

ECEP project, coord. by Marie Berchoud & Enrica Piccardo

A synthesis of questionnaires completed by teachers (in France, Germany, Poland and Italy)

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Annex to this document: Questionnaire – ECEP Investigation (ECML – Council of Europe)

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Abstract

European unity and disparities

The wide variety of answers to the questionnaire and in the subsequent interview are mainly institutional (choices, decisions, definition of the meaning of the words transmitted during teachers' training) while teachers' representations and opinions prove to be more transnational: interest in the job, value of the meaning attributed to it, marked emergence of an interest in oral activity and an enduring taste for literature, but also convergent evolutions towards more collective or team-oriented work.

Foreword

Role and shortcomings of the questionnaire

We observed that this questionnaire made it possible for each of us to know more about teachers, the way they consider their job, their opinions about the training received or desired and their teaching culture.

The limits of this questionnaire, however, are as follows:

- Little information on the actual evaluation practices (this was not clearly asked for)
- Uncertainty with respect to the answers concerning teaching as a job and the culture of evaluation: did we record the true feelings of the teachers or the image they want to project of themselves? This difficulty is inherent in the conduct of questionnaires. It can be overcome, however, by checking answers against the practices observed or described (more particularly in the interviews).

According to Béatrice Mabilon-Bonfils, the sociologist we interviewed (comments by another sociologist are still expected), the fact remains that the interest of the questionnaire is to trace the context of our work and make teachers' voices heard on important matters, which will afterwards help us to keep in touch with social reality as it is experienced, including its institutional dimensions, which vary across the countries investigated.

Teachers and how they perceive their work

(Sections A and B of the questionnaire)

As had been planned, each of us investigated the activity of at least four teachers (three women/one man; experienced/less experienced teachers). Overall, this synthesis relies on 21 questionnaires and interviews:

In France

3 teachers of English

4 teachers of French as a foreign or second language

2 teachers of French as a first language

In Poland, Italy and Germany

2 teachers of French, 1 teacher of English and 1 teacher of Spanish/Italian as a foreign languages, 1 teacher of English (Italy)

1 teacher of English, 3 teachers of French (Germany)

4 teachers of French (Poland)

The levels concerned are lower secondary level (students aged 11-15) and, more rarely, upper secondary level (students aged 15-18).

German and Italian teachers mentioned the difficulty of imagining the students' and institutions' representations.

Italian teachers mentioned that the institution in Italy is multifaceted because of the wide variety of interlocutors.

Overall, teachers like their job. They appreciate the contact with students, the freedom they have with respect to organisation and the variety of the work. In Poland, teachers also foster the love of the language. Some teachers do so in Italy and France too.

Oral practice appears to be very important for students, as a part of their preparation for their integration into the modern world. French teachers even said that they "have students write" as much for themselves as for students.

For the institution, examinations and students' integration into the world are to be focused upon. For teachers, while oral activity and students' integration are very important, culture and in some cases literature (in all the countries investigated) need to be recognised. A few teachers evoked the importance of making themselves respected. These teachers also foster intellectual training. Here, apparently, is a difference in terms of teaching cultures and generations.

Concerning France, we must note the particular place of French as a foreign language, which is experienced and seen as marginal and little recognised. However, teachers appear to be very motivated and strongly in touch with the learners' concerns and the institutional pressure seems to be less significant (this was said during the interviews, even though the institution is pressing with all its weight, notably with respect to certifications and their organisation).

Notwithstanding, the *paperwork side* of the job weighs heavily on all teachers (especially in Poland). French teachers too resent the paperwork side of their job, whether it be in relation to examinations, papers or hierarchy.

The weight of the institution seems to be very heavy in Poland (for instance with respect to the organisation of examinations) and in France (rather in relation to programme cumbersomeness, hierarchy and control of teachers). We can mention on this point the

investigation conducted by A. Geiger-Jaillet and D. Deviterne¹ on the comparative approach to French and German schools (pre-primary schools in France/kindergartens in Germany). The institutional weight is heavier in France; the German system, however, is more successful, even with fewer hours of teacher presence.

Difficulties specific to the job include how to motivate students, how to correct papers, how to be as interesting as the media (in Germany), how to do paperwork while covering the whole programme, how to find motivating documents and ideas for students and – for a minority of teachers – how to maintain discipline in the classroom. Concerning Italy, an ambiguity was underscored. Did the teacher have to answer the questionnaire in a general way or in relation to what he or she actually experienced in the classroom? The interview was to clarify this point. A few teachers mentioned their difficulty in remaining neutral and objective, especially with regard to evaluation.

A number of teachers deplored the fact that there is no teamwork any longer (Italy: a few French teachers, including of French as a foreign language).

Concerning the particular case of French as a foreign language, all teachers think that the main difficulty is to be objective with all learners and to appropriately evaluate them on a daily basis. However, the fact that certification plays a major role in such courses may be an important factor in this regard.

Overall, slight differences can be noted according to age and professional experience. Younger teachers may be more open to evaluation-related issues. In France, differences must be noted that derive from the teaching context – within the school institution, or outside of it in the case of French as a foreign or second language. In the latter case, concerns are different and the relation to students (most of whom are adults) is also different, even though – as within the school institution – examinations are provided for and certificative objectives taken into account. Finally, temporal references are different (school trajectory/month or year in French as a foreign language), which alters viewpoints and behaviours.

Teachers' teaching culture and training

(Section C of the questionnaire)

All teachers agree that their training and culture comprise two parts:

- Academic and cultural aspects (language, literature, culture, etc.)
- Professional aspects (adaptation to the job, *stages* [placements], continuing training).

Few teachers connect the two parts, with the exception of the small number who are involved in research, either individually or in groups.

A number of teachers deplore the fact that they have not been trained in relationship-related matters, psychology of learning or child or teenager psychology.

Is this division between the two different faces of the lived experience problematic? It does not seem so. Over the course of the interviews, certain teachers even said that being interested in theatre, literature or music would render them more likely to renew their professional practice and their motivation for teaching.

Teachers also mention the shortcomings of their initial training and the need for them to train on a life-long basis (see Section E of the questionnaire).

They speak with one voice to ask for European acknowledgement of their training (would it be to multiply pedagogical experiences and *stages* [placements] in Europe?). They also wish to multiply exchanges among colleagues – both compatriots and foreigners. As they see it, this is a valuable source of mutual training through dialogue-mediated appropriation of others' experiences, not only between generations, but also between subjects and between countries.

Do teachers really know the CEFR? Less than half of them know it. Concerning its integration into practice, teachers of French as a foreign language are ahead of the others. Everything proceeds as though the CEFR and school programmes were still out of tune with each other. Further, wariness subsists – but on whose side? On the institutions'? On the teachers'? One can wonder.

Teachers and evaluation

(Section D of the questionnaire)

Virtually all teachers consider that in the process of evaluation the most important thing is to follow students and know them better so as to be able to pinpoint their difficulties and strengths and then observe the progress they have made. Teachers of French as a foreign language find it difficult to carry out evaluation during interactions (see the CEFR) and would like to be better trained. Ranked third in the questionnaire is the need to control – but not necessarily to mark – so as to have at hand measures that would make it possible for teachers to situate students and for students to situate themselves.

Teachers also regard evaluation as the accompanying of students and their learning and note how important it is to help them gain self-confidence by carefully connecting evaluation processes and procedures to what they learn over the course of their classes.

Measuring *compétences* or skills (acknowledging the uncertainty attached to the meaning of the word) was often noted to be both important and problematic: how to do this properly? There is a need for more training and more contacts among teachers. European *compagnonnage* or accompanied practice and exchanges have become recurring ideas.

We must also note the sparseness of connections made on a daily basis between examinations, certifications and formative evaluation. Everything proceeds as though examinations and certifications were detached from the life of the class or group.

Teachers and continuing training

(Section E of the questionnaire)

We observed that teachers reject theory when it is not related to specific, concrete practices and when its interest has not been shown. Several teachers (especially teachers of French as a foreign language) consider that theory is all right when it comes after practice, that is, when the need to know has emerged. Finally, a few teachers explained in the interviews that trainings apparently remote from language teaching can prove very useful. Among these are:

- theatre (for oral practice, class management, imagining activities) and
- music (for learning to listen, look and observe).

Teachers were equally unanimous in deploring the lack in continuing training in general and in well-targeted continuing training in particular. Teachers seem to be more satisfied in Poland, Germany and Italy than in France. Two French teachers evoked the hypocrisy of the institution with regard to trainings (promising titles for very little indeed relating to teachers' professional lives and difficulties) and the negative influence of input from families (more particularly with respect to English). The fact remains that – for all teachers – the too rarely highlighted primary benefit derived from continuing training is the possibility for teachers to entertain exchanges among themselves over time spans detached from daily routines.

Among continuing trainings asked for we can note:

- the CEFR,
- evaluation,
- ICTs,

- Innovative methodologies (including global simulations, which are not really an innovation any longer) and

- European educational systems.

To conclude, what were the keywords and phrases used by the teachers interviewed?

Teachers connected teaching with pleasure, fulfilment and self-realisation. The aspect of transmission was also mentioned.

Though sometimes threatened, a kind of ideal seems persist, as certain teachers explicitly put it.