

## **The “learning journal” Analysis and results of a training practice for future teachers**

**Marie J. Berchoud**

### **Abstract**

For about 30 years the “learning journal” has been a practice which is different from the standard university practices (like essays for instance) in the university training of some French teachers. The aim of this work is better self-knowledge for the student; besides, these learning strategies and relation strategies (centred on the self) lead to a decentring useful to better understand what a pupil is and to allow for better teaching. Has this goal been achieved? This paper presents a description of this practice of a “learning journal”, followed by an analysis and an assessment based on quantitative and qualitative indexes through a corpus of about a hundred of these journals from two universities. The results are positive; in particular they show the importance for each student of reconstructing his or her personal past in narrative form. This poses the question of putting this practice into widespread use as well as the question of its long term effects.

### **Presentation**

For six years my personal academic path gave me the opportunity to have young students or pre-integration people write their “learning journal” as they were learning a so-called rare language as complete beginners<sup>1</sup>, this within a second-cycle academic syllabus<sup>2</sup>.

The learning journal is used for the training of teachers of French as a foreign language in their third academic year. More precisely, the learning journal is a notebook containing the final written results of observation and reflection which, for future teachers, consists in becoming pupils again, learning a language they do not know at all, have not chosen, or chosen within a constraint (analogy with school pupils), and observing this learning. Future teachers must thus decentre and come out of themselves, away from their current social positions, from their current logic of existence, so as to adopt the position and logic of a pupil and, thereby, experience (again) the feelings and attitudes of a pupil. The objective of this experiment, formalized in a chronological, summary text, namely the learning journal, is to

---

<sup>1</sup> From 1995 to 2001, several hundred learning journals were written at the INALCO (Paris) and the University of Artois (Arras, in the provinces).

<sup>2</sup> The ‘French as a foreign language’ option takes place within the third academic year of a French arts degree, in language sciences or foreign languages and cultures. It was created following proposals from the Commission of reflection on French as a foreign language. It was set up by Minister Alain Savary in 1982. At the time of the research, this diploma, now suppressed, was officially regulated by a 22 May 2000 Decree (*Journal officiel*, 30 May 2000 and *Bulletin officiel*, 15 June 2000). The ‘French as a foreign language’ option consisted of 125 hours of optional teaching, split up as follows:

- Didactics of French as a foreign language;
- History/(or) civilization/(or) French language and literature, within the context of French as a foreign language (as an option to be determined from among the three possibilities according to the student’s school and academic past);
- Theoretical learning and practice of a school language.

allow future teachers to know themselves better, to understand the varied learning strategies better, as well as failure, fear and attitudes of blockage, aggressiveness and withdrawal into oneself. Quite often, the result is conclusive. At least that is what I observed empirically reading these texts and discussing with my students during the academic year or, for some of them, in the following years, as they had by then become teachers.

This statement has to be verified, however, and – where necessary – toned down and qualified: the learning journal and the activities related to it can allow the future teacher to initiate a dynamic of evolution that goes from recentring on oneself and on one's learning strategies which, though forgotten, are still active, to decentring (Piaget's words) and to a summary reflection enlightened by theoretical knowledge – a dynamic likely to complete his or her training. Notwithstanding, it is still necessary to consider the actual effectiveness of such a practice, which means: 1) describing this practice; 2) developing tools for analysing this practice, on the basis of directions and possibilities offered, specifying which groups of students are concerned; 3) presenting the results, based on the analysis structured around indexes of a great number (over a hundred throughout one academic year) of learning journals; 4) subsequently examining how and to what extent this practice proves to be formative, and for how many students out of the sum total of students in one academic year. As a conclusion, we will consider whether this practice can be applied to other teacher trainings and on what conditions.

## The learning journal

### A complex practice born of a simple idea

What is a learning journal? It can be defined by the texts and logic that underlie it, but also by listing the directions given to elaborate it.

#### Institutional and practical-logic definition

The learning journal takes place within the framework of an annual course entitled "*Théorie et pratique de l'apprentissage d'une langue*" (Theory and practice of language learning). Within the two establishments which will be referred to here in this article, this course of fifty hours or so was organized as follows: 25 hours as complete beginners in a so-called rare language (Chinese, Polish, Russian, etc.) never learned before, with the keeping of a learning journal + a 25-hour introductory course on language learning, research guidance and learning journal writing.

This activity is apparently very simple. It is governed, however, by a logic of remembering, observation and comparison: you have to tell how language came to you and how you came to language, through a language or languages, the latest of which is the one you are starting to learn; observe this learning, what occurs during the lesson, the contents taught and relationships as well as the personal responses aroused (fear of failure, complex relationship with the teacher, cooperation or absence of cooperation with the peers, for instance), which are to be related to past learning and acquisitions; finally, summarize the whole taking up the major points of the path followed and of the lessons learned in the light of theoretical knowledge of acquisition and learning.

Such work, which takes place over several months or even a year, appears to be a real intellectual and even psychic elaboration. Decentring is favoured on two accounts: the

Mis en forme : Anglais (États-Unis)

language studied – often a non-European language – and its cultural and relational substrate are remote from the student’s reference world. Let us also mention the fact that the way of teaching can vary according to the language (the place held by remembering within the learning) and the teacher-student relationship (including the degree of distance that may exist between teacher and students). We can also note the return to the position of student whilst one is going to become a teacher, whilst time has been spent on placements or even when one has already been teaching for more or less time.

The initial idea governing the setting up of this activity is that the teacher has to try to put himself or herself in the place of the pupil so as to feel and know their situation – and not only that of the good pupil – with their diversities, so as to be able to adjust to and answer the situation in question as a teacher, considering that in general a teacher is a former good pupil in the subject matter or matters he or she has chosen.

### **Directions given to future-teacher students**

The directions given to the students with regard to their learning journal are as follows:

**a) *Observe and write down teaching-learning contents:***

- Content of the course, relative places held by grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, speech, writing, culture, progress, type of evaluation;
- *What occurs for oneself:* mode of acquisition of the mother tongue, difficulties and strengths in this acquisition, possible relationships with other family languages, significant events that occurred during childhood and adolescence, choice of foreign languages learned later on, motivation for this choice, learning mode, lived experience and results of this learning, choice of academic studies;
- What place does the choice of a branch for teaching French as a foreign language hold here?
- *What occurs around oneself:* relationships with peers, relationships with the teacher, relationship to the other language and to the other culture: what place do constraint and cultural remoteness hold? How has one adapted – or not – to them?

**b) *Establish chronological and logical links*** derived from facts and behaviours rediscovered and observed: recurrences, differences, evolution; what explanations can be given?

**c) *Analyse at least one theme more precisely*** according to the lived experience of the current learning, for example the speech/writing relationship, phonetic difficulties, the verbal and/or non-verbal relationship to the teacher, fear of failure, etc.

**d) *Organize and write down the whole text*** with a justified plan based on a personal problematic;

**e) *Write down a final summary*** of the observations and reflections opening on the future: Will the student actually become a teacher one day?

The learning journal is neither a narrative of language as it is experienced nor a narrative of learning. It is neither an account of a relationship to language or languages – whether these be the student’s mother tongue or foreign languages – nor class observation as an observer from outside. The learning journal is a text for oneself, not a text or test as such. It is not a clinical or sociological text – and not even a literary text. The learning journal is closely related to personal, motivated – in both senses of the word – engagement in teacher training.

As a text for oneself, the learning journal aims at delineating and specifying a story, relationships, an ambition, along with a renewed experience of learning another language and of didactic reflection on the learning process – both of the others, the pupils, and of one's own vis-à-vis oneself (the student is a future teacher). The learning journal is also a text of confluence, a text of appropriation or re-appropriation of knowledge. It is a text of impetus towards a distant future, prior to a project: what will I become? What can I become? What do I want to become?

Students write their learning journal for themselves, from their questioning, and also on the basis of the successive themes and questions addressed by their teacher, most specifically: motivation and learning; mother tongue/foreign language; bilingualism and biculturalism; psychoanalysis and living languages; constraint and learning autonomy; place held and role played by the teacher; learning strategies; teaching strategies; relationships within the classroom. The students, both learners and future teachers, know they will have to hand over the learning journal for their teacher to read; they also know they are allowed to compose. The students will narrate what they decide to tell and will organize their narrative as they please.

Nonetheless, regularities and differences can be identified in these texts written by students that allow for analysis of this practice and – beyond this – of its results.

## **Elements for analysis of the learning journal practice**

In order to prepare for analysing the results, we will begin by presenting the groups of students chosen and specify their characteristics. Then we will rely on the directions given and possibilities offered so as to build up a reading grid.

### **Students and their characteristics**

The corpus subjected to analysis consists of learning journals from two groups of students – 91 at the INALCO (Paris), 33 at the University of Artois (Arras, in the provinces) in the academic year 1998-1999, that is, a total of 124 learning journals.

These students were in their third or fourth academic year and were studying either literature or foreign languages. They intended, in varied ways, to become teachers one day. The course of French as a foreign language (125 hours a year) represented the first concrete contact with the experience of teaching for many candidates for IUFMs (University Institutes for Teacher Training). In this course students study didactics and think about what and how to teach, to whom – and even to oneself.

Here we can distinguish between *several audiences* as follows, according to:

- The geographic situation of the university: in Paris (INALCO) or in the provinces (University of Artois);
- Past course attended (literature or foreign languages);
- The social origins and past lived experiences (better off and/or more autonomous students as they were older at INALCO; social origins and lived experiences more traditional and modest in Arras, where the percentage of grant holders was one of the highest among French universities);

– Family histories exclusively French or not over the past hundred years. In 1998-1999 at INALCO, 50% of the students in the group considered had a recent – less than 100 years – family and linguistic origin outside France, as against 24% at Arras).

In such conditions, we can better understand why *questions of language and the relationship to language and school* are so crucial – for at least two languages are involved: French/another language and/or the family and familiar language/the school language. A dual relationship does also exist with regard to language – remote and foreign to oneself, more or less buried.

In order to show the importance of the issues involved, we will specify that all teaching – even of mathematics – is a language charged with a specific universe which has to be confronted, with the attendant risks inherent in this approach.

According to what indexes can we read and analyse learning journals?

### **Tools for establishing a reading grid for learning journals**

#### ***Directions given to future teachers***

These directions can be used for an initial quantification founded on the partial/complete respect or non-respect of each of them:

- a) *Observe* teaching-learning contents
  - oneself (actions, reactions)
  - around oneself (behaviours, interactions);
- b) *Establish a relationship* between past and current facts and behaviours;
- c) *Analyse* a theme in the light of both the observations made and a few theoretical pieces of writing;
- d) *Organize and write down* the whole text;
- e) *Write down a summary* of what has been achieved and relate it to personal projects.

These *five directions* initially serve as a *basis for quantitative analysis* (as they served for marking this work): has what had been asked been done? Is it possible to identify – in the learning journal's text – observations (contents, behaviours, interactions), relationship establishment, analysis, a problematic, a plan and, ultimately, a summary? The objectivity of these directions is such that double marking does not lead to major discrepancies. This objectivity also makes it possible to support what follows (see the following point on the tools), so that the elaboration of reading and analysis indexes is not related to the independent reader alone.

Picking up each of the works of the 1998-1999 academic year and the related reading and marking grids, we observe, however, that *this measurement of quantity also somewhat sheds light on the quality of the work*. In general, the student who followed directions did not accomplish a substitute for a pseudo-work.

Of all the students considered, all *those who respected all 5 directions got a mark equal to or more than 12 out of 20*. Their work was not necessarily excellent; sometimes, it was incomplete. Thus the results did not match the directions. The work had been done, however.

That is, the students had made earnest efforts and had engaged in the activity of centring on the self, on decentring.

In the learning journals which obtained a mark equal to or more than 12, we observed a progression that goes from the report and description to analysis, to explanation and to summary: though imperfect and piecemeal, a dynamic had been established and neither the reader nor the writer was at a loss to know how to elaborate from the observations made.

Following from this, the reading needs to be refined and the reader has to try and identify what makes this activity a transformative activity. This can be done as objectively as possible by splitting the corpus into three distinct subsets so as to compare them with one another: learning journals with marks between 15 and 18 out of 20; learning journals with marks between 12 and 14 out of 20; and learning journals with marks between 6 and 11 out of 20. For carrying out the comparison, we will use refined reading indexes relative to the initial directions – refined, since these criteria are derived from these directions and also since they are fuelled by the reading of a great number of learning journals. These indexes derive from observed regularities.

#### ***Tools developed on the basis of the reading of a great number of learning journals***

Comparing the three subsets of the corpus of all 124 learning journals requires refined indexes. I determined them as follows: the academic year considered to analyse the learning journal practice was 1998-1999, that is, for me, my fourth year in this practice, which means that I had read a great number of learning journals, that I had thought about them, that I had made a final report, and also that, prior to this, I had provided the monitoring and teaching associated with this practice. I observed and selected the following reading and analysis indexes:

All the learning journals with marks between 15 and 18 out of 20 contained:

- a')* An *observation* and accurate transcription of the contents, observation of oneself, of the other in present and past experiences;
- b')* A *narrative* of the person's pre-school and school life with respect to language, languages and learning, including an initial situation, one or several key moments, an outcome or a transformation (see Claude Brémont's narrative scheme<sup>3</sup>);
- c')* *Well-argued explanations* (identification of such or such fact or behaviour as correlated with such or such cause);
- d')* *Theoretical references* used rather than simply mentioned;
- e')* A *written summary containing a generalization*: the student reports on what is preceding and opens on his or her personal project as well as on the teacher's job.

The learning journals with marks between 12 and 15 out of 20 reveal the absence or insufficiency of one of these items. However, *a'* and *b'* are always present and relatively complete (as long as it is possible to judge). The learning journals with marks equal to or less than 11 display some elements of observation, the more or less complete elaboration of a specific narration, but explanations, theoretical references or the summary – if not all three of these elements – are lacking.

---

<sup>3</sup> See Claude Brémont, "La logique des possibles narratifs", *Communications*, no. 8, "L'analyse structurale du récit", 1966 (new edition, Seuil, coll. "Points").

Here we can note that the directions given ( $a, b, c, d, e$ ) match the indexes constructed afterwards ( $a', b', c', d', e'$ ): the objective basis conferred on the indexes by prior directions also makes it possible to delineate more precisely two of those indexes ( $b'$  and  $e'$ ) in terms of content.

## Results of the learning journal practice

Let us take another look at the group considered: 124 pieces of work, that is, 124 individuals who were future teachers. Notwithstanding, 4 of them were already teaching in the French school system and 26 had already taught, or done remedial courses, with some of them still doing this. Thus a quarter of them were non-neophytes.

### Major aspects: centring/decentring, how, for how many individuals?

#### *How?*

Through the analysis it was possible to note that index  $b'$  (elaboration or not of a narrative structure) is a reliable discriminating criterion for the presence of a work of centring on the self/decentring on the part of the person concerned: the presence of such a narrative structure – elaborated, (re)constructed – testifies to this effort. This narrative structure is present in all the learning journals with marks equal to or more than 12 out of 20 and meeting the directions. Above all, it is a basis from which a personal reflection will grow in terms of theory, will fuel a project and develop generalization.

We also noted, in correlation with what goes before, that  $e'$  (summary, personal project, generalization) goes along with an achieved, fully-elaborated narrative structure and can be the sign of actual decentring.

It can be stated that the importance of a narrative structure is at the same time personal and collective – personal, since each piece of writing is unique; collective, with noticeable regularities, the most salient of which are the initial situation/the crisis or challenge/the solution/the perspectives. Here we obviously think of the structural narrative schemes, as highlighted by Claude Brémont (see footnote 3). While the directions given do influence the narrative regularities observed, and while all narrative has a beginning and an end, a crisis or a challenge to be taken up can nonetheless be found in all learning narratives, just as in all learning and just as in all human growing processes. But still, at least the individual has to appropriate this learning by telling it, within his or her story.

#### *Centring/Decentring*

Then we consider that a work of *centring on the self/decentring* has been carried out when indexes  $b'$  and  $e'$  are identifiable. In relation to this, indexes  $a$  and  $b$  are still present (observation/description and analysis). As for indexes  $c, d$  and  $e$ , they are less systematically identified as complete. Thus, even if the direction is respected, the result is not necessarily up to expectations: the framework, that is, the direction is there, but sometimes a true theoretical reflection is lacking, the explanation is incomplete, and the summary is piecemeal.

This set of writings corresponds to the works with marks equal to or more than 12 out of 20, that is, 93 learning journals out of 124, in other words 75% of all the learning journals

considered. Within these 93 learning journals, 25 obtained marks equal to or more than 15. In this case, *b'* and *e'* are not the only indexes identified; so are *a'*, *c'* and *d'*. As has already been mentioned, directions are respected *a priori*: observation, analysis, complete writing and the work done builds on initial observations.

Overall, three quarters of the future teachers can be considered to have really taken the trouble and the freedom to try to observe, analyse and connect their observations with their memories. This elaboration can be regarded as probably contributing to organizing their move from the learner's status to the teacher's – this even though only 20% of them did meet all the directions given and – through them – did elaborate all the results expected.

### ***What about the others?***

Twenty-five per cent of the 124 learning journals, with marks equal to or less than 11 out of 20, showed *incomplete narrations*. Some future teachers replaced the links that were missing with, for instance, theoretical developments on language which obscure a move or non-move from observation to explanation or are the sign of rushed work. Such practices can be referred to as *avoidance or make-believe practices*.

The narrative structure is incomplete. Further, hardly any explanation related to observations and hardly any summary opening on a project or generalization can be found in such learning journals.

Oblivion of directions is the first and last observation which is the sign of really false work which can hardly be used and which is ultimately disappointing for both the student and the teacher. This is too much time spent and wasted making believe! This is the case for 31 learning journals out of 124, that is, one quarter of them. Within these 31 learning journals, certain students, more than others, took into account the comments made and the encouragement to rewrite or complete their learning journals for the second exam taken in September.

The teacher's guiding remarks cannot consist in putting him- or herself in the student's place and filling in the "blanks" in the narration, analysis, explanation and summary. Again, it might lead either to a blockage, a case of avoidance, or to a pseudo-work, whose artifice would nonetheless be less visible. Rather, the teacher must ask one question with regard to one direction given; this question must allow the student to start again, that is to say that it must be operative: for example, the teacher must not say, "Why didn't you tackle the theme of failure?" but instead, "And how did you move from your mother tongue to your first foreign language?"

Let us note as a conclusion that these comments, made the day when the learning journals were handed out, reveal a personal continuation on the part of the future teacher of the elaboration work undertaken, whether this work was made known to the teacher or not: a dynamic had been initiated and it went on outside the university. Was this the case in the classrooms where the future teachers would teach or were already teaching? At the moment, few elements are available that make it possible to answer this question from the vantage point of a sit-back position. Then let us focus our attention on the future teachers who were already teaching.

## Focus on a few subgroups

### *Those who were already teaching in the French school system (4 individuals in 124)*

First let us note that the most complete learning journals are not necessarily those written by non-neophytes. The four teachers in question elaborated – as a result of age and practice? – rich, though not necessarily complete, learning journals; the marks they obtained were 18, 17, 14, and 13 out of 20. What is lacking in the learning journals which obtained the lowest marks is often the theoretical base, that is, the concrete/abstract connecting. In the same way, index *e'* (summary and generalization) is not present in all the learning journals, or sometimes only in a piecemeal form. (The summary is always present, including as applied to a class the author teaches; the generalization is not.) We can thus think that while there is decentring, a blockage or resentment arises as to the return on oneself – as a pupil in a subject matter you have not chosen and are not necessarily good at, especially if you believe your failure has been noticed by everyone: both peers and teacher. The absence of self-centring marks, however, should not lead us to state that decentring occurred without self-centring. Centring may have been undermined, toned down or confined to lived experience and personal writings.

### *The non-neophytes: individuals who had teaching or remedial course experience (one quarter of the group)*

None of these non-neophytes obtained a mark lower than 12 out of 20, which would tend to testify to the good influence of an initial experience of teaching or tutoring on the elaboration of the learning journal. But what about the contribution of the learning journal for teaching?

Interrogated when the learning journals were handed back to them, the students concerned said that they understood better *a posteriori* such or such child or adolescent, that they felt closer to their pupils. Having the opportunity to observe their own past and current practices from the outside and from within, they think, is fruitful. The contribution of the learning journal lies in the fact that it allows the teachers to perceive the pupils in a new light, in that it modifies their vision of the “good” and “bad” pupils, and in that it encourages to do things differently and improve on one’s practice.

What did the learning journal bring to the neophytes (those who have never taught before)?  
A pseudo-practice?

### *The neophytes (three quarters of the group)*

Among these 93 neophytes, 61 obtained a mark equal to or more than 12 out of 20 for their learning journals. They can be considered as having done things earnestly and as having truly undertaken a work of elaboration with regard to their past and current experience as students – though with more difficulty than the non-neophytes. Overall, the result is positive for two thirds of these neophytes.

However, all the learning journals with marks equal to or less than 11 are those of neophytes. So what happened? A mistake in terms of orientation? If so, since it is better to become aware of this, the learning journal has not been useless.

We can also hypothesize that some students did this work too quickly. While it is possible to obtain a fairly good mark for an essay on which one has spent little time, things are entirely different as far as the learning journal is concerned. The learning journal requires of the student, the future teacher, that they do things over time: note-taking, observation, (re)constitution of a personal narration – i.e., a progressive elaboration.

This raises a difficulty. The learning journal is a work entirely different from those required during the third academic year. Students must not only conform to the model, they must also be themselves. In another article<sup>4</sup>, I have opposed those two types of work. Briefly, the works in the third academic year are set in a *logic of reproduction*; the learning journal, in a *logic of production*. These different types of work, however, are part of academic teacher training.

## **How and to what extent has this practice proved to be formative? Feedback on analyses and practices**

### **The results: their interest and their limits**

If we add up all the results of the students, taking into account the marks obtained as well as conformity with key indexes, 75% of the students (among all the students within a single academic year) did – partially or completely – perform a work of self-centring/decentring, which is the objective of the activity considered here. This is positive, but what about this in a teaching situation?

In this respect, it would be necessary to construct a tool for following up this activity, at least for a cohort of students and for several years, say five years, so as to obtain reliable, systematic results. The trainee teachers do not necessarily become teachers in the year following their getting their diploma: some are already teachers, others pursue their studies or take competitive examinations. We could hear answers other than mere occasional answers<sup>5</sup> on the contribution of the learning journal to the teachers' training, as against teachers who have not experienced this activity. This article aims to raise interest in such a practice among teachers and researchers.

Finally, we can think that the discoveries about oneself do not translate as such into daily teaching; rather, they filter through institutional constraints. However, these discoveries certainly give sense to engagement with a job, bring new motivations and heighten awareness of oneself and of others.

### **The role of the activity itself**

We will distinguish between various chronological phases in this activity: from the understanding of directions and their respect, in parallel with the effort of elaboration and its attendant difficulties, to the final version, that is, the learning journal, and the teacher's comments as feedback. Briefly, the activity – below the surface – consists in learning to find

<sup>4</sup> In *Les cahiers pédagogiques*, "Accompagner, une idée neuve en éducation", no. 393, April 2001.

<sup>5</sup> All the students who have become teachers and with whom we have kept in contact say that they have greatly benefited from the learning journal experience, and these are often the ones who have a taste for research as well as for teaching. Perhaps they would have reached the same results on their own. Offering the learning journal activity within the framework of a course greatly increases the possibility for the teachers to benefit from this experience of feedback on the self and from these learning practices.

new elements by closely examining what already exists, including oneself, within an organized framework. In other words, this activity consists in thinking about this activity. This thinking is not an *a priori* objective thinking, detached from the connections and context of the student's life, but rather an *a posteriori* thinking, which takes place in an effort to elaborate subjectivity and to construct objectivity.

In the beginning, the understanding of directions is not taken for granted. Sometimes, there are confusions between *the result and the process*. For instance, with the direction "Observe", the student tends to understand "write down words which look like observations", "tell what you have put down", "present the syllabus". Here, it is essential for directions to be well understood not only in terms of finished product or result, but also in terms of process or progressive elaboration. To this aim, students must be placed in a situation in which they can abandon their "obsession" with results (which goes along with obsession with marks). During the lessons, I gave many examples, read excerpts from previous learning journals, made comparisons with the physical world (for instance, observing birds, plants, people in the streets, etc.).

Then it is necessary for the student to *intend and be able to follow the directions given*. Sometimes, the student does things other than those required of him or her. "I don't remember anything about school. I did what I was told to do..." (borderline case). Here the student vainly looks for a model and takes refuge in theorizing. In more straightforward terms, the student is not aware of all the connections possible in his or her path or the events which occur along it. For instance, he or she does not notice that his or her relation to the teacher has never changed over time. So the student must list the themes which will make up a kind of fabric to be used as a guideline: relation to writing, to speech, expectations vis-à-vis the teacher, etc. These are the questions which may be addressed along the course, arousing comments and reflections, first in common, then individually.

Thus, the student must compose from *what he or she has jotted down* along his or her rare language course: his or her varied observations, comments and memories. Anxiety over the plan to elaborate for an essay is thus recurrent. Therefore, a simple standard plan is suggested:

- 1 Observations throughout the course (the learning journal in its strictest sense);
- 2 Analysis of certain high spots of the student's life path;
- 3 Summary and perspectives.

This plan encourages the student to answer the question asked, but does not preclude incompleteness, flimsy surveys or forgotten elements. Certain students need to have their own plan and make it up.

As can be understood, this activity requires to be guided by the teacher, especially and even if the best result is that the student avails himself or herself of autonomy.

### **The teacher's role**

Here the teacher accompanies the student. Between complete freedom granted to the student and too strict guidance that prevents the student from appropriating his or her own personal path, the teacher's role is to guide and allow the student to make progress.

Thus, if the activity is centred solely on the didactic aspects of the class observed and of the subject matter learned, it loses substance. When you observe a class, you do not take part in it. In this respect, participant observation raises numerous problems at this level of study.

In the same way, the activity is seriously undermined if the learning journal is confined within linguistic analysis and/or within the reiteration of the theoretical course through successive flashes reconnected to the observations written down.

The student is not there to satisfy the teacher's hobby-horses, such as learning thresholds and didactic transposition. The student is there to perform a personal work for which theory will be called upon if need be.

This testifies to the fact that the teacher too is involved in the creation of learning journals.

## Conclusion

### Can this practice be proposed for other teacher training?

#### Prospects

Mis en forme : Anglais (États-Unis)

The move to appropriation by the trainee teacher – as a subject – of his or her own training allows for better social integration, better adaptation, as well as a continued, motivated relationship to training – both given and received.

Speaking about oneself and specifying one's linguistic path is a necessary period of self-centring – prior to sound decentring –, a period in which the student will observe and reflect. As we have seen, the practice is fruitful for trainee teachers of French as a foreign language. We cannot see why it should not be so for other teachers, since an ever-increasing number of young people are foreign to their own language and/or to the language of the country they live in, all the more so when this language is the language used at school.

Thus we should reflect on the possible integration of such activities into teachers' initial and continuing training.

But end-of-the-year examinations, as well as competitive examinations, are still very present in students' minds and though the learning journal work is marked, it accounts for only part of the mark in the course *Introduction to the didactics of French as a foreign language* in the overall third academic year. Then, must such a practice be introduced into the university or into teacher training in IUFMs, since it uses logic different from that used by the vast majority of the other examination and competitive examination tests? The question deserves to be raised.

We will merely ask under what conditions this is possible and fruitful:

– Trainee teachers must not engage with the practice in a disorderly way (otherwise it may soon cause blockage – or, conversely, uncontrolled psychoanalysis), but with an objective set out by the teacher: to clarify one's relation to language, to languages, and to teaching/learning; to observe lived experiences – one's own and others' –; and to coordinate the whole with the requirements of reality as it is.

– Here lies a difficulty that relates to the institution and to competitive examinations: what is required for an essay, for instance, is entirely opposed to this work of committed action research and production required by the learning journal. Then learning to reconcile both

types of work might become the first step toward the necessary move from school life to professional life.

– This assumes that the teachers who manage this activity are themselves able to move between the two types of writings: on the one hand, write essays and produce academic works, and on the other hand, let the language live within themselves, in their own creativity, fuelled by experience, and let this creativity express itself. Most of them are able to do so, but they do not necessarily value this characteristic of theirs<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>6</sup> See the anecdote told in *Les Cahiers pédagogiques* (mentioned above), p. 49 : “Une enseignante s’autocensure pour correspondre à un programme, alors qu’elle avait su trouver par elle-même la bonne ‘posture’ face à la classe”.