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Competence development through workplace learning: The case of the French Vocational Baccalauréat from Vocational Lycées and the Maisons Familiales Rurales

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Abstract

The creation of the vocational baccalauréat track in 1985 contributed to a main innovation in the French initial secondary education system. In its objective and in its innovative way of learning combining sandwich courses (work and school places learning), this program offer students who were at school in a failure situation a path for continuing their studies or a springboard to jump into a new career or professional plan. This diploma has been implemented in different ways: through student status or in apprenticeships, and through the responsibility of the Ministry of Education in vocational high schools but also, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture like in the *Maisons Familiales Rurales* (MFR). First, this paper will present the institutional framework: what is the Vocational *Baccalauréat* (VETBac) diploma, its roles and purposes? And as the national French system of education from the Ministry of education has been the subjects of number of articles in European VET reviews (Gendron, 2005), it will be presented more in details the MFR system less known and its philosophy. The second part, briefly developed here, will give some views of the convergence and divergence of the conditions of competence development of vocational baccalauréat trainees or students with a workplace learning focus in those two previous organizations.

Résumé

Jusqu'à la création du baccalauréat professionnel (bac. Pro.) en 1985, le système éducatif français était hiérarchisé et reposait d'une part sur l'opposition entre l'enseignement général et technologique et l'enseignement professionnel et, d'autre part, sur l'opposition entre les études courtes et les études longues. Depuis la création du bac. Pro., cette structure a changé. Ce baccalauréat vise à offrir aux élèves en situation d'échec dans l'enseignement général une voie leur permettant de poursuivre leur scolarité, et un nouveau tremplin pour des études supérieures. Cependant, ce nouveau diplôme peut s'opérer sous statut scolaire ou en apprentissage, ou encore prendre des formes différentes lorsque mis en œuvre sous la responsabilité du ministère de l'Éducation nationale ou celle de l'Agriculture tel que dans les *Maisons Familiales Rurales*. Dans ce papier, après une présentation du bac. Prof., nous tenterons de montrer que cette filière selon sa mise en œuvre dans les deux institutions précédentes peut présenter des différences du point de vue du développement des compétences des élèves ou apprentis en situation de travail.

Key words : vocational education and training, competencies development, apprenticeship, workplace learning.

Mots clés : formation professionnelle, développement des compétences, apprentissage, entreprise apprenante.

1. Introduction

The creation of the vocational baccalauréat track in 1985 contributed to a main innovation in the French initial secondary education system. In its objective and in its innovative way of learning combining sandwich courses (work and school places learning), this program offer students who were at school in a failure situation a path for continuing their studies or a springboard to jump into a new career or professional plan. This diploma has been implemented in different ways: through student status or in apprenticeships, and through the responsibility of the Ministry of Education in vocational high schools but also, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture like in the *Maisons Familiales Rurales* (MFR). First, this paper will present the institutional framework: what is the Vocational *Baccalauréat* (VETBac) diploma, its roles and purposes? And as the national French system of education from the Ministry of education has been the subjects of number of articles in European VET reviews (Gendron, 2005), it will be presented more in details the MFR system less known and its philosophy. The second part, briefly developed¹ here, will give some views of the convergence and divergence of the conditions of competence development of vocational baccalauréat trainees or students with a workplace learning focus in those two previous organizations.

2. Framework: the Vocational *Baccalauréat* diploma in France, its purpose, organization and its implementation in Vocational *Lycées* and in the MFRs

2.1 The vocational *baccalauréat* diploma

A new level of diploma

This “new” diploma at level IV (fig. 1, Gendron, 2005) of vocational *Baccalauréat* was created in 1985. The purpose was to promote and revalue vocational education in schools now called vocational *lycées* and thereby to allow students in such schools to be recognised as ‘*bacheliers*’, a dignified title before only given to general and technical education schools students. The desire to make education more democratic was marked by Ministry of Education objectives in the Guidance 1989 Law which stated that the ‘Nation wants to lead 80 % of a typical age group to the *baccalauréat* level’. Such an objective implied that technical and vocational education should take part in this national effort: the proportion of CAP and BEP holders wishing to pursue their studies and not enter working life was only 20 %. The revision of vocational education happened also at level V through the creation of technical classes at the fourth and fifth grade. In addition, the BEP was revised, which now prepares up to the VETBac level.

A pluralistic objective of VET baccalauréat

The VETBac diploma was created the context of a crisis in youth employment and in important structural changes in production and labor organization implying new training and qualifications. Its goals were plural. The first was to respond to the growing demand from businesses for highly qualified production and maintenance workers with qualifications between those of advanced technicians, who hold an advanced technical certificate (BTS) or technological university diploma (DUT), and qualified workers who hold a CAP or BEP. A second objective was to respond to the development of new maintenance techniques for personal electronic and computer equipment. Moreover, its creation was also to boost vocational education and to enhance cooperation and the relationship between business and schools through the compulsory internship period. They were created in close collaboration

¹ The purpose of the paper is to give to the Inap conference audience the framework of the French system in order to focus our talk during the presentation more on concrete experience of innovative apprenticeships than in institutional or legal points.

with employers in the aim to train the VET attendees for specific skills for the labor market needs. They differ from technological *baccalauréats* as they are targeted at specific occupations, whereas the technological *baccalauréats* are broader in scope (electronics, mechanics, etc.).

Figure 1: Simplified diagram of the French secondary and higher education system (and apprenticeship system)

		Main certificates of the general curriculum (in the education system: school status)			CFA certificates (apprentice status)		
Higher education	18 years old and above	Level II-I	Doctorate	(new Bologna process structure below) Doctorate		Qualified engineer	
			DEA – postgraduate degree DESS – postgraduate diploma of advanced specialised studies Engineering diploma	Master's degree (former <i>maîtrise</i> + DEA or DESS)			
			Master's degree				
			Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree			
Secondary school	15-18 years old	3-4 years of study	DEUG – Diploma of general university studies DUT- university-level technology diploma BTS - general or technological upper-secondary school-leaving certificate			DUT, BTS	
			Level IV	General baccalaureate	Technology baccalaureate	Vocational baccalaureate	Vocational baccalaureate
			Level V	General education	Technology education	Vocational education	Vocational education
				BEP CAP	BEP CAP		

Vocational Baccalauréat principles

VETBac training lasts two years (there are recently experimentations for preparing the diploma in three years directly from secondary school) and constitutes the final cycle in the vocational route (first and terminal vocational classes). Unlike the technological *baccalauréat*, the VETBac is primarily a vocational certificate leading directly to an occupation; although its diploma also entitles holders to enter university studies. The VETBac provides qualifying training for a particular occupation and admits candidates holding a BEP (or a CAP prepared in two years after the third class) corresponding to the VETBac concerned.

Some data

02 Access rate to education level IV
(all initial education courses combined)

	en %					
	1980-81	1990-91	2000-01	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05
Baccalauréat général	22,1	33,4	34,2	33,9	34,1	34,9
Baccalauréat technologique	11,9	17,6	21,7	21,1	20,8	20,5
Baccalauréat professionnel	0,0	5,0	14,0	14,2	14,6	14,5*
Ensemble	34,0	56,0	69,9	69,3	69,5	69,9*
MEN	33,0	54,0	63,4	62,9	63,1	63,7
Agriculture	1,0	1,4	2,8	2,7	2,6	2,6
Apprentissage	0,0	0,6	3,7	3,7	3,8	3,6*

* Chiffres basés sur une estimation concernant la formation par apprentissage

source : MEN-DEP (flux d'entrants) et INSEE (effectifs d'habitants)

04 Evolution de la répartition des jeunes inscrits en classes terminales (1995-2005)

	1995		2000		2005	
	Effectifs	%	Effectifs	%	Effectifs	%
Bacs généraux	349 100	57,5	319 622	52,1	322 455	52,2
- S (y compris agricoles)	163 082	47	157 778	49	162 048	50
- L	89 880	26	66 645	21	59 928	19
- ES	96 138	28	95 199	30	100 479	31
Bacs technologiques	173 387	28,6	187 455	30,6	179 897	29,1
- STG	86 522	50	99 760	53	93 896	52
- STI	51 371	30	46 802	25	44 058	24
- SMS	19 119	11	22 650	12	24 667	14
- STL	6 988	4	7 562	4	7 916	4
- Autre techno MEN	4 683	3	3 442	2	2 781	2
- Agricoles	4 704	3	7 239	4	6 579	4
Bacs professionnels	84 216	13,9	106 390	17,3	115 026	18,6
- Production :	35 910	43	51 231	48	55 796	49
dont apprentissage	3 785	4	9 822	9	11 842	10
dont agricole	594	1	7 933	7	8 264	7
- Services :	48 306	57	55 159	52	59 230	51
dont apprentissage	3 227	4	5 881	6	6 616	6
Ensemble	606 703	100	613 467	100	617 378	100

Lecture : Les % en gras rapportent les effectifs de la ligne à l'ensemble des effectifs ; les autres % rapportent les effectifs de la ligne aux effectifs du type de bac concerné (général, technologique ou professionnel). Ainsi, à la rentrée 2005, les élèves de terminale professionnelle représentent 18,6 % des effectifs : parmi eux, 49 % suivent une spécialité de production, dont 10 % en apprentissage.

Source : MEN-MESR-DEPP

2.2 The “Maisons Familiales Rurales”: Genesis and Evolution

The first MFR was born in the south west of France in 1937 when a farmer wanted to that one of his children to go further education after his “*certificat d'études*” (first diploma of the French education system at that time). This visionary farmer, leader of the local professional organization with other interested parents, supported by the parish priest militating for the rural cause, were convinced that to be a successful farmer, it was necessary to acquire more knowledge theoretical and technical. In order to allow their children to get further education and a global approach to the rural area, they decided to buy a house naturally called *Maison Familiale* (family house) and recruited a technician in order to do the young people's training... and to give advice to the parents farmers as well. In 1941 the MFRs chose the status of Association (according to the “French 1901 law”) to be able to act quite freely. The same year they created the Union nationale des MFR (National Union for the MFR).

The MFRs are non profit organizations focus on vocational training programs under the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture. Nowadays, the organization consists of about 460 associations together in France and developed a world Federation in 1975. They are provided with the means (staff and premises) from the State, the territorial structures and various partners (associations, non-profit organizations, professional partners..) in order to set up training and development schemes which are based on essential principles: - families' responsibility in the management of the Association and in its choices (which type of training to set up, which people concerned, which financial means ?) ; - a general training combined with a professional training in relation to real life situations through an alternate training system (apprenticeship, sandwich courses...); - a global approach to education; - the involvement of the young people and adults from the MFR in the development of the area where it is set up with the very close cooperation of all local partners. A MFR works on shared principles (individual and collective responsibility, involvement of the individuals and the communities, implementation of alternate training system and actions of development).

3. The role of different stakeholders at designing conditions for competence development

3.1 Origin of the research, data, methodology and data collection

The research on VETbac of the Vocational *Lycée* was part of a European Leonardo Project “Social representations of VET” (Gendron, 2005). Its aim was to depict how VET is perceived by the different stake-holders. I explored their implementation and functioning. Six vocational *lycées* from Low-Normandy were investigated and 60 people were interviewed (the data were analyzed through a qualitative methodology (focus group) and quantitative and qualitative textual data analyses). The data from the VETbac of the MFR are from a case-study from a MFR in the Midi Pyrénées (Moissac) and the experience reported by the trainers, the director and administrator of the MFR of Moissac. This center has about 140 students (among them 20 VETBac trainees). In this case-study will be analysed the VETBac “Commerce” set up in 2001 in Moissac.

3.2 Divergence and Convergence

The two systems (*Maisons Familiales Rurales* from the Ministry of Agriculture and Vocational *Lycée* from the Ministry of Education) prepare to the same Vocational *Baccalauréat* diploma. But regarding the innovative conditions of the competence development through workplace learning, they can differ.

Convergence:

- Same national diploma, Two years of training
 - The public: the trainees are between 18 /19 year olds. They are older than the regular general Baccalauréat trainees because mainly of them have experienced failure situations or schooling difficulties.
 - Sandwich courses: periods of times at school and others in enterprises; Compulsory period of training in companies
 - All companies have tutor (person in charge of the trainees in the company)
 - Companies involved in the trainee and training assessments
- Innovative and motivated trainers staff focus not only on professional development but also on personal development: developing socio-emotional competencies, assessing and favoring “savoir-être” and rebuilding “hurt people” toward success: *Réussir Autrement*

Divergence:

- People trained in the Lycée have a student status *versus* a work contract with a company (they are “workers”); those latter are called “apprentis”;
- A different philosophy regarding its institutional organization: a public organization *versus* an association of families. The MFR structure implies a certain number of rules. Families are involved and vote for their members in the board of directors. The boards of directors meet regularly in order to ensure a smooth running of the association. Their main preoccupations are about employing and supporting the “moniteurs” (trainers) management, looking for solutions regarding education training and the development of the area. Regular meetings with all the actors and take-holders of the MFR (families, trainers, trainees, tutors from companies...) are the opportunities to analyze the results of the actions started, to decide news actions and fix problems....
- Trainers staff: civil servant – teachers- *versus* private contract –trainers- or moniteur; This difference of title is not only on the status but on the philosophy and the art of the job. The teachers are civil servants and teach a certain number of hours per week which are planed in the beginning of the academic year. In MFR, the trainers stay all day long at the MFR center. They were named “monitor” as they have various functions: they guide, animate, help, teach... They favor relationships in the group, they teach, they take an active part in the education aim while supporting each youngster's project. They are qualified to implement the alternate training system and they know very well the MFR's environment,

youngsters, their families and the training managers and company tutors. They get involved in the development of the economic area activities where the MFR are located.

- This way of working relates to the different pattern of “alternance”. The importance given to the training organisation between « school » and « work » periods varies according to the nature of the “alternance” pattern (sandwich courses organizations) and determines its modes of organization.

Diversity of the « alternance » patterns (sandwich courses organization): *juxtapositive* learning system versus *integrative* learning system:

- If in a *Lycée* perspective, the Vocational *lycée* are innovative regarding the way sandwich courses are organized and built with companies compared with technical *lycées*. But nevertheless, they also differ from the MFR, and already from the agenda.
- Sandwich training courses: In the VET *Lycée*, the periods on the job-training can be organized according to the school but mainly at the end of the academic year. During the 2-year program, trainees have 16 weeks of company-training. In the MFR, the agenda is organized in “sessions” sharing training program between two periods of time: a period of work in a company (3 weeks) and a period of study at the MFR center (1 week).
- In a perspective of effective sandwich education, the VETbac sandwich courses organization organized in *Lycée* remains “juxtapositive” versus “integrative in MFR. Thus, they could be seen as traditional and less innovative. The reason is that in vocational *lycée*, the sandwich courses are organized according to two places and agenda (school and companies) i.e successions of durations and places. Each place and time has their own logic and objectives which might not be necessarily linked together. Indeed, the link between the stake-holders can be only institutional but not organizational neither operational. The trainee will have to make the bridges and links between his or her on-the-job-training knowledge and the knowledge provided at school. The trainee difficulties can be this break between the two kinds of knowledge. In some cases, the sandwich courses were conceived as a time of socialization, or a first approach of the job reality without a real supervision or without a combined learning experience (school & work). They are only juxtaposition of knowledge, times and places. In such a situation, academic knowledge remains predominant and the logic of the training is more focused on certification (diploma oriented) than on professionalization.
- For the MFRs, according to their original philosophy, the work situation is at the core of the training system and process. The pattern of “alternance” is seen as an integrative learning system combining work and school learning experience all connected. The knowledge acquired during the period of in-the-job-training is used at the training center as the starting point of knowledge building (except for “traditional academic matters: math...”). This integrative system obliges to coordinate and organize the different periods of training in a collaborative way with all stakeholders. This kind of training program is hard to implement and explain to the trainer staff agenda. They all work full time and stay during the all day at the training center. For instance, as the agenda is organized according to the company needs, the agenda is weekly organized and reorganized. The integrative pattern is based on the principle that knowledge whatever its sources (from ground experience, from the job situation ...) is valuable and has to be connected with all knowledge in its all. Above all, those experiential learning start in the job situation and are the opportunities to reflect on it and to transform this experience in knowledge. To allow such knowledge building, the MFR has implemented a “Plan d’études”. This tool is a set of questions prepared before each company training periods. Trainees during this period, beyond their professional task in the company have to raise those questions to their tutor to know more about the work, the company and its environment. Back to school trainees discuss this

material with their trainers and shared with their peers and then, this material is used as the starting point for a lesson. When some important elements are missing, some extra information are added in the lesson by the trainer. This organization and role of the work knowledge shape different trainees/trainers relationships. Trainers not only train but animate the material given by trainees, they guide trainees' reflection, they manage the links between companies, visit trainees at the workplace and work with the company tutors. Therefore, the link between traditional trainer/trainee is modified toward a relation of accompaniment between the various places of formation and the types of knowledge, each one finding its own prolongation and use in the other.

4. Conclusion

Those VETbac programs have taken different shapes but whatever the shape it plays an important role and different roles for the young people enrolled. Those VETBac trainees seem to benefit from a longer period of schooling and the new way to learn focus on workplace learning and its organization in sandwich courses. Moreover, whatever the institution, all trainers staff were motivated and felt invested of a mission: to rebuilt those trainees self-esteem to help them at rediscovering the way to succeed. To do so, trainers innovate in a different way. But it came out that beyond the divergence, the convergence was at designing the innovative conditions to develop competencies by using the workplace as a motivating source of learning, underlining the crucial role of on-the-job training as a key factor of competence development and accomplishment. Precisely, the development of socio-emotional competencies (Oecd-Delsa 2002): autonomy, adaptability, self-confidence, conflict management, catalysing changes, teamwork competencies..., those emotional competencies essential to perform his or her job nowadays were a major clues and key competencies base for trainers in their training whereas they are neglected in *traditional* and general school system. Those results regarding the competencies developed could be analysed through the conceptual model of Emotional Capital¹ (Gendron, 2004).

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¹ This conceptual model received the *2006 Prize Louis Cros of the Institut of Moral and Political Sciences* from the Académie Française, Paris.