

The parents' toolbox/ La mallette des parents

A social experiment in education (2008-2010)

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➤ The experiment's ID card

- **Country:** France
- **Focus:** Children and their parents in 6th grade in low-income schools
- **Experiment:** 54 junior secondary schools (collèges) in three voluntary school districts (Val-de-Marne, Seine Saint-Denis and Seine-et-Marne)
- **Duration:** experiment: 2008-09 and 2009-10, continued in some schools; new experiment for the 9th grade in 2010-2011.
- **Leading organization:** school districts and Ministry of Education.
- **Funding:** 1000-1500€ per school.

▾ Principles

- Aims at **supporting parents** in becoming active partners in achieving success in school attainment of their children
- **Assumption** that parents who are better informed about and more involved in the school activities of their children are more likely to positively motivate and guide their children towards success in school
- A **virtual toolbox**: a series of thematic guidelines for schools to put in place to better inform parents about the school life and how parents can contribute to the success of their children
- More than to inform, it aims at stimulating their interest, cooperation and most important **trust** in the school and its staff

➤ Origins

- Project designed by the Academy of Creteil, a region east of Paris which contains some of the **most deprived suburbs** of the capital city
- Funded from a national experimental fund for youth (**Fonds d'expérimentation pour la jeunesse**)
- Part of a broad national strategy to **increase parent involvement** in schools, especially low-income school
- Parents seem less interested in what is happening in their children school when they enter the **6th grade** (age 11-12)

➤ Main activities

- Toolbox provides schools with material to be used during informal discussion sessions with parents
- Series of **three meetings** within the school facilities about
 - The organization of the school
 - Practical information about financial support for meals or a scholarship
 - The curriculum, assessment, etc
 - Issues parents should enquire about from their children to identify demotivation and risk of dropping out
 - How to communicate with the pedagogical staff about the situation of their children
- Emphasis on atmosphere of the sessions
- Translation
- Content designed by the school inspectorate in collaboration with sociologists and other government branches

➤ Getting in touch with the parents

- First (crucial) step
- Mailing, student workbook, email, phoning, sms
- Refreshment after each meeting
- Distribution of a DVD, explaining the initiative, in 10 languages
- A series of adult learning sessions of two hours about ICT, “being parents” and literacy

➤ Key results

- A relatively light experiment
- Behavior of children improved
- Rate of absenteeism dropped down
- Peer effect
- Nothing (statistically) significant in terms of grades
- Invited parents better understood the school issues
- Relationship between school and parents improved
 - Teachers started to use less stigmatizing ways of liaising with the parents

➤ Mainstreaming the experiment and thinking about further experiments

- The randomized evaluation
- Extension to 1300 schools in 2010-2011
- Second experiment in 9th grade
- Designing a new experiment
 - A parents toolbox for K-5
 - Including content on cognitive skills to support learning the 3Rs
 - A « child-parent center »?