

# Comprehensive semi-structured interviews: an effective tool for analyzing and describing teacher training in reflexivity

Sabeur AYACHI

*Contract teacher-researcher in education and training sciences, EMA laboratory,  
CY Cergy Paris-University, France.*

**Abstract :** *This article aims to demonstrate the value of the "comprehensive" semi-structured interview technique (Fugier, 2010) within a co-constructive approach to knowledge and understanding. This methodology seeks to deepen the comprehension of reflexive approaches underpinning the initial reflexivity training of future Tunisian teachers. It is framed within a "research with" perspective known as "institutional socio-clinics" (Monceau, 2016). We will examine the researcher's stance and methodology during the conduction and transcription of these interviews, highlighting the importance of this technique in exploring the positions of trainers and trainees with respect to the notion of reflexivity.*

**Keywords:** *Analysis of professional practices, comprehensive semi-structured interviews, training, reflexivity*

---

## I. INTRODUCTION

This article is based on doctoral research in educational sciences, carried out in international co-supervision between the University of Tunis (Tunisia) and the University of CY Cergy (France). It is a so-called institutional socio-clinical "research with" whose purpose is to analyze and describe the current training of future Tunisian teachers in reflexivity in the course of the National Bachelor's Degree in Education and Teaching (LNEE) (*Guide for the Trainee Teacher: 2022*) [1]. It aims to understand how professionals (trained and trainers) perceive the prescriptions from professionalization to reflexivity, and implement them in terms of professional design practices. In this research, reflexivity is understood to mean the ability to develop the posture of a reflective practitioner in one's professional practices (Schön, 1994 [2]; Altet, 2012 [3]; Perrenoud, 2014 [4]). This skill requires training, training and commitment, allowing everyone, individually and collectively, to transform their practices by modifying their representations. This process refers to a meta-competence of reflexive analysis of one's professional practices, implemented through previously established devices and approaches and methods. This capacity is crucial to ensure the quality of teaching and to enable teachers to adapt to the complex and unpredictable realities on the ground.

The use of so-called "comprehensive" semi-structured interviews (Fugier :2010) [5] in the analysis and description of this training has proven to be a particularly effective method for exploring the way in which the different actors of the training (student trainees and their trainers) understand and integrate reflexivity. Indeed, these interviews, used in an institutional socio-clinical approach (Monceau, 2018) [6], have made it possible to collect rich and nuanced data that highlight the perceptions of the professionals involved (Student interns and their trainers).

First, we clarify the central role of reflexivity as a key competency in the current training of Tunisian future teachers. Then, we detail how and how the so-called comprehensive semi-structured interviews represent a research method particularly suitable for exploring the reflexive approaches implemented and the different

associated conceptions. Finally, we will examine the transformative effects of subjects' participation in these interviews.

## **II. REFLEXIVITY: A KEY SKILL FOR THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF FUTURE TUNISIAN TEACHERS**

Since the revolution of 14 January 2011 (known as the Arab Spring), there seems to have been unanimity that the education system is in crisis and that pre-service teacher training centres will need to be operational again to better prepare teachers and provide them with the skills needed to produce quality learning (Etturki: 2017, p. 153) [7]. In 2016, a new initial training system was set up: the National Bachelor's degree in Education and Teaching. This bachelor's degree, introduced nine years after the closure of the Higher Institutes of Teacher Training, is spread over ten university institutes while maintaining the same training model and the same study plan. In this training course, reflexivity occupies a central place, articulating academic training and practical training in primary schools. Students are trained to reflect on their professional practices through Reflexive Analysis of Pedagogical Practice (ARPP) devices in the two training locations. At the university institute, the training of the future teacher in reflexivity is done through integrated ARPP courses, starting in the third semester at a rate of three hours per week. These courses are taught by university teachers and are based exclusively on educational situations and/or practices experienced (*observed, taught*) by the trainee during the four field internships (*observation, accompanied, partial autonomy and total autonomy*).

During the field internships, the analysis of the trainee's professional practices is carried out under the supervision of the educational inspector and in consultation with the pedagogical advisor and the teacher-trainer. The ARPP is designed as a lever for professionalization - students of the LNEE degree are trained alternately between university training and practical training, to reflect on their practices through various Reflexive Analysis of Pedagogical Practice (ARPP) devices, and this in various training places (at the university institute through integrated ARPP courses and in primary schools during practical internships. The ARPP is perceived as a lever for personal and professional development that lasts throughout the professional career (*Guide for the Trainee Teacher: 2022, p. 7*) [1].

In doing so, a group of professionals from different sectors and services (students, university teachers in charge of ARPP courses, pedagogical inspectors, pedagogical advisors, teacher trainers, school directors and administrators) must join forces to meet the institutional requirements (*training requirements*). These professionals are already interacting in various places of professionalization to reflexivity. The choice was thus made for a collaborative-comprehensive research approach, in this case, socio-clinical-institutional (Monceau: 2016) [8] to understand the meanings of the notion of reflexivity for each of the actors concerned. By offering them spaces to speak out loud about their professional practices and conceptions, we hope to better understand them.

## **III. THE COLLABORATIVE AND CLINICAL APPROACH OF THE SOCIO-CLINICAL-INSTITUTIONAL (SCI)**

Theoretically in the field of institutional analysis (Lourau: 1970) [6] and inspired by an approach of clinical sociology (Morin: 1984) [10] and on the other hand by certain psychoanalytic references (Freud, 1921, 1981), institutional socio-clinicalism, as an analytical approach, is concerned with treating educational (and/or social) problems as institutional problems that take on meaning over time, rather than problems specific to individuals or teams (Monceau: 2019) [11]. As developed by Monceau (2016) [8], institutional socio-clinical analysis offers a collaborative approach and makes it possible to go beyond simple data collection to co-construct solutions adapted to the realities of participants. The aim is to provoke the analysis of the situations that are the subject of interpretation "*here and now*" with the actors involved themselves (Monceau: 2018, p. 157) [6]. It is in this sense that the interviews (discussions, reflections) take on a deeper dimension since they are part of a process where the actors are no longer only subjects of the study, but become active partners in change. Although semi-structured interviews are a preferred research technique, they were used in conjunction with a six-month period of participant observation and a documentary analysis of the written records of future teachers and their trainers.

#### **IV. Comprehensive semi-structured interviews: a research method adapted to the exploration of reflective approaches.**

##### **1.1. The importance of interview technique in a qualitative research approach**

Whether it is directive, semi-directive or non-directive, the interview makes it possible to establish an active interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee in order to share a human experience and to understand a phenomenon under study (*Savoie-Zajc: 2009*) [12]. In qualitative research, the interview is a preferred method in the collection of data and/or information "relating to the personal frame of reference of individuals (emotions, judgments, perceptions, among others) in relation to specific situations; it concerns the human experience, whose complexity it seeks to preserve" (*Baribeau and Royer: 2012, p. 32*) [16]

Poupart (**1997**) presents three arguments in favour of the use of the interview as a leading instrument in qualitative research (*Baribeau and Royer: 2012, p. 34*) [13]:

- Epistemological argument: the in-depth exploration of the actor's perspective;
- Ethical and political argument: understanding and knowledge of the inside of the dilemmas and issues facing the actor;
- Methodological argument: privileged access to the actor's experience.

##### **1.2. The interest of the semi-directive posture in the conduct of interviews**

The so-called semi-structured interview<sup>1</sup> is in contrast to "*the directive interview consisting of a series of closed questions [...] but leaving less freedom of answer, and to the free interview, which takes place on a specific theme, but without predefined questions, [...] leaving a lot of freedom but without always having the certainty of addressing the points desired by the researcher*" (*Roux and Soler Millán: 2017, p. 357*) [14]. This interview technique aims to collect precise and in-depth data related to the object of study since it allows the interviewee a certain margin of freedom of speech. Although it is free, it allows the discussion with the interviewees to be focused on themes previously defined by the interviewer (*the researcher*). In doing so, the semi-directive posture appears to be "*the best compromise between the 'carelessness' of the non-directive interview and the dirigisme of the directive interview (which almost takes the form of an interrogation rather than an interview*" (*Fugier: 2010, p. 14*) [5].

In addition to the margin of freedom that he or she must promote during the interview, the interviewer is called upon to establish a relationship of trust with the interviewee where active listening, empathy and collaboration reign in order to encourage his or her free expression and deep involvement in the research. This kind of flexible verbal exchange is able to allow us an in-depth understanding of the real and the hidden in the process of professionalization of future teachers to reflexivity.

##### **1.3. The comprehensive interview, an extension of the semi-directive interview**

Referring to comprehensive approaches (notably the methodological formulation of *Jean-Claude Kaufman*, 1996) [15] and clinical approaches to sociological interviews, *Pascal Fugier (2010)* [5] suggests that researchers opt for a new "modus operandi" in conducting semi-structured interviews. He calls it the comprehensive interview from a clinical sociology perspective. This author (**2010**, p. 14) [5] suggests a new "comprehensive" approach to distance oneself from the impersonal posture of conducting semi-structured interviews, given that "the non-personalization of the questions echoes the non-personalization of the answers". *Anne Gotman (1985, p. 163)* [16], for her part, also reminds researchers (interviewers) that there's no point in "*fading away, looking at things from an angle, lowering your eyes, looking modest, making yourself small and forgetful: no one will believe that you have no opinion on the subject you're dealing with, nor any preference whatsoever*".

The comprehensive interview thus resembles a conversation in which the interviewer does not simply ask open-ended questions in an impersonal tone. On the contrary, the interviewer (*researcher and/or analyst*) is

---

<sup>1</sup> The semi-structured interview is also called qualitative or in-depth interview, semi-structured interview, semi-structured interview.

called upon to become subjectively involved during the interview “to provoke the respondent's commitment”, through constant to-ing and fro-ing “between understanding, attentive listening, and distancing, critical analysis” (Kaufmann: 1996, p-p 105-111) [15]. Through their suggestions and observations, but also through their questioning and their own interrogations “[...] the clinician will not only accompany the subjects in a distanced reflection on their lived experience, but will also try to lead them to carry out the practical exercise of a displacement between the perception of the meaning [of their] lived experience and the conceptualization or problematization of it...”. (Hannique: 2007, p. 95) [17]. The interest of the comprehensive approach in conducting semi-structured interviews is consistent with our particular status as a “*doctoral student-practitioner-researcher*” (de Saint-Martin and al.: 2014) [18], who finds himself emotionally and organizationally involved in the research and/or analysis, on an equal footing with the other professionals concerned, who are already colleagues and their students.

On the one hand, the discussion forums allow respondents to reflect aloud on what the institutional order provokes in them in terms of agreements, disagreements, disturbances, transformations, implications, resistance, arrangements, criticisms and suggestions for improvement. The researcher's job is to draw on “the heterogeneous and contradictory demands of the members of the collectives to conduct the analysis of the initial order” (Monceau: 2018, p. 159) [6]. On the other hand, the comprehensive posture is an effective means of practicing “*cross restitutions*” (Ribeiro Santana and al.: 2017) [19], i.e. of returning to an interviewee remarks expressed by other interviewees. It's also about opening up debate and exchange with the interviewee on what we may have noticed and spotted during our observations and interviews with other professionals. The major challenge is to direct the interviewee's testimony towards well-defined points, with the need to back up his or her opinions and make them explicit.

#### **1.4. The researcher's methodological posture during comprehensive semi-structured interviews**

The comprehensive semi-structured interview has three phases: preparation, execution and transcription. Introducing oneself, explaining the decision to contact the interviewee and presenting the research (research objectives, themes to be addressed, interview approach, etc.) are essential conditions that the interviewer must take into account before starting the conversation. Moreover, “*there is no good in-depth interview without recording*” (Godin: 2017, p. 45) [17] in the sense that note-taking never replaces recording (Beaud and Weber: 2010) [18]. This guarantees greater precision and fidelity to what is said and to verbal exchanges. It is therefore of the utmost importance to explain the usefulness of recording to the interviewee, while ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of his or her words.

The role of the interviewer (researcher) is to use an interview guide as an “aide-memoire”. This guide enables the discussion to take place around previously established themes and sub-themes, the order of which is of no importance, so that they are all addressed in the end (Fugier: 2010, p. 14) [5]. In the context of this research, the themes and sub-themes revolve around four major semantic axes (conceptions of reflexivity, the positions of the various players on the implementation of the concept of reflexivity, the future of the training device and the effects produced by socio-clinical-institutional research). The questions inherent to each theme are written in the form of open-ended questions, ranging from the general to the more specific. The choice was therefore made to avoid asking closed questions, and to resort to requests for clarification and/or further details, in order to understand the conceptions and positions of the interviewed professional in relation to the issue of reflexivity. However, beyond the questions predetermined in the interview guide, certain answers and/or reflections formulated by the interviewees gave rise to further questions or requests for clarification.

### **V. Recruitment procedures for research participants**

The survey population was constituted through several channels. Initially, we had “*recourse to an accidental sample or sample of volunteers*” (Henry: 1990, p.139) [22], from our pre-established spheres of communication during the period of participant observation but also during the exploratory phase of interviews. In other cases, contact was made via intermediaries and/or mediators (researcher, colleague, interviewee, etc.). For his part, the dual status of doctoral student and education professional having held several positions

facilitated contact with several of the professionals involved. In all cases, at the end of each interview, we ask the interviewee to recommend the name of an actor who seems interesting to interview and likely to enrich our research. If necessary, we will contact the relevant person.

Referring to the “*principle of diversification*” of the internal cases of each population concerned and that of “saturation” retained in qualitative approaches (Pires: 1997, p. 67) [23], we were able to carry out 36 individual in-depth interviews. The interviews began in January 2021, just after the second stage of partial autonomy for second-year students and full autonomy for third-year students. These conversations gave rise to 37 hours of recordings. 34% of these interviews (12/out of 36) were conducted online and 66% in person (24). The interviewees belonged to a variety of university institutes and pedagogical districts in almost every region of Tunisia.

## **VI. Transcription is all about interpretation and contextualization**

Generally speaking, the interviews were transcribed in the order in which they were conducted. The challenge was not to leave much time between the conversation and its transcription. This choice was intended to enrich our conversational themes, given that each interview brings with it new demands and particular reflections. The moments of transcription offer the researcher, caught up in the interaction of the conversation, the opportunity to discover elements to which he or she had not paid attention, thus giving rise to a new meaning of the interviewee's words. In fact, in the words of Sigmund Freud (1953, p. 63) [24]: “*the meaning of things heard is often not revealed until later*” (Beaud and Weber: 2017, p. 214) [21].

During this phase, the researcher used a small research diary to jot down, on the spot and to good effect, certain points of view, reflections, criticisms and requests that seemed useful later on in a more in-depth and thoughtful approach to data analysis. The researcher's initial comments and interpretations could relate to misunderstandings with the interviewee, or to the first impressions and interpretations that came to mind when listening to the recording and deciphering it. We were also keen to carefully mark the “*natural*” or “*constructed*” analytic elements around which contradictory positions were expressed. In this way, the transcription constitutes a formidable first moment of analysis, as we gradually begin to see the links, the structure of each discourse, and the common themes or divergences between them. However, we were aware that some of our initial ideas might later inform our voices and avenues of analysis, while others would be partially or totally invalid (false leads) (Beaud and Weber: 2017, p. 215) [21].

At another level, it was of great interest to render the conditions of each conversation, and to interpret none of the interviews independently of the individual and collective context in which they were conducted, given that failure to take into account the context of enunciation risks “*neutralizing the effects of context*”, which greatly influence the representations of social actors and their reflections on their practices (Beau and Weber: 2017, p.217) [21]. A detailed account summarizing all the ethnographic information thus proved indispensable in a process of contextualizing the interviews. On the basis of the foregoing, we drew up “*sociological portraits*” (Lahire: 2002) [25] of each of our interviewees and specified the objective and subjective conditions accompanying the conduct of the comprehensive semi-structured interview. This approach is likely to reveal the diversity of the profiles of the professionals in each sub-population involved in the professionalization of future teachers in reflexivity.

## **VII. Discussion**

During our exchanges, the research participants were in the process of acquiring professional skills and knowledge about the notion of reflexivity. These interviews were a crucial opportunity to reposition themselves in relation to training prescriptions and the various methods of implementation, particularly through the moments of restitution (Monceau: 2018) [6] and reflection with the researcher. The comprehensive approach adopted in conducting the semi-structured interviews revealed a variety of profiles of participants involved in the process of training future teachers in reflexivity, but also convergences between them.

What the interviews taught us was the close relationship between the conceptions of each of the professionals involved and what Bernard Lahire (2002) [25] calls the “*sociological portraits*” of the interviewee (his



professional and scientific background, his primary and secondary implications, his experiential déjà-là). This plurality of profiles led to diversity in the ways in which reflexive professional skills were appropriated, as well as in the ways in which the future of the training device was conceived. In addition, the clinical-participatory approach adopted in interpreting problematic situations led each of the participants (researchers and practitioners) to successive (and entangled) repositioning's (Monceau: 2016) [26]. These transformations are both objects and effects of the interactions between researcher and practitioner, and of the disturbance to ordinary practice caused by the research device. Finally, the research defined five types of relationship to the implementation of reflexivity: "technicist", "conservative and/or resistant", "legalistic", "scientific" and "convinced-malabile" (Ayachi: 2023) [23]. This typology does not propose to classify subjects into exclusive categories, but rather to support the analysis of positions that, for the same person, can evolve over time and according to circumstances. This means that the institutional command is not understood and interpreted in the same way by everyone in every training environment. It is not just an empty word, but a kind of trivialization of the concept of reflexivity. It is through this detailed description of the types of relationship to the implementation of reflexivity that the semi-structured interviews contributed to the added value of the research.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research of Tunisia, *Guide for the Trainee Teacher. Bachelor's degree in Education and Teaching*, 2022. [http://www.edunet.tn/lnee/stagiaire\\_FR2.pdf](http://www.edunet.tn/lnee/stagiaire_FR2.pdf)
- [2] D-A. Schön, *Le praticien réflexif. A la recherche du savoir caché dans l'agir professionnel*. 1994, Montréal: Les Éditions Logiques.
- [3] M. Altet, Les compétences de l'enseignant-professionnel : entre savoirs, schèmes d'action et adaptation, le savoir analyser. In L. Paquay, M. Altet, E. Charlier et P. Perrenoud (dir.), *Former des enseignants professionnels. Quelles stratégies? Quelles compétences ?* (p. 43-57), 2012, De Boeck.
- [4] P. Perrenoud, La blessure la plus rapprochée du soleil. Ambivalences et résistances face à la posture réflexive, in M. Altet, J. Desjardins, L. Paquay, R. Etienne et P. Perrenoud (dir.), *Former des enseignants réflexifs. Obstacles et résistances* (p. 79-93), 2014, De Boeck.
- [5] P. Fugier, Les approches compréhensives et cliniques des entretiens sociologiques. *Interrogations, Revue pluridisciplinaire de sciences humaines et sociales*, 11, 2010. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01651436>
- [6] G. Monceau, Le changement objet et effet de la socio-clinique institutionnelle. Le cas d'une recherche-intervention dans le domaine de la parentalité, In, Broussal, D., Bonnaud, J.F. et Sahuc, P. (dir). *Recherche (S) et changement (S) : dialogues et relations*, 2018, 153-169. Cepaduvès.
- [7] M. Eturki, *L'identité spatiale tunisienne à travers les réformes du système éducatif (1958, 1991 et 2002)*. doctoral diss, Library of the Virtual University of Tunis (ISEFEC), 2017.
- [8] G. Monceau, Transformations sociales et recherche-intervention, In Marcel, J.F (dir), *La recherche-intervention par les sciences de l'éducation: Accompagner le changement*, 2016, 209-222. Edition educagri.
- [9] R. Lourau, *L'analyse institutionnelle*, 1970, Les Editions de minuit.
- [10] E. Morin, *Sociologie du présent, Sociologie*, 1984, Paris, Fayard.
- [11] G. Monceau, Socio-clinique institutionnelle (institutional socio-clinic – socio-clínica institucional), In Vandevelde-Rougale, A. (dir). *Dictionnaire de sociologie clinique.*, 2019, 594-597. Érès. <https://www.cairn.info/dictionnaire-de-sociologie-clinique--9782749257648-page-594.htm>
- [12] L. Savoie-Zajc, L'entrevue semi-dirigée, in Gautier, B. (dir). *Recherche sociale. De la problématique à la collecte des données*, 2009, 337-360. Presses de l'Université de Québec. <http://livre21.com/LIVREF/F38/F038002.pdf>
- [13] C. Baribeau, and C. Royer, L'entretien individuel en recherche qualitative: usages et modes de présentation, *Revue des sciences de l'éducation*, 38 (1), 2012, 23–45. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016748ar>
- [14] G-B. Roux and G-C. Soler Millán, Les méthodes d'enquête et d'analyse de données en didactiques des langues. Ponencia, 26, 2017, 353-364. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324162404\\_Les\\_methodes\\_denquete\\_et\\_danalyse\\_de\\_donnees\\_en\\_didactiques\\_des\\_langues](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324162404_Les_methodes_denquete_et_danalyse_de_donnees_en_didactiques_des_langues)
- [15] J-K. Kaufmann, *L'entretien compréhensif*, 1996, Éditions Nathan.
- [16] A. Gotman, La neutralité vue sous l'angle de l'E.N.D. R, in Blanchet, A. (dir.). *L'entretien dans les sciences sociales*, 1985, 42-61, Dunod.
- [17] F. Hanique, De la sociologie compréhensive à la sociologie clinique, in Gualejac, V. (dir). *La sociologie clinique*, 2007, 91-113. Érès. <https://www.cairn.info/---page-91.htm>
- [18] C. (de) Saint Martin, A. Pilotti and S. Valentim, La réflexivité chez le Doctorant-Praticien-Chercheur. Une situation de Liminalité, ¿ *Interrogations? Implication et réflexivité-II. Tenir une double posture*, 2014, 1-12. <http://revue-interrogations.org/La-reflexivite-chez-le-Doctorant>
- [19] F. Ribeiro Santana, M.C. Fortuna, M. C. and G. Monceau, Promotion de la santé et prévention des maladies dans la formation professionnelle en soins infirmiers au Brésil et en France, *Éducation, Santé, Sociétés*, 3 (2), 2017, 115-135. <https://hal.science/hal-03133348/document>
- [20] J. Godin, *L'analyse réflexive en enseignement: les enseignants du secondaire de l'école d'Iberville*, 2017, Université du Québec: Bibliothèque Cégep de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue. <https://depositum.uqat.ca/id/eprint/736>
- [21] S. Beaud and F. Weber, *Guide de l'enquête de terrain: Produire et analyser des données ethnographiques*, 2017, Edition Argumentée, Collection grands repères/guides.
- [22] G-T. Henry, *Practical sampling*, Newbury Park, 1990, Sage Publications.
- [23] A. Pires, Echantillonnage et recherche qualitative: essai théorique et méthodologique., in J. Poupard, J-P. Deslauriers, L. Groulx,

- A. Laperrière, R. Mayer et A. Pires (dir.), *La recherche qualitative. Enjeux épistémologiques et méthodologiques*, 1997, (p.113-169), Gaëtan Morin.
- [24] S. Freud, *La technique psychanalytique*, Paris, 1953, PUF.
- [25] B. Lahire, *Portraits sociologiques. Dispositions et variations individuelles*, 2002, Armand Colin.
- [26] S. Ayachi, *Description et analyse de la mise en œuvre de la réflexivité dans la formation initiale des professeurs des écoles tunisiens*, doctoral diss, 2023, CY Cergy Paris University, University of Tunis. <https://theses.fr/2023CYUN1179>