

## Introduction:

### Michel Tozzi and the Didactics of Philosophy in France

It is well known that the school subject “philosophy” has a long tradition in French high schools. However, there is – which is less well known – also a French tradition of didactics of philosophy. Unfortunately, didactical research in France has so far been published for the most part in French only. Since we see great potential in engaging with the didactical research done in France, we took the opportunity to invite one of the leading French researchers, Michel Tozzi, to publish a translation of his article *Une approche par compétences en philosophie?* (2011). In this introduction, we give a very brief historical overview about the development of the didactics of philosophy in France and then some information about Tozzi’s work.

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The modern debate in the didactics of philosophy in France started in 1975 with the foundation of the GREPH (*Groupe de recherches sur l’enseignement philosophique*), the idea for which was based on a text by Jacques Derrida. The GREPH had basically two reformatory aims. First, to free philosophy from its isolation and bring it in contact with other fields of research. Second, based on Derrida’s claim that everyone had a “right to philosophy”, to extend philosophy education from its traditional place in the last year of high school (*lycée*), the *terminale*, to the years before that, the *première* and *seconde*, or even down to middle and primary schools. Out of the work of the GREPH resulted among others the publication *Qui a peur de la philosophie?* (1977, “Who’s afraid of philosophy?”) and the initiative for the creation of the *Collège international de philosophie* in Paris in 1983.<sup>1</sup> However, the GREPH did not attain its aims – and not much has changed since then.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the GREPH helped to prepare some of the changes in the didactics of philosophy in France.

One can, in a simplified manner, distinguish between two camps, the *traditionalists* and the *progressives*, as one might call them.<sup>3</sup> The traditionalists try to develop the teaching of philosophy within the traditional setting of the lecture by the teacher (*cours magistral*), while keeping the two basic forms of traditional written evaluation, the tightly regimented genres of texts specific to the French system, the *dissertation* and the *explication de texte*.<sup>4</sup> The traditionalist camp is backed by the Inspectorate and the Association of Philosophy Teachers (APPEP), which publishes didactical articles in their organ *L’enseignement philosophique* (since 1947). As examples of work in this traditionalist camp, one might cite the work under the direction of Françoise Raffin and the work of Jacqueline Russ on philosophical writing and on reading clas-

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<sup>1</sup> The papers by Derrida concerning these issues (*Du droit à la philosophie*, Paris: Galilée, 1990) have been translated into English in two separate parts: *Who’s Afraid of Philosophy? Right to Philosophy 1*, Stanford 2002 and *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, Stanford 2004.

<sup>2</sup> See Serge Cospérec, *La guerre des programmes (1975-2020)*, Lambert-Lucas: 2019, for a book length treatment of the “wars of the study programs” over the last 45 years.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Cospérec (2019), p. 25-26.

<sup>4</sup> For these genres, see the Country Report by Christine Martin, “The stricter the rules, the freer the thinking? The dissertation in philosophy teaching – three teaching examples from France,” *Journal of Didactics of Philosophy* 2 (2) (2018), 52-55.

sical texts. Still today, the traditional view is shared by the vast majority of the whole body of teachers in France.<sup>5</sup>

On the progressive side, one can distinguish different strands. The first strand is the development of a competency-based approach by Michel Tozzi. Tozzi was inspired by the work of France Rollin, herself inspired by Michèle Le Doeuff. Second, one should mention the work since the 1990s of the Philosophy Section of the French Association for Progressive Education (*Groupe français pour l'éducation nouvelle*, GFEN). Research output by members of the GFEN can be found in the journal *Pratiques de la philosophie*, edited by Nicole Grataloup. A third strand can be seen in the work of ACIREPh (*Association pour la Création d'Instituts de Recherche pour l'Enseignement de la Philosophie*), founded in 1998, which publishes the journal *Côté Philo: Journal de l'enseignement de la philosophie*. Although a lot of work has been done in developing new approaches, materials, and methods on the teaching of philosophy in the last thirty years, the whole progressive camp represents only a small minority of the whole body of philosophy teachers in France.

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Tozzi is on the progressive side. In fact, we may consider him to be one of the pioneers of the modern didactics of philosophy in France since the early 1990s. He has been a leading figure in the progressive movement ever since. Born in 1945, Tozzi started out as a philosophy teacher in high school from 1967 (which he continued until 1995). It is only in the late 1980s that he starts with his research in the didactics of philosophy, his early work being published as a Ph.D. thesis in educational sciences (*Contribution à une didactique du philosophe*, 1992). Further work was published as a habilitation thesis (*Éléments pour une didactique de l'apprentissage du philosophe*, 1998). From 1995 until 2007 he was professor at the department of educational sciences of the University of Montpellier 3, where he acted as its director for several years. In 1998 Tozzi founded the journal *Diotime. Revue internationale de la didactique de la philosophie*. Since 2003, when the content went online and open access, *Diotime* has become a major platform for international exchange. Unfortunately, almost all of the articles are in French. Of the very many publications of professor Tozzi, one should mention at least the early edited volume *Apprendre à philosopher dans les lycées d'aujourd'hui* (1992), the introduction to philosophizing *Penser par soi-même* (1994/2005), and the synoptic article *20 ans de recherche en didactique de la philosophie (1989-2009)* (2009).

Tozzi's approach in general is one that bases philosophical reasoning on competences. In the article we chose for translation for this journal, he focuses on the notion of competences and brings into context the different elements of the approach he has developed over the years. For readers outside of France and especially for those from German-speaking countries, it might come as a surprise that this competency-based approach is not considered to be part of mainstream didactics of philosophy. It can only be explained by the special status of the subject and its defense by the traditionalists (see above). Tozzi's approach not only delivers a needed alternative to the traditional approach. In the present article, Tozzi shows that its heart, the writing

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<sup>5</sup> See also the review of a book by Denis La Balme, which represents the traditional approach, in *Journal of Didactics of Philosophy* 4 (1) (2020), 40-43.

of a *dissertation*, requires competencies, and he gives an original explanation of what it means to teach for competencies in philosophy.

We hope that Tozzi's article will find many readers outside of the French speaking world and will inspire more studies, translations, and cooperation between researchers in different countries across the world.

*The Editors*