, which might lead to a failure (or a drop out) of pupils. Secondly teaching whose goal is to make sure that all pupils master a common “package” of knowledge and competences required to be prepared to succeed “in life” and to succeed in “one’s life”. Thirdly enhancing social cohesion, which implies to struggle against social inequalities while organising learning in order to achieve excellence whatever the background of the pupils.

Therefore five main objectives have to be pursued for building a successful educative system (Thelot, 2004, pp. 38-40). The first one is subsidiarity: school is not the only place for learning; it has to be complemented by other forms of learning. The second one is continuity: lifelong learning has to be taken into account as a “second chance” or a “continuous opportunity” as learning is an on-going process. The third one is the necessary update of the knowledge: learning has to be adapted taking into account the requirements of modern life and its many changes. The fourth one is to give a precise definition of knowledge, “know-how” (competences) and “know how to be” (behaviour) required for any citizen in the 21st Century. The fifth objective is feasibility: any mission given to the educative system must be realistic and operational in order to be achieved.

On the basis of these theoretical principles, the Thelot report offered a “common basis for knowledge and competences” required for any pupil aged from 6 to 16 years (compulsory education in France) with different steps to be overcome according to the age of the pupils. This aim integrates the PISA approach, with a level to be achieved in the 3 main domains assessed by the international programme: reading literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy. Three main steps, mainly linked to the age of the pupils are: 5-7 years for the basic level, 8-11 years for an implementation, 12-15 years for an improvement. The educative system combines compulsory competences (speaking, reading, writing, calculating,

living together, speaking a foreign language, mastering ICT) with optional disciplines (such as sport, arts, ...) (Thelot, 2004, pp. 52-56).

One main point that should be emphasised is that a bridge has to be built between “formal learning” acquired at school and all the “non-formal and informal learning” acquired outside school. This should be a successful factor for pupils with less classical profiles, more resistant to traditional ways of learning or for whom the conditions for efficient learning are not matched (violent background, lack of pedagogical equipment or absence of teacher). This has been a major concern of the Lifelong Learning programme (LLP) launched at the European Council in Lisbon in 2000.

### **Volunteering as a means to enhance social inclusion and to enrich formal, informal and non-formal learning**

Whatever the results achieved by pupils (positive or negative) at the end of their compulsory education, they must be aware very soon that they will have to update their knowledge and improve their skills & competences all their life in order to fit with the new requirements of the labour market and to adapt to the many changes they will be faced to in their professional life. This long-term approach is a key issue of the European programme launched by the EU in 2000 in Lisbon, the Lifelong Learning programme (LLP). After mentioning how volunteering might be a means to enhance social inclusion, we will explain how volunteering may also be considered as an example of non-formal and informal learning and how a voluntary experience enables the acquirement and/or development of transversal competences enhanced by the European Union in its 8 key competences (EC, 2006).

### **Volunteering as a means to struggle against social inclusion**

Social exclusion is a relatively new concept in social science (Schröer, 2004). The phenomenon was referred to as poverty or in terms of living standards and opportunities linked to social class. The concept of poverty emerged from an Anglophone context (UK, Ireland) while “social exclusion” was first used in France in the 1970’s as a reference to those people excluded from social insurance provisions. The concept has since evolved and is now defined as resulting from complex interplay of several factors of “post-modern societies”: change of family structures, with many single parents, mainly women (family factor); the decline of the protective role of the community (social factor); the deconstruction of state welfare systems (institutional factor); the decline of low-skilled jobs with the impact of globalisation (macro-economic factor); declining in-

come averages of the lower middle-class with the increase of “poor workers” (micro-economic factor); the rise of the minority issue in most European countries together with the integration policies (political factor). The social scientist Room (Guidikova, 2001) gives the following definition of social exclusion *“the process of becoming detached from the organisations and communities of which society is composed and from the rights and obligations that they embody”*.

The European Commission created a set of indicators enhancing risk of social exclusion taking into account economic factors, geographical status and education level. The aim was to measure the risk of people in the EU states to become excluded in order to offer public policies. The economic factor, measured by the poverty rate (the number of people living below a threshold of 60% of average national income) affects a disproportionate number of children and young people, elderly, unemployed people (long term unemployment) and single parents. The geographical factor is the regional context where people are living especially in deprived areas with no or little infrastructure of social and cultural services and a high level of violence is a second main “risk factor”. The education level underlines the high number of early school leavers and youngsters not in education or training or work (NEET) in the main “group at risk of social exclusion”.

Through volunteering, various aspects of social exclusion are being addressed (Davis Smith et al., 2004). Firstly, volunteering helps to combat feelings of personal isolation, which for some people can be a key factor in their experience of social exclusion. Secondly, it empowers individuals, giving them the confidence and the skills to change their environment and themselves. Thirdly, it enhances people’s sense of self-worth in getting involved and making a contribution to society. Fourthly, thanks to volunteering, people acquire a range of hard (vocational) and soft (interpersonal) skills and so they enhance their opportunities to find a job (impact on employability). Fifthly, for some people volunteering provides a route to employment, for others it provides an alternative to employment with a professional experience (impact on unemployment). Last but not least, volunteering has a wider impact on the symptoms and causes of social exclusion by providing services, in many cases to socially excluded groups, by challenging stereotypes and by bringing together people from different backgrounds.

**Volunteering as a means to enrich one’s social and human capital**  
Volunteering as a means of enrichment was underlined by the European Commission at the end of the European Year of Volunteering (Euro-

pean Commission, 2011) stating *“recognition of the competences and skills gained through volunteering as non-formal learning experiences is essential as a motivating factor for the volunteers and one that creates bridges between volunteering and education”*.

Volunteering is not a marginal phenomenon. In 2011, there were between 92 to 94 million adults involved in volunteering in the 27 countries of the European Union. This, in turn, implies that around 22% to 23% of Europeans aged over 15 years are engaged in voluntary work (GHK, 2010). Being a volunteer is a means to acquire skills and competences. A European project, under the framework of the Lifelong Learning programme, the VAEB project (iriv & alii, 2003-2006), has been pioneer in this perspective. It designed a tool and method to identify and assess a voluntary experience. A portfolio and guide were implemented by a European team gathering 7 EU members (France, Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland and UK) to identify a volunteer's experience, to express it in terms of competences in order for the volunteers to enhance a professional or educative future (Halba, 2006, pp. 135-145; Halba & alii, 2007).

On a collective level, volunteering is linked to the idea of active citizenship and social participation - social capital. The concept of social capital has been studied by sociologists as the main consequence of voluntary involvement. Helmut K. Anheier (2005) defines social capital as *“an individual characteristic and refers to the sum of actual and potential resources that can be mobilized through membership in organisations and through personal networks. People differ in the size and span of their social networks and number of memberships. Social capital captures the norms of reciprocity and trust that are embodied in networks of civic associations, many of them in the non-profit field, and other forms of socializing”*. Volunteering is seen as an important factor for gathering people from different backgrounds - age, sex, education, and culture – together, to build up social connections and social ties. Volunteering is therefore an essential resource for social understanding and social cohesion, inclusion and integration.

On an individual level, volunteers acquire and develop specific skills and competences – human capital (Halba, 2006 & Halba, 2012). The concept of human capital is an economic concept focused on skills and competences (Riboud, 1975). In a lifelong learning perspective, meant to build a knowledge society, it is important to be able to identify and value all the experiences and knowledge acquired in different places: school, work, social activities in order to express them in terms of skills and competences that will be understandable and valued in the labour market but also for social and educative purpose.



### A volunteering to gain key competences

Whatever the nature of learning (formal, non-formal, or informal), a very important issue in the lifelong learning process remains the acquisition of competences:

“/.../ key competences in the shape of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to each context are fundamental for each individual in a knowledge-based society. They provide added value for the labour market, social cohesion and active citizenship by offering flexibility and adaptability, satisfaction and motivation /.../” (European Commission, 2006).

The key competences mentioned above combine basic (traditional competences) and more innovative competences (new basis competences to prepare the citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century). (European Commission, 2006).

On the one hand, four “basic competences” are defined or updated taking into account the needs of modern society. The first one is the “communication in the mother tongue”, linked to the former basic competence “reading, writing, speaking in the mother tongue”; a focus is now made also on the expression of the pupils as underlined in the French “Common basis of knowledge and competence” (EC 2006 & Thelot, 2004, pp. 52-56). The second key competence is the “communication in foreign languages”, previously “reading, writing, speaking in a foreign language”; a special focus is made on the expression and interactions with others. The third key competence is the “mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology” involving an “understanding of the changes caused by human activity and the responsibility of each individual as a citizen” (European Commission, 2006). This dimension has become a key aspect of the French educative system from primary school onwards (Thelot, 2004, pp. 52-56). The fourth key competence is the “digital competence”, involving the “confident and critical use of information society technology (IST) and thus basic skills in information and communication technology (ICT)” (European Commission, 2006). This has also become a priority from primary school onwards in the French educative system (Thelot, 2004, pp. 52-56) and a crucial source of knowledge outside school (Perissol, 2005, pp. 9-10).

On the other hand, four additional competences are added, being defined as transversal ones. The fifth key competence is entitled “learning to learn” (European Commission, 2006). It is very much linked to the ability of pupils to find answers by themselves, to acquire some autonomy towards learning. This has become in France a main concern for teachers in the curriculum they are offered in French School for training teachers (*Ecoles Supérieures du Professorat et de l'Éducation- ESPE*).

The sixth key competence is the “social and civic competence”. It includes an “understanding of codes of conduct and customs in different environments”. Civic competence, and particularly “knowledge of social and political concepts and structures (democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights)”, should enhance an active and democratic participation (European Commission, 2006). It is also taken into account in the French educative system from secondary school onwards with learning entitled “training a person and educating a citizen” (Thelot, 2004, pp. 52-56). The seventh key competence is the “sense of initiative and entrepreneurship”. It is the “foundation for acquiring more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity”. It includes “awareness of ethical values and the promotion of good governance” (European Commission, 2006). It is enhanced in the French educative system through an intern of one month in a firm or organization for pupils aged 14-15 years, entitled “Discovery of firm and trade” (Thelot, 2004, pp. 52-56). The eight key competence is the “cultural awareness and expression” (European Commission, 2006). It is enhanced in the French educative system from the first years at school with optional teachings called “arts” or “craft work”. (Thelot, 2004, pp. 52-56).

The eight key competences are interdependent. The emphasis is on “critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking and constructive management of feelings” (European Commission, 2006). The “transversal” competences that were added to the “basic” ones are crucial if we consider a voluntary experience. Volunteering is a way of “learning to learn” as volunteers have to frequently adapt to various contexts and diverse demands expressed by the audiences of the association. A voluntary involvement is also the best way to acquire and develop “social and civic competences”. A volunteering is also the most relevant experience to develop a “sense of initiative and entrepreneurship”. Last but not least a voluntary experience is also the best way to acquire “cultural awareness and expression”. (Halba, 2006, pp. 135-145; Halba & alii, 2007). It has been a main concern in many EU countries to promote this kind of experience among youngsters in order for them to acquire specific skills and competences that could be valued in an educative or professional path (Halba & alii, 2001; Halba & alii, 2007).

We would like to illustrate this innovative approach, combining the competence approach in educative systems (both on a European and national level) and the non-formal and informal learning enhanced by the Copenhagen process, by explaining the aims and objectives of a European project, the Success at School thanks to a volunteering (SAS) project.

## **Volunteering, an alternative strategy to struggle against Early School leaving – the Success at School project**

An associative involvement has become more and more valued in Europe, notably with the European year of the volunteer in 2011, with one main recommendation made by the European Commission to Member States being to make better use of the potential of volunteering in the recognition of the competences and skills gained through volunteering as non-formal learning experiences. This recognition is essential as a motivating factor for the volunteers and one that creates bridges between volunteering and education (European Commission, 2011). We will explain the three main challenges faced by the Success at School project together with the results achieved in France on the basis of the experimentation implemented in Essonne thanks to the partnership of a secondary school (College Blaise Pascal) and the City Hall of Massy both convinced by the Community approach enhanced by the project.

### **Involving in volunteering youngsters with diverse profiles – a first challenge of the SAS project**

The Success at School project gathers different countries with various educational, economic and social backgrounds together with different backgrounds both in terms of proportion of Early School Leavers (ESL) and tradition in volunteering: United Kingdom has a high tradition of volunteering and an average proportion of early school leavers (13.5%); France has a medium-high tradition of volunteering and 11.6 % of ESL; Bulgaria has a low tradition of volunteering and 11.5% of ESL; Slovenia has a medium-high tradition of volunteering and low proportion of Early School Leavers (4.4%); Italy has a medium tradition of volunteering and an average proportion of ESL (17.6%); Portugal has a low level of volunteering and a high level of ESL (20.8%).

The first main challenge of the Success at School (SAS) project was to address youngsters aged 14 to 20 years, who have already left school (not in education, nor employment nor in training, the so-called NEET) or are affected by early school leaving (ESL) according to the European terminology. They are not the most popular profile of volunteers among youngsters. The average profile of a volunteer as it appears in the European studies (GHK, 2010)- male, with an employment, middle-age, educated, belonging to more privileged socio-professional categories- underline the close link between integrated people and involvement in a voluntary action. Moreover, if volunteering among youngsters has been promoted since 1996 on a European level with the Youth Programme (and its emblematic European Voluntary Service) once more, it is suggested that the

levels of education are correlated to higher rates of participation in voluntary organisations. Students (in Higher education) integrate volunteering into their future considering that it might be a fundamental step to prepare their social and professional life. On the contrary, students (in Secondary education) facing difficulties in school or with a more difficult social background have not yet become concerned with volunteering nor have they become main target of the national policies. (Halba & alii, 2001). Therefore there might be a form of “discrimination” (including “self – discrimination”) in a voluntary involvement (Halba, 2011). Several European projects have been implemented in the past years in order to change the perspectives and to enhance the involvement, and so the inclusion, of more diverse profiles of volunteers especially amongst migrants and ethnic minorities as a means of integration (Halba, 2014).

Volunteering may be seen as too exclusive (Davis Smith et al., 2004). Several psychological barriers have to be overcome. Firstly, myths exist that equate volunteering with activities undertaken by certain “mainstream” groups within society and a narrow range of activities within formal organisational settings. If there are still under-represented groups in volunteers (migrants and ethnic minorities, disabled people, ex-offenders...), this stereotypical image of volunteering has been challenged as alternatives (often informal) forms of volunteering gain in visibility and recognition and as organisations succeeded in involving volunteers from previously under-represented groups. Secondly, people’s perception of time both the amount of their “spare time” available and the time demands of volunteering may create other barriers for involvement. In under-represented groups, some of them (disabled people, ex-offenders...) were reluctant to regular schedules. They found it hard to sign up for regimented activities. Thirdly, a lack of confidence is a key barrier. It is exacerbated for individuals who have experienced exclusion in other areas of life and when volunteering takes place in unfamiliar environments. Fourthly, prejudices and stereotypes held by staff, other volunteers and service users put some people off staying involved. Fifthly, the fear of losing welfare benefits may be a significant barrier.

Taking into account these specific barriers to be overcome, the Success at School project designed a pedagogy based on training for youngsters together with a mentoring for educators working with them, understood in a broad sense - teacher, social workers, volunteers in associations offering school mentoring.

### Designing a pedagogical approach for youngsters, combining a practical and a theoretical content- second challenge of the SAS project

Whatever the school system or national tradition in the field of volunteering, the Success at School project aimed at designing an alternative pedagogical approach for youngsters facing difficulties at school, based on a voluntary experience to help them change their image and perspectives, to be proud of themselves, self-confident in valorising the special learning outcomes gained through a voluntary experience.

The second main challenge of the SAS project was to offer an appropriate training to youngsters together with a mentoring for their educators in order to enhance the sustainability of the SAS strategy, combining a practical and theoretical content in order to fully involve youngsters and enhance the empowerment process. The conception of the training course together with the pedagogical approach values the recreational aspects of teaching in order to break away from the classic model (role playing, learning how to act in certain situations...). It is inspired by the project-based learning (PBL) defined as being (Thomas, 2000): *“a model that organises learning around projects (.../...) that involves students in design, problem-solving, decision making, or investigative activities; gives students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over extended periods of time; and culminate in realistic products or presentations”*. John W. Thomas offers a set of five main criteria in order for a project to be considered as a PBL: “centrality, driving question, constructive investigations, autonomy, and realism. ».

In the SAS approach, youngsters are put in a position of being actors. Together they design an associative project they will be able to implement among existing associations or in an association they could create. It is possible for youngsters to create their own association in France, in the framework of the junior association promoted by the Ligue de l'Enseignement. This is the “applied part” of the proposed training course.

The theoretical content offered to youngsters tackles six main issues. The first one is to define volunteering, to introduce the volunteers (their profiles, their main motivations), to discuss the values/notions linked to voluntary involvement (solidarity, altruism, exchange...). The second issue is to explain the role and status of a volunteer and how a voluntary experience may be a way to become a citizen (being aware of the associative rights and so the democratic process) and to better know how associations are organised and run. The third issue is to explain the educative dimension of a voluntary involvement – a focus is made on the skills and competences required for a pupil and the skills and competences required for

a volunteer. The fourth issue is to make the link with the professional dimension of a voluntary experience – the portfolio process is explained, the most efficient way to identify a voluntary experience (and its different tasks) and to express it in terms of competences to think of a professional future. The social dimension of volunteering is highlighted in a sixth issue – a voluntary experience enhances social inclusion (learning life values, resisting exclusion, a vehicle for integration). The cultural dimension and the promotion of intercultural exchanges and dialogue implied by a voluntary experience are emphasised in a sixth key issue which insists on the diversity enhanced by a voluntary involvement through meeting people of different ages, diverse social and educative profiles.

### **Building a bridge with key competences - a third challenge of the SAS project**

The last challenge of the SAS project was to build a bridge between competences required at school (formal learning) and the ones implemented thanks to a voluntary initiative (non-formal and informal learning) with the aim to develop an alternative way to learn, based on informal and non-formal learning, through volunteering, and so to build a bridge between formal learning acquired at school and informal and non-formal learning acquired thanks to volunteering (Halba, 2012).

In the training designed by the SAS project, a link has been made between the key competences enhanced by the European Commission (Europe Commission, 2006), the competences required at school with the example of the French educative system (Thelot, 2005) and the competences gained thanks to volunteering on the basis of a portfolio designed to assess a voluntary experience in a professional perspective in the framework of a previous European project, VAEB (iriv & alii, 2007).

Key competences	Competences at school	Competence in the association
Communication in the mother tongue	Fundamental basic skill: literacy Learning the national language/the mother tongue may be different (for pupils with migrant background)	To be able to answer the questions asked by the public of the association both in an oral way and in a written way
Communication in foreign languages	Fundamental basic skill: language Learning a foreign language (English for most of the European countries, another language for English people)	To be able to explain to "foreigners" the main aim of the association, its activities, and its outcomes...

Key competences	Competences at school	Competence in the association
Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology	Fundamental basic skill: numeracy Mathematics from primary school level onwards	To be able to build a budget, a balance sheet, to collect the financial data concerning the association (resources/expenses)
Digital competence	Fundamental basic skills in information and communication technologies (ICT) Access to computer since the primary school	To be able to develop the website of the association, a weblog to enhance communication with its public
Learning to learn	Learning to learn supports all learning activities	To be able to explain to other volunteers the tasks to be fulfilled, to develop any document to explain the content of the mission
Social and civic competences	Some “optional” activities meant to enhance a collective work or “civic learning”	To be able to raise awareness on a specific problem in society among the general public To be able to defend a cause
Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship	Any activity meant to develop critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem-solving, risk assessment, decision-taking and constructive management	To be able to create and implement an activity among the association To be able to create one’s own association
Cultural awareness and expression	Most of creative activities such as painting, drawing, theatre,	To be able to express a different perspective considering a given context To be able to involve different cultures

The innovative approach offered by the SAS project lies in several points. Various pedagogical approaches have been focused on the inclusion of learners but none so far on volunteering as a means to do so as early school leavers didn’t fit with the “traditional” profile of volunteers (Halba & alii, 2001). The training offered to youngsters is adapted taking into account the national specificities or needs expressed by the educational system. A collaborative work is promoted among youngsters such as a tandem gathering early school leavers and pupils facing school difficulties. Different testimonies of pupils are collected reflecting the diversity of their profiles, those having left school, others who are facing difficulties, those having met difficulties and who finally succeeded, others who succeeded despite social difficulties. To enhance the empowerment process, youngsters are not considered as “just public” (passive role) but as “main actors” (active role) following strategies already implemented among migrants and ethnic minorities (Halba, 2014). On the basis of the experience gained by youngsters thanks to their voluntary involvement, they are asked to

express it in terms of competences, providing any document or justification of the experience. A special focus is made both on the profile of the target groups (youngsters affected by early school leaving) and the main barriers/obstacles faced in expressing this experience in terms of skills & competences. Some tools and methods already experimented in previous projects are used (Halba & alii, 2007). A focus is made on the specific competences acquired thanks to volunteering: the eight key competences are enhanced (European Commission, 2006).

### Results of the French experimentation implemented in Essonne

The experimentation in Essonne (France) was implemented within the national programme for Early School Leavers – “Réussite éducative” in Massy (Essonne, Ile de France, France).

The first trial of the SAS project was conducted in partnership with the City Hall of Massy among educators working directly for the City hall or indirectly for social centres in Massy. They were chosen according to their interest in the SAS project and especially in any new/innovative method in non-formal education for ESLs to prevent/struggle against 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 to the experimentation (on a voluntary basis) in complement to their other activities; any former experience in the field of school mentoring. All the educators had also a national accreditation for working with ESLs (special educators). They did not have enough time to convince the youngsters they worked with, mainly already school leavers, to join the experimentation and this first attempt didn't reach any conclusion, the educators could not convince any youngster.

A second trial of the SAS project was conducted this time in partnership with the City Hall of Massy (in Essonne) and the College Blaise Pascal (Secondary School). Personal contact existed between the director in charge of social cohesion (in the City Hall) and a teacher coordinator of the “réseau réussite scolaire (RRS)” (Success at School network) in the College Blaise Pascal. It took the form of participation in a jury held after the compulsory internship youngsters have to follow in the French educative system, during the last year of college. This second experience was implemented on a voluntary basis among youngsters aged 14 to 16 years. The first meeting was held in March, together with their teacher, coordinator of the RRS in the College. 22 pupils 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 pupils, all girls, aged between 14 and 16 attended the three sessions, on a Wednesday, 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 background. During the practical part of the session, they were asked to work on an associative project they would be interested to implement in their neighbourhood, in two groups. 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 both shy and interested to work with an adult they did not know, who was formerly introduced to them during the introductory session.

The second session was dedicated to the educative and professional dimension of a volunteering. The link was once more made with their internship and included 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 a memory on their intern period. 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. 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 will use to work with the children. The first group decided to use board games with a selection 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 to families with disabled parents since 2008, including children. Another association was selected ‘*Choeur qui mouve*’, created in the past two years, whose main object 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.

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 pupils have definitely had a positive impact on the pupils. The combination of theoretical and practical content for the pedagogy designed by the Success at School 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 don’t know, who might need your support. Another crucial point was to make a link between a voluntary experience and the internship they have to do at the end of their compulsory education, considered a contact with “professional life”.

The Success at School should be repeated the year 2014-2015 among the College Blaise Pascal as the teacher in charge of the RRS would like

to involve other pupils as teachers are given some extra-hours to organise “social or leisure activities”. The City Hall of Massy offered to welcome the pupils from the College, willing to be volunteers, in the weekly workshops they offer, each Wednesday afternoon. The institutional context is built for the sustainability of the SAS pedagogy: promoting volunteering among youngsters to re-engage them at school, enhancing social inclusion and allowing them to enrich formal and informal learning.

## Conclusion

The strategies to enhance Success at School have been constant concerns both on European and national levels for policy makers. The PISA programme, on an international level, has triggered competition among countries by carrying out, every three years, since 2000, a “world’s global metric for quality, equity and efficiency in school education”. Whatever the levels (international, European or national), the crucial question asked to policy makers in the field of education is: “What is important for citizens to know and be able to do?”

We firstly recalled the different public policies implemented in Europe and in France, to struggle against early school leaving and to enhance Success at School, in order to improve the assessment of their pupils, published every three years with the PISA surveys.

We then explained how volunteering could be a useful means to enhance social inclusion and how a voluntary experience could be considered as an emblematic example of non-formal and informal learning (European Year for Volunteering, 2011). The link was made between the competences required for a pupil and the ones gained through volunteering.

Our last part was focused on the practical implementation of a pedagogical approach using volunteering as a means to enhance social inclusion (by involving untraditional profiles of volunteers) and to enrich their non-formal and informal learning, setting forward a Comenius project, the Success at School thanks to volunteering. This European project supported by the European Commission was implemented in 6 EU countries (France, Bulgaria, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and the United Kingdom). The results for France were presented.

Volunteering might be a successful strategy to re-engage pupils by making a difference with other forms of learning and by changing the image pupils may have of themselves at school but also in society. By being volunteers, youngsters can make a difference at school and in society.

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