DISCUSSION PAPER

Teacher Education in France: Universitisation and professionalisation – from IUFMs to ESPEs

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Abstract

During the last 30 years, there have been several major reforms of teacher education in France. The role of universities in teacher education, the acquisition of professional competencies, as well as the articulation between academic courses and practice in schools, have all been questioned. These reforms have led to lots of debates and controversy, particularly about the role of universities and schools and about the balance between knowledge and pedagogy.

In this paper, I first describe the specificities of the French system in recruiting and training teachers, and I then present the major developments in teacher education in France in the last 30 years, along with the main questions addressed. After a long period of time during which primary teachers were trained in écoles normales and secondary teachers only received subject preparation, the creation of IUFMs (Instituts Universitaires de Formation des Maîtres – university institutes for teacher training) as independent institutions in 1990 tried to resolve the biggest questions of teacher education. The history of IUFMs has led to successes and failures that I will analyse. In order to improve the role of universities in teacher education and give future teachers better professional preparation through ‘sandwich training’, in 2013 the government created the new ESPEs (Écoles Supérieures du Professorat et de l’Education – higher schools for teaching and education professions).

Keywords: teaching profession, teacher training, pedagogy, professionalisation, education system

During the last 30 years, there have been several major reforms of teacher education in France. The duration of the training, its organisation, and its content have been revamped. These reforms have led to lots of debates and controversy about the role of universities and the role of schools in teacher education, the articulation between theory and practice, the balance between knowledge and pedagogy etc. Such debates were sometimes passionate and even violent! In this paper, I will describe the main developments in teacher education in France in the last 30 years, I will analyse...
the biggest successes and failures, and will try to focus on some major trends and intentions concerning teacher education.

**A centralised education system**

France is known for having a very centralised education system. The educational policy is fixed at the national level; curricula and contents are designed by the Ministry of Education. The country is divided into 30 educational regions called *académies*. Each region is managed by a representative of the Minister, the *Recteur d’académie*, appointed by the State. This centralisation has consequences for the way teachers are trained and recruited.

Generally speaking, teachers in France are civil servants. They are recruited and paid by the State, and are appointed to schools. More precisely, primary teachers are recruited at the level of an *académie*, which means they can be appointed to any primary school in the *académie*. Secondary teachers are recruited at the national level and can be appointed to any secondary school in France. There is a process for appointing them, taking their wishes and different priority criteria into account. For some of them, it may be difficult if they have some reasons to wish to be in a particular region. A consequence of such a process is that schools cannot choose their teachers! The teachers’ unions support this very strongly since they think it is the role of the State to ensure a certain equity between regions, schools and teachers, and that letting the schools choose their teachers would in a way not be equitable. But, of course, this issue is often discussed.

Secondary teachers teach only one subject (except some in vocational education). Primary teachers have to teach all subjects of the primary school curriculum.

Teachers are recruited through competitions. The law says that teachers must gain a Master’s degree and pass the competition. The competition is organised at the national level for secondary teachers (the main competitions are *CAPES* – there is one for each of all general subjects, *CAPET* – for technical subjects, *CAPLP* – for vocational education, *CAPEPS* – for sports, and *Agrégation* – a higher level competition). For primary teachers, the competition (*CRPE*) is organised at the level of the *académie*. All competitions are organised in two parts: *admissibilité* (a written examination) and *admission* (an oral examination). The form and content of the competitions have been very controversial. Traditionally, they were mainly about the subject, and very little about teaching and pedagogy. But a recent reform aims to make the competitions more professional, closer to a recruitment process than an academic examination. It may seem strange that such recruitment competitions look like an academic examination about a subject. This comes from a time when the State wanted to recruit experts in subjects and then, when recruited, train them for their new profession. But, of course, there was a lot of debate since being good at a subject does not mean that a candidate will be a good teacher!
Teacher education before 1990

Before 1990, primary and secondary teachers were trained in different and independent ways. Primary teachers were trained in *Ecoles Normales*. There was a very long tradition of *Ecoles Normales*. They were created at the beginning of the 19th century, and progressively spread across the country. For almost 200 years, they played a major role in preparing the *instituteurs* (primary teachers), and bringing people from all social classes to the profession of *instituteur*. Gradually, the level of recruitment of primary teachers was increased, to the *baccalauréat* and then to the *DEUG* (a diploma assessing 2 years of university studies). In the late 1980s, primary teachers received 4 years of *post-baccalauréat* training before becoming a teacher: 2 years at university, then 2 years in the *Ecole Normale*. There was a selection for admission in *Ecole Normale*, and this selection was in fact the recruitment of teachers: once you entered an *Ecole Normale*, you received training and then you were almost automatically appointed as a primary teacher in some school. During the training at *Ecole Normale*, students were already civil servants and paid as such. 

Secondary teachers were trained at university. They first had to obtain a *licence* (Bachelor degree) in the subject of their choice, then prepare at university for the State competitive examination to be recruited. They were recruited only on the basis of their subject aptitudes. And once they had been recruited, they received (light) professional preparation in the so-called *CPR* (*Centres Pédagogiques Régionaux*, Regional Pedagogical Centres), through tutored practice in a school, and some pedagogical lectures given by inspectors.

At the same time, vocational education teachers were recruited and trained in special institutions: *ENNA* (*Ecoles Normales Nationales d'Apprentissage* – National Normal Schools for Apprenticeship).

Thus, the French tradition was to recruit teachers and then train them, which had several consequences: the recruitment did not take professional competency into account and was based on subject knowledge; universities were used to preparing future teachers only for subject content since the professional preparation was not their responsibility.

In the 1970s and 1980s, we saw the development of both educational research and in-service teacher training. For instance, IREM* (Research Institutes on Mathematics Education) were created in universities (one in each *académie*) around 1970. They worked in teams, including academic staff and primary and secondary teachers, produced a lot of educational resources and offered many sessions and courses for teachers’ in-service training. Educational research, education sciences, and didactics of different disciplines were more and more active in universities, even if considered as marginal.
In 1982, the government created the MAFPEN (Mission Académique pour la Formation des Personnels de l'Éducation Nationale), one in each académie, a service under the Recteur d'académie, in charge of in-service training for teachers and educational personnel. Under the Recteur d'académie means that they were not in universities, but in the education system (primary and secondary). But more and more, universities were asked to contribute to teacher in-service training, and many academic professors were appointed as heads of MAFPEN. At that time, there was a lot of funding and posts for teacher in-service training. But, progressively, the means were reduced and almost disappeared.

A great reform: the creation of IUFMs

In July 1989, an important law was adopted by the French Parliament: the loi d'orientation sur l'éducation (orientation law on education). This law stated the main principles for education: education is the first national priority; education must be 'pupil centred'; each child must be the main actor of his/her orientation; the educational community, including the parents, is in charge of education etc. This reform organised the school in ‘cycles’ instead of ‘years’: a ‘cycle’ is a set of 3 years during which the competencies to acquire were fixed by a national curriculum.

The new law included (Article 17, 8861-8862) the creation of IUFMs (Instituts universitaires de formation des maîtres – University Institutes for Teacher Education), in charge of teacher initial professional training (for primary and secondary teachers) and contributing to both in-service teacher training and educational research. The main idea was to train all teachers in the same university institution. IUFMs were created in 1990 and 1991 (one in each académie).

With IUFMs, the process to become a teacher was the same for all teachers (primary and secondary):

- take 3 years at university (and obtain the ‘licence’ – Bachelor degree); and
- then take 2 years at IUFM, with the recruitment competition at the end of the 1st year.

So the first year was mainly focussed on preparation for the recruitment competition and, after passing the competition, during the 2nd year, students were given the status of ‘trainee-teachers’ and paid as civil servants. At the end of the 2nd year, an examination confirmed most of the trainee-teachers as permanent teachers.

The question of the place of the recruitment competition in the process was strongly discussed and has remained controversial up to now. Two options would seem simpler: either to pass the competition after 3 years at university, and so be a paid civil servant during the 2 years at IUFM; or to pass the competition at the end of the 2 years at IUFM. The first option would have been too expensive for the State! And the second one was strongly rejected by the teachers’ unions because being paid
Some core principles and ambitions

A report by Daniel Bancel (1989) provided the core principles on which the reform was based: to give future teachers not only a subject competency, but also strong professional preparation. The report says there are three main domains of competencies necessary for a future teacher: knowledge about the subject identity (knowledge to be taught, history and epistemology of the discipline, social role of the discipline), knowledge about learning and teaching (didactics and pedagogy), and knowledge about the education system (national educational policy, the educational institution etc.).

The main components of the reform were:

- secondary teachers should be provided with professional and pedagogical preparation, not only with a disciplinary background;
- primary teachers should be trained in a university context, not in separate institutions. They should be given preparation of the same quality (and duration) as secondary teachers (this led to an increase in the preparation by one year). And, as a consequence, secondary and primary teachers would then receive the same salaries.
- All future teachers (primary and secondary) should be trained in the same university institution. IUFMs will be created in each académie and be in charge of teacher preparation. They will be independent institutions, not part of the university, but have a status very close to universities, and be strongly linked with universities.
- IUFMs should also contribute to both in-service teachers’ training and educational research.

The first year at IUFM is mainly devoted to preparation for the recruitment competition. Subjects are central, but also entail a first reflection about teaching and learning, and some didactical and pedagogical input.

The second year is based on professional practice. Students spend about one-third of their time as (tutored) teachers in schools, and their courses at IUFM are articulated with the practice they experience. They also have to write a professional dissertation.

This reform and the creation of IUFMs aimed to reinforce the coherence of teacher education:

- Coherence between primary and secondary teachers’ training: train them in the same institution, in the same spirit (not the same way, since in France primary
teachers teach all disciplines, and secondary teachers generally teach only one discipline). Some common courses were designed for future primary and secondary teachers, based on the continuity of a discipline and its concepts throughout the school, and on the continuity of the development of the pupil throughout primary and secondary school.

- Coherence between discipline content and professional preparation. Not only should they be juxtaposed as independent parts of the training, but they should be closely articulated, with one feeding the other. The first competency of a teacher is certainly mastering the knowledge, but the teacher has to stand back and be able to ‘look at’ his/her discipline: know about its history and epistemology, know about its role in other subjects and in society, about its applications and uses. The teacher also has to know about the mechanisms of knowledge transmission and acquisition (didactics) of his/her discipline. He/she has to acquire other types of knowledge, such as knowing about children and teenagers (psychology), knowing about the education system, its social role, its functioning, and also mastering technical competencies (voice and body mastering, technological tools etc.). Information and communication technology must be integrated into the teaching profession. There is a risk of just adding and juxtaposing too many modules about all the components which appear necessary for a teacher. IUFMs have tried to design integrated curricula, taking all of the components of the training into account, but articulating and integrating them in a coherent way.

- Coherence between theory and practice, articulating them. As for almost all professions, students need to acquire theoretical knowledge and practical abilities and competencies. The idea in IUFMs was not to separate these two sides, but to link them strongly, to articulate them: theory obtains a meaning when confronted by concrete real situations; theory helps preparing and managing specific situations. And concrete situations help with understanding and applying theoretical knowledge, and give input for further theoretical learning. This calls for strong cooperation between the trainers at IUFMs and the tutors in schools. And this needs a kind of ‘reflective analysis of practice’ to be practised, in groups.

- Coherence between pre-service and in-service training. The teaching profession needs to be permanently in a ‘trainee’ spirit. Initial training is the first part, but cannot provide for all the competencies and knowledge needed for one’s whole career. In-service training must be considered a normal component of the teaching profession, and be ‘prepared’ by initial training.

- Coherence between training and research. IUFMs must develop educational research in order to acquire a real university status and spirit. Teachers do not need to be researchers, but need to be able to read and question research, bring problems to be solved, and reflect using research tools.
Some main principles lay at the core of the reform:

- Being a teacher is a profession that must be learnt and prepared. It is not just a talent or a gift, as many people thought before! Actually, of course, there are talented and gifted teachers, and maybe some of them would be excellent even without strong preparation! But the point is not to have some of those teachers, but to prepare the huge number of teachers the country needs. France has to recruit around 15,000 to 20,000 teachers per year. Finding gifted candidates is not enough! But preparing and training 20,000 future teachers every year is possible!

- The main motto which was launched with the creation of the IUFMs was “Recruit more, train better”. At that time, there was a lack of candidates for becoming a teacher. The creation of IUFMs was supposed to attract a large number of students. The idea was ‘to make clear and visible the path for becoming a teacher’. We could observe that in public opinion it was clear how to become a doctor: just go to the faculty of medicine. It was clear how to become an engineer: go to one of the engineers’ schools. It was also clear for primary teachers, with the *Ecoles Normales*. But how to become a secondary teacher was not so clear. Many students said ‘I passed the competition and became a teacher just because I did not do anything else’!

For primary teachers, the reform increased the level of the recruitment: before, you could enter an *Ecole Normale* 2 years after gaining the *baccalauréat*. For accessing an IUFM, you had to study 3 years after acquiring the *baccalauréat*. Some people were anxious that such an increase could lower the number of candidates. But it was the opposite: IUFMs immediately attracted a large number of students aiming to become primary teachers. There were probably two main reasons for this: the salaries of primary teachers were increased, reaching the same level as secondary teachers. And many students thought that it should be easier to become a primary teacher than a secondary teacher since being a secondary teacher requires being very good in one precise subject.

- Equalising the dignity of primary teachers and secondary teachers was also a main point. Training them in the same institution, with similar programmes of the same duration, and paying them the same salary supported the idea that the two professions had the same dignity.

- IUFMs had the ambition of giving all teachers a ‘common culture’. This was done through ‘common modules’ attended by future primary and secondary teachers, based on the common culture of schools and addressing, for instance, the uniqueness of a subject throughout primary and secondary school, and the uniqueness of a pupil throughout schooling. But designing such
common modules was not easy, and most of them progressively disappeared after some years.

- ‘Universitariser, professionnaliser’: The double aim of IUFMs was to make teacher preparation more academic and more professional. More academic, because up to then primary teachers were not trained at university, and because secondary teachers had an academic education only about their subject, not about pedagogy or professional preparation. IUFMs aimed at providing future teachers with an academic context, linked to research and with universities. Yet some people thought that making the training more academic could lead to less professional preparation. IUFMs were in charge of giving all future teachers a strong professional preparation.

The method used by the Ministry for creating and developing IUFMs was quite innovative. Usually, in France, a reform starts with a law and then ministerial decrees and orders organise everything. Due to centralisation, most things are organised from Paris and then locally applied! This is a very bureaucratic system! However, in the case of IUFMs, the law only gave very short general statements:

“An IUFM will be created in each académie, from 1 September 1990, attached to one or several universities [...]. IUFMs are public higher education institutions [...], they run the initial professional training of teachers, [...] they contribute to teachers’ in-service training and to educational research [...]” (Orientation Law on Education 1989, Art. 17). The law also stated that IUFMs are managed by a Director and a Board. The first IUFM – Grenoble – was created on 1 September 1990; two others were created on 1 October 1990; and the creation was generalised to all académies on 1 October 1991. But, when the first IUFMs were created, there were very few decrees and orders so that IUFMs had to solve a huge quantity of organisational, administrative and educational problems on their own. The process was very interesting: each IUFM collected all the problems and questions they had encountered and the solutions they had proposed, which was enriched by the work of the Conference of IUFM Directors and then discussed with the Ministry. Thus, the Ministry gradually produced all the necessary decrees and orders based on concrete problems and pragmatic solutions! It was a very interesting process, even if it sometimes gave the IUFM staff a feeling of vertigo, like working without a safety net!

**Debates and controversy**

From the beginning, the reform of teachers’ education and the creation of IUFMs led to intense political and ideological debates and fights (Le Point, 1991)!

A political debate: The government considered this reform as a major one, within the framework of the new orientation law on education. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Education were personally and highly involved in the reform, and engaged in several strong discourses to support it. As a consequence, the reform was
considered by some people as a ‘left-wing reform’, and it was therefore strongly
criticised by the right-wing parties. Traditionally, a majority of teachers in France
vote for the left. Some party leaders from the right wing said that IUFMs were
established in order to prepare ‘left-wing teachers’. The argument behind this is that
pedagogy has often been considered as a left-wing concept, and pedagogy had
become more important in IUFMs than it was before, especially for secondary
education. The political debate about IUFMs became ever tougher and, in 1993,
during the campaign for the parliamentary elections, the main right-wing party,
RPR, announced that it would cancel IUFMs. They won the election but, of course,
they did not suppress the new institutes, which were necessary for training all
teachers. They made some changes in order to please their right-wing voters. It is
interesting to note that, all through their existence, IUFMs were at the centre of
political debates.

An ideological debate: The main problem IUFMs encountered was the debate
between ‘republicans’ and ‘pedagogists’! The word ‘republican’ here does not mean a
political side. You can find them both in the left- and right-wing parties. As for
education, they are quite conservative. They say that ‘teaching is an art, not a science’,
based on common sense and pragmatism, and they denounce pedagogy as something
empty and useless, just words without real content. They consider subject knowledge
as the core component of education, and criticise pedagogical methods based
on collaboration, projects etc. One aim of creating IUFMs was to introduce more
pedagogy and didactics in teacher education, particularly for secondary teachers, who
were only trained in the content of their subjects. Pedagogy, didactics and psychology
were considered important parts of the IUFM curricula. But republicans said that
enhancing pedagogy would reduce the subject knowledge, and that this is not
acceptable. Some philosophers and writers were supporting these ideas, such as Alain
Finkielkraut or Elisabeth Badinter (Le Monde, 1990). On the other hand, specialists
in pedagogy and educational sciences such as Philippe Meirieu were promoting the
development of pedagogical research, and supporting IUFMs. Very tough debates
unfolded in the press.

This led to a strange paradox. For some people, IUFMs looked too pedagogy-
oriented, which could lead to a diminution of knowledge mastering (some said that
IUFMs were the ‘temples of pedagogy’!). Yet other people, mainly IUFM students,
had the feeling that practice and pedagogy were too weak in the IUFM programmes.
IUFMs always tried to maintain a good balance between subjects and pedagogy, and
between theory and practice. But some pedagogy or didactics courses sometimes
looked too theoretical and were badly received by students.

Some resistance: IUFMs were created as ‘university institutes’, yet outside
universities. This means that IUFMS had some similar characteristics to universities
concerning teaching, research, staff, administration, but were independent institu-
tions. This caused some strong resistance from different sides: certain academic staff
(especially professors in some subjects as history, languages, philosophy etc.) complained that academic courses could be given out of universities. They ‘owned’ the subjects and disagreed that IUFMs could prepare teachers about subject content (even if most of those courses were given by academic staff, teaching partly in IUFMs). Before IUFMs had been created, secondary teaching recruitment competitions were prepared for in universities, so some had the feeling that these preparations had been stolen from them!

There was also some resistance from inspectors. Secondary inspectors were the main actors in ‘CPR’ (Centres Pédagogiques Régionaux), which provided light pedagogical preparation to newly recruited secondary teachers through weekly lectures. They were invited to contribute to teacher training in the new IUFMs, and some of them became deputy-directors of IUFMs. But many of them sensed that they had lost some of their power, and they complained. Most of them were not used to working with universities. After a few years, their contribution to teacher training in IUFMs became more natural and accepted.

When IUFMs were created, the previous institutions for primary teachers’ training, Ecoles Normales, were suppressed. It was difficult for their staff, and for the primary inspectors who were quite powerful in Ecoles Normales, to be in new institutions totally different from the previous ones. The Minister decided that all the staff from Ecoles Normales would be automatically integrated into IUFMs, without any conditions. Most ‘played the game’ and contributed to the reform, but for some of them it was a huge change of culture and a difficult transition. Previous Ecole Normale teachers constituted the large majority of the IUFM staff. This gave IUFMs a culture which was considered as too primary, and it sometimes led to difficult problems.

The reactions of students to the creation of IUFMs were very diverse. At the beginning, many secondary student teachers had the feeling that only the subject content was important in order to become a teacher, and they were quite critical of pedagogy and didactics. But more and more, they realised that being a teacher is a profession which needs professional training. IUFMs had a few difficulties in designing appropriate courses and training activities. Some courses seemed too theoretical, not concrete enough.

**Training content and methods**

IUFMs spent a lot of time and energy on designing new courses. Besides the traditional subjects, students had courses in human and social sciences (philosophy, psychology) and about the education system. They also had courses in didactics and pedagogy. During the second year, students also had to write a ‘professional dissertation’. The main challenge was to organise teaching practice periods in schools. This could take several forms: ‘accompanied practice’, where the student was together with a teacher in the classroom, and also during the second year ‘full responsibility practice’ where the student was alone with the pupils. But it was
important that these teaching practice periods were strongly connected to the courses in the IUFM: the courses gave tools for practising and for analysing what had happened in the classroom; and, back in the IUFM, students had sessions for analysing what had happened during the teaching practice (‘practice analysis seminars’). It was very difficult for IUFMs to master precisely what had happened in the schools during the teaching practice periods. In the schools, students were tutored by teachers, although the collaboration between these teachers and the IUFM staff was often very weak. For 15 years, a lot of work was done in IUFMS in order to make the training evolve, to enrich it, to innovate, to better meet the needs of both students and schools. It was quite paradoxical that, throughout the 20 years, there was general satisfaction among the students, along with some strong criticisms, but some very positive reports were written about IUFMs, although the ideological debates did not cease.

The integration of IUFMs into universities, and ‘masterisation’

In 2005, the government decided that IUFMs should be integrated into universities. The chief reason was that IUFMs had difficulties in developing an academic culture (for instance, some IUFMs had no relationship with university research), and that in most other countries teacher training was being done in universities. Progressively, all IUFMs became university institutes, within universities. They lost part of their autonomy and became more dependent on university policy. When IUFMs were created in 1990, the question had been raised: should they be independent institutions, or part of universities? The government considered that universities did not show enough interest in teacher training, and that independent institutions would be more efficient. But, 15 years later, universities looked more ready to integrate teacher training into their mission. This led to another issue: which degree should future teachers be given? The recruitment competition for teachers is not considered as a diploma. In fact, future teachers spend 5 years studying in universities and IUFMs, but their highest degree is the ‘licence’ (Bachelor degree) obtained after 3 years, and which was the compulsory degree in order to take the recruitment competition. There were many requests that teachers should graduate with a 5-year degree: a Master’s degree. Accordingly, in 2008 the government decided that having a Master’s degree would be compulsory in order for teachers to participate in the recruitment competitions. This changed the content of the training in IUFMs, and the status of newly recruited teachers. The content of the 2 years at IUFM was organised around preparation for a Master’s degree and preparation for the competition, which then took place at the end of the 2 years at the IUFM. The development of professional competencies, which was an important mission for IUFMs, was then reduced. This was very badly received by universities and by the actors of IUFMs since it was regarded as an impoverishment of teacher training. And the positions of ‘trainee teachers’, which newly recruited teachers got just after
passing the competition at the end of the first year at an IUFM, and which meant they were paid as civil servants during the second year, was cancelled. From then on, they did not receive any salary during their studies at IUFM. This was mainly decided for economic reasons (around 16,000 positions were cancelled). At the same time, the in-service training of teachers, which was partly done by IUFMs, was transferred to the ‘rectorats d’académie’, which meant it was no longer the responsibility of universities but totally managed by the secondary school system. From 2010 till 2013, the feeling was that teacher training was no longer a priority, and had become very weak; the future of IUFMs was very unclear, and how to become a teacher was again non-understandable by the population! A consequence was a huge reduction in the number of applicants for the competitions, leading to a fear of a lack of well-prepared teachers.

A new reform: the creation of ESPEs
After the presidential election in 2012, the new government decided to start a new reform of teacher training, and to give teacher training real priority. France had quite poor results in the PISA evaluations, and many questions were raised about the quality of the French education system. One of the main answers was that improving the education system needed good and well-prepared teachers, that the teaching profession should be reinforced, and that it should gain better recognition among the wider population. On 1 September 2013, 23 years after their creation, IUFMs were cancelled and replaced by new institutions: ESPEs (Ecoles Supérieures du Professorat et de l’Education). ESPEs are internal schools within universities, and there is one ESPE in each académie, which makes 32 ESPEs in France (Journal Officiel de la République française 2013).

The main ambition of ESPEs is to offer professionalising training for 2 years, after acquiring the Bachelor degree, leading to a national Master’s degree: MEEF (Métiers de l’enseignement, de l’éducation et de la formation – Professions of teaching, education and training). The training is based on the ‘sandwich training’ concept, combining academic courses and practice periods in schools.

The global scheme is quite similar to the IUFM one: after 3 years at university, students enter an ESPE and undergo 2 years of training. The recruitment competition is taken at the end of the first year. The first year is devoted to preparation of the ‘MEEF 1’ degree, including preparation for the recruitment competition, and the second year leads to the MEEF degree. During the second year, students are paid as trainee teachers (and they have to teach half-time in a school).

Two main national documents were published by the Ministry when this change took place:

- A ‘reference table’ of professional competencies for the profession of teaching education, stating the objectives and common culture for all education
professionals to be acquired during the initial training and throughout lifelong
training. A list of 14 competencies was designed by the Ministry (Ministerial
Order, 1 July 2013) (Journal officiel de la République française 2013).
The approach through competencies is new and interesting. We were used
to curricula based on knowledge to acquire. Now, the ESPEs have a certain
autonomy in designing the content of the training, and must prepare future
teachers leading to professional competencies.

- A ‘national framework’ for the curriculum of the MEEF Master’s degree
  (Ministerial Order, 27 August 2013), to be followed by universities and ESPEs
  in order to gain national accreditation for delivering the MEEF Master’s degree
  (Journal officiel de la République française 2013).

The content and methods of teacher education are changing and are now more
professionally oriented. But the reform will only be efficient if the way teachers are
recruited evolves. The previous recruitment competitions were mostly based on
academic knowledge in the different school subjects; a reform of the competitions
has now been launched, aiming to give the competitions strong professional content.

This reform has been well accepted by all stakeholders since it showed a new
interest in teachers’ training, and again started to attract numerous candidates for
the teaching profession. But implementation of the reform, which is still underway,
is difficult: within a short time, the teams in ESPEs had to design new content and
new curricula. This generated a huge workload for ESPE staff. And students have the
feeling of a very heavy programme: preparing at the same time for a Master’s degree
and a recruitment competition is very difficult. Further, during the second year,
teaching half-time in a school, writing a dissertation, and preparing the second part
of the Master’s degree is considered a huge workload.

A National Committee has been appointed in order to follow up implementation
of the reform. This committee is working on the reform’s main intentions: giving a
strong meaning and concrete hints for professional sandwich training; and elabo-
rating recommendations for adapting the content to different categories of students.
Twenty years ago, when IUFMs were created, most students were young, continuing
their initial studies without interruption. But now there is a significant number of
students who have done something else in between. Some have studied in another
field, some have worked for a few years, others have a job and can only study part-
time etc. And the new system brings new types of situations, such as students who
pass the Master’s degree but do not succeed in the recruitment competition or,
oppositely, students who pass the competition but do not obtain their Master’s
degree. Such students have to spend one more year on the preparation, but some
adapted content must be designed for them. The normal Master’s degree for
becoming a teacher is the new MEEF Master’s degree, but many students already
have another type of Master’s degree, and of course they are entitled to take the
recruitment competition, but they need a special curriculum in order to receive full professional preparation.

The official ministerial documents defining what ESPEs are and giving instructions for the curricula and the way future teachers are trained look very similar to the official texts published 25 years ago when IUFMs were created! Some have the feeling that history is hardly taken into account! Clearly, in a new context, the ambition for ESPEs is very close to the ambition for IUFMs! The question is why IUFMs did not fully achieve the initial ambitions, which errors they made, and why, after 20 years, IUFMs had moved quite far away from their initial aims.

There is a need for an assessment, for a check-up of IUFMs’ achievements and mistakes, successes and failures. Otherwise, there is a risk that the same mistakes will be repeated!

**Successes and failures in teacher education**

Clearly, for 20 years IUFMs were the actors behind huge progress in teacher education in France. Let us look at some of the main benefits brought by IUFMs, together with some mistakes to avoid!

- Public opinion about the teaching profession and teacher education has changed profoundly. Twenty-five years ago, it was considered that being a teacher was a kind of art, a gift. Nowadays, people understand that it is a profession which needs professional competencies and professional training. The path leading to the teaching profession is now clearly identified, with IUFMs and now ESPEs.

- When IUFMs were established, there was a lack of candidates. They were successful in attracting more and more candidates for many years but, after 10 years, the number of candidates was again a problem. The creation of ESPEs has clearly restarted the process: in the last 2 years the number of students in ESPEs has increased. During their 23 years of life, IUFMs trained around 500,000 teachers, and this is a great success!

- A major difficulty at the beginning of the history of IUFMs was the confrontation of three different cultures: university culture, secondary education culture, and primary education culture. These differences, and the difficulty of each culture to accept the two others, was an obstacle to the success of IUFMs. This is linked with the teaching personnel in IUFMs and ESPEs: in 1990, all the teaching staff of the previous *Ecoles Normales* were integrated into IUFMs. Progressively, some secondary teachers were recruited as teaching personnel in IUFMs and some academics also joined. Yet it was always difficult to find a fine balance between the three categories. Of course, 25 years later, many of the previous *Ecoles Normales* teachers have retired, and it is now easier to have a well-balanced staff in ESPEs. But there is still a problem with the relationship
between the ESPE staff and the school teachers who tutor students during their practice periods in schools. A question was often raised in IUFMs: should a teacher trainer be or have been a school teacher? Some say ‘yes’, and therefore consider that academic staff can hardly prepare future teachers for their professional competencies.

- The role of universities in teacher education has been a difficult question. In 1990, universities did not show much interest in teacher education, except for the subject content. Professional development was not their topic! But, paradoxically, universities always felt they were the owners of teacher education (mainly for secondary education). IUFMs were gradually successful in making universities more aware of their important role in teacher education and more involved in the pedagogical and didactical aspects. The attitude of some academic staff was one reason for some failures in IUFMS. But now, with ESPEs as internal schools in universities it seems that universities will fully take on the responsibility of training future teachers.

- During the last 25 years, educational research has progressed a lot in France, and this can be considered a success for IUFMs. Giving teacher education an academic dimension also means linking the training with research, and integrating the results of education research into teacher education. The creation of IUFMs gave an opportunity to develop educational research in France, particularly didactics of several subjects. New academic positions were offered in IUFMs, and educational researchers could be recruited. Some IUFMs opened new laboratories for educational research in connection with universities.

- Making teacher education more academic and more professional was the main ambition of IUFMs, and this is still true for ESPEs. Yet it is a very difficult challenge. Becoming more academic calls for the strong involvement of universities. This was progressively done during the 23 years of IUFMs. But some failures also happened. For instance, being more academic was sometimes understood as more theoretical, giving some students the sense that they were not well prepared enough for the real-life situations they encountered in schools. To be more academic means articulating theory and practice, providing the intellectual and scientific tools needed to understand and analyse the practical situations of teaching and learning. The dissertation that all students have to write during their second year at IUFM (and now at ESPE) is a core component of their academic training. However, the training must also be more professional. This means that one has a clear vision of what the teaching profession is, and what the necessary professional competencies are. A lot of work has been done in the last 20 years about professionalising teacher education. ESPEs are now trying to apply it to the new curricula for teacher training.

- IUFMs tried to establish a ‘common core curriculum’ for some courses, offered to both future primary and secondary teachers in order to together acquire the
'common culture’ of education and build a ‘common identity’. It could be, for instance, a given subject (mathematics or language), from primary to secondary school, or ‘the pupil’ through primary and secondary school, or common knowledge about the education system. This was clearly a failure of IUFMs. Students consider the teaching profession to be totally different in primary and secondary schools, with different professional identities. ESPEs are now trying again to design ‘common modules’ for all future teachers.

- Another important issue for teacher education is linking theory and practice, linking courses at IUFM or ESPE with school practice. IUFMs were very creative in designing new ways for articulating theory and practice. Practice analysis seminars were established, gathering students, academic staff and tutors. They were quite successful. But many students always had the feeling of there being too weak a connection between the two sides of their training: the side at IUFM and the side in the schools. The idea of ‘compagnonnage’, according to which future teachers can acquire professional competencies simply by spending time with a good experienced teacher, was sometimes promoted, but mostly denied. ESPEs are now establishing models for a kind of ‘sandwich training’, articulating theory and practice very strongly.

- With IUFMs and then ESPEs, teacher training has been improved in its content and methods. But there was an increasing gap between the training and the content of the recruitment competition. The competition did not take the professional competencies into account enough, and remained mainly as a subject examination. Since the primary aim of students was to be recruited, there was a kind of contradiction in the first year at IUFM: being prepared for the teaching profession and being prepared to pass the competition did not totally coincide! The success of the new reform (ESPEs) depends considerably on the way the competitions will evolve and become more professionally oriented.

- Future teachers cannot acquire all the necessary knowledge and competencies for their whole career during their initial training! A teacher never finishes learning and developing his/her professional competencies. It seems clear now that initial training without in-service training will not be effective enough. In-service teacher training was quite well financed and organised 25 years ago, but year after year the funding was reduced and the training almost disappeared. There is a need to re-develop in-service training and connect it with initial training. ESPEs are being asked to play a major role in in-service teacher training.

**ICT and teacher education**

Digital information and communication technologies (ICT) will have an ever greater impact on teaching and learning, and therefore on the teaching profession.
The integration of ICT into education started 30 years ago, but so far schools have not truly integrated digital technologies. There are, of course, lots of good and fruitful experiments using digital tools and resources, but they are mainly based on individual initiatives. The ‘generalisation’ has not happened. Many plans have been implemented in France, usually based on three pillars: equipment and connectivity; production of digital resources; and teacher training. But this is not enough and does not change the pedagogy. There is still a huge amount of work to be done concerning the impact of digital technologies on pedagogy. Integrating ICT into education is often announced as a priority, yet change is very slow and there is a risk that schools are ‘by-passed’ by society; knowledge will be available in many other places. Schools must take account of the new relationship to information and knowledge, the new relationship to time and space, the new relationship to others, the collaborative ways of working, and learning.

The teaching profession is changing very profoundly under the effects of digital technologies. New competencies are now necessary for teachers, and new professions are appearing. However, teachers must accept such changes and evolutions, and be aware of the core role of schools when knowledge can be accessible in many other places. Making pupils concentrated, organised, curious, reflective, thinking and social is a major task for schools. With digital technologies and resources, the teaching profession is more collaborative, and networked. Teaching and learning a subject is being changed by digital technologies. New dimensions are emerging in the profession: being a pedagogical engineer, being a digital pedagogical designer, being a tutor, being a moderator etc. All teachers have to integrate digital technologies into their professional activity, not only those who teach informatics. They must integrate digital technologies and resources as tools for teaching and learning, and because it is necessary in a digital society. This covers all the dimensions of their profession (teaching, pedagogy, administration, relationship with colleagues, with the school management, with parents, and with other partners).

Teacher education is, of course, essential in the development of digital technologies in education. IUFMs have progressively started integrating ICT into teacher education, but the result is not as good as expected. ICT has not been sufficiently considered an issue for all teachers, and as a question for all dimensions of the profession. There was an ICT department in all IUFMs and there is now one in all ESPEs, but it is still something apart. The generalisation of ICT in teacher training has not happened.

Strong recommendations have been made to ESPEs. The aim is not to ‘digitalise’ the teacher of today, but to design the teacher of the future. ESPEs must develop a ‘digital culture’ in all dimensions of the institution and in all dimensions of the training. Teacher training must enable teachers to prepare responsible citizens of the digital society; teacher training must prepare professionals of pedagogy: ‘pedagogical engineers’, ‘digital pedagogical designers’.
Conclusion

Teacher education has progressed a lot in France over the last 25 years. The creation of IUFMs was a big step forward, and triggered many developments. The recent creation of ESPEs is bringing new dynamism to teacher education, and reactivating the reflections on the methods and content of teacher education. It seems amazing that so many ideological debates have occurred around teacher education. Teacher education raises questions about all the aspects of an education system, and all the tensions of education systems are present in teacher education. The core competencies that teachers should acquire are now clearer. There is a consensus on the fact that teacher education must be both academic and practical, and that professionalisation is the main aim of teacher education. There is still a great deal of work to be done in order to design well-balanced training, articulating a Master’s degree and professional preparation. ESPEs must be aware that they are preparing beginner teachers, not experienced ones! There is no need to include in pre-service training all the competencies a teacher should acquire during his/her career. A newly trained teacher must, of course, be able to teach pupils in a classroom! But he/she must be prepared to be a lifelong learner, constantly enriching his/her competencies.

IUFMs experienced great successes and some failures. It is necessary to analyse both their successes and failures in the process of designing renewed teacher training within the framework of the new ESPEs.

The huge changes in society and their consequences for schools will change the teaching profession. Teacher training institutions must not only train for tomorrow the teacher of yesterday; they must anticipate the main evolutions in society and foreshadow the teacher of tomorrow.
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