

Special Education

Essay:

Do the immigrants need a special education?

France-Finland

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Change our country, our language, our culture is not so easy. It's difficult to adapt oneself to a new culture and to a new language. The immigration in Finland is weak. Indeed, it represents only 2% of the population; it's the weakest rate of Europe. But this immigration is quite recent. So the Finland has a lot of children from an immigrant background and the country has to integrate them to the Finnish educational system, to the Finnish culture.

In France it's a huge problem. In fact, there are some initiatives to integrate the immigrants to the French educational system but it's quite complicated. In France, the students with an immigrant background represent 8% of the student (2004, INSEE). These students don't speak French at home. At school, the French language is compulsory and the students don't have the possibility to learn their own language. These students are integrated in the normal class. But in France, a lot of immigrants live in the same area. Contrary to the Finland, in **France, the students have to go to the school of their area**. Thus, the classes in these areas are full of different nationalities. So, the teacher has to learn the oral French language at the children whereas in the other "school" at the same age they learn to read and write. There is no special program for these students. That's why, there are a lot of failure at school. In some case, some secondary school or primary school tries to create a FLE class. It means French "as a foreign language". In these classes, the students learn the French and have an adapted program. But these initiatives are not common, because it's expensive for the school. So, the students from an immigrant background go to the normal educational system, they have to adapt themselves to the French educational system even if it is completely different. They have **to fit the mould**.

What is going on in Finland? At school, when the child or the teenager arrive he has one year of adaptation. During this year, he learns the Finnish language in order to integrate himself to the Finnish educational system.

The Finnish national Board education says that « **The objective of immigrant education is to provide people moving to Finland with opportunities to function as equal members of Finnish society and guarantee immigrants the same educational opportunities as other citizens.** »

Talk Finnish or Swedish is essential to get a job, to integrate oneself in the Finnish society but the multiculturalism is important too. In Finland, the immigrant has the right to have a

course of his mother tongue and to keep his culture. The History of Finland is maybe the reason of the tolerance and the respect for the other culture. Indeed, the Finland had the Swedish as the official language before the XIXth century, after during the Russification period the Russian was compulsory in the secondary school and it became the official language. Moreover there were clashes between the Fennoman and the Svecomans during the XXth century. So, now, I think the Finnish want the language's peace.

According to the Finnish national board of education, during the pre-primary age (6 years old), the aims of the education is to "support" the Finnish or the Swedish language but also to give at the child **"the opportunity to grow into two culture"**. The child doesn't have to choose. The school respects his origin even if it's important to integrate the child to the Finnish society. During the basic school, it's also possible to study the mother tongue as the first language if there is a school adapted (because there aren't so much schools like this).

However, mainly, the pedagogy regarding the immigrant is the individualization of the pedagogy. The Flexibility of the Finnish educational system allow to the teacher to adapt his pedagogy. This flexibility allows to the head teacher to change the functioning of the school according to the children.

In France, we don't have flexibility at school. The program, the timetable are national and the same for all. So, when a school has a lot of students from an immigrant background, it can open a special class with special program and asks a special help. The government decides if the city needs a special class for the students. Moreover, in France, the head-teacher doesn't choose the teacher, the government decides. If you pass the exam to become a teacher, the government will find for you a job. That's why, some teachers have to go in a class with an immigrant background whereas they are not trained to learn the oral French language and to learn the French as a second language. The teacher are not motivated, the students have a lot of difficulties: we can understand why there are so many problem for the immigrants.

Does the Finnish system is the solution for the France? I don't know. But the contexts are very different and the mentalities too. I think it will be very good to let more importance at the mother tongue and at the culture of the student from an immigrant background. Because, the student can't live a school's culture during the week-days and live the family's culture the evening and the weekend. It's too much for a child. The French educational system needs more tolerance. But, the actual government is quite conservative and they don't pay attention at this problem nowadays.

So, do the immigrants need a special education? The answer is **"yes"**. Finland gives them a special education with the mother tongue courses and the year of adaptation. In France, it will be good to have more flexibility to give to the immigrant the **individualized pedagogy** that they need. But, before to change the school, we need to change the mentality in France and accept the multiculturalism.