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A synthesis of the culture of evaluation among language teachers in their initial teacher training

(A) Master's level trainee teachers of French as a mother tongue

(B) Master's level trainee teachers of French as a second language

Synthesis of the information and data collected:

Professional reports of trainee teachers (within the school system)

The example of Burgundy, Dijon IUFM

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Abstract

Within initial teacher training and in professional reports, evaluation holds a marginal, though real, place, and one which apparently varies greatly among trainers. It is linked to reflections on autonomy, directions and correction of students' work. We observe, however, that, with respect to languages, trainers and (thus) trainee teachers still often content themselves with the four basic skills, with the fifth one, spoken interaction, remaining virtually untouched. This raises the issue of the diffusion of innovation: according to Jean Hébrard, it takes twenty years to diffuse an innovation, and even so, it only reaches on average 20% of the population. With the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML), we hope to raise this percentage through targeted and interactive measures (the aim of our project).

We shall note that problem-situations often trigger concern about evaluation: oral activities in the classroom, marking, language activities traversing several subjects, or specialised classes for students in difficulty.

Furthermore, one can wonder whether trainee teachers are not themselves sufficiently preoccupied with the system of evaluation that will be carried out on their own work and *stage* (placement) and are therefore not as available to consider evaluation in the classroom, more particularly formative evaluation.

Finally, during collective meetings with teachers, the word “evaluation” is sometimes negatively perceived and gives rise to suspicion, probably because it is understood as the opposite of the “daily life in the classroom.” Therefore, it must be said that, even for us, evaluation is located within and beyond tests and examinations.

A - I. The French education context (the example of Burgundy)

A few local data and figures

Trainee teachers are required to write a professional report.

The IUFM of Burgundy (University Institute for Teacher Training, a specialised department of the university) each year welcomes:

- from 150 to 180 lower-secondary-school trainee teachers (lower secondary level = students aged 11-16) in various subjects, mainly maths, French and English,
- about 300 primary-school trainee teachers (primary level = pupils aged 6-11;) who teach all subjects.

Professional reports available

All teachers complete a report on a theme they choose, under the supervision of a teacher-trainer (who takes part in or guides their choices). Some of these reports (from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ according to the subject and teaching level) are digitised. These digitised reports can be consulted and downloaded on the <http://dijon.iufm/fr> website (espace documentaire / catalogue / mémoires professionnels).

The reports now available cover the years 2003, 2004 and 2005. They are more numerous for primary-level teachers in their last training year, that is, 382. Concerning secondary-level teachers, the sum total of reports available for these three years is 167.

However, figures are varied: teachers of German are the least numerous and also the least likely to accept the digitising of their reports, while teachers of English are the most numerous and also the most numerous to have their reports digitised. Forty-three reports on English teaching are available; but just three on German teaching (with a German section comprising about 5 or 6 people according to the year). In French language and literature, both modern and classical (teachers of French in France), about 20 reports are available, which over three years corresponds to fewer than half of those who succeed at the *concours* (recruitment examination).

The decision to digitise a report rests with the jury (who may put forward a negative opinion) and with the author (who must provide prior written consent), while the choice of the subject and the manner in which the report is executed are influenced by the trainer supervising it. A few reports posing technical problems, however, have not been digitised (information from Alberto Garcia, who is in charge of this task and also manages the statistical data. I want to thank him for that.

Technical point:

We chose to focus attention on secondary-level teachers (students aged 11-16), most specifically modern language teachers, in accordance with the objectives of the ECEP project (<http://ecep.ecml.at>). To make comparisons between levels and to study teachers' culture of evaluation along complete schooling trajectories, we also analysed primary-school (students aged up to 11) teachers' reports and a few reports written by teachers teaching French as a native or quasi-native language in France – when these reports addressed the issue of evaluation.

II. Trainee teachers in Burgundy (France) and evaluation

Trainee teachers' professional reports were read and then selected on the basis of their keywords and actual content. Our aim was not to judge the academic quality of these written works, but to seek information on the culture of evaluation as it is experienced, diffused and disseminated.

A.II.1 Lower-secondary-school teachers (students aged 11-16): problem-situations trigger reflection on evaluation

Although I shall focus on language teachers, I shall also examine the case of those who teach other subjects or are even involved in specialised teaching (teaching specifically designed for or adapted to students in difficulty) insofar as they are concerned with evaluation and can provide information on the culture of evaluation. For each of these three categories, I shall focus on one or two reports particularly representative among the selected ones.

LANGUAGE TEACHERS¹

In English (as a second or third language): *motivation, correction of errors, assistance and repair action*

Among 43 reports, it is possible to note some unity in terms of themes and approach that, without a doubt, is owing to the trainers: the student(s) – that is, the individual or individuals the reports are concerned with – is generally considered as having an insufficient level and/or as being not greatly motivated and is alleged to see English as a compulsory language whose interest remains to be proved.

Two reports address the issue of evaluation in relation to oral activities, one dealing with the role of evaluation in the treatment of errors (a theme considered in several reports), the other

¹ I do not consider German, since the unique report digitised held no relationship at all with evaluation in modern language.

with its role in reading. A single report addresses the notion of *autonomy* by showing how important it is in the language classroom. This report deals with the contribution of oral improvisation in English,² drawing on an experience with a fourth-form class at a lower secondary school (students aged 14-16).

Again, the *relationship between oral activity and evaluation* is made: probably because oral activity is not easy to evaluate and does not count as much as written activity in summative evaluations, but also because oral activity is connected with classroom management, individual expression and motivation; such is the contribution of these reports. This is also true for reading. Concerning error treatment, it runs from grammatical technique to error observation more or less in relation to the learners, their backgrounds and learning. The dominant approach revolves around language and, on the other hand, students in difficulty, who need “help” and for whom the teacher must find “repair actions.” The reflection on learning, however, seems to be active. It must be noted that most of these trainee teachers have made one or several stays abroad as teachers and/or tourists and that this fact is integrated and referred to in their reflections.

In Spanish (as a second or third language): *learning signification, motivation and evaluation*

Among the 18 reports written by teachers holding a CAPES (Certificate of aptitude for teaching at secondary level) in Spanish, one is entitled *Donner du sens aux apprentissages par la verbalisation*³ – “Giving meaning to learning through verbalisation” – (with a fifth-form class; students aged 15-16), with most of the reflection focusing on formative evaluation: “*evaluating as a way of assisting learning rather than as a way of measuring a*

² Marceline Evrard, *L'improvisation comme déclencheur de la parole et son rôle dans la qualité de la production orale*, supervised by A. Morizot, 2005.

³ Anne-Lise Gagnon, supervised by M. Soumier and M. Lebel, 2004.

performance” (p. 22). Thus I focus here on this report. The others deal with communication, language, etc.

In this report, the teacher’s aim is to identify successes and errors, to lead each student to do so, and to repair errors through readjusting strategies (p. 26).

Giving meaning to learning is – on the part of the teacher – a matter of allowing each student to engage in it, which does not necessarily correspond to play activities. Thus, the usefulness of student/teacher verbalisation is displayed with questions like, “Why am I learning this?” “What is the use of it?” and “What is expected of me at school?” as an integral part of the continuous and formative evaluation system.

In French (as a first language): *oral activity, learning-building and evaluation*

From among 20 reports written by teachers holding a CAPES in French, I selected two which open the reflection on evaluation: both focus on oral activity, which is by no means coincidental.

The first one – *Comment rendre la parole de mes élèves constructive ?*⁴ (“How to make my students’ speech constructive?”, with a second-form class; students aged 12-13) – directly integrates evaluation in its consideration of oral activity in the classroom. The teacher thoroughly analyses the issue, seeking the best pedagogical approach and taking into account the heterogeneity (in terms of levels and social backgrounds) of her class. Relying on lived experiences in her classroom, she also notes that the choice of media and the consideration of students’ speech are very important factors, which sometimes upsets the preparation the teacher has made for his or her lesson. She has thus conceived of an approach “functioning on the mode of a discussion in which the teacher becomes a ‘stage director’, for [...] everything

⁴ H  l  ne Paris, supervised by P.-A. Chiffre, 2004.

rests on the organisation of the lesson and the teacher's capacity to guide students' remarks" (p. 10).

Following from this, to deliver a good lesson it is necessary to "know one's students" and "evaluate" them: to take interest in their individuality rather than simply in their conformity to the model or level required. This young teacher is concerned with what "making progress in learning" means and notes the importance of continuity. Continuity unfolds when the teacher moves his or her students towards autonomy: thus these students can build their own learning, rather than merely receiving (or not) what is transmitted.

The second report I chose is called *Attitudes et pratiques de l'écoute dans l'enseignement et l'apprentissage du français en classe de 5^{ème}* ("Listening attitudes and practices in French teaching and learning in the second-form class"). At the outset the report focuses on students, their motivation and capacity to be attentive and then it shows through examples how to develop listening (not only listening to the teacher, but also listening to one another). Thus it becomes possible for the teacher to "listen instead of explaining" and to "make the student take part in the evaluation process" (P. 30).

Other reports focus primarily on reading, literature, history of literature, image, and attention in the classroom. Written production is more sparsely dealt with.

TEACHERS IN OTHER SUBJECT MATTERS

I then looked at other subject matters, for my prior search with keywords had shown that in reports on classes in physical education, history/geography or the sciences, the issue of evaluation was more present or addressed more directly. As this is beyond the scope of our investigation, I shall content myself with a brief exemplary parenthesis showing the differences from language-related subject matters.

⁵ Stéphanie Varriot, supervised by A.-M. Achard, 2004.

The example of history/geography

In history/geography, several reports deal with the *transmission* and *comprehension of directions* in written or spoken activities. I selected the report *Améliorer les consignes pour une meilleure mise en activité des élèves*⁶ (“Improving directions for improving the student’s engagement in activity”; with a first-form class; students aged 11-12) because *It focuses on learning through individual styles of learning*, on knowledge and know-how through a re-examination of directions (direction + criteria / structures / procedures) and also because it takes steps towards a self-evaluation grid, which was rarely the case.

Moreover, the issue of interdisciplinarity is raised through language in the various subjects. In fact, the language activities proposed, notably written activities (the most likely to be subjected to marking), are common to various subjects, while the explanations or directions given to the students are not necessarily common to those subjects. We can note, for instance, the summary, reasoned paragraph, and reading for understanding directions and representing the task to execute and its execution.

In specialised teaching: presenting the physical education task in the specialised first-form class⁷

Lower-secondary-school specialised classes have a low student population (twelve students in this case study). They welcome children in serious difficulty, either over the course of their schooling trajectories or owing to a sensory/motor/mental disability (mainly deaf students here). In physical education, the teacher is thus led to think even more about how to organise activities and give directions so as to *avoid rejection* and *weariness* and to

⁶ Laetitia Duval, *Améliorer les consignes pour une meilleure mise en activité des élèves*, supervised by J. Thivilliers, 2005.

⁷ Etienne Baud, *Comment présenter efficacement la tâche en 6^e spécialisée*, supervised by C. Fourot, 2005.

make sure that all students, whatever their difficulties and the manner in which they learn, *understand well*.

Experience shows that the teacher must give *shorter and clearer directions, associate verbal communication with non-verbal communication (most specifically visual supports, but also gestures)*, avoid contradiction and visually present the task to complete in order that students can achieve the abstraction necessary for appropriation, mastery and transfer. This abstraction is also necessary for the students to represent for themselves an organised space. The teacher also uses a video camera on a tripod to allow students to look at themselves.

In other words, *trainee teachers are led to ask themselves questions when they are faced with a problem to solve*. The action-oriented approach of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is still to be diffused and explained, so as to be used in teacher training and in lower secondary classrooms. Is the situation different in primary-level education? It will be noted that primary-level teachers are a little more involved. This may simply be explained by the following facts: they have to teach all subjects, students are younger and there is no examination at this level.

II.2 Primary-level teachers and their reports: more evaluation and more autonomy than for secondary level. Is this because they teach all subjects?

Out of 382 reports, I selected 20 reports relevant to our theme:

- 6 reports deal directly with evaluation in the classroom, rather than solely in languages.
- 6 reports target languages (French, French as a second language and English).
- 2 reports are concerned with directions.
- 1 report considers students' work.

- 3 reports are concerned with the learner's autonomy.
- 1 report deals with communication in the language classroom in relation to skills and evaluation.
- 1 report addresses the issue of the student's recognition in relation to evaluation.

As has already been mentioned, the reports were selected on the basis of their keywords, abstracts and tables of contents. I chose a report that stood at the limit (on French) in order to highlight representations on language, its teaching and learning – representations which are the very fabric of the culture of evaluation.

Remark

Words like *evaluation*, *directions* and *autonomy* are keywords found in the reports mentioned in this article that refer to a teaching culture that clearly include evaluation. Is this because of the national evaluations carried out in *CE2* (Year 4 in the British school system; students aged 8-9)?

It does not seem so – for two reasons. First, evaluations are also carried out at the secondary level: in the first form (students aged 11-12) and in the fifth form (students aged 15-16). Second, according to the primary-level teachers interviewed, the practice of formative evaluation long-established in primary-level teachers' culture typically considers both the child and the student, as against what happens at lower secondary school, where the focus is on the student only, with the child being not or little considered. Again, the presence/absence of examinations seems to make a difference in terms of the culture of evaluation.

In agreement with our work for the ECEP project, I selected the reports that dealt – at least a little – with the issue of evaluation. This explains why, for example, I did not choose

the reports that dealt with “communication” at large (in reading, narration, drama practices, etc.) without addressing the issue of evaluation.

What do trainee teachers (and their trainers) think about evaluation?

I have already discussed teachers’ choices and their trainers’ influence. This influence lies in the fact that those who are inclined to deal with evaluation are trainers specialising in the treatment of learning difficulties, thus focusing on learners, their difficulties and the conditions for their success.

Evaluation appears to be a formative practice to develop and there is no trace of summative aspects in the reports examined. Summative aspects, however, are a little more present in the report that deals with the “good” way of correcting students’ works, though not as present as among lower-secondary-level teachers.

Evaluation in languages does not acknowledge as much difference between French language and foreign (or second) language as lower-secondary-school teachers do, and everything proceeds as though there were a language continuum. This may be because the emphasis is laid on the student rather than on language. Fatima Necer’s report,⁸ *Evaluer l’oral pour mieux l’enseigner* (“Evaluating oral activity to teach it better”), focuses on oral formative evaluation at pre-primary school with and in spite of the diversity of pupils: diversity in *savoir être* or “existential” skills (great/medium/reluctant speaker, according to L. Lentin) depending most particularly on individual and family background.

Another report, *L’anglais et le français en langue seconde*⁹ (“English and French as second languages”), focuses on evaluation in French and English during two different

⁸ Fatima Necer, *Evaluer l’oral pour mieux l’enseigner*, supervised by N. Charvy, 2003.

⁹ Aurélie Colombo, *L’anglais et le français en langue seconde*, supervised by J.-M. Sandon, 2003.

placements, one in a French school, the other in an English school. This is the only report addressing the issue of CEFR. It shows the differences and similarities in the way the second or foreign language is perceived in the two countries: for parents, the social aspect of the language is very important in both countries (usefulness of English language in France/uselessness of French language in England, except when in relation to cultural consumption and shopping); practices largely move away from official guidelines, which are strikingly similar in both countries (less communication than required, situations often stereotyped in France, hence the idea of making practices evolve).

The author also notes that while multiplying occasions for communication and acquisition of micro-dialogues and set phrases, the teacher must nevertheless shed light on the functioning of language. Otherwise, learning will not be firmly fixed in students' minds and will run the risk of being blocked quite soon (as early as lower secondary school). At any rate, one can note the coexistence of languages as an important initial step, especially when considering the next report.

Emilie Froppier's report, *Enseigner la langue française par son observation*¹⁰ ("Teaching French language through its observation"), starts with an investigation – "What grammar is useful for" – carried out among *cycle 3* pupils (Year 4 to Year 6 in the British school system; pupils aged 8-11), the results of which show pupils' representations and the bearing these have on the pupils' relation to language. Flowing from this, the author concludes that there is a need for setting up a new relation with new practices. Drawing on Célestin Freinet's observations on the necessity to make the student the actor of his or her learning, the author then develops an account of her own reflective observations of language sessions and of her "graphic workshops" (in orthography). In this case, although it is

¹⁰ Emilie Froppier, *Enseigner la langue française par son observation*, supervised by N. Charvy, 2004.

concerned with making the student the actor of his or her learning, the report does not refer to “evaluation” or “autonomy” and thereby only partly answers my criterion for choice. It sticks to teaching without investigating learning any further. Is this because of its subject, that is, French language and grammar?

A reflection on directions cannot avoid a reflection on evaluation. This makes it possible to go beyond summative evaluation and marking with the help of a global approach. A 2005 report, *De l'importance des consignes*¹¹ (“On the importance of directions”), analyses with respect to several subjects (physical education, maths, French, etc.) the lived experience in the classroom and pupils’ representations: how they understand directions (what they have to do and the results) and how they consider what they have to do. This is sometimes unclear, and the non-representation of the task to perform was observed to lead to failure. The transmission of directions must lead students to grasp the part they play in their learning and thus to move towards autonomy by giving signification to their learning. The transmitting of directions must appropriately situate the latter within the learning of such or such knowledge and know-how.

A 2004 report, *La compréhension des consignes*¹² (“The understanding of directions”), analyses directions and distinguishes various types of directions (with much/little guiding), addressing the issue concerning their choice according to the advancement of learning. Above all, the author shows how to make students appropriate directions so as to gain autonomy and be successful in the activities relevant to their learning: an investigation on what a direction is (document in the annex to the report); direction-writing and mutual evaluation through the carrying out of the activity required by the teacher (pair work).

¹¹ Aurélie Lengagne, *De l'importance des consignes*, supervised by F. Bourbon, 2005.

¹² Delphine Vassaux, *La compréhension des consignes*, supervised by P. Grosjean, 2004.

How to do well with corrections? This question has relevantly been set alongside the issue of evaluation by a 2003 report¹³. This report first traces the evolution of the conceptions of error and shows that it is now given a place within learning. Then it focuses on the various possible ways to correct. This goes from correction by the teacher to self-correction by the student. This report also highlights the important role that interactions (student/student; student/teacher) play in a successful process of correction.

The reflection on learners' autonomy in classroom practices is above all related to the issue of group work. The teacher examines how group work makes it possible to develop all the dimensions of learners' autonomy: spatial and temporal; bodily and intellectual; but also moral and language autonomy (p. 8): "knowing how to express oneself, to use appropriately spoken and written language, but also daring to formulate what one wants to say" (language autonomy); "for guiding or judging one's action, refer to rules that have value in themselves instead of merely submitting to the teacher or group" (moral autonomy). This work¹⁴ goes against a long-standing individualistic and elitist tradition in showing the social stakes in relation to autonomy and raises the question about the role played by the teacher in the development of the student's autonomy.

The other report dedicated to autonomy (Delphine Faurie, supervised by R. Gasparini, 2005) relates autonomy with evaluation and with self-evaluation and co-evaluation. As the young teacher sees it, the development of autonomy is a long-term project. "*Autonomy is neither an acquisition nor a prerequisite. It must instead remain an objective. In effect, nobody has ever been totally autonomous. One learns to become autonomous in situations that favour or require autonomy*" (R. Brunot, p. 168). Then, according to her, "*it is necessary to offer students situations that will require of them more and more initiative and the taking of*

¹³ Sophie Roy, *L'utilisation des corrections dans les apprentissages*, supervised by F. Bostel, 2003.

¹⁴ Damienne Poulet, *L'enseignant et l'autonomie des élèves*, supervised by P. Durand, 2004.

responsibility” (p. 6) over the years at primary school. Mutual evaluation in common as early as *Cycle 2* (pupils aged 5-8) at primary school can lead to co-evaluation and then to self-evaluation in *Cycle 3* (pupils aged 8-11).

How and why to value students in the classroom is an original reflection on the teaching practice that has been derived from a 2003 placement in the United Kingdom. The teacher shows why it is important to “have a positive view of the student,” to listen to his or her speech, taking the drama out of error, so as to overcome the student’s fear to learn and lack of motivation. Given the destructive character of strong negative criticism, in itself and with regard to school missions, this teacher recommends drawing on the English model with respect to continuous positive evaluation in the management of the classroom. However, she sets limits to this model. She experimented with these limits: “*Sometimes the teacher has to dare to punish and he or she must be neither a demagogue nor a demiurge*” (Carol Breysse’s report, 2003).

Communication and evaluation appear to be marked by the communicative approaches developed since the 1970s that have now entered classrooms. At primary school they associate under this appellation part of the action-oriented approach: approach by skills (some skills only, expression-reception at the oral level, but this is at primary school); importance of “speaking and doing”; “the student as the actor of his or her learning” (Virginie Servais’s report, 2004).

To conclude:

The CEFR is still little considered and yet primary-level teachers are the most open-minded. This is confirmed and reinforced by teaching experience abroad. Thus the importance of trainee teachers’ placements abroad must be underscored.

Differences in focus can also be noted according to the subject:

- Foreign language teachers are massively concerned with motivation and the signification of learning;
- Teachers of French (as a native language) discover the study of oral performance and relate it with motivation.

Evaluation, class management and learning are still too sparsely associated. In this respect, awareness needs to be raised.

B - Teachers of French and English as foreign languages and evaluation

Professional reports and accounts of practices

The following information was derived from different sources:

1 Accounts of evaluation practices taken from *Master* (first year) reports or collected *via* the media or organisations (supervised by M. Berchoud).

2 *Master* “Research on evaluation” (second year) and doctoral theses: a few significant excerpts about Malta and Latvia (supervised by M. Berchoud).

1 An example of good practice; an example of a brake on good practices and an example of good practice on the student’s part

1.1 A practice successful in motivating learners and in enlightening the teacher and students about the latter’s learning and level achieved

Perla, a young Mexican teacher in Switzerland, teaches French as a foreign language at a Swiss establishment that welcomes students aged 13-15. She narrates how she suggested

to her students that they take a final evaluation in front of their parents, so as to show the parents that their children already knew many things and dared to express themselves orally.

In each class, the students were given the opportunity of choosing between three activities:

Second-form students

- Producing an original dialogue with a classmate
- Interpreting a song
- Introducing oneself

These activities were analysed and their respective levels of difficulty were gauged by the class. The song was considered as the most difficult activity; no one chose it. Two activities were still to be prepared for.

Third-form students

- Introducing a famous French speaker
- Creating a poem and reciting it
- Presenting and describing one's favourite sport

All three activities were very successful. While sport is generally alleged to be a very popular subject among boys, the boys were the most numerous among those who chose the poem and its recitation.

With each class, she made her students write directions themselves, while assisting them to do so. The starting constraints were as follows: individual work; marking from the description of the activity and from the expectation in relation to the level of the written examination taken at the end of the school year (end of the 2nd or 3rd year of French).

Finally, Perla became aware that the success of this evaluation lay in the fact that “the students found in it [the evaluation] a means to express themselves and assert their identity, sometimes including a more buried part of it.” Further, her objective was clear. In effect, she wanted to “show [her] students that they were able to speak French appropriating the

language as their own to express themselves.” The issue of time is more difficult to deal with as it depends on the class.

1.2 An approach to a few brakes on evaluation in English as a foreign language

Valérie, a 35-year-old, teaches English and French (foreign language and native language) in France. At lower secondary school (when she was 13), her teacher of English insisted on oral practice and spoke exclusively in English during the class. Twenty years later, her daughter now learns English with the same teacher! This brings back memories for Valérie. What can she say about the past and the present? She explains that her teacher “was a passionate and dynamic man who was nonetheless disparaged by a lot of students because he ‘says everything in English’ [...] ‘We do not understand anything’”. She continues: “I’m not sure I understood all that he said better than the others did, but I successfully managed my evaluations and I liked his lively and passionate style.”

This latter aspect is without a doubt very important: as the teacher aroused her interest, young Valérie looked for the logic behind the tests in order to pass them and she concluded that they were always about a grammatical point recently studied and that students were merely required to learn to manipulate the language, but very carefully, that is, using the *right form*. Thus, no risk of expressing oneself was to be taken, no risk at all was to be taken. Today, as she sits back, she considers the tests as well worked out. “The difficulty of the exercises was often progressive and the formulae contained in the grammar part could be re-used in the expression part. In a spiral fashion, we also met again with elements from previous lessons.”

Now as in the past, however, no more than two students in each class are successful in doing tests. Then what is wrong with such linguistic tests, which, nevertheless, are well worked out, and with such intensive oral practice?

Firstly, it must be noted that oral practice essentially revolves around listening (non-guided; without repetition) by students and speaking by the teacher. Students have little or no opportunity to produce a continuous speech and are simply required to answer questions.

Secondly, evaluation is writing for evaluating an oral practice. However, the teacher gave and still gives very few written elements. He lets his students take notes by themselves, but afterwards he takes spelling into account (when in the process of marking). Notwithstanding, learning to take notes is far from being natural for students.

Moreover, “this oral teaching did not open on any real oral ability, unless the student was able to transpose *I was having a bath when the phone rang* to other situations. But absolutely nothing in the course and practices allowed students to **speak** this foreign language. There was no *oral teaching* as such. The teacher, who obviously knew the language very well, simply *explained* in the *foreign language* grammatical notions. We orally studied sentences and we were to reproduce these sentences during evaluations. Unfortunately, this technique does not foster any communication skill.”

Finally, relational aspects were as follows: the teacher explained neither his method nor the way he carried out evaluations, so that students as a whole opposed him to a certain extent. In fact, his evaluations measured the teacher’s teaching rather than the students’ learning.

Then how did Valérie manage to succeed all the same? She had efficient *reading* strategies with respect to evaluations (in a way, she evaluated the evaluations) and she was *able* and *motivated* to work by herself at home and look up the meaning and spelling of the words that she missed when taking notes during the class. Besides, she already knew her *mother tongue very well, she had the capacity to seek, infer, relate*, and so on, and she also had a *taste for all that concerned language*.

Today, Valérie continually trains herself. For instance, she has taken part with her colleagues in the development of a portfolio designed to help students advance with respect to skills and to situate themselves in their own learning path, so that they may take steps towards autonomy. She concludes, however, that “the difficulty lies in the articulation with the selective, and possibly certificative, evaluation that pervades our system and which cannot be totally eluded.”

2 Evaluation: a culture and practices

2.1. Oral activity in French language in Malta

Angèle completed a Master (second year) “Research¹⁵ on evaluation” at the secondary-school level in Malta. There, oral skills are evaluated at the end of the school year by means of a “role play” in which the teacher is the receiver of the student’s oral performance and on the basis of heterogeneous and imprecise descriptors. While acknowledging the effort made to improve evaluation at the secondary-school level in Malta, she noted how the culture of evaluation in this country focuses on writing, which is considered nobler. Still, people in Malta are friendly and expressive and oral expression is very important in their daily lives. So why does such a dual scale of values exist? Why does a scale based on both daily life, in which orality prevails, and a more academic context, where writing predominates, exist?

Some teachers associate oral activity with disorder and time loss while the programme in French is very full. This programme is based on the communicative approach and on language description. Oral activity is included in this programme, but teachers consider that it is very hard to practice oral activity with 30 students in a class: each student has very little time to speak and those who speak are always the same, that is, those who know the answers. Besides, French is the fourth language taught in Malta, after Maltese, English and Italian.

¹⁵ Angèle Vella Lauwers, *Une approche de l'évaluation de la production orale en français langue étrangère à Malte en situation scolaire*, supervised by M. Berchoud, 2007.

The author of the study also shows that modern language teachers do not rely enough on multilingual skills and do not use teamwork (English as a teaching language along with Maltese, Italian and French) even though they know one another in their private lives. Language switching, for instance, is forbidden in the classroom (except when a difficulty has been observed), while such moments should be used to develop knowledge and know-how, more particularly the observation of languages in contact.

Generally speaking, teachers who innovate and train themselves do so in their own subject, that is, in relation to the language they teach, its grammar and literature. Whether it is possible to go beyond this compartmentalisation is not certain. In effect, there exists an identity cohesion among teachers who teach the same language, a language they have chosen for its culture, literature, and so on.

Then is it possible to take steps towards increased communication and common action among teachers of modern languages?

An investigation among teachers in Malta shows that $\frac{3}{4}$ of them are women, of whom one in two is between 30 and 40 years old, and that the training they receive revolves around language and literature, while pedagogy remains quite sparse. Most teachers say they teach the various standard skills; one in two considers writing (reception and production) as more valuable than oral work; and all deplore the fact that they do not have enough time to dedicate to oral skills. Above all, the part devoted to oral skills in examinations at the end of the year is very small, so that it is the final examination that determines what is taught during the year. Teachers say their goal is, “to make students succeed.”

Thus, tensions can be observed in programmes, which combine linguistics with communication, in examination tests and in teachers’ practices. However, most teachers recognise that students like oral work. Teachers like oral work too, but they lack tools and references to design motivating classroom situations and activities. Most often, evaluation is

carried out individually; only a few teachers have tried evaluating students by pairs or small groups; and very few record students' oral productions, thus depriving themselves of a valuable tool for listening again and improving oral production.

The tensions mentioned above certainly result from a particular history and the attendant experience. Change starts with this new awareness as derived from a research study.

2.2 Latvia: continuing training and learners' autonomy

Jonathan is studying the Latvian context and shows how the ways of doing and behaving in language teaching and learning¹⁶ are still marked by the past – both close and remote. Latvia has joined the European Union, in which it has to find a place for itself, while simultaneously it has been reconstructing itself as a nation state since 1991. Therefore the issue of national language is pervasive in Latvia, just like the issue of national identity.

At the same time, Latvian people and their government are well aware that successful integration in the European Union is subordinated to their being able to show autonomous attitudes and choose an approach to language-related professions that acknowledges skills likely to be evaluated, transferred and harmonised. Thus, there is a need for autonomous learning, but it develops against a background doubly marked:

- by traditional culture, which focuses on language philology and linguistics, with a strict hierarchical view of people's places within society and in human relationships, hence in language situations and activities, and

- by the Soviet period (1940-1991) culture, centred around the organisation of teaching, consideration of students and promotion of the best students on a grammatical and linguistic basis.

¹⁶ Jonathan Durandin, *Les apprentissages autonomes en Lettonie (contexte universitaire)*, ongoing thesis supervised by M. Berchoud.

Thus, the culture of learning is only emerging now, and even that depends on the scale one refers to: the European Union or national level. The culture of teaching remains traditional, as it is marked by the student's dependency *vis-à-vis* the teacher, within which evaluation is evaluation-*sanction*, in every sense of the French word: punishment when the result achieved is insufficient, acknowledgement of success when a grammatical level is achieved (generally in writing). Thus a dual need can be observed: a need for autonomy with regard to foreign language learning and also for the strengthening of and refocusing on Latvian, the national language.