

A COURSE FOR PRE SERVICE TEACHERS ABOUT TEXTBOOKS AND EDUCATIONAL MEDIA. REVISITING ALAIN CHOPPIN'S PROPOSAL

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This text, as a counterpoint to Egil Borre Johnsen's contribution, is a tribute to Alain Choppin. He was not only a brilliant researcher, but also an educator. Ideas he developed some fifteen years ago about teacher training in textbooks are still relevant today. We will briefly present them, explain that the implementation by an association of publishers was unfortunately not of good quality and propose that it might be interesting now to revisit his ideas and consider a specific teacher training course about the ecosystem of educational resources.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of teacher training in textbooks is an old one. In particular, the issue of whether there should be specific training for pre service teachers. Indeed, if training courses are regularly organized to help textbook authors or publishers (for example the one proposed by Arno Reints and Jim Mac Call), training courses designed for all teachers is much more scarce.

A few years ago, at the beginning of twenty first century, Alain Choppin presented such an initiative which he began to implement in a teacher training institute in Paris. This idea was based on two observations.

On the one hand, increased criticism against textbooks encouraged young teachers not to use textbooks anymore and to elaborate pedagogical material on their own. On the other hand, textbooks had changed considerably, offering "a lot of textual and iconographical documents, displayed in "reticular" way, in order to allow teachers to adapt their strategy to groups of pupils which have become more and more heterogeneous". According to Choppin, these evolutions "lead teachers to face serious difficulties, not only in selecting and using new textbooks, but also in helping their pupils to use them" (Choppin, 2005).

DESCRIPTION OF A TRAINING COURSE DESIGNED BY ALAIN CHOPPIN

Alain Choppin organized the resources for his training course in three parts: (1) the textbook and its environment (including statistics, economy, design process); (2) textbooks functions (from different points of view: teacher, pupil, general); (3) selecting a textbook. A historical approach (a thirty-page document) was

also written. He designed a number of activities (21) for trainees, in relation to the second and third parts.

One key idea, according to Alain Choppin, is that teachers have to work on textbooks which are related to subject matters they do not teach. They have to discover how each textbook works, without help from their content mastery. Put in a pupil's position, they should pay attention to material elements they do not usually notice (layout, colours, general structure of the book, typographic variations and so on).

Another important point is to initiate exchanges and promote discussions on textbooks between preservice teachers. The intention is to help develop a common culture on textbooks, including a common language (for example in technical fields as typography).

Alain Choppin taught his course in a teacher training institute for three years and then a publisher association expressed interest in extending this course and developing a computer version.

VERY GOOD IDEAS, BETRAYED BY A PITIFUL IMPLEMENTATION: A CD-ROM DEVELOPED BY SAVOIR LIVRE

A CD-Rom entitled «Le manuel scolaire. Quels choix pour quels usages?» (The textbook. Which choices for which uses?) was then produced by the *Savoir Livre* association on the basis of Alain Choppin's ideas.

To understand what happened, it is important to know what *Savoir Livre* is. According to its website (<http://www.savoirlivre.com/>), "Savoir Livre is an association run by six school publishers: Belin, Bordas, Hachette, Hatier, Magnard and Nathan. Its objective is to follow the evolution of the education system".¹

It is worth noticing that the information on this website is very old. For example, in a part called "All about the textbook", a page named "Key figures"² explains that "The school sector (textbooks, extracurricular books and pedagogy) represented 11.9% of total publishing turnover in 2004."³ This data is almost 15 years old! It appears that the latest information was published in 2006, except one page called "Communiqués" (Press releases)⁴ which provides some information including press kits. For example, in 2010, the inauguration of the first Master of School and Youth Publishing, in association with the publishing world and a

¹ <http://www.savoirlivre.com/tout-savoir/index.php>

² <http://www.savoirlivre.com/secteur-economique/chiffres-cle.php>

³ Consulted June, 12th 2018 !

⁴ <http://www.savoirlivre.com/communiqués.php>

teacher training centre in Bordeaux (not a training course for teachers!). The association is in a way a *false nose* of the main school publishers and is rather dormant, except for some lobbying actions. Nevertheless, *Savoir Livre* had decided to produce the course proposed by Alain Choppin.

I was asked to assess the CD-Rom by *Savoir Livre* and I organized a test (April, 2004) with master students (University of Caen). It was a disaster. Everyone was very disappointed by the product and was faced with problems of usage, navigation and understanding. The prescribed tasks were performed with difficulty. Basically, users considered that it was a kind of “book on the screen”, without the advantages of digitization. In the end, the product, in its current form, was considered unusable. An improvement to the CD-Rom did not seem conceivable. It would require a complete redesign including the development of interactive parts, which would have been costly.

It is a pity because everyone recognized the quality and interest of the texts presented. What is said about textbooks is still very little known by the vast majority of teachers.

One may wonder whether *Savoir Livre* (and school publishers) was really interested in developing a course for teachers about textbooks. Producing poor materials was perhaps a good way to prevent this from growing and teachers from becoming aware of the educational resource market and developing better capacities for selecting them.

PERSPECTIVES

As already mentioned, the question arises more broadly about training on educational resources. Indeed, twenty years ago, few education systems let their teachers choose textbooks and educational resources. Things have now changed, notably as a result of the increased supply of educational resources and a more open vision of education encouraging diverse points of view. In order to be better prepared for choosing and using educational resources, it would certainly be very useful to have a more precise vision of their modes of production and possible ecosystems. The question then arises of the content and modalities of such teaching.

Some key elements elaborated by Alain Choppin may be reused: studying educational resources in a subject matter you do not teach, promoting discussion and developing some language in technical fields (hypertext, indexation...), proposing activities for preservice and inservice teachers.

A training course about educational resources could also be linked to the list of standards (Classroom Teaching and Learning Materials,) initially developed by Mike Horsley. This is certainly a new avenue to explore and a task that could be addressed by IARTEM.

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