

# Information literacy : French approach

**Jean-Louis DURPAIRE**  
**Inspecteur général de l'éducation nationale**  
**Ministère de l'éducation nationale**  
France

Competences to be acquired do not concern a specific field in French secondary education, except for the pupils of "lycée" who choose the option information-communication. They are registered in the programs of the courses of teaching. Their evaluation is thus integrated into each field. In addition, since ten years, devices of formation are set up : they move traditional teaching. Their common characteristic is to call upon the search for information and the production of documents by the pupils. Lastly, B2I has been just instituted to validate competences as regards control of information.

## **Context : an education system historically centralized and being decentralized**

The French education system was built on a centralized model where everything was decided by the ministry in Paris. Since twenty years, laws of decentralization allocate significant responsibilities to local authorities : those are in particular charged with school buildings - construction, maintenance - ; material operation (the data-processing equipment for example) and since last year of the staff in charge with maintenance of the institutions. It is necessary to specify this context because the CDI (information and resource centre ) from now on are modernized by the local authorities. In parallel, the Minister for education representatives - vice-chancellors and inspectors of academy - have a much more significant capacity.

Nevertheless, the ministry keeps very broad competences : programs of teaching and schedules, the evaluation of the education system (its degree of performance), the staff recruitment, their formation framing. The legislative power gives the educational system general orientations : the two last laws are in date of 1989 and 2005. For our subject, the law of 1989 included a plan for the development of CDI ; the law of 2005 for the future of education insists particularly on the "key competences" : essential knowledge that any pupil must control when leaving school (obligatory schooling up to 16 years).

To study the question of competences, it is necessary here to clarify three other strong points in the organization of the French education system :

- The education system is organized in three levels: primary education (the pupils from two to eleven years are accommodated in schools), secondary (the pupils from eleven to sixteen years are accommodated in colleges; then, they continue their schooling in "lycées" (general, technological or professionals where they prepare the baccalaureat); superior (they continue in "lycées" or are accommodated at the university or in "grandes écoles").

- The education system is mainly public (80 %). Its staffs paid by the State (even for the part which belongs to private teaching when a contract has been signed with the State). The impact of the decisions taken at the ministerial level thus remains large since the instructions given apply in all the institutions. It should however be considered that, on a number of points, the school institutions have to appreciate the implementations. They must do it within the framework of what is called the project of establishment, the documentary policy being part of the project of establishment.

- The primary schools in France are small structures. Generally, they have five forms, but they can have some less in the countryside and some more downtown. They are rather well equipped in computer equipment. All have collections of works of reading and documentary, generally joined together in what one calls since 1975 a BCD, documentary library-center. The colleges are more significant structures. A college generally has between 300 and 600 pupils. The "lycées" have a more important public reaching 2000 pupils. Any college has at least one documentalist called professor-documentalist (generally, two in "lycées"). Now, I will give the French vision of information literacy and will indicate how the validation of competences in this field is or could be carried out.

### **Information literacy in the programs of the disciplines of teaching**

The concept of informational competences is not new for the French education system ; it entered gradually within the framework of a general reflexion on the quality of the educational action and the form of this action. The documentary action at school is since its origins a means of considering the pupil differently : it is a question of giving him another manner of learning, another relation with the knowledge.

The French efforts initially related to two points : the creation of resource places (BCD in primary education, CDI in college and "lycée") and of course on the staff. Any college and any "lycée" has today a documentation and resource centre : it is about a rather vast space which makes it possible to accomodate a high number pupils for personal work, reading pleasure, use of Internet or meetings directed by a teacher (work in history for example with use of documents). Internet is very present in the CDI. Local authorities have a competence as regards data processing what involved variations in the equipment. In some regions, each pupil has his own portable computer and the college received specific financings for the acquisition of numerical documents.

On the other essential point, any college has at least a professor documentalist. French pupils spend a long time at school, from 8 H or 8 h30 to 17 H even 18 h. They come there not only for the courses, but for other activities of school life: different cultural activities, work in autonomy, etc. Many pupils take their lunch at the school restaurant.

In 1982, a ministerial text specified the objectives of school life : education to get responsible, development of autonomy, working methods. The question of documentary competences is mentioned without particular precision: "*a methodical initiation for pupils (...) to the documentary techniques*". It specifies: "*this initiation would be led, according to a program and techniques worked out, at a rate of one hour or half an hour per week or fortnight*". The concept of program remains fuzzy and no national program was defined. On the other hand, many colleges set up a specific time for documentary techniques initiation. The text of 1982 specified that this work was part of the "*usual work of the documentalist*", and that "*to be methodical (...), resting on a collaboration documentalist-professor, (it) should appear in the timetable of the pupils*". In 1986, an other text pointed out the work of the documentalists by registering as the first point "*an initiation and a training of the pupils to the information retrieval*" competences concerned are as follows:

- *to locate themselves in the CDI and to know its resources and the various types of documents;*
- *to define an objective of research and to identify the corresponding key words;*
- *to use the instruments of information retrieval (dictionaries, tables of content, index)*
- *to select relevant documents according to the objectives of research;*

- *to /understand the information contained in a document ;*
- *to take in note and to summarize this information;*
- *to logically organize the information collected for the final communication indicated by the professor ( reading notice, talk, presentation, posts...)."*

The text does not specify schedules ; it is up to each college to be organized according to the material possibilities of the C.D.I. and according to the methods established in collaboration with the professors. As an example rather traditional , here is for the class of “sixième” :

- knowledge of the CDI (various spaces and their functions)
- basic activities: knowledge of the various supports and their functions (usual...)
- computerized information retrieval: use of the documentary software,
- Internet : search engines

### **Informational competences today**

Since ten years, strong evolutions are taking place. Initially, the disciplines integrated the concept of information literacy, then teaching manners accorded more importance to student personal work, finally the formations delivered by the documentalists are less technical.

#### *Documentary competences and disciplines of teaching in secondary forms*

In the French education system, disciplines of teaching are very important. Teachers teach generally only one subject: French, English, Portuguese, Spanish, physics, sciences, visual arts, etc. In France, teaching programs have a great importance. They are accompanied by a regulation of the methods or approaches and a place from now on is granted to documentary or informational competences.

Thus in history-geography, for the level “end of college”: *"the activity of documentation puts the pupils in regular contact with all the current tools of communication. The project is certainly not that of a technical update, (...) but an implementation of the intellectual capacities developed by the teaching of history and geography : requirement of the localization of the sources, information criticism, capacity to sort and treat on a hierarchical basis are essential qualities in a world where the exponential increase in available information doubles increasing difficulty to identify the transmitters. All the questions in the program could be studied with an autonomous information retrieval and support development with pupils of a method in conformity with the scientific requirements of history or geography "*.

In the same way, in physical sciences, the program requires to treat the following question : water in our environment and our food. It is suggested to make an information retrieval.

Therefore, in nearly all the courses, teachers are invited to work with the professor-documentalist and to go to the resource and information centre. In the “lycées”, some students get a particular approach since information and communication are, for this level, part of the teaching. : *"the teaching of information and communication must allow the acquisition of the basic concepts of sciences of communication, information and organization (...). It contributes on the one hand to give the control of instruments of formalization of information and its circulation within the organizations, on the other hand to fix the*

*technological bases making it possible to clarify logics of institution, configuration and use of ICT".*

### *Informational competences and interdisciplinarity*

During the ten last years, the ministry proposed teachers new forms of work. The best known figure took the name of “travail personnel encadré” (TPE) independent studies. TPE consists in studying a subject under several approaches. The topics are fixed by a note of the minister : it concerns students in the year before last year of “lycée”.

Economic and social series	Literary series	Scientific series	
		Option life sciences and Earth	Option engineering
man and nature	man and nature	man and nature	man and nature
Ruptures and continuities	Ruptures and continuities	Ruptures and continuities	
Territory and territories	The image	Models, modeling	Energy and environment ,
Leisures as a cultural practice	Borders Arts, literature and political Mémoire/mémoires	Growth	natural and technological risks
The newspaper industry territorial companies and their strategies		Natural and technological risks	
		Sciences and food	Information and communication

Pupils define their subject precisely. They must then make research, constitute a file, produce a synthesis. The TPE changed the documentalist role : he was then more solicited by the teachers.

One finds also this same importance of the documentary method in what is called “topics of convergence”, their objective being to make various concepts be comprehensible by an approach crossed between courses ; six topics were adopted for a practical application of this work : energy, environment and durable development, meteorology and climatology, statistical way of thinking in the scientific glance, health, safety.

### *Informational competences : the evolution of the concept*

For the teachers, informational competences are only elements among general ones. For the documentalists, until recently, they could think that technical training belonged to them. We thus had sessions of formation to the use of the documentation retrieval softwares (the same software equips nearly all the institutions), familiarisations with the thesaurus (used in all the establishments), use of search engines. Today, significant evolutions leave back technical formations and are centered on a help to solve information problems. French researchers in cognitive psychology, joining other foreign researchers, make this question evolve by showing that the search for information is initially a question of intellectual treatment of a problem. The linearity of research procedures - to determine the subject, to seek the sources of information, to select the documents, to take information, to process the data, to restore information - is strongly called into question.

## The evaluation of competences and knowledge of the pupils

### *The base of knowledge and competences*

The law of April 23, 2005 known as law of orientation and program for the future of the school creates a base of knowledge and competences: "the compulsory schooling must at least guarantee to each pupil the means necessary to the acquisition of a common base made up of a whole of knowledge and competences which it is essential to control to achieve successfully his schooling, to continue his formation, to build his personal and professional future and to make a success of his life in company. This base includes - the mastery of the French language ; - control of the principal elements of mathematics; - a humanistic and scientific culture allowing the free exercise of the citizenship; - practice of at least one foreign living language; - the control of the usual techniques of information and the communication "

### *B2i*

Competences which concern the informational literacy locate at the same time in the mastery of the French language and of course in the control of the TIC. B2i was set up in 2000. It is being revised. It consists of three levels : school, college, "lycée". It is structured in five fields: to adapt an environment of work; to adopt a responsible attitude; to create, produce, exploit data; to get information, to do some research oneself to communicate, exchange. B2i defines objectives, competences, skills. A progressiveness was defined. For the objectives, on the school level , to know to inform themselves and do some research oneself in simple cases ; on the level college, to know to inform themselves and do some research oneself in response to the expressed needs, on the level "lycée", to know to get information and do some research oneself in an autonomous way. As for the competences, a graduation was indicated between the level school and the level college, but for the "lycée", it began again with what was indicated for the college.

### Project

The pupil must be able:	The pupil must be able:
to carry out a simple research	To implement a step of organized research
to consult a document with the screen and to select information in the page	To request documentary resources of the college
to indicate the origin of the answer, in simple cases	To request documentary resources external with the school establishment
-	To sort information
	To identify information
	To know to restore information in an organized way

For the capacities, the three levels were respected :

### Project

I can seize an address of site to find an answer	I can seek the reference of documents using the data base of the CDI	I can consult the documentation data bases at my disposal
I can use a menu to carry out a research	I can seek the reference of documents using the data base of a library	I can constitute a bibliography including of the documents of numerical origin

I can use a key word to make a research.	I can seek information in an encyclopaedia or an electronic dictionary.	I can use the advanced functions of the tools of research on Internet
I can find the answer to the question put in a page with the screen	I can use a search engine	I can compare the results of research with several different tools carried out
I can indicate where I found the answer	I can locate and raise the elements allowing me to know the origin of information (author, date source...)	
I can read a documentary note	I can select results and give elements allowing to justify my choice.	I can appreciate the relevance of an answer
	I can present an answer to the put question in an oral way.	I can present an answer to a given question (verbal statement)
	I can formulate an answer written to the put question.	I can carry out a file on a given question
	I can create a documentary note	I can create a documentary note

### The professors documentalists

The documentalists who work in the colleges and the “lycées” are professor certified of documentation since 1989 ; they are recruited by a national examination (between two hundreds and three hundreds each year ; there are twelve thousand documentalists in France). They must at least have the first degree at university **or** be bachelor at the university to be able to sit for the examination. They carry out one year or two years in a IUFM (university institute of training of the Masters) where they supplement their basic training in particular as regards information sciences and discover practical work in institutions. They have four missions : to take part in the definition of the documentary policy of the establishment, to have the documentary system to evolve and to manage the center of resources, to take part in the training with the control of information, to contribute to the cultural opening of the institution.

Some documentalists are perplexed today and even in search for identity. So some seek stronger signs of a membership of the teaching staff (a body of knowledge to be taught, notes to be related to the pupils, etc), others make a point of keeping their singularity which is at the origin of their job. The development of technologies of communication and information is either seen as a difficulty or a chance. In the same way, information literacy questions : who is an expert today ? And how to train the pupils while being assured one does not train with techniques or by already obsolete methods ? There is thus a need, an obligation for each professor-documentalist to be in permanent learning. To carry it out, there are three principles : a personal attitude, a relationship to the structures of training (in particular the University) and a work of collaboration in a proximity network. The French education system, like others, must today take up the challenge of the training of all the pupils : the professor-documentalists play a considerable role at the same time in the assistance with the general organization of the studies, in the image given of the knowledge and the method of acquisition. The information culture must belong to the general culture acquired at school, the access to the control of information is a fundamental element to make it possible to each pupil to progress and to be trained throughout his life.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.