

Educational Policies that Address Social Inequality

France case study report 3 Bilingual Schools in a French Region

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Bilingual schools in a French Region: *Calandretas* of Midi-Pyrénées

Rationale and Aims

“French is the language of the Republic” is a Constitutional statement and that is why all subjects are taught in French, except foreign languages. But, some areas did not speak French before the 50s. After the Second World War, some languages like *Occitan*, *Basque* or *Catalan* may have disappeared and in the 70s there was a strong reaction and some teachers and parents created associative schools to teach regional languages as school languages. It was first a question of identity but it was also to give equality in learning for children who do not speak French as a mother tongue.

The ambition of these schools was to be reintroduced in the State system. It was done in 2002 but two official texts organising a complete bilingual course in school were cancelled the same year by the State Council¹.

Description, Implementation and Financial aspects

Calandretas (in gascon idiom, *small larks*) are bilingual schools in French and Occitan. There are also in Brittany diwan schools, in Basque area ikastolak schools, in Northern Catalunya bressoles schools.

The first calandreta was set up in Pau (Pyrénées-Atlantiques) in 1979. Today there are 48 schools spread in French Occitan area: Limousin, Auvergne, Aquitaine, Midi-Pyrénées, Languedoc-Roussillon, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, together with two secondary schools to welcome 2,500 *calandrons* (pupils).

The calandreta is a free and secular school but it is not a State school. The school is maintained and ruled by a parents' association. The *curriculum* is the National Curriculum. The pedagogy is based on active learning and Freinet's methods to accompany children towards autonomy, sharing and citizenship.

There is a Calandretas' federation in Béziers (Hérault) that provides teachers' training and is acknowledged by the Ministry of Education.

In Midi-Pyrénées Regional local authorities support the calandretas whose aim is to spread the Occitan language learning in the area. This federation contributes also to the opening of Occitan courses in State schools together with educational and cultural activities. From 1998, the Regional budget devoted to Occitan culture has had a 50 percent increase to reach 1,000,000 euros today.

Evaluations, Outcomes and Recommendations

There have been some evaluations in primary schools that give evidence that bilingual education is productive and the result was published on a website (www.veosearch.com/searchindex.php?q=synth%E8se+CRPE&type=web&page=19:FELCO_audience_ministere_27.6.07.pdf, consulted 21 December 2008)

¹ Décision du 28 octobre 2002 ; http://conseil-etat.fr/ce/jurisprd/index_ac_ld0239.shtml.

A comparison between 9-year-old pupils in these bilingual and monolingual schools (percentage and number of pupils)

Above national average score	Bilingual	Monolingual
French	76.5% (124 pupils)	56.2% (192 pupils)
Mathematics	80.3% (30 pupils)	36% (130 pupils)

Below national average score	Bilingual	Monolingual
French	23.5% (38 pupils)	43.8% (150 pupils)
Mathematics	19.7% (32 pupils)	62% (212 pupils)

Bilingual pupils' scores are roughly higher in French and Mathematics than the national average and also than their fellow pupils who are monolingual.

In fact, many parents choose Calandretas not for the Occitan language necessarily but for educational and cultural activities. There is a big problem due to the French Constitution. 45 propositions of law on this matter were made but none has been discussed over at the French National Assembly. Even if France signed Unesco Convention about protecting and promoting cultural expression diversity, there is no hope to have other language for education than the French language. In 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy promised to prepare a new law and it is urgent to give a national framework for linguistic minorities.

The only recommendation is: France has to respect linguistic minorities in school and to offer choices for school languages.

References

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