



## Training in the military: deciphering a model system

military-Earth thinking notebook

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**Even though the education system, which has been declared a national priority, seems to be struggling to get France out of its difficulties, the armedes are deploying a training system which could set an example and which deserves to be preserved despite the current strong budgetary pressure.**

Teaching in France is torn between two major trends which, historically, have structured all its progress: the need to increase knowledge in order to generate progress, on the one hand, and on the other, the humanistic will to increase the level of knowledge of the masses, toOn the other hand, the first trend favours elitism and the search for performance, the second the popularisation of knowledge and equality of opportunity. This tug-of-war creates a paradox: teachers, coming from an essentially elitist system, selected by competition (ESPE, CAPES, agrégation) on the basis of their knowledge, but who must deploy pedagogical treasures to reach the greatest number. And it must be said that they are poorly prepared in this respect, as the debates are more often ideological than methodological.

The economic crisis and the retreat of the Western European powers in an increasingly oppressive global context are putting additional pressure on education: Faced with the deindustrialization of France and the hyper-competitiveness of the emerging countries, the political authorities are counting on knowledge and technological advances to regain a strong economic situation and growth. This policy is based on the desire, reaffirmed by the various orientation laws of recent years, to give a large part of the population access to higher education. Thus, the law of 23 April 2005 sets as an objective for the French education system to have at least 80% of an age group acquire the baccalaureate level and to lead 50% to a higher education diploma [1]. However, the PISA report[2], published on 3 December 2013, which places France in 18th place among OECD <sup>countries</sup>, underlines the difficulties encountered in achieving these objectives.

The French education system, which is nevertheless subject to regular reforms, thus

seems to need to be thoroughly rethought, both for the training of the youngest and for "lifelong learning", which is still a challenge today.

**At a time when the education system, despite having been declared a national priority, seems to be struggling to get France out of its difficulties, the armedes are deploying a training system which could set an example and which deserves to be preserved despite the current strong budgetary pressure.**

The purpose of this article is not to describe the Ministry of Defence's training system, but to decipher the essential reasons for its success by comparing it with the recommendations of thinkers on pedagogy and andragogy [3]. 3] This is in order to keep in mind what constitutes its main assets in the conduct of the restructuring of the entire Ministry of Defence.

## **From tradition to training**

If the armies can today boast of real expertise in the field of training, it is because they have been able to capitalise on tradition, i.e. the transmission by the elders of know-how and skills to the younger ones, in the manner of masters and apprentices.

The standardization of manoeuvring pawns and their execution procedures since antiquity made the need for common training very early on apparent. Thus, young recruits of the Roman legions were trained according to a standardised programme, in places and with materials dedicated to instruction. This training was supplemented by collective manoeuvre training with real weapons covered with scabbards to avoid accidents. The legionnaires then returned to their units where the younger (hastati) lived and fought with their elders (principles). At the higher level, the teaching of tactics has long been linked to the study of past battles and the learning of patterns that only certain generals managed to overcome to ensure victory. The development of effective tactical and strategic training, after long being hampered by the prevailing honorary and political aspects of these levels of responsibility, took off at the end of the 18th century. The influence of Napoleon I and the richness of the thinking of this period led to the creation of officers' schools (Royal Military Academy of Woolwich in 1741, Royal Military College of Sandhurst in 1801, Special Military School of Saint-Cyr in 1802...). This led to the development of training courses capable of making the most of the study of the past, but also of innovative techniques and doctrines. The industrial and information age has accentuated the need to achieve a high level of technical knowledge to master increasingly complex weapon systems and situations.

In fact, military history shows us that armies have always capitalized on training, equipping every level of the hierarchy with knowledge in the field of pedagogy: every executive, from the team leader (corporal) to the general, is therefore a leader, educator and trainer.

## **Military pedagogy: a repository of values and processes that structure the military pedagogy**

According to Philippe Meirieu, "the pedagogical experience is, fundamentally, an experience of the resistance of the other to the project I am developing on him: the other never really wants what I would like; he does not necessarily want to learn what I have

programmed for him, nor does he necessarily want to bend to the learning strategies that I propose" [4]. Adherence to a common goal is therefore an essential factor, which may be lacking especially in primary and secondary education, where the user is described as "captive" because of its compulsory nature. This adherence is all the more difficult to obtain when the user is also "plural", as parents' appreciation of the user's behaviour is often based on a "plural" approach. This adherence is all the more difficult to obtain when the user is also "plural", the parents' appreciation is naturally to be taken into account, and he belongs to a "class group" whose coherence is a matter of "alchemy" [5].

Now, a strength of the training given in the armies lies in the existence of a common frame of reference of values and an esprit de corps that facilitates this adhesion. The feeling of belonging to a separate social group, at the heart of the problem of the armed-nation bond, is, in this case, an important springboard for military pedagogy. The training then takes on an initiation dimension.

As the learning conditions are therefore more favourable, the objectives clear because of the operational imperative that they reflect, the training itself remains to be provided. Here again, the armed forces have been able to transform a weakness into a real asset. Indeed, the very fact that the trainers are not training professionals, but operational personnel who have temporarily left their core business, guarantees, on the one hand, that the training will be carried out in the best possible conditions and, on the other hand, that the training will be carried out in the best possible way. The very fact that the trainers are not training professionals, but operational personnel who have temporarily left their core business, on the one hand guarantees permanent adaptation to the reality of the units and, on the other hand, has obliged the armed forces to develop quality teaching procedures and methods. This reflection has led to the drafting of regulatory texts such as the Manual of Military Pedagogy (TTA 193), an indispensable methodological reference for trainers, but also to the generalisation and standardisation of practices in this field (standardised pathways, training continuum, etc.).

## **The essential role of initial training schools**

The philosopher Alain [6] stresses the importance of the school as a neutral, dispassionate place, far from the tyranny of feelings that governs the family unit, and therefore more conducive to learning. This is the strength of the initial training schools of our armies: a place where the pupil is neither under the gaze of his superiors nor that of his subordinates. It is a place where creativity is stimulated and decision-making is ventured, a necessary precondition for learning autonomy and leadership. In such an environment, error becomes fertile, and even if the aim is to eradicate it in order to obtain future operational results, it is necessary, according to Jean-Pierre Astolfi [7], to let it appear, and sometimes even to provoke it. Moreover, it is a valuable indicator in the learning process. The main difficulty lies in the fact that military teachers, like civilian teachers, but to a greater extent due to the "cult of the mission" that usually animates them, are reluctant to make mistakes, which reflects an unpleasant image of their pedagogical work. This feeling is too often amplified by the negative perception that hierarchical commanders may have of them.

Thus, initial training schools remain the ideal place to learn autonomy and a sense of responsibility, provided that they agree to give a certain freedom of action to trainers to accompany their pupils in their experiments. These learning conditions are essential to guarantee the preservation of the originality of French tactical thinking, characterised in

particular by the autonomy of the various hierarchical levels (principle of subsidiarity).

### **Efficient in-service training**

At a time when the French education system is struggling to promote "lifelong training" in practice, the armed forces accompany their personnel, all categories combined, throughout their legible and varied career paths.

The armed forces' expertise in the field of andragogy is clearly apparent when comparing civilian and military career paths. The key to this success lies, on the one hand, in the fact that the armed forces, attached to the youth of their human resources, are constantly pushing for professional advancement, and, on the other hand, in the concern for competence linked to the frequent changes of position that such a policy induces. This is a fundamental difference from the world of business, where career development is generally driven solely by the individual concerned. However, continuing education concerns an experienced population for whom the questioning of an application to an examination or competition, or even a return to student status, is not necessarily self-evident.

According to Roger Muchielli, andragogy has a strong ecological dimension [8]. His basic premise is that reality, for adults, corresponds to their lives with their professional and future responsibilities, their aspirations and their time horizon. He therefore advocates that continuing education should be organised in relation to concrete professional situations and well-defined practical behaviour. The armed forces fit perfectly into these mechanisms by providing tailor-made training and drawing on the experience of the trainers, all from the operational units, as well as that of the students themselves, particularly through collaborative work and the creation of group dynamics.

Today, budgetary pressure is having its effects in the field of continuing education as elsewhere, resulting in the temptation to validate experience and to replace schooling by distance education. The impact of these two measures needs to be measured.

According to the andragogical model described by Malcolm Knowles, adult learners have a need for greater recognition and autonomy that predisposes them to approach distance education favourably [9]. Nevertheless, it is now accepted that this model, tinged with a certain angelism about the adult learner population and its real motivation, needs to be nuanced. Above all, however, distance education deprives learners of the added value of group work and, in particular, the sharing of experience. Such sharing is essential for broadening one's own vision and anchoring one's knowledge in concrete terms. Finally, distance learning is an individual approach that runs counter to the desire to promote common methods and procedures within the military institution. The same criticism can be levelled at the validation of experience if it is not accompanied by a centralised system. These devices, tempting by the economy they may represent, can thus generate a real loss in the quality of learning.

### **The special case of civilian schooling**

The system of continuing education for the armed forces is supplemented by the possibility of civilian schooling, particularly for officers. Although the target of drastic

reductions for budgetary reasons, these schooling programmes have proved to be very fruitful for the armed forces.

First of all, they constitute an indispensable added value for all jobs that serve as an interface between the civilian and military worlds. In this respect, these training courses are totally in line with the logic of professional competence described above, through acculturation to the sector of the civilian world targeted by schooling.

Moreover, they constitute a source of inspiration for military thinking. Indeed, these schools are a privileged means of enriching the methodological and knowledge repository of the armed forces in order to maintain the performance of the procedures and actions carried out.

Finally, these courses go as far as the creation of real partnerships with major engineering schools (such as Supélec or Centrale), but also political science (IEP) or business schools (HEC). They thus enable the armed forces to extend their influence in key sectors of civil society, such as higher education, on the one hand, and the world of business and politics, on the other.

### **Strategy and monitoring: two elements for the evaluation of training activities**

While the grandes écoles, firmly anchored in the labour market by their alumni networks, manage to set clear objectives, they are the exception in the education system, one of the main characteristics of which is the wide dispersion of students on leaving. This characteristic makes it very difficult for the education system to evaluate its action, mainly because of the lack of feedback from employers, but also because of the way schools operate.

Here again, the armies have undeniable assets. Indeed, schools generally operate on the model of the "professional bureaucracy" described by Henry Mintzberg, marked by a weak hierarchical line and little developed authority [10]. 10] In contrast to this model, which is not very evaluative, the militaries contrast the extremely hierarchical structure of defence training institutions, where military procedures for conducting action place control as an essential and accepted dimension. Moreover, to face the difficulties of adapting their procedures to the specific field of training, the armed forces, under the impetus of the staffs in charge of training, have been able to include their organisations in a continuous improvement process, in particular through ISO 9001 certification.

The main advantage of the armed forces' training system is that it is firmly anchored in the very culture of all defence players. Its system is organized around a dynamic inherent to the military profession itself, which today allows Ministry of Defence nationals to have access to a model training system, a driving force for social advancement and a factor of influence in a society that is struggling to develop an efficient educational system.

This observation shows the interest of the armed forces to communicate more about their conception of training and pedagogy. Finally, this is an opportunity to serve the interests of the country and the future of the nation by fuelling reflection in these areas.



[1] Law No. 2005-380 of 23 April 2005 on the orientation and programme for the future of schools.

[2] PISA report, published on 3 December 2013, 2012, 2012 survey of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment.

[3] Andragogy: adult education. This term is generally used to refer to continuing education and training or even retraining.

[4] « Pedagogy, between saying and doing » Philippe Meirieu, 1995, ed. ESF.

[5] « 100 sheets to understand the education system » P. Deubel, J.-M. Huart, J.-M. Huart, M. Montoussé, D. Vin-Datiche, 2007, ed. Bréal.

[6] « About education », Alain, 1961, ed. University Press of France.

[7] « Error as a teaching tool », Jean-Pierre Astolfi, 1997, ed. ESF.

[8] « Active methods in adult pedagogy », Roger Mucchielli, 1991, ed. ESF.

[9] « The adult learner », Malcolm Knowles, 1973, ed. Organizational.

[10] « Organizational structure and dynamics », Henry Mintzberg, 1982, ed. Organization.

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