

## LEARNING METHODS USED IN CEPOL COURSES – RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT



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**Keywords:** Learning methods; training methods; objectives; evaluation; training needs; analysis of CEPOL courses; E-Learning; webinars.

**Abstract:** This article describes the main results of a research project developed on behalf of the CEPOL Working Group on Learning during 2012. The objective was to make an inventory of learning and training methods used in CEPOL courses and to briefly discuss the didactical state of the art in such courses.

### INTRODUCTION

The ‘philosophy’ of CEPOL courses is to contribute to police cooperation through learning for senior police officers in EU Member States, by providing training sessions based on common learning (science) and professional standards which can help police officers to acquire new competences.

Taking into account theories of learning, some principles should be present in CEPOL courses. According to the state of educational sciences and taking a CEPOL policy document into consideration, we have pointed out at least eight constitutive elements:

- Active learning
- Learner-centred approach
- Contextual learning
- Learning from each other, resulting in a learning community
- Future-oriented learning, related to policing in Europe;
- Supporting self-directed, continuous learning
- Competence-based learning
- Learning, based on science and providing insight into science (see Brekelmans et al, 2010)

The main intention of the research was not to describe or explain all these elements, but to investigate their presence in these courses in detail. We tried to rate whether the didactical design of the courses reflected (some of) the principles. We especially looked for indicators pointing to a shifting from the ‘classical’ style of delivery (teachers’ activities) towards a learner-centred approach (learner activities), and also for a matching of methods and objectives. The theoretical basis of the analysis draws from authors like Bloom, Gagne, Ausubel, Coll, Kolb, Zabala, and Knowles, among others.

### RESEARCH METHODS AND EXPLORATORY RESULTS

Before starting the inventory we had to define the empirical basis of the analysis. As it was not possible to provide an overview of all CEPOL courses ever organised, we decided to analyze a sample of CEPOL courses. As a sample basis we chose the 2010 courses. We assumed that the 2010 course bundle was not structurally different from any other years’ course bundles.



Furthermore, we assumed that the relevant information in these particular courses which was more complete than that of previous years, was widely available via the CEPOL secretariat. Another important and practical aspect was that the information concerning the 2010 data, could be made available via CEPOL's web-based Learning Management System (LMS).

The basis of analysis was the information about CEPOL courses found in the LMS, mainly the course curriculum (or the course descriptor) and the draft programme. The list of 2010 courses contains 98 courses, seminars and conferences. Of these 98 events, we analyzed 47 courses. The reasons for that reduction are: some courses were cancelled; for a lot of courses there was no programme and/or curriculum available in the CEPOL LMS (for both we had no access to data); for some courses there was no explicit assignment between topics/content and methods (e.g. some language courses).

In the analysis we took over the denominations of methods used in the draft programme respectively in the course curriculum, or (if not named) we tried to identify the methods according to the programme context. By using this procedure we found the following applied methods, described in Table 1.

**Table 1: Main learning methods.**

1.	Lecture (given by an expert)
2.	Participants' presentation (mostly from a pre-course assignment)
3.	Group work or workshop
4.	Plenary discussion (mostly after group work or individual work)
5.	Individual work (assignment)
6.	Study visit
7.	Demonstration (e.g. PC application, presentation of a case study)
8.	Panel discussion
9.	Exercise (incl. group exercise).

Whether all method names are used in a unique sense is not totally clear. But the likelihood is, is that most of the labels used made sense to do so.

Relating to the quantitative dimension, we summarised the real time (hrs) spent in learning activities, structured according to the used methods. We only regarded activities in close relation to the title/topic of the course. For example: in course 17/2010 (the topic was 'stolen arts') we only registered a study visit to the Carabinieri Department for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, but not a field trip to Appia Antica and the Vatican Museums. That may be incorrect; but in this respect we cannot preclude some uncertainties in the research.

The absolute figures were then transposed to percentage figures. In this way we got an overview of methods proportion for every analysed course. The last step was to summarise the data to an absolute total and a proportional overview of the use of methods in the analysed courses, described in Table 2, Figure 1 and Figure 2.

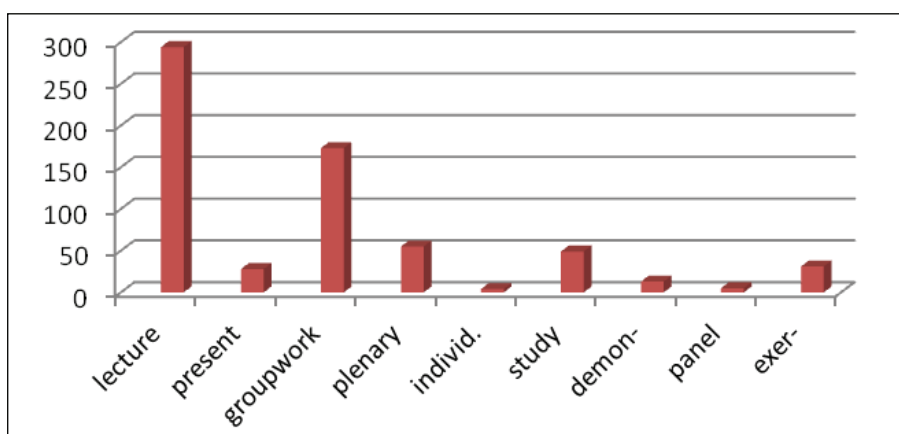
Comments, in Table 3, mention the plausibility of accordance between the written planned objectives and the methods used in each course. There is no evaluation of the suitability of the objectives, as such (e.g. relation to training needs analysis, and alternatives). They are only exploratory comments and, therefore, not a judgment on the 'internal reliability' of the objectives-methods relation, that is, in what way was there an apparent accordance between those two didactical factors in the courses.



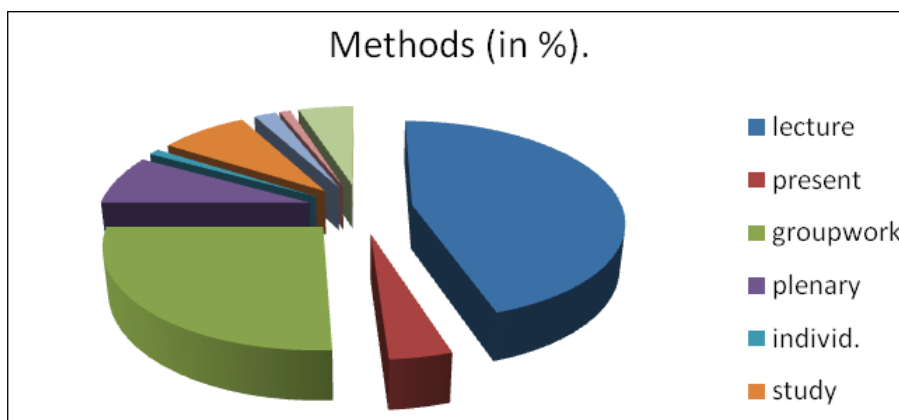
**Table 2: Overview of the use of methods in the analysed courses.**

	Duration (training hours net)	Method								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Sum hours	654	294	28	173	55	4	49	13	5	31
Methods (%)	100	45	4	26	8	1	8	2	1	5

**Figure 1: Methods used, by total learning hours.**



**Figure 2: Methods used (in proportion to total).**





**Table 3 – Accordance between learning objectives and learning methods.**

2010 code	Courses (titles)	Duration training hours net)	Duration training hours net)
02 2010	Community Policing	15	No remarks
03 2010	Counter Terrorism	18	Much information; not all objectives met
05 2010	Forensic Sciences	20	Objective n°2 not clear
07 2010	Airport Security	15	No remarks
09 2010	Fraud ag. EU bodies	19	No remarks
10 2010	Fraud	15	No remarks
17 2010	Traffic. stolen artwork	12	Doubts about number of study visits
18 2010	OC SE Europe	16	Some objectives not covered
23 2010	Cr Contr + Traff. Safety	16	No remarks
26 2010	Road Safety	13	No remarks
29 2010	FSJ CSDP	16	No remarks
33 2010	JIT	14	No remarks
35 2010	PolCoop Schengen	16	No remarks
36 2010	Pruem Treaty	17	Excessive number of lectures
38 2010	SIRENE Basic	16	No remarks
39 2010	SIRENE Advanced	15	No remarks
40 2010	PolCoop Neighb Cou	11	No remarks
45 2010	EU P+J Systems	20	No remarks
46 2010	EU P+J Systems	20	No remarks
47 2010	KnowlEuropPolSyst	16	No remarks
49 2010	TOPSPOC	17	No remarks
50 2010	TOPSPOC	20	No remarks
51 2010	TOPSPOC	18	No remarks
52 2010	TOPSPOC	15	No remarks
55 2010	Large Scale Disast	22	Doubts about sufficient space for exchange
58 2010	Management Diversity	19	No remarks
63 2010	Crime victims	18	No remarks
64 2010	Cyber crime	16	No remarks
65 2010	Domestic Violence	13	Excessive number of objectives (9)
66 2010	HR	17	No remarks
67 2010	THB	12	Too many lectures
76 2010	Bologn/ Cop Process	18	No remarks
77 2010	Pol Res+ Sc in Tr	12	No remarks
78 2010	Res SympMaj Event	11	No remarks
79 2010	Res+ScConf	14	Unknown/ no clear objectives
85 2010	LMS Training	13	No remarks
86 2010	LMS Training	13	Only exercises
89 2010	CC Dom Viol	11	No remarks
90 2010	CC THB	11	No remarks
91 2010	CC Drug Traff	11	No remarks
92 2010	CC Europol	11	No remarks
93 2010	CC Pol Ethics	11	No remarks
94 2010	SIRENE Basic	17	No remarks



## CONCLUSIONS

Lectures had the highest frequency and proportion in the CEPOL learning environment, then followed by group work. If we assume that the method plenary discussion means mostly a presentation and discussion of a group work, and that exercise is also an involving method, we can assume about 40% of the net learning time was dedicated for activated learning opportunities in the analysed courses.

Based on different learning theories and different teaching strategies, developed for adult learners (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson 2005), we claim, as a main conclusion, that police officers need more learner-centred teaching 'active learning strategies', often referred to as 'experiential learning' — problems to solve, opportunities to discuss, hands-on projects, simulations, workshops, etc. i.e. learner-oriented learning — and less lectures. Also, within learner-centred teaching, a major emphasis should be to help students progress in their critical thinking skills. In Kolb's model, reflection is one of the crucial steps of learning. Without reflection, learning doesn't occur.

We also found most of the settings to be adequate and appropriate for the stated objectives. That does not mean that the setting was optimal in every case. Probably, there could have been alternative settings with higher learning attraction in some courses. But this is only a presumption that cannot be derived from the information at our disposal. We think results point to a rather reasonable, and perhaps to an improved picture, of the learning environments for CEPOL courses.

For us, there is no reason to assume that the reduced number of cases/courses in the net

sample (a kind of missing values) has produced a bias in the findings of our research. We could not detect a systematic pattern in the reasons for these missing values. We consider the results valid and representative of the current method settings in CEPOL courses.

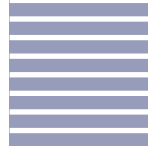
Future research should take a similar research approach regarding CEPOL e-Learning opportunities. e-Learning and webinars seem to have become more and more frequent in the CEPOL learning structure, as they represent a considerable part of learning opportunities within the CEPOL community. According to this obvious increase, it is important to undertake research about the methods and learning circumstances/situations in these events.

Questions of interest are, for example, in which way they (can) meet pedagogical standards (in course design and performance of training) or which competence profiles are requested for e-Learning 'teachers', organizers or facilitators. Additional questions may be which 'CEPOL content' is suitable for this kind of course, what its position is in relation to other CEPOL learning environments (especially conventional courses and seminars), and to what extent participants can accept and benefit from this new method of learning.

Assumptions are only assumptions, or could be guesses or suppositions, but assumptions based on educational research and the search for training needs, are more than a supposition. It is the way to build and promote quality around some educational key indicators, and for a sustainable future in the law enforcement training and educational aspects.

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