Case Study

Competences and Self Esteem

France

http://keyconet.eun.org
KeyCoNet (2012 – 2014) is a European policy network focused on identifying and analyzing initiatives on the implementation of key competences in primary and secondary school education.

On the basis of the evidence collected through literature reviews, case studies, peer learning visits, country overviews, videos and exchanges between network members, the project’s final objective is to produce recommendations for policy and practice regarding the enablers and obstacles to a holistic implementation of key competence development.

Among KeyCoNet’s current 18 partners in 10 countries (Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden), are Ministries of Education/related agencies, universities/research institutes, European organizations, and practice related partners. KeyCoNet also has a growing number of associate members from other countries and stakeholder groups, steadily increasing our network’s scope and influence.
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ABOUT THIS CASE STUDY

Part of a series
This case study is part of a series of case studies being produced by KeyCoNet, to highlight various initiatives concerning key competence development, taking place across Europe. Each case study analyzes the initiative’s implementation strategies in depth, and will feed into the network’s recommendations for policy and practice on how to implement a key competence approach in schools most effectively.

How and why was this case selected?
Each year the KeyCoNet network identifies initiatives concerning key competence development across Europe, and a case note is produced providing basic information about each one. Following this, network partners participate in an online selection according to pre-established criteria, as well as an in-depth face-to-face discussion, in order to select the most interesting initiatives to develop into case studies.

The French case study analyses a local school initiative in which the pedagogical team has developed an IT tool for the assessment of subject-related and cross-curricular competences in relation to the national core curriculum of knowledge and competences (le socle commun de connaissances et de compétences). In parallel, the team also developed non-numerical assessments, aimed at highlighting students’ strengths, identifying where they needed further work and tailored support, and improving their self-esteem and motivation to learn. This case study was considered particularly interesting by the network, as it is one of the few initiatives identified which deals with the difficult issue of assessing competences, particularly transversal ones. Moreover, the initiative targets the development and assessment of all competences, fosters students’ development in a holistic and inclusive way, and through its evaluation has proved to improve low achieving students’ performance as well as attitudes towards learning.

Which methodology has been used?
Case studies are the main tool used by the network to probe beneath the surface of each selected initiative and provide a rich context for understanding the implementation issues involved. The initiatives selected by the network differ in many ways, according to the nature of the key competences addressed, the implementation process used, the number of students and teachers directly concerned, the type and number of actors involved, and the duration and stage of development etc. A multiple-case study design, whereby each initiative generates its own case study, but uses one single prism for a common analysis, was therefore chosen. This method makes it possible to explore diversity, as well as the enablers and obstacles to the initiative’s implementation, as perceived by the initiators and stakeholders interviewed. Moreover, through a multiple-case study design it is possible to identify choices, strategies, characteristics, situations or contexts leading to success or failure in a recurrent manner. This will particularly contribute to fuelling the set of recommendations for policy and practice at institutional, local, regional, national and European level, for the effective implementation of key competences in school education.

Each case study included interviews with the initiative’s coordinators and stakeholders, as well as desk research. In some cases, where considered feasible and fruitful, focus groups were also organized. For this particular case study, a head teacher and a deputy head teacher were interviewed, along with four teachers directly involved in the project since its launch, a panel of teachers who had discovered the project during the last year and a panel of students from four different grades in the collège of Vérac.
**BASIC INFORMATION**

<table>
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<th>Country:</th>
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| **Title of initiative:** | [FR] *Compétences et estime de soi*  
[EN] Competences and self esteem |
| **Coordinator/ Organization:** | M. Joyet, head teacher  
Mme M.H. Pierre, teacher  
Collège L. Drouyn  
1 tour de Vérac  
33 240 Vérac  
(N : 44.991846, E : -0.339468) |
| **Key competences addressed:** | The key competences addressed are those of the socle commun des connaissances et des compétences (core curriculum of knowledge and competences):  
[FR] maîtrise de la langue française [EN] command of the French language;  
[FR] pratique d’une langue vivante étrangère [EN] use of a foreign language;  
[FR] compétence de base en mathématiques et culture scientifique et technique [EN] basic competence in mathematics, science and technology;  
[FR] maîtrise des techniques usuelles des TIC [EN] command of common techniques in ICT;  
[FR] culture humaniste [EN] humanistic culture;  
[FR] compétences sociales et civiques [EN] social and civic competence;  
[FR] autonomie et initiative [EN] autonomy and initiative; |
| **Type of initiative and channels used for implementation** (e.g. curriculum reform introduced through legislation etc.) | Local initiative launched in 2009 and linked to the implementation of the core curriculum of knowledge and competences. |

**Partners:** The Rectorat of Bordeaux and national body in charge of the follow up of innovations and pedagogical pilot projects

**Scope:** Local level project concerning all students, the pedagogical community of the Collège and parents

**Learning context:** Formal and informal

**School education levels:** Lower secondary school, Students from Sixième [first year of Collège, age 11-12] to Troisième [final year of Collège, age 14-15]

**Target groups:** All students of the Collège

**Time frame:** 2009—on-going

**Relevant links:**  
- VÉRAC: http://verac.tuxfamily.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php  
- School website: http://clgdrouyn.fr
SUMMARY

The L. Drouyn Collège in Vérac has been implementing a pedagogical project on competence-based teaching and evaluation. The pedagogical team has carried out an analysis of competences to implement and certify the acquisition of the core curriculum of knowledge and competences. They have developed an IT tool adjusted to the evaluation of disciplinary or cross-curricular competences; a tool that permits the follow up of all students’ progress. In parallel, they have also introduced non-numerical evaluations to reinforce students’ self-esteem and involvement in their studies.

This initiative, launched in 2009, has already resulted in a change in students’ attitude towards their studies, has had a positive influence on students’ achievement, on the involvement of students and their families, and on the image of the school.

INTRODUCTION

The project was integrated into the first point of the school’s mission statement: “Restore students’ self-confidence, particularly the most vulnerable, by developing a positive assessment of acquired skills and knowledge.”

What were the original aims of the initiatives?

- Restore students’ self-confidence, particularly the most vulnerable, by developing a positive assessment of acquired skills and knowledge. Strengthen long-term self-esteem.
- Enable each student to acquire a maximum level of knowledge and skills.
- Motivate students by providing them with specific and realistic objectives that underline their strengths and take their progress into consideration.
- Better target the difficulties of each student in order to plan a more rapid, adapted and effective solution, while also highlighting students’ strengths in order to offer better individual support.
- Develop students’ autonomy and academic ambition.
Were the original aims achieved?

In terms of the development of the initiative, the original aims were achieved since, for example, the entire project was carried out at all levels of lower secondary. This was in fact achieved earlier than predicted in the initial scheduling of the initiative, with all lower secondary students involved in the pilot project by the fourth year instead of only two classes out of five.

In terms of expected results, the school administration and teachers observed a slight improvement in the number of early school leavers, with some students no longer requiring extra support (cellule de veille). In general, the team observed that the situation of students with weak to very weak academic results was transformed hugely due to a change in their attitude; for example, almost no blank test papers are now returned at the end of an assessment. These students now have slightly better results and have fewer schooling problems. Finally, another positive effect of this pilot project was the fact that students and parents identified more with the school, which has gained a very positive reputation in recent years.

Were there any modifications to the original aims at any time?

The original aims of the project were not modified but the project was adapted to its environment and evolved whenever the team saw necessary changes or adaptations, particularly those linked to the VERAC tool (Vers une Évaluation Réussie Avec les Compétences).

1. CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCE

Which contextual factors have been perceived as enablers to the implementation of the initiative?

The pilot project at the collège in Vérac was organised within the more general framework of the implementation of the common base of knowledge and skills (socle commun de compétences et de connaissances, framework act 2005).

The arrival of a new head teacher at the school enabled working meetings to be held in order to review the current situation and to propose solutions to any problems. It was in this way that the team decided to launch a pilot project according to the difficulties faced by students, both in terms of their successful learning and of their interest in their own education.

Why have these factors been perceived as enablers?

As teachers already had to carry out competence-based teaching and assessment within their teaching practice, these factors facilitated the work of the teams as the project allowed teachers to go further and experiment with new practices in assessment such as, for example, removing marks or signing a “contract of trust” with the students.

Which contextual factors have been perceived as obstacles to the implementation of the initiative?

The factors seen as obstacles by the majority of people interviewed (pedagogical teams as well as parents and students) were:
• The transition from graded assessment to gradeless assessment;
• The continuation of double assessment at the end of compulsory education;
• The training of new colleagues;
• The consultation period.

Why have these factors been perceived as obstacles?

The transition from graded assessment to gradeless assessment:

While this transition is not seen as a problem a priori by the different interviewees, some do find its application unsettling. One student interviewee made a particularly pertinent observation: “it is clear to us that the colours chosen [the degree of success in assessments are colour-coded in red (competences not acquired), orange (competences in development), yellow (competences almost acquired) and green (competences acquired)] are grades translated into colour, and afterwards we reconvert them into grades; this is not logical.” This observation reveals the problems faced by certain teachers in working effectively on competences; their assessments remain traditional with a simple conversion to the new system of reference without fully adopting a new approach to assessment. Parents, however, did not speak of any reticence or difficulties in terms of accepting competence-based and gradeless assessment (except in 3ème, the final year of lower secondary school, see below); this is notably due to the fact that the head teacher and the project team presented the pilot project to them when they registered their children with the school. The parents particularly liked the VERAC tool as it is accessible online, allowing them not only to easily follow the progress of their children but also to understand the logic of the competences that are being worked on. Some parents perceived a certain heterogeneity within the pedagogical team regarding the acquisition of competences; although this was not a great concern, they highlighted the fact that this could pose a problem for students in terms of consistency, particularly when they move on to the next level of schooling.

The continuation of double assessment at the end of compulsory education:

The diplôme national du brevet (DNB – national assessment at the end of compulsory education for the vast majority of students) requires students in 3ème to be given grades. Not only does this constitute a constraint for teachers, despite the support provided by the VERAC software that converts assessments by colour into grades, but it also brings problems of comprehension, both for parents and students, regarding the overall rationale behind the assessment system. It should be noted, however, that this double grading system is also of great reassurance for parents, for whom it ensures that the transition to the grading system in upper secondary will take place without any negative impact on their children. However, it should also be mentioned that this continuation of the assessment of students’ competences alongside graded exams of the DNB is a concern for many groups at national level as they feel that it compromises an effective implementation of the common base of knowledge and skills. We also observed that the nature of assessment and the separation of competence assessment from performance assessment still remain subjects of discussion for the different stakeholders.
The training of new colleagues:
This issue has been a challenge since the beginning of the pilot; the school has had a significant change in teachers in recent years (more than half of the school’s teachers have been at the school for less than three years, while the main project team is essentially formed of teachers who have been working in the school for many years). Furthermore, some of the new teachers wanted to join the school particularly because they were interested in the project. These new colleagues are supported by those who have been at the school for a longer time (for example with a voluntary system (SOS VERAC), which helps to train them on the main issues of the software and to help them learn about the tool). The new teachers appreciate the support given but they would like it to be expanded, particularly through more consultation periods for the whole of the team involved.

The consultation period:
All evaluations of pilot measures show that consultation between the teachers involved in a project is indispensable for the smooth running and success of the project. The leaders of the Vérac project are aware of this but are faced with the organisational problems regarding such consultation within the current regulatory framework, both in terms of teachers’ working hours and of the education received by students.

2. SUBSTANCE RELATED ISSUES

What substance-related issues can you identify?
The issues that drive the team are:

- Issues linked to the application of competences within the framework of the implementation of the common base of knowledge and skills, which requires the learning outcomes according to subject to be determined. The issues and questions discussed by the team were similar to those discussed by other teams in all lower secondary schools in France, but these discussions were fed by their experience and by that of other experimental schools (see section on partnerships below), which enabled them to refine their strategy. Certain choices within the project undoubtedly helped schools in terms of how to identify the role of each person regarding the competences that are to be taught and evaluated. This is the case for the decision to have a school report card with three clear sections on competences:
  - One section for transversal non-disciplinary competences (in reference to the European framework: social and civic competences, initiative and autonomy)
  - One section on multidisciplinary transversal competences (language skills, science and humanities)
  - One section on subject-based competences.

This structure facilitates the work of each teacher, as they must identify the elements to which they will apply a certain assessment or part of an assessment. Furthermore, as the report cards are given to the parents in person at the end of each term, teachers can explain the competences that have been developed to parents and to students, thus creating a culture of competence-based assessment amongst all stakeholders in the school.
* Issues related to the implementation of gradeless assessment. The team had to draw up a new assessment framework, with the aim of identifying as accurately as possible the competences that have been acquired by students.

Regarding both of these issues, the team underlined the fact that the lack of continuous in-service training slows down the development of their dynamic; this includes a lack of in-house training within the school, which would allow for strengthened dialogue within the project. The team would also like to benefit from an outside perspective, which would allow them to better analyse and evaluate their organisational choices.

**Which substance related issues have been the most difficult to fix?**

For the teachers who were interviewed, the most complex task was to identify which competence should be evaluated in their teaching and how to implement this assessment.

**There were various levels of difficulty:**

Firstly, this was the first time that competence-based teaching and assessment had been implemented in the school for all subjects; this required teachers to carry out work on identifying what exactly is covered by the competences that they wish to teach and evaluate. Teachers therefore first identify the micro-competences (basic knowledge and procedures) that are involved (one teacher counted up to 80 micro-competences for one section of a mathematics programme). Teachers then work towards reconstructing what it is that defines the target competence before being able to evaluate it within a complex task for example. This is a long and complicated process, but one teacher observed that being involved in this process had been hugely beneficial in terms of professional development.

The team then had to adapt assessment strategies to the different competences in a way that would enable the assessment of students in terms of real competences (particularly within complex situations) and, since the aim of the project is also to help students build their confidence in the learning process and during assessments, which would also help them in the progressive acquisition of these competences. The team also offers students the chance to be re-evaluated, enabling students (particularly those in the youngest age groups) to develop at their own speed and to play an active role in their education by requesting a re-assessment.

Finally, the extension of the pilot project to all levels and all classes in the school raises problems of heterogeneity within the practices of teachers, which can mean that students are put in a situation where the teaching or assessment of competences is different; this risks creating confusion among students in terms of understanding what is really expected of them.
3. PARTNERSHIP RELATED ISSUES

How did you decide to work with the partner organisations and individuals, and what did you learn from this experience?

As this is a local project, partnerships must be considered within the framework of exchanges with other teams involved in competence-based teaching and assessment and considering the contribution of research findings that the team have read. The team of the collège in Vérac first met with teams that were already carrying out competence-based work (the Collège Clisthène in Bordeaux and the Collège Jacques Prévert in Bourg sur Gironde) in order to learn from their experience. After this, a teacher from the school, also a trainer at the IUFM (Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres – Teacher Training Institution) held pedagogical meetings to refresh the concepts of assessment and to define the concept of competences. Finally, this group of teachers attended a conference by André Antoine on “The Macabre Constant” (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macabre_constant). Now that the team has acquired its own experience, it can help to train other pedagogical teams on the subject of competence assessment, particularly in lower secondary schools in the surrounding area. The school was also awarded one of the innovation prizes (Prix de l’école) at the third edition of the journées de l’innovation (innovation days) organised by the French Ministry for Innovation, in recognition of its expertise and investment.

4. STRATEGY RELATED ISSUES

What strategy or strategies were implemented for the initiative?

The strategy of the team was determined, planned and implemented at the local level, based on an analysis of the establishment carried out by the team in order to best adapt the project to the observed reality of the school and of the students involved. The team chose a participatory approach that included teachers, parents and students, in order to ensure that the project would be accepted by all stakeholders. The school’s website (http://clgdrouyn.fr/spip/spip.php?rubrique12) and the site dedicated to the VERAC programme (http://clgdrouyn.fr/verac/) provide a direct link to the pilot project in order to inform parents in the best possible way about its contents. Parents also have access to the VERAC tool, which allows them to see the competences that are being developed and those that have or have not been acquired by their children. The creation of this tool, which all users found appropriate and easy to use (and which was also enhanced with new functions according to the needs that arose from the pilot project), also contributed to the team’s reflection on competences because it was the teachers themselves that selected the details of competences that are registered in the VERAC tool.

Moreover, although offering students the chance to be re-evaluated requires a great amount of preparation, it has a very positive effect on the students (and their parents). The opportunity to be re-evaluated leaves students time for learning and for trial and error, which avoids discouragement and allows them to rediscover the satisfaction to be gained from hard work. However, it ap-
pears that these re-assessments are mainly carried out at 6ème level (first year of lower secondary) as time for re-assessments is given during students’ individual support hours. In higher levels teachers still propose re-assessments but these are only carried out during class time and students are required to be more autonomous in their requests for re-assessment. It is not always clear to students and their families how this practice functions. It would therefore be useful to explain to parents the development in the system by showing them that students are given greater responsibility regarding their re-assessment requests with the aim of instilling in them a greater sense of responsibility for their learning.

**Which aspects of the strategy implemented for the initiative have proved to be most problematic?**

The sharing and harmonisation of practices. Use of assessments from other disciplines to support students’ progress.

**Why did these aspects prove to be problematic?**

Lack of consultation.

Consider all levels that could be concerned (the school, the education authority, the education system as a whole...)

**5. MAINSTREAMING RELATED ISSUES**

Was mainstreaming one of the objects of the initiative?

In the French context, a local pilot project is not intended to be extended to other structures either at a local or a national level; however, information on the initiative must be made available to other establishments so that it can potentially be adapted to other educational contexts. An academic system and a national system (i.e. websites for sharing information) allow the different local initiatives to be shared and to be made known to the entire pedagogical community. Meetings between delegations from the collège in Véraç and from other schools allowed the schools to exchange of practices and enabled participants to outline areas of consideration for teams who would like to be involved in such a project.

Furthermore, institutional requests such as requests for articles for the dossier de rentrée (brochure/magazine providing educational news and insights of best initiatives within the region) of the regional educational authority for Bordeaux or for the review of the Rouen education authority help to spread information about these initiatives.
6. SYSTEMIC ASPECTS

To what extent has the initiative been designed as a systemic one from the starting point, i.e. introducing changes in several areas related to the student curriculum (such as teacher training, assessment, school organisation, etc.)?

The initiative was designed in a systemic manner at school level as it took into account the objectives in terms of education, assessment and the application of dedicated tools, while also including elements of teacher training. The organisation of the school was, in general, changed very little by this initiative, which was mainly concerned with teaching in the classroom. However, the initiative did allow for the establishment of multidisciplinary projects firstly in 6ème during the second hour of individual support and, from the beginning of the 2013 school year, during one class period in 4ème.

What have been the enablers encountered during the implementation because of the systemic aspect of the initiative?

The internal dynamic of the school and the support of the administrative team were determining factors in the implementation of the various aspects of the initiative, and also in the construction of the VERAC software for helping teachers with their objectives in terms of teaching and assessment.

The project received academic support through the allocation of time and financial resources.

What have been the obstacles and/or challenges encountered during the implementation because of the systemic aspect of the initiative?

The main difficulty for teachers is the integration of the different aspects of the project within their teaching; this is particularly true for new teachers at the school who must carry out all aspects at the same time without knowing what the real priorities are. Some teachers have difficulties or do not want to be involved at the different levels of action of the initiative and remain focused only on assessment.

How have the obstacles and/or challenges encountered been overcome?

By raising teachers’ awareness that everyone is involved in various areas of the project. Development of a cognitive map accompanied by a short film and slideshow to show the coherence between various concurrent actions, all of which improve students’ self-esteem.

Have some parts of the original design of the initiative [from the systemic point of view] been abandoned and why?

No
7. EVALUATION RELATED ISSUES

Was a simultaneous/real time evaluation process part of the initiative?

The team carries out an evaluation of the project at least once a year (at the end of the school year) in order to envisage the necessary changes. Furthermore, this type of initiative should provide a description of its actions and results every year; this information is then shared at the academic and national level in order to spread information about the work carried out, its benefits and any possible limitations.

8. NEXT STEPS

What is planned next for the initiative?

The main focus areas for the future are:

- The extension of the project to the entire school raises problems regarding the harmonisation of practices with the development of success criteria.
- Refining the double assessment (by level and grade) in order to reconcile the results of competence-based assessment with grades.
- Reorganisation of the report card so that it is more practical, comprehensible and effective.
- Re-assessment: how to make best use of it within our lessons?
- The implementation of multidisciplinary activities that aim to resolve the difficulties observed; in particular a project on the history of art and science in 4ème.

FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OUR NETWORK’S PARTNERS:

MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION / NATIONAL AGENCIES

http://www.bmukk.gouv.at
http://www.education.gouv.fr/
http://www.ie.uminho.pt/
http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/

http://www.ncca.ie/

UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH INSTITUTES

http://www.ie.ul.pt
http://www.ie.ens-lyon.fr/ife
http://www.ie.slu.se

http://www.jyu.fi/en/

PRACTICE-RELATED PARTNERS

http://www.ja-ge.eu
http://www.rektorsakademien.se
European Schoolnet is the coordinator of the KeyCoNet Project.

European Schoolnet is the network of 30 European Ministries of Education, based in Brussels. As a not-for-profit organisation, we aim to bring innovation in teaching and learning to our key stakeholders: Ministries of Education, schools, teachers, researchers, and industry partners.

Since its founding in 1997, European Schoolnet has used its links with education ministries to help schools make effective use of educational technologies, equipping both teachers and pupils with the skills to achieve in the knowledge society.

In particular, European Schoolnet pledges to:

- Support schools in achieving effective use of ICT in teaching and learning
- Improve and raise the quality of education in Europe
- Promote the European dimension in education

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