



Association for the Development of Education in Africa

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**Field Training and Support for Young Volunteer Teachers
in Basic Education in Niger:
The Experience of the Paul Gérin-Lajoie Foundation**

**Working Document
DRAFT**

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Acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| ADEA | Association for the Development of Education in Africa |
| CONFEMEN | Conférence des Ministres de l'Éducation des pays ayant le Français en partage |
| MLA | Monitoring Learning Achievement |
| NESIS | National Education Statistical Information Systems |
| PASEC | Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Éducatifs des Pays de la CONFEMEN |
| PRSP | Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers |
| SACMEQ | Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality |
| SAP | Structural Adjustment Programs |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |

ABSTRACT

The Paul Gérin-Lajoie Foundation observed the learning conditions of pupils in 19 rural schools in Niger, finding that some teachers were serving only as “babysitters”, while others were trying to teach some lessons but were not sufficiently knowledgeable about the course content. There was a great deal of absenteeism in these classes, and in some villages the parents no longer wanted to entrust their children to these teachers because they were not learning anything. This paper analyzes procedures for training principals and education volunteers that were conceived as part of an action research project and implemented in the field to help improve the quality of instruction. The results seem very encouraging in terms of teachers’ motivation and their relations with school principals and in terms of what pupils learn. The second part of the paper concerns the *Éducateurs sans frontières* (Educators without Borders) program, a network of volunteer Canadian educators who provide support to their counterparts in the school systems of Southern countries. The aim is to promote the sharing of educational knowledge and know-how to support the development of basic education. In addition to Haiti, three African countries, Senegal, Mali and Niger, have benefited from this program.

1. EXPERIENCES OF FIELD TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEER TEACHERS IN THE SAY REGION

1.1. Overview of the issues

1. As part of the Paul Gérin-Lajoie Foundation's Program of Support for Niger's Schools (Programme d'appui aux écoles du Niger – PAEN), we studied the learning conditions of pupils in 19 rural schools in the Say region.

2. Our classroom observations showed that some teachers were doing no more than "babysitting", while others tried to teach lessons but did not know the course content sufficiently and as a result were teaching their students falsehoods. There was a great deal of absenteeism in these classes, and in some villages the parents no longer wished to entrust their children to these teachers because they were not learning anything.

3. The problem facing us was that of classes taught by volunteer teachers: young people recruited to replace retiring teachers and to increase educational provision, particularly in rural areas. These young people are recruited a few weeks before the beginning of the school year and assigned to teaching positions without any preparation. In the schools we studied, the principals were trying to improve the situation by giving the volunteer teachers a little bit of help, but the task was too big for them alone.

1.2. The first experience

4. In February, to try to save what was left of the school year, we asked the Inspectorate for Basic Education 1 to quickly organize a training course for the thirty-odd volunteer teachers in the schools we were studying.

5. This first experience was an intensive training course held from March 13 to 19, 2002. Our training personnel had, following their reflexes, reproduced what they had seen in their own training, giving lecture-based courses focusing on the transmission of theory. This approach allowed the volunteer teachers to acquire some theoretical concepts, but its impact was restricted to the cognitive level and it steered our trainees toward highly stereotyped approaches to lesson preparation.

6. At the monitoring-evaluation stage, we noted that, despite its limitations, this first experience had produced several changes for the better in the classroom behavior of the volunteer teachers. For the first time, they had been introduced to the rudiments of the profession and given some notion of their role as teachers.

1.3. Action-research project on methods of training volunteer teachers in our 19 schools

7. Our evaluation of the first experience became the starting point for reconsideration and the implementation of an action-research project on training methods for the volunteer teachers in our schools.

8. We made the following assumptions:

- We are dealing with adults who should be the main actors of their own training.
- Skills are developed in action, and learning comes through thinking about experience.

9. In view of the constraints we were facing, we opted for intensive basic training supplemented by on-the-job monitoring and support. Working as part of the school teaching staff, volunteer teachers have to take charge of their own training through exchanges with colleagues, teamwork and reflection on teaching practices. In short, they must find the source of their training in their day-to-day teaching experience.

10. The strategy was to provide training first for the principals of our schools, to prepare them to develop and manage, in collaboration with their teaching staff, a plan including both training for volunteer teachers and professional development for accredited teachers. In a second stage, it was to be our duty to support the implementation of these plans by revitalizing and restructuring the “teacher units” (*cellules d’animation pédagogique*) and providing basic training activities.

11. The training course for principals was held on July 17-19, 2002. During the course, the participants drew up an initial training plan for the volunteer teachers. The aim was to determine the essential components of an intensive training course in basic teaching for volunteer teachers who have no training whatsoever but do have a year of practical experience. We needed to identify the strict minimum required to satisfy the need for instruction in our classrooms.

12. Six broad topics were selected and became the basis for the second intensive training course for the 35 volunteer teachers in our 19 schools (as well as 17 other volunteers from nearby villages).

13. This course, which was held at Say, September 2-30, 2002, mainly took the form of workshops, situation scenarios and consideration of teaching practices. We made the volunteers the central figures of their own training and immersed them in a context of active, participatory educational methods – a context that also gave them food for thought!

14. The second component consisted of monitoring and support provided by advisers and one-day training sessions. Each school’s teaching staff took part in eight such one-day sessions during the 2002-03 school year.

15. Over the course of the year 2003 our system gradually came up to speed, and in June the school teaching teams presented their training plans for 2003-04. As a result, our volunteer teachers (of whom there are now more than 60) received basic training while accredited teachers and principals participated in professional development programs. These activities took place in September 2003 and will be followed by about ten one-day training sessions during the 2003-04 school year.

16. The monitoring-evaluation during the year will guide our next year's program and help us establish tools to evaluate the impact of training for volunteers. We intend to take a very pragmatic approach, and our methods and procedures are constantly changing. Our goal is to improve learning conditions and educational quality for the pupils in our schools.

1.4. Provisional conclusion

17. As a provisional conclusion, we provide here a few indicators of the impact of these experiences in training our volunteer teachers.

- The volunteers in our schools are motivated, display more professional behavior and see themselves in the role of teachers.
- Less conflict between principals and volunteers.
- Less pupil absenteeism. Parents' associations have informed us that the children find their school activities more interesting.
- More effective learning: parents have observed that the pupils in our schools are ahead of children of the same age in neighboring villages.
- A side effect: training volunteer teachers as part of the school teaching staff had positive consequences for the performance of the entire school (see Table I, which compares the 2002 and 2003 results of the schools supported by the PAEN).

Table 1 Comparison of results of schools supported by the PAEN, 2002 and 2003 sessions

| No. | School | Examination and purpose | 2002 session | | | 2003 session | | | Difference 2003/2002 (%) |
|--------|----------------|-------------------------|--------------|--------|---------------|--------------|--------|---------------|--------------------------|
| | | | Took exam | Passed | Pass rate (%) | Took exam | Passed | Pass rate (%) | |
| 1 | Dokimana | CFEPD | 57 | 14 | 24.56% | 41 | 33 | 80.48% | + 55.92 |
| | | Admission to 6th grade | 57 | 14 | 24.56% | 41 | 33 | 80.48% | + 55.92 |
| 2 | Djongoré | CFEPD | 18 | 11 | 61.11% | 26 | 25 | 90.15% | + 35.04 |
| | | Admission to 6th grade | 18 | 11 | 61.11% | 26 | 25 | 96.15% | + 35.04 |
| 3 | Bokki | CFEPD | 29 | 14 | 48.27% | 33 | 27 | 81.81% | + 33.54 |
| | | Admission to 6th grade | 29 | 14 | 48.27% | 33 | 27 | 81.81% | + 33.54 |
| 4 | Karé | CFEPD | 28 | 14 | 50% | 18 | 16 | 88.88% | + 38.88 |
| | | Admission to 6th grade | 28 | 13 | 46.42% | 18 | 16 | 88.88% | + 42.46 |
| 5 | Dalwèye | CFEPD | 23 | 21 | 91.30% | 20 | 20 | 100% | + 08.7 |
| | | Admission to 6th grade | 23 | 20 | 80.95% | 20 | 20 | 100% | + 19.05 |
| 6 | Doguel Kaïna | CFEPD | 20 | 14 | 70% | 21 | 10 | 47.61% | - 22.39 |
| | | Admission to 6th grade | 20 | 14 | 70% | 21 | 10 | 47.61% | - 22.39 |
| 7 | Kohan Garanké | CFEPD | 25 | 16 | 64% | 7 | 5 | 71.42% | + 7.42 |
| | | Admission to 6th grade | 25 | 14 | 56% | 7 | 5 | 71.42% | + 15.42 |
| 8 | Say - Quartier | CFEPD | 123 | 77 | 62.60% | 115 | 88 | 76.52% | + 13.92 |
| | | Admission to 6th grade | 123 | 77 | 62.60% | 115 | 86 | 74.78% | + 12.18 |
| 9 | Finaré | CFEPD | 45 | 27 | 60% | 27 | 12 | 44.44% | - 15.56 |
| | | Admission to 6th grade | 45 | 26 | 57.77% | 27 | 12 | 44.44% | - 13.33 |
| 10 | Tillaré | CFEPD | 11 | 4 | 36.36% | 14 | 13 | 92.85% | + 56.49 |
| | | Admission to 6th grade | 11 | 4 | 36.36% | 14 | 13 | 92.85% | + 56.49 |
| 11 | Féto Bonoyé | CFEPD | 10 | 8 | 80% | 3 | 3 | 100% | + 20 |
| | | Admission to 6th grade | 10 | 8 | 80% | 3 | 3 | 100% | + 20 |
| Totals | | CFEPD | 389 | 220 | 56.55% | 325 | 250 | 76.92 | + 20.37 |
| | | Admission to 6th grade | 389 | 215 | 55.26 | 325 | 248 | 76.30% | + 21.04 |

Ministry of Basic Education 1 and Adult Literacy
Regional Directorate of Basic Education and Adult Literacy (DREB/A) for Tillabéri
Basic Education Inspectorate for Say
PAEN / Say

Of the nineteen (19) schools supported by the PAEN, eleven (11) sent candidates to the end-of-year examinations for the 2002 and 2003 sessions. It should also be mentioned that the Say-Quartier, Tillaré, Finaré and Féto Bonoyé schools did not begin to receive support from the PAEN until 2002-03.

The remaining eight (8) schools have not yet begun to send candidates to the end-of-year examinations.

Note: CFEPD: *certificat de fin d'études du premier degré* (primary school certificate).
Admission to 6th grade: the CFEPD is the competitive examination for admission to 6th grade, i.e. the first year of general middle school.

2. THE *ÉDUCATEURS* SANS FRONTIÈRES PROGRAM IN HAITI: PAUL GERIN-LAJOIE FOUNDATION

2.1. Brief presentation

2.1.1. Introduction

18. The Paul Gérin-Lajoie Foundation is a non-governmental organization dedicated specifically to supporting the development of basic education for children and their parents in Southern countries, as well as helping to increase the awareness of both the children and the Canadian teaching personnel. In addition to its programs in Canada, the Foundation is currently active in four countries (Senegal, Mali, Niger, Haiti).

2.1.2. Formation of the *Éducateurs sans frontières* network

19. The Paul Gérin-Lajoie Foundation has initiated a new form of support for basic education of children and literacy training for their parents by setting up a network of experienced Canadian educators to serve, on a volunteer basis, as advisers to their counterparts in the school systems of Southern countries. The network, known as *Éducateurs sans frontières* (Educators without Borders), takes action only on request, with the aim of sharing know-how and promoting the transfer of knowledge between peers.

2.1.3. Project funding

20. The project was launched in 2001 as a pilot project lasting for a period of two years and requiring approximately \$400,000 in all, or \$200,000 a year. The Foundation put together a funding package, mainly from private sources, in the expectation that the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) will soon provide financial support to the project. This support will encourage private donors in the future and make it possible to expand the project.

2.1.4. The distinctive character of *Éducateurs sans frontières*

21. Several characteristics of the program set it apart from existing development cooperation programs involving volunteers.

Objective of the program

The objective of the program is to contribute to the development of quality basic education for children and their parents with the support of Canadian volunteers. More specifically, the aim is to strengthen the capacity of educators and managers in the basic education systems of Southern countries.

Network

22. The program is setting up a network or a permanent pool of educators trained for overseas service and available according to the requirements and requests of the target countries. Instead of recruiting educators to meet specific, previously identified needs, the *Éducateurs sans frontières* program recruits candidates on an ongoing basis and provides them with basic training so as to be in a position to respond quickly to any requests. The services of the educators recruited and trained in this way are used only on request. In the meanwhile, they constitute a permanent reserve.

The educational field

23. The program applies exclusively to the field of education, so that the network consists entirely of specialists in this field or in related fields of activity. An “educator” is any person who performs a task relating to schools, to teaching, to training, or to any question connected with the acquisition of knowledge or know-how.

Experience and training

24. Applicants to join the *Éducateurs sans frontières* network must meet the requirement for teaching experience and must take the specific training course offered by the Paul Gérin-Lajoie Foundation.

Purpose

25. The purpose of the *Éducateurs sans frontières* program is to provide practical on-site support to teachers and education system managers in partner countries who may already have theoretical training but who wish to acquire practical experience. Such support is mostly temporary and short-term.

Supporting role

26. The function of *Éducateurs sans frontières* is first and foremost to remedy a specific deficiency in the work of school personnel. This function consists in providing ongoing support to one or more educators in a Southern country who are designated as partners. Instead of academic instruction, this support takes the form of observing on a daily basis how they approach their work, discussing possible improvements, offering advice and developing a system for following up decisions taken jointly. The role of the ESF educator is mainly to accompany the partner on the job, and should last only for the short or medium term. These supporting actions are based on daily personal contacts, which lead to real, tangible results in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

Teamwork

27. The ESF educator can work alone or as part of a team, generally advising several schools or classes. *Éducateurs sans frontières* promotes the organization of seminars, which offer the opportunity for exchange of experience among a number of educators and a number of schools or classes. The ESF educator also fosters teamwork among the teaching staff of schools.

Sequence of support actions

28. The ESF educator plays this supporting role for three months. Over the next three months, the partner educator works without the presence of the ESF educator, reliving the experience he or she went through in the partnership. After this period, the ESF educator or one of his/her colleagues rejoins the partner for a further three-month period of support and presence, observing the progress achieved by the partner educator and repeating the process used in the first three-month period.

Flexibility

29. Flexibility is absolutely required as far as the duration and number of such actions are concerned. Appointment terms last for three months in principle, and may be renewed. Each action concerns a limited group of about ten schools.

Standalone project

30. *Éducateurs sans frontières* functions as a standalone project, which by agreement may support other projects apt to benefit from the services provided. Its standalone nature makes it possible to monitor this form of cooperative action to encourage both performance and progress.

Research and development

31. The *Éducateurs sans frontières* network will pursue its activities in several countries and various situations, giving rise to research (what is known as “action-research”) and the development of new forms of action concerning which the Foundation will publish research papers.

Volunteer services

32. The services of *Éducateurs sans frontières* are rendered on a volunteer basis. The Foundation does reimburse some of the expenses incurred, in accordance with the standards it has established, and in particular for accommodation, daily living expenses and transport.

2.1.5. Recruitment of educators

33. This program recruits applicants who are working or retired educators, willing to spend several months abroad to provide practical support to teaching personnel or school managers in primary education or literacy training for parents in countries of the South. The general strategy of the program is to establish linkages between the skills found at home and the needs of schools in the Southern countries.