

Par-Chemins: Learners set up their association

WHO ARE WE?

The purpose of the Par-Chemins Association is to convince more and more people to join training by helping them “open the door” and to inform, testify and sensitize to the issue so that the right to education becomes effective.

Par-Chemins is a link in the chain Chaîne des Savoirs.

The Chaîne des Savoirs is a movement made up of local groups, the “links”- that involves learners, tutors, local elected officials and social workers in the framework of action-research about literacy difficulties. Together with Anne Vinérier (PhD in Educational Sciences), they study the causes and consequences of literacy difficulties and identify potential action paths.

DESCRIPTION

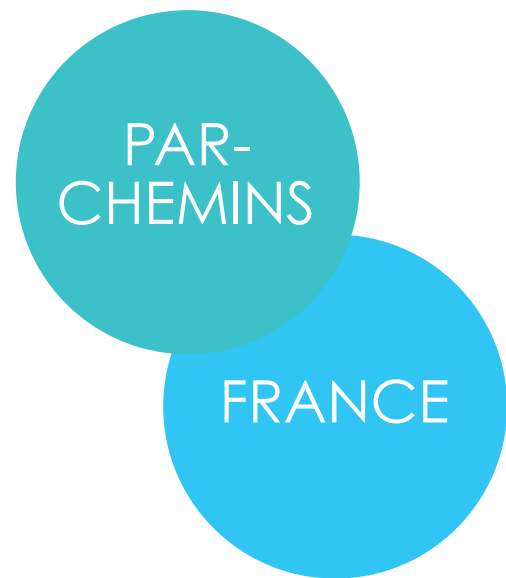
For Par-Chemins, things got started in 2008-2010. During those two years, learners took part in three experiments where they worked in a partnership with tutors, volunteers, social workers and local elected officials:

- Parents with literacy difficulties took part alongside Actions Educatives Familiales in the creation of a documentary called “Les mots, le monde” (“The words, the world”) to say what was at stake in re-learning to read and write as an adult and they participated in discussions after the projection of the film,
- Learners joined members of the Chaîne des Savoirs in a research-action-training project to improve awareness of the fight against illiteracy and the right to lifelong learning,
- Finally, learners participated in the European project Grundtvig to create a European network of learners-ambassadors to fight illiteracy.

THE CREATION OF PAR-CHEMINS TO GIVE MEANING TO LEARNING

After these initial actions, we proposed a programme to parents to continue their training for one year, and then to set up a local association to militate for the right to lifelong learning for all. By learning the principles of associative life, and by working on helpful skills (debating, defining a project, writing statutes, voting, writing minutes, planning, making commitments, establishing a budget...) they became the ones who would undertake a citizenship action by bringing together allies for the right to lifelong learning, thereby shifting from the status of a learner to that of a militant in the fight against illiteracy.

In June 2011, the General Assembly that officially created the Par-Chemins Association took place at Château-Chinon. It grouped some fifty members – learners, volunteers, professional tutors and allies – supporting the project. The Steering Committee and Bureau were elected, consisting of equal numbers of learners and “literate”. Each position in the association consists of a pair: the chairman and co-chairman, treasurer and co-treasurer... (One a learner and the other not). This is a way of envisaging lifelong learning for all.



PAR-CHEMINS/FRANCE

Members of the Steering Committee must learn to be understood by all, in all acts of the life of the association (organization, discussions, exchanges, decision taking, voting...). Learners speak out as a group, or address target audiences during the debates, research projects, and presentation of video documents. They are present in the decision taking bodies of the association, as well as in the various committees that organize and plan its action. At this time, there are 4 committees: budget, communication, awareness, prevention. And finally, the learners use democratic decision-taking processes, seek arguments and listen to those of others.

Associative life in itself is a fantastic source of basic training: note taking, writing minutes of a meeting, preparing an agenda, answering correspondence, keeping accounts, accepting and fulfilling responsibilities... all as life-size exercises.

PAR-CHEMINS WANTS TO SEEK OUT THE “INVISIBLE”

The people whom the association refers to as “invisible” are people with literacy difficulties who are hiding –because they are ashamed, because they don’t dare envisage the possibility of getting training. The association is located in the Morvan region, an extensive rural area, which is fairly hard-hit by illiteracy. The learners who created Par-Chemins say that the training programme changed their lives. The ones who made the effort to reach out to education say they know other people who don’t dare take the step. The association takes action locally to remove the stigmas from the learning process and to encourage those people to come out of the dark.

Through its action, the association increases awareness of illiteracy by showing the many parameters that can touch on this theme.

In these local actions, the learners meet with parents, schools, local officials...

When they speak in tutor training, they explain how their lives were totally changed because they learned basic skills. With the tutors, they consider proposals for educational approaches.

When they take part in meeting in the Chaîne des Savoirs, they think with other learners about a common theme related to literacy issues. These meetings give the learners a chance to shift focus away from their own backgrounds, and to gain a better knowledge of the world.



PARTICIPATING IN PAR-CHEMINS, FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

Participation in Par-Chemins is a commitment. The quality of this participation is what creates strong and remarkable impacts at various levels.

Working “with” learners supposes that relations are established in mutual respect, meaning transparent, democratic, cooperative relations. For example, sitting on the steering committee, which includes learners, entails preparing the content, the level of language and even the operational process to ensure that “dropping out” will be kept to a minimum.

It pays off, well beyond the initial effects. From an individual standpoint “coming out of the dark” has undeniably enabled some people to improve their lives, to recover self-confidence, to take steps on the path to social and professional integration, to make progress in fields we hadn’t even considered: family relations, health, self-determination, social inclusion...

Moreover, shifting from “me” to “us” means taking an objective look at one’s personal experience, analyzing it and understanding it as part of a whole. This is an effort that requires accompaniment, and it is an important dimension of the training programme: by undertaking it, the learner produces knowledge about his/her own path. This knowledge is important both for him/herself and for others.

From the collective standpoint, the purpose is to give a place in the community to a fringe of the population that has become “invisible” because of uneasiness and guilt feelings. In our society, literacy issues are still considered a “shameful” handicap, shame that is broadly shared by the adults with literacy difficulties themselves and by those who are not, but prefer not to see the problem...

Destigmatizing this situation, in a positive approach, is the first job to be done to deal with this problem. People with literacy difficulties, who have taken the step to seek training, have overcome their personal difficulty, and have come to see illiteracy as a social issue, are the best equipped to do this.

WHAT ABOUT THE TRAINING?

By writing an article for a regional paper, speaking out to an audience, preparing a general meeting, bringing a poster to a social centre, presenting a film, or meeting a journalist... the person is **TAKING ACTION** in the sense of the objectives of Par-Chemins, to improve the situation in the meaning of the Charter of the Chaîne des Savoirs. In this sense it is a **MILITANT ACTION**.

At the same time, it means reinvesting in things that one already knows how to do, as well as doing things for the first time, taking risks, succeeding or failing, and learning lessons from it... This is **LEARNING** by doing things that one would not be doing without the opportunity provided by Par-Chemins. In other words, this is training through experience, also referred to as non-formal education.

Of course, there are other ways of getting training, which consist of acquiring knowledge or skills directly. This is programmed training or formal training, which consists of acquiring "reference knowledge", beginning with basic skills. These include traditional on-the-job training programmes that may be done with a tutor or volunteer. Often these start with situations (that are often described in written documents) conceived specially for the learning process.

There is no hierarchy to be created between these two types of learning programmes, nor should one take priority over the other, even if all learners in Par-Chemins began by formal training.

An action becomes a learning process when it is done conscientiously, or, in other words, when the skill has been identified and one can verify that the learner can use it in a new situation.

Par-Chemins (and Chaîne des Savoirs) is a place where ambassadors and support staff **MILITATE AND LEARN** through experience.

TO KNOW MORE ABOUT IT:

www.cooperativedessavoirs.org/fr/partenaires/6-par-chemins
www.chainedessavoirs.org

CONTACT

NAME OF THE ORGANIZATION
Par-Chemins is a link
of the Chaîne des Savoirs

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