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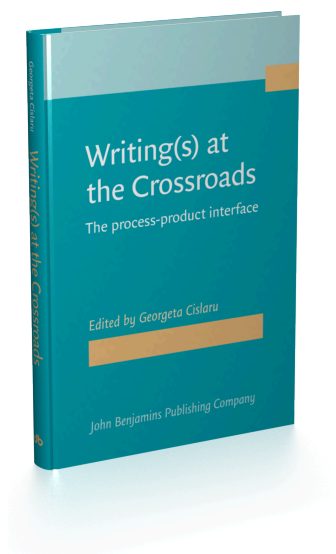
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Professional writing as institutional norm and personal style

Inspection reports in French elementary schools

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The present study is based on 85 inspection reports in primary schools, composed during the 2010–2011 academic year by six National Education Inspectors in an academy in Brittany, France. Our main objective is to describe the genre of the report in a text statistics framework, using both extralinguistic (enunciative situation, pragmatics) and linguistic characteristics. Among the results we obtained, we noted that the reports were significantly grouped together by author. In spite of significant compositional and generic constraints, strengthened by the report model recommended for use by the Academy, some authors clearly distinguished themselves from the others and this allowed us to consider “personal styles” of writing for these administrative reports.

Keywords: discourse analysis; text statistics; professional genres; inspection reports; personal styles

1. Introduction

Professional writing has been theorized by anthropologists as *creation*: in contrast to its oral counterpart, written discourse is inseparably constituted by the object, which, in the most concrete sense of the term, remains its medium. “Every act of writing”, affirms Béatrice Fraenkel (2008, 62) “contributes to the construction of an object, and this object takes up its place where the action occurs”. Whatever its nature and form, be it a book, report, note, file or review, professional writing is an integral feature of many people’s work activity, from its conception to its final distribution. Created as part of one’s work, it is stored at the workplace by its author or recipient. The discourse that is produced is indissociable from the situation in which it is written (see also Delbreilh this volume; Prior this volume), and forms “part of the act of creating an object, an act relevant to written language practices” (Fraenkel 2008, 62).

The study described here was carried out as part of the ECRITURES (*Writings*) research project financed by the French National Research Agency (ANR) and conducted by the CLESTHIA laboratory at University Sorbonne nouvelle.¹ The aim of this research project is to characterize professional writing, focusing on the writing of reports in two different professional spheres:

- descriptive reports of children at risk;
- reports on elementary school inspections carried out in France by the Ministry of National Education.

It is the second category of reports that formed the subject of the present study. The final versions of these reports underwent textometric analyses using Le Trameur (<http://www.tal.univ-paris3.fr/trameur/>) and Dtm-Vic (<http://www.dtmvic.com>) software, which will be used to examine the draft versions at a later date. This chapter therefore describes one of a series of studies on the written product considered in terms of its formal conditions and pragmatic ends.

We begin by describing the inspection report from the point of view of the writing category to which it belongs, as well as the way in which it constitutes an *object* (cf. Fraenkel 2008) in the professional relationship between inspectors and the teachers in their local education authority. We then set out the characteristics of the corpus we studied and report the results of our analyses.

2. Inspection reports: Overview of the genre, discursive and institutional constraints

Written in different locations, signed by people other than their authors, addressed to three different entities, archived, and regularly consulted, elementary school inspection reports have all the characteristics of an object that occupies a position and plays a role in the professional environment. As such, its composition can be seen as an act of creation – a *creating* in the sense employed by Fraenkel (2008). This *creating* is framed by a specific form that gives the report-as-object a unique appearance. It thus takes on an official character that might be there to compensate for its general lack of efficiency.

2.1 Professional writing that is circulated

Ministry of National Education inspectors (NEIs) are responsible for a specific local education authority (LEA), a geographical zone of varying size that generally

1. <http://www.univ-paris3.fr/anr-ecritures-96530.kjsp>. See Brunner and Pordeus Ribeiro this volume; Cislaru and Lefevre this volume; Olive and Cislaru this volume.

contains between 40 and 60 nursery and/or elementary schools. They have authority over the teachers in their LEA, and inspecting these teachers is without doubt viewed as their most important task.

In principle, teachers must be inspected every four years. In reality, inspections generally take place every five or six years. An inspector's visit is thus a noteworthy event for a teacher, as fewer than a dozen inspections will take place over the course of his or her career. The term *inspection*, with the semes of hierarchy and authority bestowed on it by its most frequent contexts (e.g. inspection by the police), reinforces the important nature of the event.

Today, inspections take place as follows:

1. The teacher fills out a preliminary document, which is sent in advance to the NEI. In this document, the teacher fills in sections about his or her professional activity, questions, aspirations, problems, and so on. This document allows the inspector to prepare the visit, for which notice is given at least two weeks in advance.
2. Inspection visit.
 - First phase: observation of classroom teaching. The inspector spends between 1½ and 3 hours in the teacher's classroom. The inspector takes a seat, armed with the tools of the trade (pen and paper and/or computer), at a table on which the teacher has placed his or her various teaching aids (schedule for the term and/or year, weekly class timetable, schedule for the different disciplines, daily lesson plans, etc.). During this phase, the NEI observes the activity of the teacher and the students, looks through the aids that have been provided, in order to gain additional information, and takes notes or even begins to write the report, if he or she is working directly on a computer.
 - Second phase: interview with the teacher. This interview is fairly ritualized. The NEI begins by listing the points that attracted his or her attention. These points are discussed in detail, with the discussion possibly broadening out thereafter. The NEI will have also noted a number of aspects that the teacher is expected to explain or comment on.
3. Creation of the report: a report is drafted following each inspection visit, containing at the very least a description of the classroom observation and the interview, together with evaluative comments and advice, and finally the grade given to the teacher by the inspector.

Once it has been drawn up, the inspection report follows a complex path before being reproduced in triplicate and stored in the offices of the LEA's inspectorate (local level), the offices of the Administrative Director of the National Education

Services (ADNES, state level), and finally by the teacher who was inspected. In summary, once it has been written by the NEI, the report makes a round trip between the NEI and his or her secretary, then goes to the ADNES, the inspectorate, the teacher, and back to the NEI, before being sent to its three recipients.

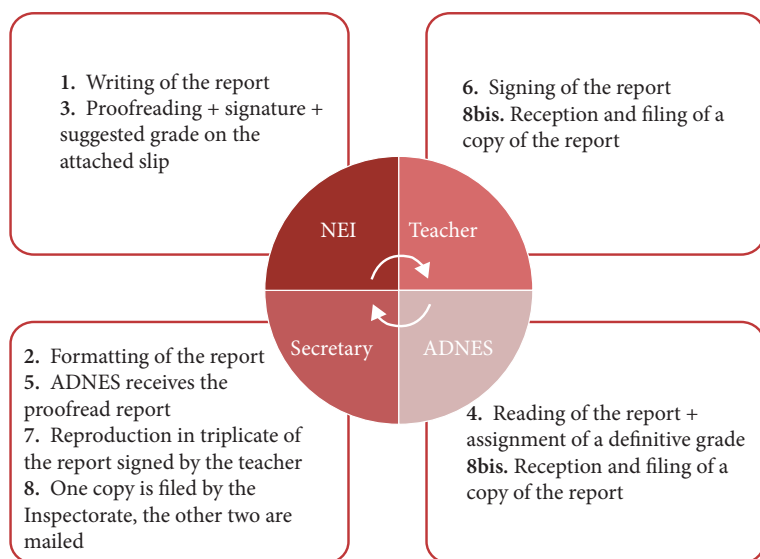


Figure 1. The path of the inspection report

This complex path highlights the particular enunciative situation of report's composition: written by the NEI, it is supplemented by the ADNES, who confirms – or questions – the grade that has been suggested, and who may, if he or she so wishes, add further recommendations for the teacher. The fact that the report is addressed to three different parties raises various issues surrounding its composition:

- With regard to the teacher, the report has a formative and even transformative goal, as it is supposed to flag up good practice, but also less good practice, by formulating observations and advice. Given the lack of disciplinary power that NEIs have over teachers, this advice tends to be couched in very moderate terms, designed not to upset or annoy the teacher.
- The ADNES is the NEI's superior, so the NEI must be sure to present him- or herself in a good light in the report. Thus, depending on how the visit is justified, the NEI may present him- or herself either as a conscientious employee who obediently follows the orders given by the ADNES, or else as a rebel with very little regard for his or her superiors.

2.2 The framework of the hierarchical discourse: The form of the inspection report

Depending on the LEA, the NEI may either be free to decide on the form of the report, or else be required to use a template. This was the case for the LEA we studied. A working group set up two years before these reports were compiled established a specific template for the reports that all the NEIs were supposed to follow. They did so in an attempt to harmonize reports from different LEAs. In practical terms, it also constitutes an adaptation of the existing professional discourse, thereby contributing to its legitimacy. Following the example of official judicial documents (Gasse-Granjean & Tock 2003), the template uses visual marks to create a visible hierarchy of the enunciative roles.

Mrs. / Mr.:
School:
Class:

Date of inspection / /

1. General context, work conditions, and structure of the class.

Monitoring of the students

Attendance: attendance rate			
In September:		The entirety of the month prior to the visit:	
Course: number of students			
Passing:		Failing:	
		Retained at the beginning of the year (repeating):	
Individualized projects			
PPRE:		PPS:	PAI:
			Number of AVS:

2. Conformity of the institutional tools

Conformity of the pedagogical organization

	Yes	No	Observations
Attendance record			
Schedule			
School report book/ record of competences			

3. Pertinence of professional writing

	Yes	No	Observations
Daily lesson plans			
Planning			

4. Sessions observed (pedagogical goals, proposed situations, results obtained.../analyses and advice)

5. Work and product of the students (observations, analyses, role of writing, diversity of expectations, visual displays, tools for the course.../analyses and advice)

6. Role of evaluation in the teaching practices (tools of observation and monitoring, pedagogical adaptation, use of tools, references to performance indicators, help and support tools, and student results.

7. Interview (Professional investment, analysis of teaching practices, training, review of previous reports, career, areas for improvement...)

Bibliographic information.

Figure 2. Report template recommended for use by the LEA we studied

The first three sections contain identifying and quantitative data that are not analyzed here, although some were entered in the metadata. Only Sections 4–7 lead to the composition of a text. This text may be either a description of what was observed (in standard font) or a series of remarks and recommendations (in italics). After completing this first sheet, the NEI provides a general assessment of the performance he or she observed.

The report structure described above imposes a significant constraint on writers and, whether consciously or not, many refuse to conform to it: the reports we examined contained regular and sometimes quite substantial deviations from this template. This observation is an early indication of the unique status of these reports, in that they are both institutional objects and products to which the writers personally contribute. Among the constraints on composition, in addition to the structure, we can cite the need to use *academic* terms, which serve to place the reports in the institutional context to which they belong. For example, talking about the *actual work of the students* or the *portfolio* anchors the report in the contemporary institutional discourse. Despite this institutional obligation of subordination and discourse use, NEIs can invest themselves in the composition of the reports not only structurally (by modifying the template) but also in the choice of wording. Our data showed that some NEIs had writing *styles* that were peculiar to them. These styles are connected in part to professional variables, such as the NEIs' length of service, in that they may have trained at a time when report writing recommendations and, indeed, the very profession of inspector, were very different from what they are today. These styles may also, of course, depend on variables that are more individual – and thus more difficult to define –, such as the degree to which the NEIs contribute to their own personal development (keeping up with all the latest research, or even conducting research themselves) and their personal relationships with teachers (many NEIs are married to teachers, and most are former elementary teachers).

2.3 Assessing teachers and fostering their development.

The report's (well-nigh) impossible mission

The inspection report is, without doubt, primarily the record of a teacher's assessment at a given point in his or her career.² The writer of the report, the NEI, is the immediate superior of the teacher being inspected.

However, the inspection is of very relative importance: teachers can legally refuse to be inspected and, even though the inspection results in the awarding of a

2. The French term *évaluation* is extremely polysemic and loaded with connotations in the teaching world. The École Supérieure de l'Éducation Nationale (ESEN) website provides an insight into the notion from the inspectorate's perspective: <http://www.esen.education.fr/fr/ressources-par-theme/evaluation/epistemologie-et-methodologie-de-l-evaluation/>

grade that is supposed to affect the professional advancement of all state employees, the NEI's liberty in the assignment of this grade is checked by a grid that shows the range of possible grades according to the teacher's length of service. Additionally, the infrequency of the inspections (once every three to four years at the most) does not allow for teachers to be properly monitored.

This relative powerlessness with regard to the work of the teachers leads NEIs to view these visits and the ensuing reports as an opportunity for dialogue and advice rather than as a means of taking disciplinary measures. In his research on the assessment of elementary school teachers, Jean Ferrier (1999) used the term *inspections* for the century 1880–1980, but preferred to talk about *assessments* for the period from 1980 onwards. In 1983, the then Education Minister Alain Savary noticeably modified the nature of the NEIs' work by (1) making it compulsory for them to give advance warning of their visit, whereas previously the visits had been unannounced, (2) placing the individual inspection within a more general system that also assesses the work context, and (3) giving teachers a right of reply and the possibility of contesting the grade.³ In July 1990, this reform was taken one step further by statutory guidance specifying that “the evaluation primarily concerns the students and the staff. The individual assessment of each teacher is placed in the more general context of the establishment.”⁴ As a result of a movement where teachers refused to undergo inspections in the 1970s, the inspection moved from being punitive to being evaluative. In France, as in other European countries, the assessment of work done by individuals has increasingly moved toward the assessment of system efficiency (see Paquay, 2004). Although we can still talk about the individual report as an *object* with specific functions within the professional context, it is regularly called into question in debates about teacher assessment, and its status has changed as the report process itself has been adapted and modified.⁵

3. Corpus and methodology

The above description of inspection reports shows just how complex they are. It is difficult to attribute a precise role to them. There is considerable tension between the ambiguity of the report's author (the empirical writer is not the one who signs it) and its evaluative and even punitive character. Then there is the gulf between

3. Memorandum of 13 December 1983 regarding the modalities of inspections carried out by NEIs.

4. Decree of 18 July 1990 and memorandum of 4 July 1990.

5. A list of official publications, books, articles and reports can be found on the École Supérieure de l'Éducation Nationale (ESEN) website: <http://www.esen.education.fr/fr/ressources-par-theme/evaluation/evaluation-des-personnels-enseignants/>

the NEI's power – the mark of this power potentially being the report (the officially documented and administrative record of an *in situ* assessment of the teacher's performance) – and the relative ineffectualness of the report.

3.1 Corpus

We collated 120 reports of inspections conducted in primary education institutions (nursery or elementary schools). All these reports had been produced during the 2010–2011 academic year by six NEIs in the same LEA in Brittany. Unfortunately, one third of these reports had to be excluded from the study, and the corpus thus comprised 82 reports, totaling 94,462 words.⁶

The NEIs were chosen in accordance with two criteria:

- urban/rural/special district (education and services for students with special needs (e.g. adaptation and schooling of handicapped children, ASH) in nursery schools, etc.);
- length of service (less than 5 years/more than 5 years as an NEI).

Their consent to take part in this study was sought by their superiors. Four of the six NEIs were part of a working group that had spent two years developing a new template for the reports. This template had been distributed to all the NEIs, who were all supposed to use it (see above).

The data were collected by the LEA. Following an initial meeting in June 2011, the LEA made available 20 reports per NEI. There was no possible bias, as the NEIs had no knowledge that their reports would be used as material for a linguistic study at the time of writing. This first meeting led to the distribution of questionnaires that were quickly returned by all six NEIs. These allowed us to collect demographic metadata (length of service, professional responsibilities, etc.) and to gain some insight into their conception of the inspection report, its role as a supervisory device for the teachers, and so on. The questions probed the NEIs' conceptions and were organized into three areas:

- The role assigned to the inspection report: recipient (teachers vs. superiors) and principle functions of the report (assessment vs. training vs. exercise of authority);
- The most important elements to observe during a classroom visit;

6. About 25 of the reports were inspections of principals or headmasters. These take a specific form: the section about activity in the classroom is generally shorter, and there is an additional section on administrative duties. We could not, therefore, include them with the reports about teachers, who are not school administrators. Other reports were rejected because of technical problems during collection (inappropriate format difficult to rectify).

- The procedure for writing the report: technical aspects (composition tools), the order in which the different sections are filled in, the NEI's professional stance with regard to the teacher (e.g. choice of elements to mention in the report, reasons behind this choice).

As the inspection reports contained confidential data, they had to be rendered anonymous prior to the textometric investigations:

- replacement of the name of the school with “rural school” or “urban school” and deletion of the name of the municipality;
- deletion of the inspection day (we only retained the month and year);
- replacement of the names of the six NEIs with letters from A to F;
- replacement of the names of the teachers with identifiers made up of the letter corresponding to the NEI and a single digit (e.g. the teacher Mr A3 was the subject of the third report written by NEI A). The sex variable was communicated, enabling us to maintain the abbreviations Mr, Miss or Mrs).

In general, each report contained around 10,000 characters (range: 5000–12,000).

3.2 Methodology

In order to describe the report genre, we chose to adopt an exploratory and empirical approach. In other words, we endeavored to let the corpus speak for itself and allowed its structure and its specificities guide us, in order to test our hypotheses and arrive at our interpretations and conclusions.

In this sense, we set ourselves apart from previous studies, which were either more local and more qualitative (e.g. Cauterman et al. 2007), or else more deductive (Si Moussa 2000). This author applied quantitative methods to content analysis, such that the units that were retained and potentially annotated were the fruit of a research hypothesis, rather than being inferred from the structure of the corpus. Our analyses, on the other hand, took the textual material and corpus system as their starting point. In other words, our study was constructed on the basis of the associations and contrasts that gave the corpus its quantitative structure.

3.2.1 *Processing the corpus*

Once the corpus had been formed, it was annotated in XML in order to facilitate the extraction and import of data in formats suitable for the analytical tools we were using. The annotation was partially automated by means of scripts.⁷

7. We are grateful to A. Lardilleux for performing this part of the work.

In this way, both the overall structure and individual sections of each document were marked out, as were the formatting marks (bold, italics, underlined): italics had regularly been used to structure the document.

These annotations therefore allowed us to take note of variations in the structure of the reports as a whole, as well as in the separate sections making up the reports.

3.2.2 *Analytical methods*

We chose to adopt an exploratory perspective, using inductive methods to highlight the organization of the reports and the most specific and most meaningful linguistic units (words, morphosyntactic categories) that would help us to describe them. This comprehensive examination thus revealed the most important characteristics as far as the structure of the documents was concerned – characteristics we subsequently examined in greater detail, implementing more conventional and qualitative linguistic corpus methods, such as concordance and co-occurrence.

In order to bring the structure of the corpus to light, we applied a set of methods and tools developed to analyze large bodies of text as part of the *Textometry* project, based on the systematic quantification of lexicometry. Developed at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Saint Cloud in the 1980s, and originally applied to political corpora, lexicometry involves the use of a set of methods and statistical measurements to explore and compare (sub-)corpora, considering that the norm is endogenous to the corpus, as linguistic units do not actually have frequencies in language (Lafon 1980). *Textometry* represents a particularly effective approach to the analysis of corpora, whether it is *corpus-driven* (i.e. led by the corpus) or *corpus-based* (i.e. validated by the corpus) (Tognini-Bonelli 2001).⁸ Its statistical tools and methods could thus be used in both phases of our analyses, since they include functionalities that allow for both the quantitative and the qualitative observation of the corpus.

The whole of the corpus was submitted to two tools that perform exploratory analyses of textual data, and which were chosen for their complementarity. The most inductive analyses of the corpus were performed with DTM-VIC software, developed by Ludovic Lebart, and the qualitative investigations with Serge Fleury's *Le Trameur*.⁹

8. The most recently developed methods actually take textual linearity and reticularity into account.

9. These programs can be downloaded free of charge:
 DTM: http://www.dtmvic.com/05_SoftwareF.html
 Le Trameur: <http://www.tal.univ-paris3.fr/trameur/>

4. Structure of the corpus – enunciative device and institutional constraints

In order to investigate the structure of the corpus, we first performed a correspondence analysis (CA) on all 82 reports making up the corpus. The first factorial plane we obtained is presented in Figure 3.

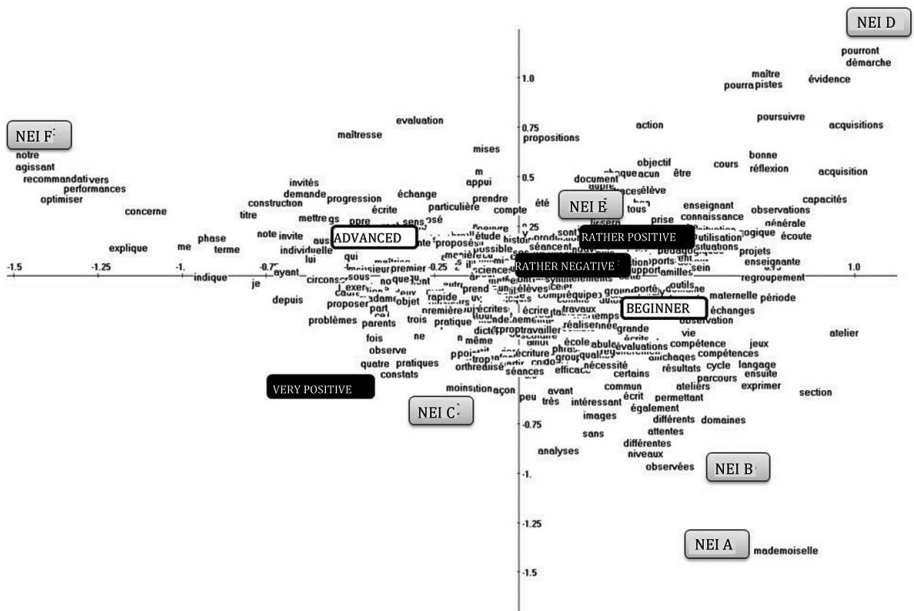


Figure 3. First factorial plane from the CA with projection of the NEIs' categorical variables (assessment and length of service) – 82 full reports

As well as allowing us to observe the most significant contrasts and similarities in a large set of data, and identify the lexical and stylistic characteristics that determined the structure of the reports, the CA also provided information on the evaluative nature of the genre. As inspection reports are part of an evaluative practice, we might assume that the texts are primarily organized around an evaluative vocabulary that differentiates between positive and negative reports, as is the case for web 2.0 genres and Internet user ratings. However, this proved not to be the case, as the CA did not plot the reports according to the positive or negative nature of the assessment, instead contrasting the strongest assessments (i.e. either very positive or very negative) with more moderate ones (i.e. fairly positive or fairly negative). In other words, the sharply positive and negative reports were grouped together and contrasted with the more moderate reports, whether these

were positive or negative. The polarity of the overall assessments therefore had no significant character, as confirmed by our use of the bootstrap test.¹⁰ As we can see in Figure 4, the confidence ellipses overlap considerably, showing that the moderate reports had many characteristics in common, unlike the more strongly worded reports.

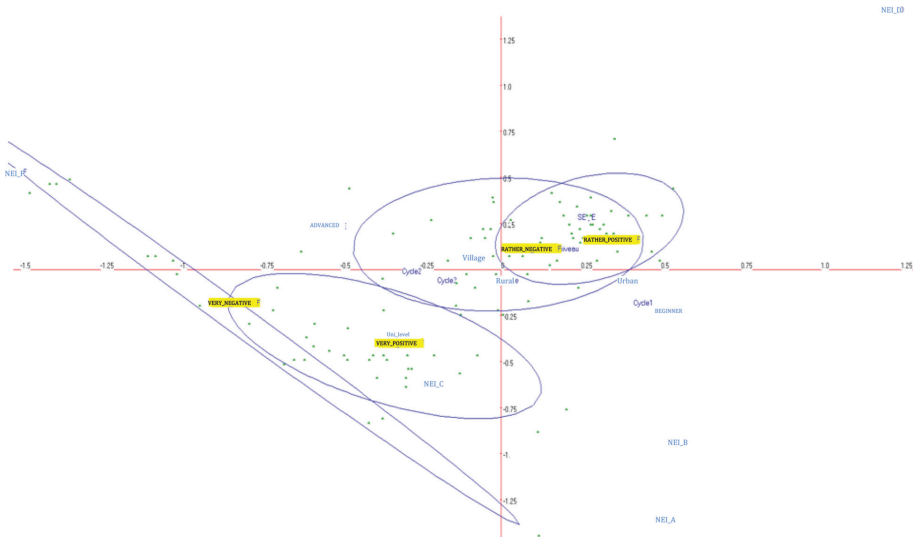


Figure 4. Confidence ellipses around the four modalities of the overall assessments

These initial observations reflect what we said in Section 1.3. about the changing nature of the inspection system and the increasingly evaluative role of inspection reports. Moreover, very negative reports were rare, such that the moderate or mixed reports primarily contrasted with very positive ones. We explore this distinction further in the following sections describing the analysis of the most significant thematic and stylistic poles.

Clear thematic poles reflect distinct conceptions of teaching and of the practice of inspection (4.1.). We can also discern what are sometimes marked personal styles (4.2.), for despite significant compositional and generic constraints, some

10. An extremely strict test of the stability of a structure that involves making statistical inferences about *new* samples taken from an initial sample. Thus, we disturbed the sampling of the 120 reports by placing them in a box and pulling out a report at random, *and returning it to the box each time* 120 times (on average, 70% of the reports). A sample treated in this way is a *replication* of the initial dataset. Other replications are constructed (30 or so are sufficient for a context like ours), and the analysis of the set of replications defines the halos around each point, marked by the confidence ellipses.

writers stood out very clearly from the others, allowing us to talk about report writing *styles*.

4.1 Thematic poles

In Figure 3, we can find the most significant lexical variations by observing the lexical items situated at the ends of the two axes.

4.1.1 Teacher performance versus student acquisition (Axis 1, horizontal)

This axis contrasts words such as *agissant* (*effective*), *notre* (*our*), *recommandations* (*recommendations*), *optimiser* (*optimize*), *performances* (*performance*), *explique* (*explains*), *vers* (*toward*), *concerne* (*concerns*), and *me* (*me*) on its negative side with words such as *démarche* (*approach*), *pourront* (*could*), *atelier* (*workshop*), *acquisitions* (*acquisitions*), *acquisition* (*acquisition*), *évidence* (*apparent*), *section* (*class*), *capacités* (*abilities*), *période* (*period*), and *écoute* (*attention*) on its positive side.

In other words, one pole is centered on the *teacher* and associated with a vocabulary of *performance* (e.g. *performance*, *optimize*, *phase*, *construction*, *progression*, *grade*, etc.), and the opposite pole is centered on the *student* and associated with a vocabulary of *acquisition* (e.g. *acquisition*, *abilities*, etc.).

This axis clearly reveals a contrast between NEIs D and F. NEI F is characterized by the use of terms such as *performance* and *optimize*, which focuses on the result of the teaching act presented to him. The term *optimize* pops up in all the reports written by NEI F, except for those containing very positive assessments. Each teacher whose practice is rated as sufficiently satisfactory or not very satisfactory is thus advised to *optimize* an aspect of his or her work. The focus on the students' performance likewise concerns the result rather than the process that may have led to it. By contrast, NEI D favors the *acquisition* of knowledge or know-how, observes the *approach* taken by the teacher, and looks not at the students' *performance* but at their *abilities*.

We can assume that NEI F has a teleological conception of the teacher, whereas NEI D adopts a more open perspective.¹¹ This contrast clarifies the position of the *very positive* reports as far as the assessment of the teacher's performance is concerned (cf. Figure 3). The focus on the teacher triggered more enthusiastic and

11. Nevertheless, this contrast is not entirely clear at first sight: the term *construction*, which refers to the Vygotskian perspective of the construction of knowledge in the pedagogical discourse, situated near NEI F, should logically accompany the term *approach* that characterizes NEI D. However, *Le Trameur's* concordancer shows that NEI D likewise used *construction*, but in the configuration "construction of learning". By contrast, NEI F used *construction* with a variety of complements, such as *construction of meaning*, *construction of sounds*, *construction of graphics* and *construction of language*, which explains why *construction* occurs so frequently in his reports.

more direct comments than the focus on the students – even though, at the end of the day, the effect that teaching has on the students should be the motivation behind the assessment. In NEI F's discourse, we find an almost systematic association between observation of the teacher and the *very positive* character of the report, for example:

A professional of considerable caliber. Mrs F3 takes the recommendations she receives into account. She regularly updates her teaching practices.

We can also find enunciative differences between the discourses of NEIs D and F referring to their self-representations of their involvement in the exchanges they report and the unfolding of the dialogue. NEI F set himself apart from the rest of the NEIs through his use of the pronoun *me*, as in the following utterance:

Even though Mrs F7 tells me that the performance of her students is sufficiently homogenous on the whole, she nonetheless indicates to me that the particular situation of one student in the GS [class for 5-year-olds] is giving her cause for concern.

This very characteristic form of NEI F's discourse includes the strong presence of *I*. Although it is closer to the center of Axis 1, it still appears in the list of words specific to F's discourse that was automatically generated by the software (cf. Figure 4 below).¹² In contrast to NEI F, NEI D favored an indirect manner, using the future tense of the modal verb *can*. This contrast is exemplified in two types of utterances that seek to give advice: "I have pointed out to Mrs X" versus "Mrs X could", where one type of self-enunciation serves to highlight NEI F and one to obscure D.¹³

4.1.2 *A traditional vocabulary that recommends versus a contemporary vocabulary that describes (Axis 2, vertical)*

Regarding the second factor, the terms on the negative side, namely *mademoiselle* (young lady), *observées* (observed), *niveaux* (levels), *analyses* (analyses), *sans* (without), *différentes* (different [feminine plural]), *attentes* (expectations), *domaines* (domains), *différents* (different [masculine plural]), *images* (images) and *écrit* (writ-

12. The word "I", located at -0.7 on Axis 1, does not lie right at the end of the axis because it is used throughout the corpus and is less distinctive than terms like *performance* or *optimize*, which figure almost exclusively in NEI F's discourse. However, the location of *I* shows that it was used preferentially by F.

13. A comprehensive study of the reported exchanges would reveal the abundant use of *me* and *I* by NEI F, who continually presents himself as being in the midst of speaking. At the end of the day, he is very much the hero of the inspection visit.

ing) are contrasted with the terms on the positive side, namely *pourront* (could [3rd person future plural]), *démarche* (approach), *maître* (schoolmaster), *maîtresse* (schoolmistress), *pourra* (could [3rd person future singular]), *pistes* (strategies), *poursuivre* (pursue), *évaluation* (evaluation), *actions* (act), *mises* (most frequently in the collocation *mises en oeuvre* [implementation]) and evidence (*apparent* [in to make apparent, to show]).

On this vertical axis, a key contrast concerns the designators of the elements observed, with people (*schoolmaster*, *schoolmistress* and, less significantly, *students*) on the positive side, but primarily objects (*image*, *writing*) and abstractions (*levels*, *domains*) on the negative side. Consequently, *practices* are observed on the negative side, whereas on the positive side, the future modals indicate recommendations, and the focus is on *approaches*. NEIs D, E, and F used *schoolmaster/schoolmistress*, *implementation*, and *approach*, whereas NEIs A, B, and C preferred to use *practices* and *skills*.

The contrast between *implementation* and *approach* on the one hand, and *analysis* and *practices* on the other, reflects the opposition between a top-down approach to instruction and a horizontal one. The term *implementation*, intentionally used twice, corresponds to a vision of instruction as the application of a protocol that has been thought out beforehand. Similarly, the term *approach* refers to the elaboration of a protocol. By contrast, when the NEIs mention *practices*, they refer to a set of professional acts, whether these are tools, the teacher's discourse, or the unfolding of the sessions, which is certainly supposed to find its origin in the planning of the session but in principle cannot be separated from it (as the terms *reflective practices* show, for example). Thus, whereas the term *implementation* connotes a kind of exteriority on the part of the teacher with regard to his or her action, *practices* seems more integrated.

The use of *observed*, almost always in the noun phrases *sessions observed* and *disciplines observed*, indicates a desire to objectify the inspection. By contrast, on the positive side of the axis, we find the terms *approaches* and *strategies*, which refer to (1) the teachers' pedagogical approaches, and (2) the pedagogical strategies recommended by the NEIs. Highly characteristic of NEI D, *approaches* and *strategies* are classifying designations, whereas the adjective *observed*, associated with A and B's discourse, highlights these NEIs' neutral stance.

The word *skill*, present in both the singular and the plural on the negative side, weighs less heavily on this axis than the terms commented on above. However, it is worth a mention because of its particular value in the institutional discourse: the skill-based approach, "an attempt to modernize the curriculum, reorient it, and take into account not only knowledge, but the ability to transfer it and put it to use" (Perrenoud 2000), is coherent with the "common core of knowledge and skills", the frame of reference for compulsory education in France

since 2005.¹⁴ In the NEIs' discourse, the use of *skill*, be it in the singular or in the plural, referred in the vast majority of cases to these common-core skills. Thus, from the point of view of the interdiscourse, *skill* is part of a technical and contemporary vocabulary. It is also part of the essentially mandatory register of official discourse. Thus, it is surprising to find this term on only one side of Axis 2, as it belongs to a professional vocabulary that should be shared and therefore not characterize either axis. Its underuse by NEIs D, E, and F should be considered as characteristic, and not its presence in A, B, and C's discourse, where it has no real significance.

Consequently, it is the presence of the dated terms *schoolmaster* and *schoolmistress* (the contemporary, institutional term is *teacher*) that most strongly characterizes the discourse of NEIs D, E, and F.¹⁵ D and F are contrasted on the horizontal axis, but come together on fundamentals like the status of the individuals being observed. Students still call their teachers by the appellatives *maître* and *maîtresse*. *Teacher*, the term most often used in curriculums and official instructions, designates people by their function and places the emphasis on the core activity of their profession, namely teaching. It is thus associated with the content to be communicated and with know-how and professional activity. In statutory documents, *maître* is generally used today to designate a grade (*maître de conférences* [Associate Professor], *maître auxiliaire* [non-certified teacher]), and *schoolmistress* is virtually absent from the Ministry of National Education website (3 occurrences). These NEIs therefore adopt an intermediate position between the daily discourse of the students, parents, and teachers who favor *maître* or *maîtresse*, and the noospheric

14. The common core document is currently in the process of being simplified. The initial version of this document, dating from 2006, is available online: <http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/51/3/3513.pdf>

15. The contemporary preference for *teacher* and the decreasing use of (*school*)*master* is illustrated in quantitative terms by the inverse variation between the elementary school curriculums of 1985 and those of 2008: 37 occurrences of *schoolmaster* and 0 occurrences of *teacher* in 1985 versus 22 occurrences of *schoolmaster* and 48 occurrences of *teacher* in 2008. Analysis of all the curriculums published between 1985 and 2008 reveals a steady increase in the use of *teacher* to the detriment of *schoolmaster*, with a particularly strong shift in 2002:

- 1985: no occurrences of the noun *enseignant* (*teacher*) (one occurrence of the gerund *enseignant*).

- 1991: 0.2 *teacher* for 1 *schoolmaster*

- 1995: 0.25 *teacher* for 1 *schoolmaster*

- 2002: 1.8 *teacher* for 1 *schoolmaster*

- 1991: 2.2 *teacher* for 1 *schoolmaster*

discourse that favors *teacher*. By contrast, the other four NEIs are resolutely on the side of the noosphere.¹⁶

We can apply a similar analysis to the term *practices* (especially in the phrase *professional practices*, as the terms *professional* and *practices* tend to form a collocation in the NEIs' discourse). *Practices* also features in one of the subtitles of the report template (*Role of evaluation in the teaching practices*). As with *skills*, the absence or rarity of this term in some reports is almost more significant than its strong presence in others. It was scarcely employed at all by NEIs D and F, which means that they were out of step not only with the other four NEIs we observed, but also with the institutional discourse. We only indirectly took account of the words *analyses* and *expectations* on the negative side of the axis, because they, too, feature in one of the report template's subtitles, and in the vast majority of cases, it was in this context that they emerged in the concordancer. Their presence therefore reflected the NEIs' decision to use the template, rather than an idiomatic usage. However, these two terms are significant precisely because they featured in the template: it is important to note that the vertical axis contrasts the two or three NEIs who used the template (on the negative side) with others, on the positive side, who considerably distorted it, showing that they took full responsibility for all the attributes, both hierarchical and professional, of their function.

4.2 Personal styles

As well as highlighting different conceptions of the inspection and what should be observed and assessed, the lexical axes also showed up individual differences. For instance, NEIs D and F had very particular personal styles indeed, contrasting not only with each other on the first axis of the factorial chart (Figure 3), but also with NEIs A, B, and C, who were grouped together on the negative side of Axis 2. We were able to identify the words that characterized their discourse, on both the positive and the negative sides, using data and text mining (DTM) software (value test; see Figure 5).

Generally speaking, from the first factorial analysis onwards, we noted that the reports were significantly grouped by author. Figure 5 shows the confidence ellipses around the different NEIs: none of the ellipses overlap, and their small size clearly confirms the (statistical) significance of each author.

16. Likewise, NEI D borrowed the very frequent usage of the axiological adjective *good* (54 occurrences of *good* [feminine], 21 occurrences of *good* [masculine]) from daily discourse. She was without doubt the NEI whose discourse contained the least professional terminology.

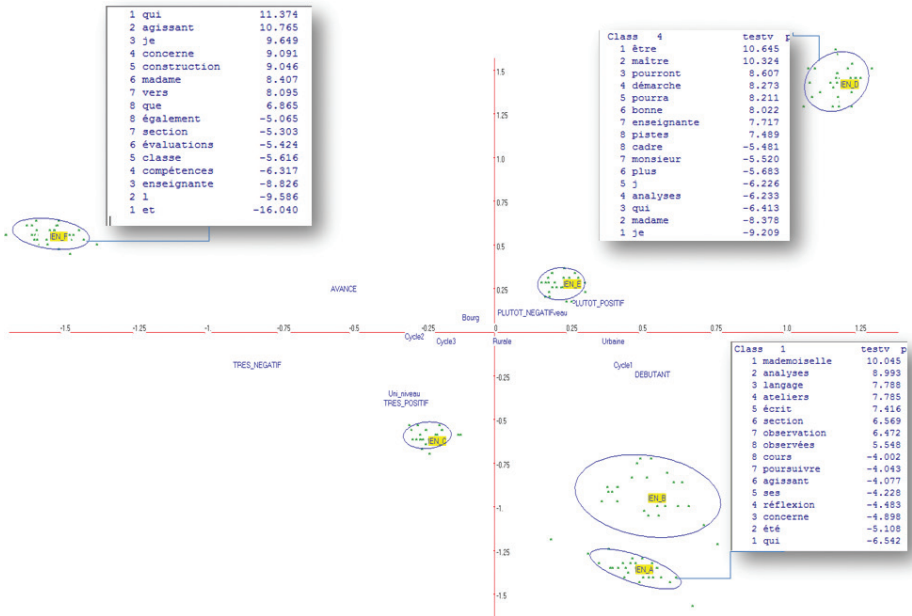


Figure 5. Confidence ellipses around the NEIs—unique vocabulary of NEIs A, D, and F

As we have just indicated, the NEIs who were the furthest away from the center (those who distanced themselves most significantly and who were therefore the most singular) were A, D, and F.

F contrasted with D (and with A, albeit to a lesser extent) on the first factor, whereas D and F contrasted with A on the second factor. We have already identified and described the contrasts between F and D on the first factor (see Section 3.1 above).

We based our analysis of personal styles (still only exploratory) on these three NEIs. For this reason, we only show the words that were unique to them in Figure 5.

Whereas the preceding sections deal with the characterization of the DEIs’ socio- and technoelect, it is their idiolects that were the focus of our research here. We also examined the NEIs’ descriptions of their practices in the questionnaire we distributed.

4.2.1 Lexical contrasts

NEI F was characterized above all by significant usage of the relative pronoun *qui* (*who*) (v-test +11.3) and the conjunction *que* (*that*) (+6.8), revealing a tendency toward a subordinating writing style. A and D, however, who contrasted with F on Axis 1 (teacher’s performance vs. students’ acquisition) were not positively

characterized by grammatical words, and A even underused the relative pronoun *who* (−6.5).

An indication of the writers' enunciative commitment to their writing, the personal pronoun *I* likewise significantly characterized the styles of F (+9.6) and D (−9.2). It is worth recalling here that D was characterized by the usage of the verb *pouvoir* (*can*), nearly always modal and in the future tense. NEI D also gave advice in an indirect manner, and her manner of expression distanced her from her remarks, even though she passed judgement on her observations.

From a lexematic perspective, NEI D was characterized by the use of the adjective *good* in the feminine (v-test +8, present 57 times in the 14 reports produced by this NEI, equivalent to four occurrences on average per report). In addition to its inherent axiological seme, it contained a moralizing element here. Rather surprisingly, given that reports are supposed to be objective observations, *bonne* (*good*) was used to qualify nouns such as *situation* (*situation*), *attitude* (*attitude*), *facture* (*technique*), *compréhension* (*comprehension*), *mise en place* (*setup*) and *réflexion* (*reflection*). In constructions like *good reflection* or *good setup*, for example, we can see that the adjective's meaning is clearly subjective, and the absence of any other qualification heightens this impression. This use of *good* to describe situations for which axiological assessing scales exist is in some ways similar to the use of the old-fashioned character of the appellative *maître* (*schoolmaster*) commented on above. It reveals a strong personal involvement in the judgment of the actions being observed, and indeed of the protagonists, as they are preferentially designated by the co-presence of the terms *schoolmaster* and *teacher* on the positive axis. NEIs D and F are grouped together on Axis 2 as the authors of axiological discourses that reveal a rather traditional view of teaching practices. They personally involve themselves, either directly or indirectly, in their function of giving advice to teachers, all the while clearly indicating a hierarchical distance (predominance of *I/future modal*).

Contrasting with NEI F on both axes, NEI A is characterized by the overuse of objectifying vocabulary: *analyse* (*analysis*), *observations* (*observations*), and *observées* (*observed* – in the collocation *practices observed*). The contrast with F is lexically materialized by three words: *qui* (*who*), *agissant* (*effective*), and *concerne* (*concerns*). These words are unique to F's discourse and are noticeably absent from A's. The contrasting use of the term *section* (*class*) (very frequent in A's reports, but strangely absent from F's) does not have the same meaning: used in the collocations *grande section*, *moyenne section*, and *petite section*, corresponding to classes for 5-, 4-, and 3-year-olds, it specifically designates nursery school classes, and its frequency simply indicates that A's reports frequently concerned nursery schools and those of F elementary schools. This is corroborated by the presence in A's reports of the terms *langage* (*language*) and *ateliers* (*workshops*), which are both associated with nursery school.

A also contrasts with D on Axis 2 (traditional and axiological vocabulary vs. contemporary and objectifying vocabulary) by his use of *analyses*, which was underused by D.

4.2.2 *Contrasts in background*

NEIs A, D, and F had distinct professional backgrounds: A (male) and D (female) had only recently embarked on their careers as NEIs, whereas F (male) had been an NEI for 10 years. A and F completed the full training program 10 years apart from one another. D, on the other hand, was recruited without having to take the competitive entrance exam, and did not undergo this training. These characteristics may explain the differences and similarities between these NEIs:

- A, having only recently been trained, used a contemporary vocabulary and utilized techniques he had learned very recently. The more traditional vocabulary employed by F can be explained by the fact that he trained much earlier, while the vocabulary used by D may be due precisely to not having undergone any training, thus obliging her to refer to her initial teacher training, which by then was already dated;
- It may also be the training and its legitimizing effect that explains the enunciativ marks used by the three NEIs. Without doubt, F's length of service and the legitimacy he derived from it made him feel self-assured and influenced his propensity to use *je (I)* and involve himself personally in the narration of the observations and interactions with the teacher being assessed. *I*, not one of the words that characterized A's discourse (i.e. neither over- nor underused), was strangely absent from D's discourse. Correlated with her lack of training, this may reflect the difficulty she had feeling like a legitimate inspector.

In addition to the processes of linguistic legitimization, the NEIs' responses to the questionnaire about their professional stance revealed differences that likewise reflected their feelings of legitimacy or otherwise. Regarding the primary role of the inspection report, A and F responded that it was to *assess the teacher's professional skills*, whereas for D, it was to *provide the LEA's inspectorate with a picture of the teacher's work*. We can assume that she felt the need to refer back to her superiors in order to validate her observations and her own professional practice.

4.2.3 *Procedural contrasts*

The three NEIs also composed their reports in different ways. First of all, the writing medium varied. A and F used word processors straightaway, and in fact began composing their reports right from the start of the process, while they were observing the teacher. By contrast, D did not bring her computer into the classroom,

taking notes by hand during the observation and reviewing them in their entirety once she had returned to her office. The responses of these three NEIs led us to identify three separate working periods: during the classroom observation, during the interview, and outside the classroom after the visit. The tools (word processor vs. pen and paper) were used in the following manner:

NEI F	NEI D	NEI A	
Composing the report directly on the computer	Taking handwritten notes	Composing the report directly on the computer + jotting notes down in a notebook to prepare for the interview	<i>Classroom observation</i>
Word processor	Taking handwritten notes	Taking handwritten notes	<i>Interview</i>
Resuming use of the word processor	Composing the report on the computer	Resuming use of the word processor	<i>Back at the office</i>

We can hypothesize that the variations in the composition medium during the observation period—pen and paper for D, word processor for A and F – affected the NEIs’ cognitive activity. In the first case, the composition primarily corresponded to note-taking, which Pétillon (2004) calls “writing with urgency”. The goal is to record as quickly as possible the information that will later be organized and reformulated to constitute the text of the report: “taking notes within a work situation consists in understanding a flood of information expressed in words, picking out the essential or useful parts, and composing a written product that cannot be compared to an explicit and linearly organized text” (Piolat 2010, 55). Numerous psychological studies have already demonstrated the significant cognitive effort required for note taking (cf. Piolat 2006 for a review). Despite all this effort, notes do not constitute a text that is readable for others, and the composition’s communicative dimension pertains solely to the communication that can be said to take place within the author’s mind *at a later time*. In other words, the notes must be sufficiently clear for them to be used later on. The task that NEIs A and F took upon themselves, namely directly composing the report on the computer in the classroom during the actual observation, implies a supplementary dimension: taking the reader into account, or rather the final readers of the report, namely the ADNES and the teacher being assessed. The task was more complex still for NEI A, because of his sporadic recourse to pen and paper whenever he noticed things he felt warranted questions in the interview phase. A precise study of the NEIs’ handwritten notes and *online* writing – an investigation that has been planned but not yet performed – would allow us to address the difference between the two

procedures in detail. A recording of NEI A has already shown that the direct composition of the report on a computer cannot be divided into steps corresponding to note-taking followed by formatting. On the contrary, NEI A simultaneously formulated and formatted his text, frequently stopping to put segments of text in italics or capital letters. At least as far as the writing process is concerned, he did not go through phases of content elaboration, as the syntactic-lexical characteristics already complied with the report norms. When he returned to his text following the visit, NEI A carried out a general tidying-up, during which he inserted a few new elements, particularly for the *interview* section. NEI D, on the other hand, had to start composing the report from the very beginning, based on the notes she had taken during the session. During report composition, therefore, the activity differs depending on which instrument was used, screen or paper.

The three NEIs we observed here also differed from one another in terms of procedure, that is, the order in which they filled out the various sections of the report. There are six of these sections, which are listed in the left-hand column of the table below, in the order in which they appear in the template report. The other three columns contain numbers indicating the order in which each NEI filled out these sections.

NEI F	NEI D	NEI A	
Before the visit	1	1	Identification
Before the visit	6	6	Monitoring of the students
	2	3	Conformity of the institutional tools
	3	5	Pertinence of professional writing
1	4	2	Sessions observed
	5	4	Work and product of the students
		7	Role of evaluation in the teaching practices

Whereas D filled the sections out one after another, following the order provided by the template and justifying this procedure by her desire “to take the template into account”, A stated that he proceeded according to the recommendations of the LEA’s working group: “begin by noting what you see first (*natural* order of things).” Rather than a choice or a habit, this “facilitated” the procedure for him, “knowing that we have to take in a lot of information in a limited space of time”. As for NEI F, he did not really seem to take the sections into account at all, adopting a procedure all his own. He indicated that the organization of the writing depended on the situation he had before him and the elements he viewed

as important in that situation, thus reflecting a relative independence from the institution, doubtless to do with his length of service. These differences in procedure appear to reflect the NEIs' greater or lesser willingness to adapt themselves to the collective constraints. This is certainly not the least of the paradoxes of this profession, whose members represent the state and speak with official authority (i.e. collectively, as state employees), while at the same time acting and speaking as individual inspectors in their own districts.

5. Conclusion

This initial exploration of inspection reports allowed us to identify several different dimensions of this professional genre, reflecting interactions between institutional constraints and the liberties taken by individual NEIs. Intended both to assess and to foster teachers' professional development, these reports play an important role, in that they reflect professional practices at a given moment in time, but one that is ultimately limited, owing to the rarity of the visits and the ineffectual nature of the suggestions that are given. Nonetheless, the form and content of these reports clearly illustrate the NEIs' investment in this mission, and above all show the variety of stances the reports' authors are able to adopt within what is a restricted form with well-defined institutional concerns. Results revealed disparate representations, with as many elements to evaluate (teacher's performance vs. students' learning) as ways to assess them and to convey those assessments.

Additionally, these reports can reveal different professional (or personal?) styles. For instance, NEIs A, D, and F stood out particularly clearly in the factorial chart, the lexical contrasts without doubt reflecting major divergences in their vision of the profession. Lying at the interface between professional stances and elements that are more about each inspector's personality, these examples of professional writing are objects that symbolize the relationship between an NEI and the teachers in his or her LEA, and establish writing as the locus of contradictory interactions between roles and individuals.

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