



## COMMENTARY – IUFM Créteil

### 1. Preliminaries

As the MOBIDIC team Créteil consisted of a mixed group of educational theoreticians (Methodology of Foreign Languages, History and Geography) and practitioners (teachers), its work was very fruitful and inspiring.

The experience of developing teaching units that were practically tried out afterwards is highly informative. After intense discussion, the individual groups decided on targets, selection of resources and the phases of the learning process within the individual sessions. These ongoing exchanges prevented the groups from dividing into theoreticians and practitioners respectively. In fact, this cooperation resulted in a group of experts who were able to develop and practice teaching modules (initial teacher training as well as CPD) and to establish a network of consultants in various European schools.

### 2. Conceptual Interaction

Exchanges during the meetings and seminars that took place at the partner institutions in the different countries were an integral part of the process. They had a three-fold function:

- They provided information on the conditions and contexts of the partner institutions. Particular teacher training practices were discovered, which allowed for a critical self-assessment of one's own practices and for learning from each other.
- The participants of the project were able to develop relationships based on trust.
- The encounters made it possible to analyse the project and to apply the targets to the actual realities in school.

### 3. Selection of Resources

Apart from combining theoretical reflection and actual application in teaching, the exchange with the partner teams helped us make the progress with authentic materials. Requesting materials directly from the partners abroad offered access to a great variety of sources dealing with the same topics, albeit from various angles and perspectives. Because of the richness of this pool of material, it was possible to choose sources that offered pupils easy access to the topic or that were of particular interest to them, as they linked with their own experience. It also helped in questioning the assumption often to be found amongst pupils that the material chosen by the teacher reflects reality truthfully – as if it replaced reality instead of offering just one perspective on it. Dealing with several sources on the same topic allowed pupils to realise that texts often give a distorted image of reality and, as a result, that they have to be dealt with carefully.

The reflections within the MOBIDIC Team Créteil also contributed to one of the fundamental aims of the project: the creation of learning situations that activate pupils to use the language in class. The multiple perspectives resulting from the diverse authentic materials stimulated the students' willingness to comment on them from a personal point of view.

This willingness is indispensable for the discovery of social and cognitive conflicts (shocking, puzzling or provocative statements), which are, as we know from academic research, highly effective instruments and catalysts in the pupils' learning process.



#### 4. Obstacles

One of the most essential aspects in the design of the project was to identify and limit recurring obstacles, which impeded the original outline of the project's targets.

- To find teaching material that fulfilled the set criteria turned out to be problematic. It was necessary to look into vast numbers of sources and to balance their respective pros and cons – while knowing that trying to find the ideal teaching material is a hopeless venture. At some point a decision on the material simply has to be taken on the basis that it corresponds to the set criteria as well as possible (or: that it disagrees with them as little as possible).
- When developing teaching aids (for the handling of source material), it is desirable, if difficult, to avoid the mistake of continuously confronting pupils with new questions and assignments, starting with detailed exercises up to global tasks. Instead, one should ask questions that are helpful for a quick understanding of the text. The exact nature of such questions cannot really be described theoretically; however, numerous concrete examples can be found in the teaching units themselves.
- When adjusting the project to the criteria of “European Schools”, certain difficulties arose. The projected aims probably had been too ambitious and diversified compared with the time available. However, this problem should not be underestimated as it can create tension between different aims, especially with regard to involving the pupils in active learning on the one hand and imparting knowledge on the particular subject topics on the other. This tension often has negative consequences for the original objective, e.g. the intention (or demand) to impart a minimum of subject knowledge at the expense of the activation of pupils in reading. The transmission of knowledge sometimes results in a drastic reduction in pupils' contributions, which remain limited to minimal utterances, from simple or fragmented sentences to single words. Because of the many investigations that have been carried out into the function of oral contribution in the learning process, we know that this type of student participation does neither allow for a sufficient development of skills in the mother tongue nor for the acquisition of a foreign language. The underestimation of the amount of time necessary for differentiated contributions from pupils is one of the basic problems and difficulties that often tempts teachers to acts of compensation: teachers will then tend to administer a construct or extract of knowledge rather than initialise a slow, hesitant learning process that might lack precision at first but that ultimately aims at clarification.

#### 5. Linguistic Aspects of the Project

In order to improve the use of authentic material, the language level of the texts had to be taken into consideration. In this respect, the cooperation of linguists, historians and geographers was fundamental. Linguistic indicators in fact give us insights into the author's intention as well as into the social and cultural concepts of the original audience (for whom the text had once been written for at a particular time and place). The linguistic approach allows for an analysis of the lexical and syntactical features of a text. The semantic dimension of certain words that seems to overlap in various languages, for example, often includes highly diverse cultural standards, especially words like *citoyenneté*, *démocratie*, *monarchie* etc. Metaphors and other rhetorical devices, too, are culturally determined. The use of modal markers like “we will”, “let them”, “they must” etc., the temporal uncoupling, anaphoric and referential marks like “*leur culture*”, “*cette religion*” etc., the use of active and



passive constructions give many indications that can help in the interpretation of the text and that are indispensable for methodological analysis.

Our team mainly worked on the problem of how to secure processes of understanding on the basis of didactical applications and on the basis of linguistic and non-linguistic indicators in authentic pictorial, video and text material.