

Leaving the Abstract for the Concrete in Written Expression in Elementary School in Benin

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Abstract

This article aims at analysing and influencing the pedagogical practices of six teachers involved in an action-research in written expression in the Elementary Course at the elementary school in Benin in order to optimize the learning capacities of the pupils. To this end, a research protocol was adopted that included a stage of identification of the problem, the establishment of an action plan, the implementation of the action, the evaluation of the effects of the action, the communication of the conclusions and the valorisation of the research. It was found that the teachers did not maximize the children's learning opportunities during the "chasse aux idées" phase; they did not get the children moving; they did not praise them properly; they remained in the abstract about the themes addressed. Several decisions were taken at each stage of the progression in the realization of the sequence II in written expression (first draft), the most important of which is the concretization based on clear and expressive images and reinforced by social writing.

Keywords: Written expression; concretisation; sequential images; elementary school.

1. Introduction

The French language is the official language in the Republic of Benin. It is the second language, that of schooling in the country. Many children from an early age arrive at school with their cultural capital, Bourdieu (1964), in total contradiction with school tradition. They have difficulty understanding and writing the second language. Those whose family culture is in tune with what the modern school teaches do well regardless of the curriculum. This difficulty shown by children from underprivileged classes is all the more justified because they do not find themselves in this new world that is the white school. There is often a breakdown of sense in Author [5] and mental absences Author [1]. From the external evaluation mission of the Louis BERGER group, led by Charles TESAR, in the Republic of Benin in 2003, it appears that the observations carried out in the classrooms expose the shortcomings of the pupils in the mastery and handling of the French language.

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spoken, read and written. For these experts, French being the language of instruction, non-mastery has serious consequences for the education of Beninese children. The upper grades are filled with school children who do not have sufficient fundamentals. Less than 20% of pupils in the third year of primary school (CE1) reach the level required by the New Education Programs. 40% of primary school students being in CE1 and CP, this means that four out of ten students are in a situation of academic failure in French. Author [16]. Even more recently, the summary of the PASEC 2019 surveys indicates that 55% of primary school students have learning difficulties in French (PASEC, 2019). Written expression, which is an integral part of this field of training, comes first. The objective here is to produce a written text based on a writing project (subject) proposed by the teacher. It's about finding the right words to express your ideas or even order them. The student is thus placed in a situation where he can express his ideas in writing, alone or in a group [7] .

According to the report of the analysis of the results of the Certificate of Primary Studies (CEP), 2013 edition, of the National Institute for Training and Research in Education (INFRE), it is clearly written on page 11, that "In written expression, criterion 1 relating to the adequacy of the production with the requested task could only be satisfied at 47.06%. This means that the candidates certainly did not benefit from the subsequent supervision to succeed in this test. In 2014, and according to the same study, there was a regression of 2 pts, or 45.16% in [7]. This trend is observed in 2015 where we only note a satisfactory rate of 47.96% of candidates having respected the characteristics of the nature of the subject then 49.43% who were able to develop the ideas in accordance with the task in [8]. Are not these performances of the schoolchildren linked to the way of teaching the discipline of which the schoolmaster is the organizer? It is not uncommon during French sessions in written expression to see teachers indulge in ex cathedra lessons. The teacher announces the object of teaching. He writes his text on the board, tries to explain it. The children crane their necks to see what is written on the board. He erases and then starts again. This often lasts almost the whole lesson - He writes, the children copy. There is little interaction between the teacher and the students and the class is very quiet. Here, it is the teacher who is at the heart of the learning and not the child.

Furthermore, the pedagogy of the competency-based approach requires placing the teacher in a research-action situation, that is to say, encouraging his didactic inventiveness on the one hand and training his ability to regulate it by observing its effects on the other hand. The teaching profession has been transformed. He is no longer a mere transmitter. You don't need workbooks or "turnkey" activities. They are more ideas, sketches of situations, etc. author [14]. And to get there, primary school teachers, particularly those in levels II and III, must prepare and conduct writing sessions efficiently. The second session, which focuses on the first draft, is decisive in terms of its content. It is at this stage that the learner is subjected to an analysis of a writing project (topic), research, formulation and organization of ideas. But things are different A few questions deserve to be asked all the same: do teachers have a good perception of the current teaching-learning-assessment process for written expression at level II? What difficulties do most teachers encounter in researching, formulating and organizing ideas? What are the factors that prevent the success of the second session of written expression at level II by teachers? How to successfully implement the 1st draft in written expression? This is why this research team called the Technical Commission for Specialized Interventions in French has chosen to carry out an action research around written expression at levels II and III to provide some relevant solutions to all these questions.

2. Materials and methods

This action research was conducted by a research team from the Technical Commission for Specialized Interventions (CTIS) of the National Institute for Training and Research in Education in the Abomey school district. Six (06) teachers from the public elementary (CE) and middle school (CM) have voluntarily agreed to participate in the changes in pedagogical practices. There are two State Employees (FE) and four State Contractual Agents of Public Law (ACDPE). In reference to the professional life cycle of teachers proposed by Huberman [11], these teachers in the research team have a general seniority of between 9 and 15 years. This is a time in their careers when teachers are questioning their classroom practices. This suggests that most of the teachers on the research team are at a point in their careers where their teaching practices are being questioned. This probably justifies their deliberate participation in the present project, which, in its research and action components, lasted a total of twelve months. Several approaches lead to action research. The one we adopted follows the five steps indicated by [3].

The stage of identifying the problem was that of making contact and defining the problem and the methodology by consensus (co-construction); of planning the sessions and sequences to be observed, followed by the establishment of the action plan. Through a focus group conducted by two members of the team, the research participants chose to observe in a real classroom situation each teacher engaged in this process of improving his or her practice in written expression. To this end, a rigorous plan was drawn up for the conduct of the class sequences in a rotating manner.

It was also decided that each class observation session would be followed immediately by a session analyzing the teaching experience. This is a kind of selfconfrontation. This could make the experience of teachers more accessible, as they are led to revisit their practices, explain their pedagogical approaches and make a self-criticism of them. [17].

In other words, a critical look is taken at the classroom sequence carried out by each teacher. The reflections carried out and the dysfunctions identified allow corrective strategies to be put in place [3]. The intervention phase is controlled and measured. It lasted three months from Thursday, October 20, 2022 to Wednesday, December 7, 2022, with a weekly meeting on Thursdays. During the implementation of the plan, readjustments are made after the sessions analyzing the pedagogical experience. Indeed, the members of the research team unanimously decided to improve the teaching approach to facilitate the learners' production, which is the ultimate goal of this action research. The evaluation of the action plan consisted of one-on-one interviews with the teachers. The last session was an opportunity for discussion and reflection on the changes observed at the personal level by each teacher in his or her practice and then at the level of the learners. The last step, that of communicating the conclusions and valorization of the research, invites each of the teachers involved in the research to share the fruits of their work with their peers.

The documentary research was an input for the present work. The present article aims not only to popularize the results of the research among other actors in the Beninese education system and elsewhere, but also among the scientific community.

3. Results

In Benin, from the Cours d'Initiation (CI) to the Cours Moyen second year (CM2), French is taught in units. A unit is made up of oral communication, reading and writing activities. As the child progresses through the school curriculum, the program becomes more complex with the acquisition of linguistic tools (grammar, spelling, conjugation, vocabulary) to help refine written expression. Formerly called "Rédaction" or "Composition française", the new name "Expression écrite" appeared with the arrival of the New Curricula in 1990. Imagination was the approach that governed its teaching and evaluation where students are asked to tell a fable, an event, a tale or a short story. With the pedagogy oriented towards the Competence Approach, the practice has changed through the impregnation by the student of the genre of text through the reading of a similar text. These are the familiar letter, the administrative letter, the poster, the newspaper article, the story, the question, etc.

What are the stages of teaching this subfield today?

3.1 The normative stages of teaching written expression

In the elementary and middle school, written expression is taught in four stages. The first stage is that of impregnation, where the child is subjected to the reading of a text similar to the literary genre to be produced. It is in this stage that "the teacher places much more emphasis on the structure and characteristics of the text to be produced" in [6]. It is highly recommended that the teacher tap into the learner's reading manual. This is a step that allows the learner to move from oral to written code. In the second phase, the learner makes contact with the writing project (topic). With the help of the teacher and his/her classmates, he/she appropriates it and proceeds to search for ideas (from the most relevant to the least relevant) and to classify them. The teacher helps the learners to develop a writing plan from which the learner writes his first draft. During this exercise, the teacher introduces the linguistic concerns to be discovered during the unit. The third step comes after the linguistic tools are in place. The teacher makes sure to send the child back to his text to reinvest what he has learned. This third session, which takes place after several partial improvements, allows the child to revise his or her text and to clean it up in [6]. The teacher assesses the productions and prepares the report. The fourth stage is the debriefing stage.

Between the prescribed standards and the teacher's work, many practices are observed. How do teachers then teach written expression?

3.2. Observables

In the context of this action research, the classroom observations were oriented towards the second stage indicated above. Before the start of the class sequences, several sessions of coconstruction of a consensual approach to teaching first draft written expression were carried out by the teachers. They focused on the literary genre under study.

On Thursday, October 20, 2022, we were at the Urbaine school Centre/D, in the third grade, for the very first

class observation session on the letter as a literary genre to produce. The students were asked to write a letter to a parent to give them news about the health of a family member. Here is a production from a group of students

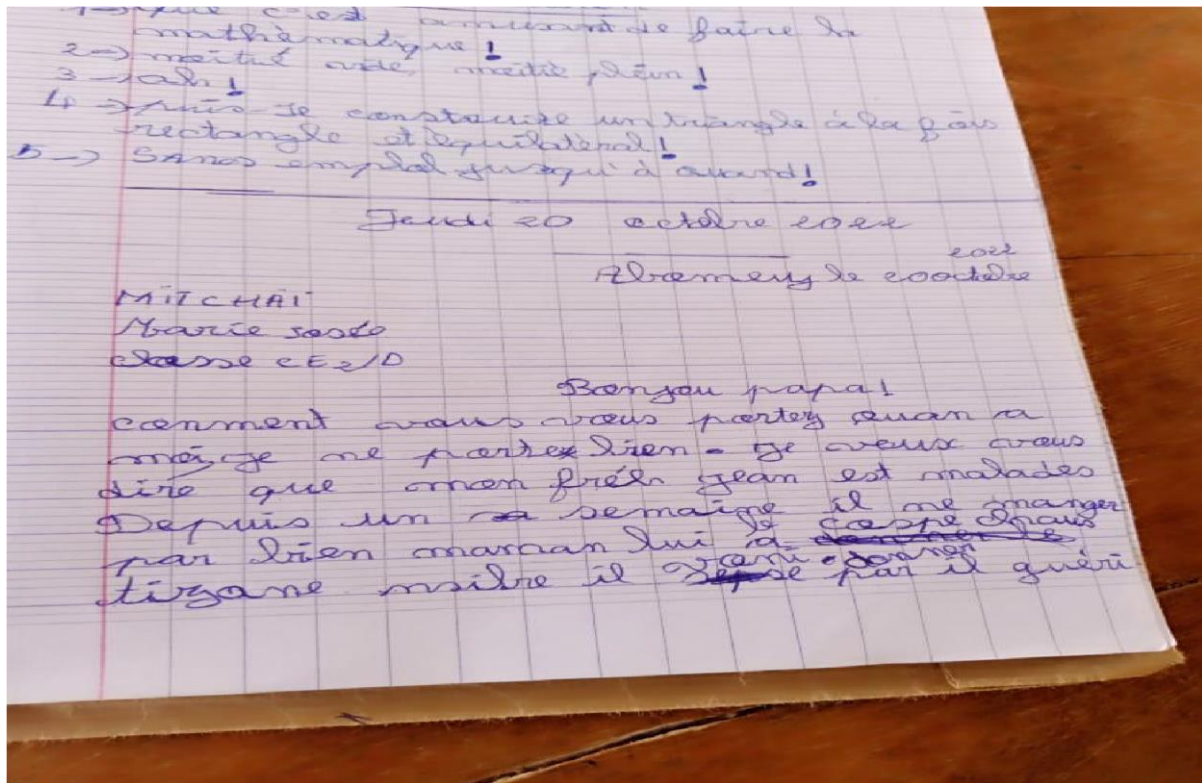


Figure 1: Group 3's writing production.

During the pedagogical experience session, a group's production was presented to analyze the teacher's work. The approach to conducting the lesson was at the heart of the discussions. In this regard, the teacher who worked on the lesson was unanimously criticized for not having explained the writing project properly. Thus, a silent reading of the text used as instructions is essential. It will be followed by probing questions and an oral lecture to ensure that the students understand the task at hand. It is the beginning of the understanding of the subject. Also, the necessary use of national languages to reinforce understanding was added. The possibility of using images during the search for ideas is also not excluded.

On Thursday, October 27, 2022, the second session took place at the Cours Moyen 1st year (CM1) of the EPP Guézoyèmè/D. It focused on the poster whose project is to realize by the learners for an NGO of the place, a poster within the framework of the fight against smoking.

An improvement was noted during this session both in terms of the conduct of the sequence and the material organisation. The teacher provided photocopies of sentence extracts. The learners participated in the session unlike the first one. The attempted plan produced in this session is as follows: tobacco is a plant that is smoked; smoking is an intoxication caused by tobacco; tobacco causes a number of diseases such as coughing, cancer of the oesophagus, lung cancer; tobacco gives bad breath; tobacco contains nicotine which is a danger.

However, it was noted that they were not convinced because the photocopies had not been well used. During the discussions following the class practice, it was strongly decided to find sequential images as a way of helping to find ideas. It was also recommended to provide concrete materials (example of tobacco rod and cigarettes).

In the third session, the elaboration of a questionnaire for surveys in EPP Guézoyèmè/C, CE2 occupied the pupils and the research team. Here, the learners were asked to write a survey questionnaire to be sent to a health worker to obtain information on AIDS. Here the teacher suggested sequential images to support the search for ideas. Here are some of the images



Figure 2: Images as a substitute for living material for the teacher.

This session placed a lot of emphasis on the use of key words and the children's writing. The children write with sound. For example, "Can we cure AIDS?" to say "Can we cure AIDS?"

The observation of class sequences for the fourth day took place in CM1 at EPP Guézoyèmè/C and focused on the writing of a newspaper article to relate the numerous damages caused by a flood in the schoolchild's living environment or any other place. The teacher made efforts to find enough copies of newspaper articles to facilitate the recall of the characteristics of this kind of text. In this session, he put a lot of emphasis on key words. We were also given sequential images to reinforce the idea retrieval, some of which are included here for illustrative purposes.

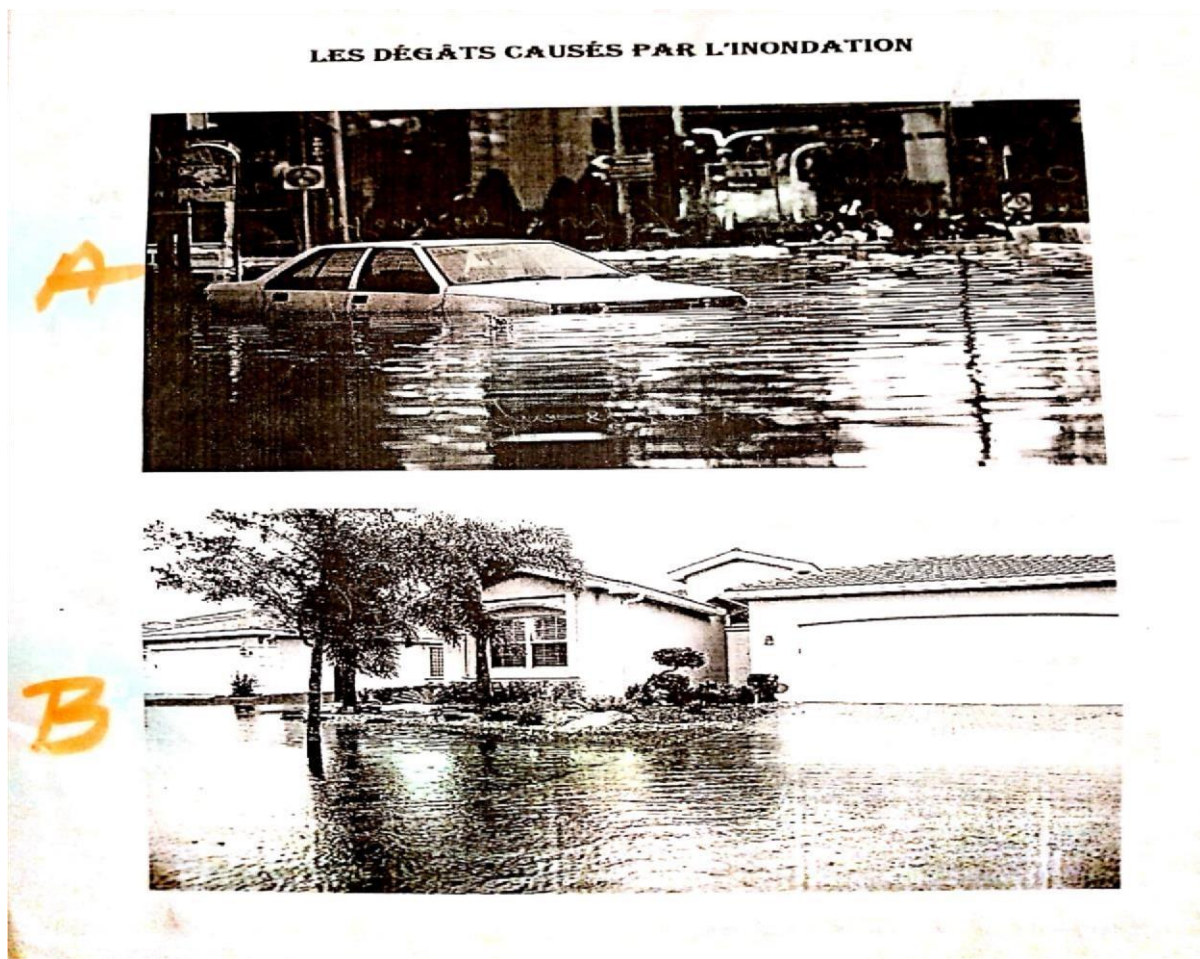


Figure 3: Images serving as a substitute for living material for the school teacher.

The cycle of observations was resumed to check whether the teachers involved in the innovation had taken into account the advice given during the production of this type of text, followed by the session of restitution of the results produced together and readjustment of the data. In this way, a **desired situation** was selected to optimise the learning capacities of the CE and CM in written expression. The teaching-learning-assessment approach to written expression goes through three phases: introduction, completion and feedback.

At the introduction stage, the teacher starts with a situation, a kind of motivation and takes into account the

learners' previous knowledge. He/she may use concrete material or pictures. The teacher asks the learners to read the text silently. Ask probing questions (check) to ensure effective reading. Read out loud and/or have the writing project read. He/she then asks comprehension questions about the text read. The teacher announces the learning object. The teacher reminds students of the characteristics of the type of text to be produced.

The teacher leads the learners to identify the key words and highlights them. He explains each word. He asks the learners to reformulate the writing project following the explanations. The learners, with the help of the teacher, are invited to look for ideas and select the most relevant ones. During this exercise, the teacher uses sequential images to facilitate the search. "Each topic is presented in a lively form. It is illustrated with one or more engravings and followed by directions and a plan that guide the student without interfering with his personality. (Gadet and his colleagues [10].

The teacher invites them to produce the first draft and chooses a few to read their production.

When they return, the teacher objectifies the knowledge built up and evaluates it.

4. Discussion

The cultural limit shown by teachers contenting themselves with the bare necessities seems to have been a recurring problem since the advent of competency-based curricula. However, Author [14] recalls that it is important to show that, far from turning its back on knowledge, the skills-based approach gives it new strength, by linking it to social practices, complex situations, problems, to projects.

It can claim to at least deal decisively with the question of the relationship to knowledge and the meaning of school work. We have seen, in fact, the erroneous view that believes that there is incompatibility between the APC and the curricula.

For the author [14], warning practitioners against this erroneous delimitation based on dysfunctions of the contents of the programs, which must be interconnected "as long as each discipline develops its curriculum according to its own logic and without reference to a problem-based approach, the virtues of skills orientation will remain limited. If the education system maintains the compartmentalization between disciplines and does not give skills a "right of management" over knowledge, according to the expression taken up by [15], it is unlikely that problems and projects likely to mobilize previous achievements.

The most convinced teachers can certainly circumvent the obstacle in part by offering appropriate support, by making available to learners the knowledge they have not yet acquired, but this good will quickly finds its limits in a course where the programming of disciplinary knowledge is in no way designed to promote its mobilization in interdisciplinary projects.

In any case, to resolve this situation, the team understood that the teacher can always make the link between the sequence and a past reading, a situation of impregnation; in short, always note the link between learning, at least within the same subject.

5. Evaluation of the results observed

At the end of this action research, there is no need to say that the lines have really moved in the teaching-learning-evaluation of written expression in the second session (1st draft). We can say that the strength of this one lies in the fact that this great deficit was targeted and received special attention from the second class sequence with a curve diagram whose arrow rises appreciably because, after each session of reflective regulation, new decisions are taken from observation and practices of self, hetero-reflective regulation.

This was thanks to the strategies suggested to them. Practitioners and theorists thus joined hands for tangible results at the CTIS.

One teacher was able to say: "This is the first time that my learners have given ideas and formed sentences on a first draft writing project. If we could continue, these children will become great at writing. Chimène ADONON épouse TCHAOU

Another teacher gave the following testimony:

"The presence of the French Specialised Technical Commission of the INFRE in the Pedagogical Region N° 41 is an excellent opportunity for teachers. The teachers whose schools were targeted for the mission were happy to acquire new knowledge.

Indeed, for the record, I was having quite a bit of difficulty in running a class sequence in written expression.

The teaching-learning-evaluation process of the first draft session was a bit too theoretical through my performances. For me, to concretise everything up to the written expression would already be out of the ordinary. So this pedagogical standard was not too important to me.

I admit that my classroom practices at the time did not make it easy for me. To put it plainly, the learner's understanding of the new knowledge being studied was not at all easy. It is now that I have understood, thanks to the CTIS, that this conception of mine naturally created a blocking factor in the learner's impetus through original ideas that were well adapted to the communication situation...

"The ideal solution provided is mainly based on concretisation. In fact, concretisation is the only lever that triggers a good stimulus in the student. This means that the learner now has a free tongue to express his thoughts in writing...". Christian S. GBOHOU (EUC Abomey/D).



Figure 4

6. Decisions

From the synthesis of the teachers' comments, it is clear that they had difficulties in carrying out a class sequence in written expression.

The teaching-learning-evaluation process of the first draft session in written expression was very theoretical. For them, how can learning in written expression be made concrete, given that it is not a Science and Technology Education (STE) course? But the reaction of the learners after each concretisation of the learning object, the enormous and rapid progress observed in the learners, the improvement in the quality of their answers denotes the relevance of the contributions and results observed after each reflective regulation session.

The teachers agree that the concretisation is a stimulation for the learners. From now on, teachers decide to: concretisation; focus the movements on the learner; directed/guided explanation of the communication situation (the writing project); mimes to break down any barriers to understanding, language barriers; make the room lively throughout the sequence

- appreciate, encourage and congratulate the learners even if the answers need to be perfecte; implementation of intrinsic motivation : teaching a thing in the presence of the thing ;
- search for ideas through coherent sentences guided by the teacher through questions.

7. Limits, constraints and difficulties of the study

Due to budgetary and time constraints, the research area was limited to the four schools of Abomey/D, Guézo Yèmè/A, Guézo Yèmè/C and Guézo Yèmè/D. They are places of learning where the problem identified is acute in the school district of Abomey. It should also be noted that time and work materials for the concretization are lacking because of the limited resources of the teachers. The difficulties also relate to the formulation of the guide questions to encourage learners to go on a hunt for ideas, to go beyond, by going beyond. This study cannot be generalized. But other researchers can rely on it to find remedies for other areas.

8. Conclusion

Finally, for three months, the action research on first draft written expression in Abomey took place. It was carried out by researchers and practitioners, i.e. between pedagogues and didacticians. It allowed for both critical and collegial reflection on teaching practice in the context of classroom sequences. On the whole, as the various class sequences unfolded, as well as the various analyses of the pedagogical experience, the clouds on the approach dissipated. The learners understood their role better and participated strongly in the research and the setting up and shaping of ideas on the different writing projects after the first, "chaotic" session. But for this to happen, teachers had to understand and accept the idea of making their teaching concrete by researching and gathering enough materials for learners to see. Thus, the fundamental gain of this action research was to encourage the massive participation of learners in the development of a class sequence in first draft written expression and above all to get them to produce texts of various forms and types: a familiar letter, a poster, a survey questionnaire and a newspaper article.

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