

Marie-Anne Mallet

Provincial Director of Association Formiris in Pays de la Loire, France

Aneta Słowik

University of Lower Silesia, Wrocław

Formiris: supporting the professional development of teachers and school principals in France

This paper presents activities of Formiris, the federation supporting French teachers and principals of non-public state-subsidised schools in the department of Maine-et-Loire. The paper discusses areas, organization and assessment of individual and group forms of professional support of the teachers and the school principals. It also presents the perspective of the counsellors supporting the teachers and principals in their professional development, as well as the beneficiaries' appraisal of the counsellors' work.

Keywords: Formiris, problems of French teachers and school principals, psychological and professional support

Introducing various activities supporting the school employees was an expression of political will of the regional authorities. The concept of this activity, its general organization, methods of its implementation and its results fit into the paradigm of lifelong personal development, including also the development of professional competences, and are consistent with the principles of the new law on vocational training, promulgated in France on September 5th, 2018¹. The “Bill for the freedom to choose one’s professional future” regulates means, scope and methods of the activities supporting the professional development of the teachers, who, in order to be able to teach in a school having agreement with the state², must pass a competitive examination (after obtaining the Master’s degree – *Master 2*).

In 2021 the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sport (MENJS), in accordance with the republican values, initiated a significant change not only in the educational system but also in the progress of education and supporting the careers of teachers and school principals, having regard to the four priorities: recognition,

¹ Formiris’s document of 13/04/2018 – archival material, accessible on site.

² In France the body responsible for organization and management of education (from the preschool level to higher education) is the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sport (MENJS). Higher education is managed by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MESRI).

cooperation, openness and protection. In practice it means that MENJS recommended introducing the assessment of needs related to the support of the staff of the educational institutions (public or private, such as denominational schools, e.g. Catholic, Muslim or Jewish, or alternative schools, such as Freinet or Montessori) in all regions of France, assuming that the career counsellors will be available for every matter and will respond to every request; that their work will focus mainly on cooperative solving of the problems of school employees and that it will become the place in which the wishes regarding the professional education and development will be confronted with the real needs, in order to find out together what kind of support is the most suitable³.

Formiris

Organizing activities supporting teachers and school principals was entrusted to the Formiris federation. Formiris acts in accordance with the provisions of the French Law on Associations of 1901. It consists of 14 regional associations, representing and supporting teachers and school principals in the whole territory of France. The seat of the federation is located on Paris. Formiris promotes the principle of parity and active participation of the social partners, which is particularly expressed in its statute by the respect for the rule of law, legal protection and recognition for the system of values of the Catholic education, such as solidarity, justice and responsibility, both individual and collective⁴.

The main goal of Formiris is providing professional development and psychological support through designing, organizing and leading trainings, courses, workshops and studies as well as providing individual counselling. In this way, through orders, public tenders etc., Formiris helps individual teachers and the whole teaching staff to participate in suitable forms of improving the development and modelling the career. The tasks of Formiris are executed on the following levels:

- a on the local level, within the framework of the direct cooperation with the educational institutions through submitting proposals of supporting activities and developing local support schemes;
- b on the national level, in respect of developing the national program of professional support and supervising the implementation of this program;
- c on the federal level, through harmonizing the activities based on the principle of neutrality and subsidiarity. It is on this level that, on the basis of the reported needs, the federal programs of trainings, courses, workshops and studies are developed and the requests for financing and allocating the funds for various forms of supporting the teachers' professional

³ Formiris's internal document (13/04/2018) – archival material, p. 5.

⁴ Formiris's internal document (13/04/2018), p. 15.

development are assessed. Also on this level the accounts are settled and the reports for MENJS are prepared⁵.

Although Formiris has an extensive structure, its activity is not overly bureaucratic. It is a service-providing “thinking organization”, which means that it performs its tasks on an ongoing basis. The comprehensive and active approach to the needs and problems is aided by an open calendar, which makes it possible for the Formiris teams to plan their activities well in advance and at the same time get involved in the multiannual programmes of professional development of teachers and principals of all educational levels according to their needs, as well as react to the current signals.

In general, the stages of support provided by Formiris are as follows:

- 1 developing the general policy and planning Formiris activities on the national level for a given year on the basis of an analysis of the needs reported from below;
- 2 presenting the offers of support at the federal branches;
- 3 choosing appropriate forms on the local (departmental) levels;
- 4 reporting the needs by the individual schools and arranging the terms of cooperation;
- 5 direct contact of the Formiris counsellors with the beneficiaries (teams and individuals).

When the research was conducted, Formiris offered several forms of group support for the teachers and principals, both those starting their professional career and those in the middle or at the end of their career path. The offer entitled “Career support” consisted in short-term and long-term forms of cooperation. The aim of short-term, three-day forms was to make it possible to the teachers and principals to analyse their professional situation and future careers. The following topics were suggested: 1) *Teamwork: learning cooperation and building together*; 2) *Facing the changes in the teaching profession: keys to successful adaptation*; 3) *Rendez-vous of a career and a portfolio*; 4) *Developing self-awareness: better knowledge of oneself and adapting to changes*; 5) *Better knowledge of oneself and developing assertiveness as the way to improving the internal harmony while exercising the teaching profession*; 6) *Learning to work more cheerfully at the end of the career*⁶.

Long-term forms allowed for planning specific activities connected with the teachers’ career. Here are some titles: *Thinking about the changes in the profession or about changing the profession* (13 days), *Assessment of the group competences* (6 days), *Assessment of the professional orientation in the Catholic education* (6 days);

⁵ Formiris’s internal document (13/04/2018) – archival material, p. 12.

⁶ Formiris’s document – statistical presentation of the scope and forms of support for teachers and principals – archival material, pp. 4-5.

Looking at one's own career and building one's own professional project (10 days);
Discovering one's own talents: serving the group (8 days)⁷.

In order to ensure the uniform principles of funding the projects, the Local Commission for Training Plans (*Commission Territoriale du Plan de formation*), which is the Technical Commission of Formiris Board (*Conseil d'Administration*), set out the criteria according to which the requests for financing are assessed. These criteria were approved by Formiris Board and provide financing of such forms of support as *Taking up a managerial position in an educational institution* (grant of 50 or 100% of the total cost); *Professional development and improvement* (grant of 50 or 100% of the total cost); *Vocational conversion* (grant of 50, 70 or 100% of the total cost). In response to the problems identified, in the school year 2019/2020, 69 individual applications (30 of them are multiannual programs) were initiated and carried out; 57% concerned secondary school teachers and 43% - primary school teachers⁸.

Methodology of the research

The aim of the research was finding the response to the questions regarding the activity of Formiris in supporting the teachers and principals of the non-public state-subsidised schools in the department of Maine-et-Loire and its assessment by the beneficiaries of this support.

From an organizational point of view, Formiris in Pays de la Loire is a team consisting of 2 assistants, 2 counsellors and 4 persons responsible for trainings, workshops, courses and studies. Since 2017, this team has been providing assistance to 18000 teachers from 1200 primary and secondary schools in all 5 departments of the region. The support activities are performed with reference to the idea of empowerment (Le Bossé, 2016). Empowerment (*le développement du pouvoir d'agir*) is the individuals' (in this case, the teachers' and the principals') ability to control more efficiently the things which are important for them, for their loved ones or for the groups they identify with and work in.

The researchers conducted 3 narrative interviews with the Formiris counsellors and 4 interviews with the principals of the primary and secondary schools. The teachers were also invited to take part in the narrative interviews; 5 persons who benefitted from the counselling were interviewed. The classes conducted by these teachers and the educational materials they used were observed and analysed as well.

The narrative interview was treated both as a technique and as a research method (Kaźmierska, 1997). Consequently, at the beginning, following the suggestion from Fritz Schütze (1983), the interviewees were asked an opening question, initiating

⁷ Formiris's internal document (13/04/2018), p. 8.

⁸ Formiris's document (13/04/2018) – archival material.

free narration: “Please tell us about the support regarding your professional development which you have received from Formiris.” Following Schütze’s guidelines, the researchers determined some thematic field in the narrations, such as:

- ◆ organisation and methods of support in the field of professional counselling (kinds of meetings, trainings, courses, workshops, studies),
- ◆ methods of recruitment,
- ◆ assessment of the offer of support addressed at the teachers or principals (available, utilized, desirable, rejected).

It was a kind of “thematic focus” of the interviews which, according to Gabriele Rosenthal (1990) is a technique characteristic for a biographical-narrative interview⁹.

After grouping the contents of the narration into thematic sections, the researchers noted down their frequency and their importance, highlighted by repeating or frequent stressing of a given topic. They will be presented and illustrated with the comments of the teachers, principals and Formiris counsellors later in this article.

The research with the participation of teachers, principals of non-public schools (pre-schools¹⁰, primary and secondary schools) and the Formiris counsellors from the Maine-Loire department was possible due to the research grant of the French government awarded to Aneta Słowik. The research project, entitled *Migration experienced by the Polish and Ukrainian children in Maine-et-Loire (France). Biographical studies and life histories*, was carried out in September and October 2020 at the Western Catholic University and the Formiris local division in Angers. The department and prefecture of Angers were chosen by random purposive sampling because, according to Formiris’ data, 80% of students in the non-public Catholic schools are children and adolescents from immigrant Muslim families, which creates new problems and demands constant professional improvement from the teachers. Joint research was possible thanks to the long-lasting scientific cooperation of both authors. Marie-Anne Mallet, as the provincial director of Formiris in Pays de la Loire, collected the documentation while Aneta Słowik sampled empirical materials during her field work. The authors worked together on planning the research, interpreting the interviews and discussing the conclusions. The material used in the present paper is only a part of the obtained results and is concerned with

⁹ According to Rosenthal, “Within the interactional framework of the interview the biographer relates his or her life story in a thematically focussed context based on negotiations about what the interactants [biographer and researcher – A.S.] consider relevant. Life stories are not finished products ready to be “served up” on demand. [...] The topics can centre on a certain period of the biographer’s life, on experiences arising in connection with certain historical or social events, or on a single biographical strand such as the person’s occupational career.” (Rosenthal, 1990, pp. 99-100).

¹⁰ In the present paper I will be using only the term “primary school” because pre-schools are an integral part of primary schools.

the assessment of the counselling support provided by Formiris to the teachers and principals of the schools where the students use French as their second language.

The results of the research are grouped into three categories: support for teachers (team and individual); support for school principals; opinions of the Formiris counsellors about organizing the support, difficulties they encounter and the meaning of their work.

Assistance for the teachers

Team assistance in the teachers' narratives

Areas and organization of support

Organizing various group methods of support was in accordance with the direction outlined by the present Minister of National Education, Youth and Sport, Jean-Michel Blanquer, who believes that drawing talents to the national education will be done through transforming the teachers' careers, and particularly through "a complete change of the ongoing learning, consisting in lifelong self-education of the teachers, in accordance with the school's needs and the aspirations of the learner, in close relationship with the area of the education [*en lien étroit avec l'université*]" (Blanquer 2017, p. 112).

Teachers who want to participate in the group forms of support are mainly recruited during individual interviews with the Formiris counsellors when appropriate training/course/workshop/studies are suggested. Another way of recruitment is declaration of participation during consultations with school principals who can propose or suggest participation in a suitable group form of support. The teachers utilize group forms of support not only in their place of work but often also outside of it because not every school is able to fulfil varied expectations of the teachers.

One of the objects of assistance is helping teachers with their professional skills assessment. In order to meet the needs of the schools whose budget is not sufficient for organising individual meetings, Formiris created programs of group counselling for the purpose of meeting this objective, in this way undertaking the activities which are an example of creative assistance (*accompagnement agile*), which, according to André Chauvet (2018), consists in meeting the needs of the individuals, thanks to innovative and creative approach that deviates from established routines and schemes. Not all educational institutions responded positively to the offer of this form of assistance, arguing that the rules for conducting the professional skills assessment are strictly defined by the Ministry's guidelines and that such assessment must be done individually. Among the researched schools, only two schools started the cooperation, helping a total of 60 teachers.

The narrators indicated improving the teaching and pedagogical skills as the most important subject pursued as part of the workshop-type group support. They have also identified the sources of the needs in this area:

“the problem lies also with the teachers because they lack knowledge and skills in the area of the new family typologies, family problems, not to mention the aspects of multiculturalism. Besides, many teachers believe that these matters are the responsibility of the social workers, psychologists, animators, and that the teachers are not the persons who should take care of them. Furthermore, the issues discussed here should not be mentioned officially because for a teacher it would mean admitting defeat, fault, lack of knowledge [...] so this is the reality, this is what it looks like” (a secondary school teacher).

Having in mind the importance of this subject, Formiris decided to dedicate a number of various trainings or group courses to the subject of relations between parents and teachers, and especially to the issue of joint education of children (*co-éducation*), developing the educational competences and accompanying the development and education of children in cooperation with parents. However, these subjects were not often chosen by the teachers for reasons mentioned above.

The long-term form of group support was organizing nearly 200 semi-annual or annual courses and postgraduate studies dedicated to subjects such as “Education and pedagogy” (*Apprentissage et pédagogie*), “Influencing the school atmosphere” (*Agir sur le climat scolaire*), “Taking up the profession” (*l’Entrée dans le métier*), “Didactics and disciplining” (*le Didactique et le Disciplinaire*). Having received the permission of the school management, frequently preceded by an interview with a Formiris counsellor, teachers can utilize them adequately to their needs and in accordance with their work schedule.

The teachers planning to change occupation were offered a possibility of further learning while pursuing another occupation, which was paid by the Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sport. It is an indirect message aimed at the teachers, showing them that the Ministry and the educational system appreciate their work. The essential condition for using this form of support is ten years of professional experience. However, before such support is provided, during an interview with a counsellor, the teacher searches for reasons for this decision, and then for other, less radical solutions, having in mind that a “safe” leaving the profession is always possible.

Evaluation of the offers and the possibilities of using them

One of the teachers has evaluated the methods of the group support (workshops, courses) in the following way:

“I had serious reservations regarding the offer of such group training, because skills assessment is always done individually but now I don’t regret even for a minute. My participation in the group support opened up the possibilities I have not

even imagined. I also was able to broaden the circle of friends who pursue the same profession as I do” (a secondary school teacher).

Another teacher said: “It was hard to me to believe in the advertised benefits of the group form of skills assessment. Now I can say that the group form was really great. During the training I learned more from my colleagues than from the trainers, I also found that my colleagues have the same dilemmas and doubts as I do, and this calmed me down in a way, I felt less lonely and thanks to that my doubts regarding motivation to staying in the teaching profession have partly disappeared” (a primary school teacher).

After three years, the counsellors point out that even 90% of teachers participating in the group support of career development do not leave the teaching profession despite their earlier declarations. Instead, they practise their profession in another way, although sometimes they need a change and undertake additional work, after “pausing for breath.” In order to protect their privacy, they can define for themselves borders which are not to be crossed. They also point to the need of further sessions of group support.

These forms of support organized by Formiris arouse significant interest of the institutional partners, who refer increasing numbers of teachers to the counsellors, especially those who are planning to quit their job.

Personalised support

Organisation and methods of personalised support

I will begin with summarizing the causes of organizing personalised support for teachers. Dominique Bucheton (2019, p. 15) wrote that “at present there is confusion in the teaching profession”. It is then not surprising that, during the interviews with Formiris counsellors, the teachers and school principals look for individual forms of support. One of the interlocutors described the external, non-personal causes in the following way: “disappearance of values and points of reference, employment crisis, uncertainty, harmful management of the education system – due to all these factors the teaching profession became destabilised and there are not many people who want to pursue it” (a primary school teacher).

The same author (Bucheton 2019, p. 210) also argues that a teacher’s work in class today demands professional skills which are much more complicated and going far beyond “standard” competences obtained during pedagogical studies (*MMA: Modèle du multiagenda*)¹¹. Besides, many teachers cannot find their way in their everyday work at school, which can be an example of “prevented work”

¹¹ According to *MMA: Modèle du multiagenda*, the teacher’s activities in the classroom consist of many overlapping tasks: carrying out the educational goals, conducting classes, influencing the classroom climate, „building”, giving meaning to studying and supporting the students (the ability of applying various methods of helping the students in making progress).

(*travail empêché*), the work which cannot be performed because of the limitations and requirements imposed on the teachers. This can result in fatigue and suffering caused by forcing the teachers into a tight “corset” of activities and putting up barriers to creativity, innovation and autonomy (Clot, 2012).

During the interviews the teachers mentioned deeper causes of looking for individual counselling, other than the professional ones: personal, private difficulties. Talking about them, one of the teachers said that “the teachers need individual counselling primarily for their own sake (a primary school teacher). However, also these difficulties are usually connected to their professional life. The teachers say that “it is the result of exhaustion caused by the didactic work” (a primary school teacher); “the educational system is constantly being reformed by the ministry and every new reform replaces the previous one. As a result, I have to change the solutions developed during the previous reform and to start anew, and I’m just not strong enough to do this again” (a secondary school teacher); “the children are getting worse, their behavioural problems are becoming more and more serious, it is increasingly difficult to teach” (a primary school teacher); “if no one helps us, if no one supports us, we are going to fall, and who will replace us?” (a post-secondary school teacher).

Some teachers declare that the reason they look for individual support is constant pressure connected to their authority being questioned by students, colleagues, and increasingly often also by parents and guardians. Nervousness, depression, indifference are regularly mentioned in the teachers’ comments as the feelings which accompany them every day. One of the teachers also indicated that “some of the older teachers don’t follow the technological developments and don’t feel at home in the digital world. They can’t enter the virtual world of the students, they don’t know its terminology, they can’t use adequate terms and are unable to adapt their teaching methods to the modern technical solutions, especially during pandemic. This is why the students treat them as old-fashioned, out-of-date or even backward, make fun of them, mock them, which causes their frustration. Very often this is made clear during individual interviews with a counsellor or a school principal. Attempts are being made to rectify this situation if it is possible and if the teacher concerned agrees” (a secondary school teacher).

Evaluation of the offer and the possibilities of using it

As we can see, the personalised support provided and organized by the Formiris counsellors regards primarily the professional development of the teachers, but the offered face-to-face counselling meetings result not only from their individual needs, but also from the in-depth analysis of the changes in the environment and the teaching profession. One of them is personalisation and individualisation of the professional careers of the teachers. This is why the aim of the individual interviews is to help the teachers to understand the idea of lifelong learning, to develop

adaptability, to update their knowledge but also develop their teaching skills and tutoring skills, as well as competences necessary for building their own professional career, in order to become not only an actor, but also an author (cf. Savickas, 2012). We may say that the aim of the counselling meetings is help in becoming “a thoughtful practitioner,” according to the definition from the regulation of May 28th, 2019¹², confirmed on December 1st, 2020 in the program of the educational reform in France (*Grenelle de l'éducation*) and discussed during the conference “What should teachers be like in the 21st century?” (*Quels professeurs au XXIème siècle?*).

The opinions of the interlocutors indicate that the individual meetings with the advisors are for them primarily the place of a satisfying dialogue in which they can freely speak their minds, share the common problems and opinions as well as find out that their personal situation is important and understandable, and that their problems can be solved. The meetings frequently result in an invitation to participate in trainings, courses, workshops regarding not only professional matters (such as trainings in positive psychology, developing relational skills in contact with the parents of the students and with the environment; methods of preventing professional burnout; building a sense of belonging to the group; use of coaching in the teaching work) but also personal matters, solved (even if on ad hoc basis) during yoga, sophrology, meditation classes, voice emission courses, etc. In Pays de la Loire, the program of the individual meetings with the counsellor and the possibility of such meetings are implemented through the rights guaranteed to the teachers and through offering them time: a paid free day dedicated for the interview.

Support for the school principals

Establishing contacts

Since its creation in the school year 2014/2015, Formiris in Pays de la Loire has been working on supporting the career development of the school principals. In order to fulfil, at least in part, the expectations of the school management, three forms of professional support were offered: (1) preparing the school principals for work in the Catholic schools (*BOPEC: Bilan d'Orientation Professionnelle dans l'Enseignement Catholique*); (2) stimulating and developing the professional careers through learning new practices; (3) preparing the principals for a new job in the event that they decide to quit the job and change the profession.

Firstly, the school principal contacts the counsellor delegated by Formiris for talks with the school management. This meeting can have two objectives: in some cases, it is an opportunity of establishing contact, “breaking the ice”, overcoming the prejudices, in other cases it is an opportunity of inviting the teachers and other

¹² Regulation of May 28th, 2019, amending Regulation of August 27th, 2013, defining the national framework of e. g. trainings carried out as a part of the master studies „of the teaching, educational and training professions”.

principals to visit a counsellor at the Formiris office. On the other hand, allowing the principal to participate in a long-term form of support outside of his educational institution, depends on the result of the introductory interview with the counsellor, who decides if a particular form of support is suitable to the career project he designed.

Organization and methods of supporting the school principals

The school principals can participate in group trainings/workshops/courses which support them in activities such as:

- ◆ developing and managing the yearly plan of trainings/workshops/courses/studies,
- ◆ evaluating the needs of the teachers who demand particular group trainings,
- ◆ developing a territorial offer of support as well as rules and formalities connected to the participation in a course/training/workshop,
- ◆ drawing up a proposal for a particular training/workshop/course in their own school,
- ◆ identifying the institution which most closely meets the criteria necessary when an application for help is prepared, in order to receive a model of proceeding,
- ◆ applying for help in assessing the effects of support,
- ◆ making first steps in providing the counselling support to a teacher in a difficult life situation,
- ◆ organizing the counselling support at the school level for the teachers covered by the PPCR¹³ program during the school year,
- ◆ managing and leading an educational institution – diagnosis, difficulties, prevention¹⁴.

As we can see, the activities are varied and sometimes difficult to carry out, which was pointed out by the principal of one of the primary schools, who described the difficulties in organizing group support: “School principals can motivate their colleagues to educate themselves, pursue further development, seek help, but it is difficult to impose orders because this can cause tensions among the teaching staff; besides, teachers don’t want to participate in trainings and courses in their workplace, because it is exhausting and doesn’t allow for viewing the situation differently, which can be done on an neutral territory.”

¹³ PPCR: Protocole Parcours Professionnel, Carrières et Rémunération des enseignants, Protocol of the professional path, career and remuneration of teachers, the decree no. 2016-907 of 01.07.2016, setting out the rules of the professional career, in particular remuneration – salaries and bonuses – of the public sector employees in France; since 2017 this protocol has completely reorganised the principles of career development of the public sector employees, whose career development must be now more transparent and regular.

¹⁴ Formiris’s internal document.

His colleague enumerated other difficulties: “only in a small measure can I affect my colleagues regarding their professional development; they are tired, after a hard day they dream of finishing their work and go home to their families, and they don’t want to stay at school; during the weekends no one will come to school; one wants to rest from the school as a workplace; it sometimes happens that teachers are entitled to a paid leave dedicated for trainings, courses, workshops, and they choose it but they treat it in an instrumental manner because it’s free from teaching, and teaching is something one runs away from; some teachers will do anything to avoid teaching because they are fed up with it and I can understand it.”

In spite of the above-mentioned difficulties, the school management, through consultations and casual conversations with the teaching staff, cooperates successfully with Formiris, which is attested by the evaluations.

Evaluating the support offer

During the interviews many school principals evaluated their contacts with Formiris very positively, underlining the high quality of the support provided by the counsellors, their openness and effective help in finding the solutions. Here is a selection of their comments: “It is great to meet a Formiris counsellor, I expected a meeting with an administration employee but I met a listening person who understands my needs and is ready to help” (a primary school principal). “The counsellor is a professional; he knows the school and visits it; we know him; he is not a controller, an inspector, an evaluator, but an understanding friend in the same line of work with whom we look for solutions” (a secondary school principal). “All forms of support are interesting. During a conversation with a counsellor, I am looking for the form which is the most suitable for me. Sometimes I choose the course which I didn’t know about earlier and which was presented differently during the interview with a counsellor than it was described” (a pre-school principal). “I am talking with a person who knows what I am talking about, who trusts me, who respects my opinions and my decisions, who allows me to search for a solution on my own” (a primary school principal).

„Wish”, „need” or „constraint” of the professional development? – the counsellors’ perspective

According to Marie-Hélène Doublet (2019, p. 38), “counselling support consists in assisting people in finding their own way. It is necessary to provide them with means for engaging in a personal reflection and gaining knowledge, which will make it possible for them to consciously take actions with fixed risk level”. Formiris, according to one of its counsellors, operates “according to the principle: not to suggest specific trainings, courses, workshops, classes, meetings to the applicants, but to assist them in identifying their real needs in that respect.”

All interviewed counsellors underline the ambivalence of the formulated wishes, needs and constraints felt by the teachers and principals regarding their professional development. They also notice that the beneficiaries often modify their position regarding these matters during narration. Initially they maintain that they are driven by willingness to participate in a training, meeting, or course related to a particular topic which interests them. Later, during consecutive meetings, this declared need is replaced by another one, which the beneficiaries initially did not recognise or did not want to reveal, and which turned out to be real and directly related to their problems. As one of the counsellors said:

“The support for the teachers and principals is a response to a request submitted by e-mail or during a phone call in which they ask for a face-to-face interview, in the form of either a meeting or a videoconference. The counselling interviews are founded on two basic principles: confidentiality and non-payment (for the teacher, the principal and the school). Every teacher who reports the need of counselling is treated and heard in friendly way and with respect. The topic and the contents of the interviews are confirmed by each participant and remain inside Formiris. They are not disclosed to the actors of the training nor to the school management. If a report from the interview should be disclosed, Formiris is obliged to obtain the participant’s consent. Furthermore, not all the requests for a meeting with a counsellor are about counselling regarding the professional development. Nevertheless, all the requests are noted and then forwarded accordingly, in a friendly way and with support (if it is needed), in a sincere and transparent way, in order to help the applicant, reach the solution of the problem.”

The interlocutors pointed out two main reasons why the teachers and principals ask Formiris for help. These reasons are the need (felt or forced) for improving their professional skills (in relation to school management, teaching, subjects taught, changes in the profession and in the community, class tutor’s role etc.) and the need for motivating oneself (again) to pursuing the profession, the need of distancing oneself from it, the need of protecting oneself against professional burnout, and, as a last resort, a change of profession. However, the beneficiaries do not always want to discuss it. This was noted by one of the narrators: “The school management, who are responsible for the career development plan and who approve referring teachers to various support forms, have access to their subject matter and contents. This is why some of the teachers are more willing to participate in a training titled “Sophrology” than in a course titled “How to efficiently tutor a class?”. Choosing the latter, one can admit lack of such competences, and the teachers usually don’t want to be thought of in that way.”

The issue of distinguishing the wishes from the real needs of the teachers and principals is always present in the counsellor’s professional practice, which was also indicated by another interlocutor: “Although Mr Dupont may want to participate in a particular training, course or workshop, he might not need it at all, while Mrs Dubois may need this particular form of support but may be unwilling to participate

in it. We should not confuse “willingness” with “need”. A teacher’s need doesn’t exist in its own right: my task, in cooperation with the teacher, is to set the targets to be achieved, to identify the problems which need solving and to determine the changes which have to occur or be initiated, and counselling is just one of many ways of achieving it.”

Alexandre Lhotellier (2001) indicates that “counselling does not consist in giving advice”. One of the Formiris counsellors offered a similar remark: “we accompany teachers in creating their way of education and development and we help them to identify that which might be for them the best help in improving their professional competences. We act according to Lhotellier’s definition of counselling (Tenir Conseil), initializing a dialogue, methodically and multidimensionally searching for the meaning of an expressed wish or a need and developing activity in cooperation with the teachers.”

Consequently, it may be concluded that during the interviews with the counsellors four objectives were discussed:

- ◆ treating the request of the teacher and the principal as a task to be performed,
- ◆ identifying the needs (mainly professional ones) of the applicants in order to accompany them in making the right decisions regarding the choice of suitable trainings, workshops, educational support programs (individual and group), local, regional or federal,
- ◆ assisting the teachers and/or principals in developing their professional projects,
- ◆ referring the teacher or principal to another agency, if the support they need is outside of the scope of assistance offered by Formiris¹⁵.

In order to achieve these goals, each of the counsellors worked in team with a person responsible for administrative and technical organization of counselling in a specific geographical area (e.g. a city district), and the counselling activities of the team had to cover the five departments of Pays de la Loire¹⁶. In 2019 and 2020, in spite of the epidemiological crisis, the team of the counsellors of Pays de la Loire conducted 330 individual interviews with school employees. Each of the interviews took at least one hour. Because of the pandemic, it was necessary to change the earlier forms of counselling sessions but it did not slow down the upward trend which has been observed in the region since 2017. A videoconference has become the main tool allowing to ensure continuing support in the present situation of mass inflow of individual applications for professional or personal support, which is also

¹⁵ Plan and structure of the forms of professional support of the teachers and principals file:///C:/Users/mamallet/Desktop/2-1-guide_plan-de-formation-coreps-1.pdf (accessed 27/10/2020).

¹⁶ Plan and structure of the forms of professional support of the teachers and principals file:///C:/Users/mamallet/Desktop/2-1-guide_plan-de-formation-coreps-1.pdf, p. 3.

related to the changes, challenges and difficulties caused by the pandemic in the work of the teachers and principals.

Conclusion

In 2008 Marcel Pochard noticed in the Green Book (*Livre vert*) of the changes in the profession of the teacher that “the career perspectives of the teachers are very limited [...] the opportunities of professional diversification through doing side jobs in addition to teaching, are still insufficient”. For this reason also, the teachers and principals look for help, and, as one of the counsellors said, “they want change, they want an additional job, maybe a part-time job, but they don’t want to be at school all the time.”

The Green Book also states that

After ten years since the report [Pochard, 2008] was published, a large number of teachers, especially the youngest ones, declare that they are not going to sacrifice their whole career to teaching: 35% of teachers who have been nominated teachers for less than three years declare that they are considering quitting their job, temporarily or permanently. Very limited opportunities of any change are among the factors which reduce the attractiveness of the teaching profession and create a feeling of certain hopelessness which leads to desire of changing their profession¹⁷.

The challenges related to the education and professional development of the teachers and school principals in Pays de la Loire are numerous. The decision to participate in e.g. training, course, workshop, meeting, studies is not always simple and obvious for teachers and principals. It is caused, among others, by the fact that not only the teaching profession but also the career counselling is becoming increasingly professionalised and that teachers, school principals and counsellors more and more often have to face new, previously unknown challenges and changes in the teaching profession and in the world around them.

Changes are under way also in Formiris; the federation is in the process of negotiation and mediation, of getting to know the new needs of the counsellors, teachers, principals, parents and children, especially during the pandemic situation, which forced the necessity of changes but also of learning or quitting the job. This process can be noticed in the responses of the teachers, principals and counsellors. Some of them see the benefits of further professional development in these circumstances, while some need time and support to make their way in the new reality. In this process of adaptation to the change and development, Formiris counsellors offer support (to groups and individuals, in the educational institution and outside

¹⁷ The information report for the Senate no. 690 (2017-2018), prepared by M. Brisson and F. Laborde on behalf of the Commission for Culture, Education and Communication, submitted on 25.07.2018 (Formiris’s internal material, made available on the spot).

it) which is getting more and more anticipated and, in spite of the above-mentioned difficulties, is assessed uniformly positively by the beneficiaries.

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