

## **Integration of non-French speaking immigrants in the secondary education system of the French – speaking Community of Belgium: findings of a research-training**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This article highlights the methodology and findings of four years of research-training undertaken by students of the University of Liège (Belgium) within the framework of a class called “Problematic of immigrants confronted to the learning of French” (Master’s Degree “French As a Foreign and Second Language”) under the supervision of Altay Manço. The work done by the students led to a better understanding of the social-cultural context of young newly arrived immigrants who do not speak French, in schools of the French-speaking regions of Belgium. The practices that led both teachers and students alike to succeed in terms of academic performance and integration are described in both qualitative and quantitative terms. The exercise also establishes specific policy and pedagogical recommendations. The objective of the research-training was to introduce students and future teachers of French as a foreign or second language (FLES<sup>3</sup>) to the challenges of integrating immigrant students who do not speak French, the medium of instruction. This paper represents a synthesis and builds upon the learnings of several studies. It was written with the contribution of an external evaluator (Aude Harou) and allows us to complete and generalize the scope of local observation. The article begins with an introduction presenting an overview of the performance of first and second-generation immigrant students in Belgium based on several international studies, and the organizational and legislative context in which newly-arrived immigrants integrate into the educational system. Next, observations and analysis are presented, relating to (i) the personal experiences of young immigrants in secondary schools, focusing on the specific case of non-accompanied immigrant minors (“MENA”), (ii) the integration of incoming immigrant students in schools and (iii) the perspective of FLES teachers, which lead to pedagogical recommendations.*

This article highlights the methodology and findings of four years of research-training undertaken by students of the University of Liège (Belgium) within the framework of a class called *Problematic of immigrants confronted to the learning of French* (Master’s Degree “French As a Foreign and Second Language”). The work done by the students led to a better understanding of the social-cultural context of young newly arrived immigrants who do not speak French, in schools of the French-speaking regions of Belgium. The practices that led both teachers and students alike to succeed in terms of academic performance and integration are described in both qualitative and quantitative terms. The exercise also establishes specific policy and pedagogy recommendations. The objective of the research-training was to introduce students and future teachers of French as a foreign language to the challenges of integrating immigrant students who do not speak French, the medium of instruction.

This paper represents a synthesis and draws conclusions based on a set of studies. It is presented in the form of an evaluation and allows to us to complete and generalize the scope of local observation. The article begins with an introduction presenting an overview of the performance of first and second-generation immigrant students in Belgium based on several international studies, and the organizational and legislative context in which newly-arrived immigrants integrate into the educational system. The paper also includes an introduction presenting an overview of the performance of first and second-generation immigrant students in Belgium based on several international studies, and the organizational and legislative context in which these students integrate in the educational system. Observations and analysis relating to the personal experiences of young immigrants in secondary schools will follow, focusing on the specific case of non-accompanied immigrant minors. The integration of incoming immigrant students in schools is then analyzed through a survey that compares the perspectives of teachers and students. Finally, the perspectives of teachers of FLES are gathered during a roundtable event, which finally leads to concrete recommendations linking the micro experiences to the macro aspects of education.

These different approaches are complementary: the objective is to both identify and address the discrimination and denials that this particular group of people is experiencing, as well as to improve the ways in which schools deal with diversity within their organizations. The study also allows raising the issue

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<sup>3</sup> For simplicity, the original French abbreviations will be used in this translation. For instance FLES is an abbreviation for “français langue étrangère et seconde”

of the *intercultural creativity* of students and teachers, which cannot be simply condensed into a class subject<sup>4</sup>.

The different parts of the study were conducted from 2003 to 2007 in different regions of French-speaking Belgium: in the provinces of Liège, of Namur, as well as in Brussels. Close to sixty students made observations and conducted surveys whose results are summarized and presented in this paper; in so doing the students developed new skills. They met and interviewed more than forty teachers and social workers and gathered the experiences of more than fifty children. The research-training concluded with the organization of an information sharing session on the theme of good practices and pedagogy held in Brussels on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2007, resulting in the teachers of FLES promise to build upon the recommendations that they first validated. We would like to thank all the students, teachers, social workers and immigrant children for their valuable contribution, without which it would have been impossible to conduct this study.

## **1. SCHOLASTIC CONDITIONS OF IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES IN FRANCOPHONE BELGIUM**

Belgium has a population of approximately 10 million citizens divided amongst three linguistic regions. Our study shall focus on the condition of young migrants and children of migrant families within French-speaking schools in Wallonia (in the southern part of the country) and in the Brussels region, where close to half of Belgium's school population receive their education. Amongst the countries of the European Union, francophone Belgium receives the highest proportion of immigrant students of 15 years or less<sup>5</sup>.

Increasing the level of diversity and equity within the educational system are two necessary and urgent objectives in Belgium, where the results of the PISA<sup>6</sup> study indicate high levels of disparity between autochthonous (francophone and Flemish) and immigrant (first and second generation) students. As an example, Belgian students are on average two years ahead in terms of reading and mathematics aptitudes compared to non-European<sup>7</sup> immigrants educated in Belgium. Furthermore, the gap observed in Belgium between autochthonous and immigrant students is the widest of all the countries participating in the PISA survey<sup>8</sup>.

Of particular concern regarding the OECD's statistics is the fact that in francophone Belgium, there is no statistically significant difference in school performance between non-European immigrants (referred to as "first generation") and those born from immigrant parents (referred to as "second generation"). In other words, the expected effect of social adaptation, which should be a function of the time spent in the country receiving the immigrants, appears to have been cancelled<sup>9</sup>.

The government of the francophone Community of Belgium has implemented several policy measures to address the difficulties encountered in providing school education to first and second-generation immigrants. One of these measures is to designate "positive discrimination schools" which receive additional resources to tackle these challenges. Another measure is to label certain classes "welcome B classes": these will be discussed in more detail further below. Nevertheless, it can already be stated that few evaluations exist to gauge the effectiveness of these measures.

Yet another initiative, which was implemented in 2001 and targeted specifically at newly-arrived children, consists in "bridging classes". This measure concerns a specific population, namely persons having lived less than one year in Belgium, non French-speaking and coming from a shortlist of countries considered "developing countries". In practice, however, a limited number of these "bridging classes" exist, as they can only be set up in so far as there is a center for refugees in the district.

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<sup>4</sup> Crutzen, D., et Lucchini, S., 2006, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> PISA, 2000 et 2004.

<sup>6</sup> *Where Immigrant Students Succeed. A comparative Review of Performance and Engagement*, OECD, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Jacobs, D., Rea, A. and Hanquient, L., 2007, p. 27. See also : Schleichner, A., 2006, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> OECD, 2006, p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> Jacobs, D., Rea, A. and Hanquient, L., 2007, p. 27.

Set aside these relatively isolated policy initiatives, the procedures for welcoming and integrating first and second-generation immigrants within the educational system, whether they be French-speaking or not, are left to the discretion of the local school administrations. Beyond the initiative of the “bridging classes”, the teaching of FLES to immigrant children is not an option. Migrant children who do not categorize as strictly newly-arrived immigrants are considered autochthonous for all practical purposes. In turn, this void in educational policy leads to serious difficulties.

Maravelaki and Collès (2004, p. 35-36) summarize these difficulties as follows: lack of a program or underlying policy with regards to the subject matter to be taught; lack of resources tailored to the educational needs of newly-arrived children; lack of coordination not only between teachers of different subjects within the bridging classes but also between the teachers of bridging classes and ordinary classes; lack of coordination between schools, as well as between schools and other education organizations; high number of students per class; difficulties in coping with late enrollment of students throughout the school year, which is compounded by highly heterogeneous classes; difficulties in teaching basic reading and writing skills in the language medium of the schools, namely French; lack of proper evaluation and feedback on the teaching methodologies being used; and lack of training and specific support geared to the needs of the teachers.

Subjected to this education, which is poorly adapted to their situation, the immigrant or second-generation immigrant children often fail or are sidetracked to professional education. This track has a poor reputation in Belgium, as it does not lead to higher education. In the following section, we shall study further in detail the systems known as “bridging classes” and the “B classes”.

According to a decree dated June 14<sup>th</sup> 2001 from the French-speaking Community of Belgium, the bridging classes provide an *“educational structure whose function is to welcome, provide guidance and an optimal integration of a newly-arrived first generation migrant student within the basic or secondary educational system.”*<sup>10</sup> One of the advantages of this decree is that a newly-arrived student is no longer compelled to follow the professional education track and rather can decide on his or her educational orientation after an initial adaptation and observation period.<sup>11</sup> According to this decree, the newly-arrived student must *“...be between 2.5 and 18 years of age, have applied for recognition of his or her refugee or state-less status, or have been recognized as such, be a minor accompanying a refugee or state-less person, be a citizen of a country which is considered as ‘developing’ by the Belgian law, and have arrived on Belgian territory since not more than one year.”*<sup>12</sup> The duration of the stay of a newly-arrived student typically lasts between one week and one year, the latter being the maximum duration allowed. The program includes a minimum of 15 periods of French classes each week; there may not be less than 8 periods of science and mathematics, and 3 periods of physical education are also scheduled. In Brussels, the students are also entitled to receive Dutch classes. A school may only open a bridging class if it has at least 12 students enrolled who comply with the above-mentioned criteria. As a result, there are only a total of 12 schools in Brussels that offer bridging classes. In Wallonia, only 9 schools have such a program and for instance in Liège there are none.

Yet all minors in Belgium are entitled by law to receive an education, notwithstanding their status and/or that of their parents. However, one observes that the means allocated to the achievement of this objective are very limited. Theoretically, bridging classes are not designed to accommodate more than 15 to 18 students. In practice, however, teachers often accept many more students of all different levels, given the pressing needs that currently exist.

In the secondary education system, if a student is able to demonstrate that he or she has the necessary level of knowledge to pursue education in the mainstream track, then he or she may leave the bridging class. In any case, after a year in the bridging class, all the students must leave this special support program, whether they have achieved a sufficient level to enable them to pursue their studies in French, or not. If the students

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<sup>10</sup> Decree of the French-speaking Community of Belgium, 14 June 2001. URL: <http://www.cdadoc.cfwb.be>.

<sup>11</sup> Maravelaki, A., 2005, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Decree of the French-speaking Community of Belgium, 14 June 2001. URL : <http://www.cdadoc.cfwb.be>.

can produce proof of their level of schooling in their home country, then they continue their education in the appropriate grade. Otherwise it is the Integration Council dealing with refugee candidates that decides which grade they will enter, on the basis of an exam that determines their level of scholastic maturity and proficiency in French. Generally, the aptitudes of the students are under-evaluated. In the case of students lacking any form of identification, on the basis of their estimated age they are automatically directed to the “First B” level, a type of preparatory year that orients them towards a professional secondary education track. This “downgrade” of sorts of the newly-arrived student’s level poses several problems, namely the large age differential between the students of a single class.

According to the official educational guidelines of the French Community of Belgium, the “First B” level is designed for *“those students who due to certain shortcomings, are not able to follow at the same rate as their peers the classes of the first year of the first level of secondary education. In this specific program, teaching is more individualized and aims at giving confidence to the child, and if needed, to reconcile him with his school environment as well as reinforce his or her basic skills.”* At the end of this preparatory year, the student should be able to begin in “First A” level (mainstream track of secondary education) or alternatively enter in the second year of the professional education program. In practice, however, the organization of these kinds of classes designed for illiterate, non French-speaking and newly-arrived immigrant students is often left to the initiative of the teaching bodies of the schools and thus leads to a variety of different implementations. The classes which are organized for non-native French speakers, in fact, do not follow any specific format and are thus difficult to evaluate both in terms of their effectiveness from the student’s perspective and in terms of the methodology used by the teachers. The high level of heterogeneity of these classes means they are difficult to manage by the teacher and make them rely to a large extent on volunteering (Manço and Petit, 2005).

Schools (in particular public schools) must admit all children who apply to them, whether their immigrant status is clear or not. However if the student is not recognized as being a newly arrived immigrant as such, the school does not benefit from the advantages associated with this status that include for example, a better level of support or additional hours of French classes. As the recognition of the status of newly arrived immigrants is so difficult to obtain, some school administrators give up attempts to achieve this recognition due to the time and effort involved in the process. Moreover, the administration in charge of delivering this status often eliminates from the onset half of the applications when it strictly abides by the regulations. In the face of such adversity the schools opt to dedicate their efforts to educating the “regular” students. Thus a situation is created whereby the goodwill of the educators is diluted by the weakness of the overall organizational framework for educating immigrant children. Another consequence is the heterogeneity of the quality of education for immigrant children amongst different institutions.

In order to improve the capacity of the Belgian educational system to deal with the challenges of integrating newly arrived immigrant children, a consultation process took place in the late 1990s. Amongst the issues, questions and proposals, which were raised at these workshops, it became clear that there was a need to adapt the continuing education of teachers to take into account the new realities and make use of more practical tools. The consultation process also concluded the need to collaborate further with extra-curricular partners and parents. It was also proposed to create a database accessible to all schools that contained all the tools and methods used for teaching French. Finally, recommendations were made to conduct studies to evaluate the effectiveness of bridging classes, to assess the experience of immigrant children and efforts made by educators to adapt to their new classrooms.

## **2. EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES, EXTRA-CURRICULAR ASSOCIATIONS, AND NEWLY ARRIVED IMMIGRANT STUDENTS**

Within the framework of studies conducted in French-speaking Belgium from 2003 to 2007, by students of the University of Liège and their professors, it was observed that certain school administrators who were confronted with the problems of integrating newly arrived children in their schools wished to establish partnerships with other structures such as support associations and other educational organizations which had experience in dealing with immigrant children, in order to help them find common solutions to the difficulties they were facing. Usually, school administrators are on their own when it comes to deciding about internal school policies concerning newly arrived immigrant students. Since they are also usually in

the frontline of the problematic they could play an important coordinating function with the other professionals mentioned above. They also have the capacity to adapt class schedules in order to allow other extra-curricular support associations to jointly design and coordinate a well-structured support program for the children (Manço and Petit, 2005).

Unfortunately, the educators interviewed during the workshops indicated that for the most part they were not able to benefit from either specific training or support with respect to the newly arrived students' problematic. According to the educators, given the lack of initiative on the part of school administrators and directors, it is the teachers who ultimately act on behalf of the newly arrived students with a variety of different methods such as additional French language classes, more frequent testing, and more attention and modification of the curriculum- to name a few. However there is no consultation or collaboration between teachers on these actions.

The extra-curricular support organizations known as "Psycho-Medical-Social" (PMS) centers intervene only in case a problem is referred to them. The study undertaken by the students of the University of Liège was not able to identify preventive action of any kind such as an individualized follow-up of a newly arrived immigrant student from the moment of his or her arrival in a school. Although in theory the PMS could provide a link between the educators and the students, in practice it appears that this is not the case. The educators deplore this state of affairs as all too often they lack information regarding the student's immigration status and cultural background, and find themselves involved in the often, complex situations which characterize these students (stress disorders due to wars, cultural conflicts, etc.) and which go beyond their capacity to deal with these issues in a classroom environment. The study has shown that apparently some PMS centers claim not to be able to perform their work properly due to language barriers. However when a newly arrived student is enrolled in a school, the PMS should be able to interview the student if necessary through the services of an interpreter, to document the student's family, scholastic, linguistic and immigrant backgrounds, and offer specific assistance corresponding to his or her needs (i.e. referral to a support association or an after-school homework program to help with school work, referral to extra-curricular French classes, etc.). While respecting the confidentiality of certain information, the PMS center could in this way communicate vital information to the educators, which would assist them in their work.

Local "grassroots" support organizations and particularly after-school homework programs can play an effective role by building on the work of the teachers by providing a more individualized follow-up of newly arrived students. They often compensate the lack of such support within the schools. However, they are mostly targeted at students of primary schools and few are available at the secondary school level. With respect to extra-curricular French classes, these are mainly designed for adults and are typically scheduled during school hours. It becomes apparent then that few of the external support systems are really adapted to adolescent immigrant students (Manço et Petit, 2005).

On the other hand, the after-school homework programs can establish relationships with parents who are alienated from their children's schools because they don't understand the subjects or the language medium. These after-school programs are more flexible and therefore facilitate the creation of relationships. Parents perceive these homework schools as more accessible and therefore feel more comfortable working through them. Stronger links between the schools and the after-school homework programs would allow schools to improve their level of communication with the parents of newly-arrived migrant students, parents who are all too often forgotten by the school system.

According to Manço and Petit (2005), parents may become alienated from the education of their children for various reasons: some because they themselves do not have a school education, others because they simply do not understand the school medium, namely French; still others because they are lost within the complexity of the Belgian school system. The after-school homework programs may be part of the solution to this problem but initiatives from the schools themselves should also be forthcoming such as parent-school forums. The study from the University of Liège points out that interactions between the schools and parents are mostly isolated, as in the case of parent-teacher meetings or as a follow-up to a specific problem with the student. In those cases the schools could also arrange for an interpreter to be present during the meetings or request the presence of somebody close to the family who understands French.

It appears through interviews conducted by the study that newly-arrived students are motivated to learn French. Nevertheless one observes that adolescents are often found to be either in the professional education track or in the preparatory classes, given that the level is less demanding and this allows them to have more time to learn French. In practice however, the role of the bridging-classes as a means of orientation towards the mainstream education track seems to be non-existent. According to the educators, the level of French of the students remains either too weak or they are simply too far behind in terms of academic performance to be able to contemplate a transition towards the mainstream education. Therefore, unless they display unusually high levels of motivation and hard work, these students are often “stuck” in a track that does not correspond to their capacity, potential, or with their previous scholastic backgrounds.

### **3. HOW DO THE NEWLY ARRIVED IMMIGRANT STUDENTS EXPERIENCE THE SCHOOL SYSTEM?**

In order to reply to this question, newly-arrived students attending secondary school in the region of Liège were interviewed through a questionnaire. The objective of this interview was to gain an understanding of their migratory journeys, the problems they encountered along the way, their personal and academic difficulties, as well as the factors that had been most instrumental in facilitating their integration and new life in Belgium. The interview questionnaire covered a total of 104 points. A total of 36 students (17 girls and 19 boys) were interviewed with such diverse nationalities as from Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Congo, Ghana, India, Kosovo, Morocco, Philippines, Poland, Rwanda, Chechnya and Turkey. Their ages ranged from 14 to 19 and they had been living in Belgium between 6 months to 5 years.

In the empirical sample considered, close to 60% of the students were in Belgium as a result of regrouping their families, part of their family having been present in Belgium prior to their arrival. More than 70% of the students also benefited from the presence of other persons from their communities of origin, that had settled nearby. 80% of them have an immigration status that permits them to legally live in Belgium. Although these indicators seem to point towards rather stable and favorable conditions for immigrant youths, it is worth noting that 6 out of the 36 students polled do not live with their parents. This issue seems to have a strong influence on the integration of these students in the school system, and has led to dedicating another study to the specific segment of non-accompanied minors that shall be presented further below.

The parents of the interviewed youths generally have a certain academic level (secondary and higher education), but on the other hand have little or no knowledge of the French language upon their arrival in Belgium. The language that is spoken at home is mostly a foreign language (29 out of 36 students). Sixty percent of the mothers have never worked but close to 70% of the fathers have been able to work in Belgium, even if this has rarely been stable work.

The majority of the students interviewed were enrolled in a school almost immediately after their arrival in Belgium and close to 90% of them have changed schools only once since their arrival, which translates to a certain amount of stability. Close to 80% of the students are enrolled in a professional education track. Although assistance to schools appears to be satisfactory, 90% of the students are running behind, with gaps of up to 4 years as compared to their Belgian peers. For 60% of the youths, school is perceived as mainly a place to learn French. Few of them (10/36) consider school as a path towards higher education and a future career.

In 70% of the cases it was possible to conduct the interviews in French. The students appear to have a rather positive view of their school education in Belgium, even if apparently this education does not recognize the schooling and skills they had in their countries of origin, and does not prepare them for future qualified professional activities.

In their lives outside of school and their homes, half of the students interviewed spend their time with persons of similar origins. However 60% of them admit to not having any pastimes or hobbies, which seems to indicate a certain sense of loneliness and alienation. Although 75% of them express a feeling of dissatisfaction with respect to their current lifestyles, 90% of them express optimism for the future.

40% of students have had their school medical examination, and as many have been absent from school due to medical reasons. Only 5 out of 36 students have had a psychological examination. Overall, 70% of the students report as not having personal or family medical problems. However, 17 out of 36 youths report having encountered a variety of psychological complaints such as nostalgia for the country of origin, difficulties in adapting to Belgium, and anxiety. It is also noteworthy that 70% of the students reported having a family doctor, who in 20% of the cases, is of the same origin as them.

Over 80% of the youths indicated having contacts with their countries of origin. 90% of the youths do not wish to return to those countries except for holidays. The perception of their own lives in Belgium is therefore positive, even though close to 90% of them wish to maintain their culture of origin. 80% of them report adhering to a religion, with two thirds of them being of Muslim religion.

The analysis of the data shows that a successful integration at school (meaning they enjoy going to school, perceive the atmosphere as positive, and have constructive relationships with their teachers) is closely related to their view of their future lives and prospective projects. One also observes that the degree of professional satisfaction of the father has a direct impact on the social network of the family and the academic support that the child receives from his or her family and friends. As such, it is the children who benefit most from the support of their families that tend to have the clearest and most positive view of their future, despite the instability, which results from their immigrant condition.

The level of education of the father also has an influence on the quality of life of the students. As such, the greater the level of education of the father, the higher the chances that the child will live in an environment where social capital is abundant. Moreover, the fact that the father has a professional occupation provides the student with the opportunity to live in housing of higher quality.

The interviews undertaken in the context of the research-training, show that as a whole, the development of the education of newly arrived immigrant children depends on several factors: personal motivation, the involvement of parents in the education of children, the degree of linguistic immersion which the child is exposed to outside of school, and the stability of the family. These children belong to families whose immigrant status is unclear and who must often move, sometimes even to different linguistic regions of Belgium, which further complicates their education. One sees that their academic performance does not depend on their earlier schooling: even though some students are brighter or have had access to quality education in their countries of origin, they are hampered by their poor knowledge of French and are often misjudged as lower performing students. A gap exists between the expectations of the host schools and what the newly arrived students are capable of achieving given their limited understanding of the teaching medium. It is also worth noting that these students are often isolated from the other “normal” students and also have a tendency to form groups with persons of similar origins or facing similar difficulties. This tendency does not promote rapid integration.

#### **4. THE CASE OF FOREIGN NON – ACCOMPANIED MINORS (“MENA”)**

The observations made earlier lead to a more in-depth analysis of the situation of the MENA, which amounts to several hundred in Belgium: a total of 421 accommodations are available for them in Belgium. It is also known that an additional number of MENA live in Belgium illegally. In 2006 a group of students from the University of Liège visited the facility in Florennes that hosts 41 of these minors (young men from 16 to 18 years of age). Two main questions were posed by the study: *What is the legal framework and the policy with regards to receiving MENA in Belgium? How is the school education of MENA organized?*

According to the law, a MENA is “*a person of less than 18 years of age, non accompanied by an adult providing parental authority or supervision according to the national law on minors, citizen of a country which is not a member of the European Economic Area, and having either applied for recognition of*

*refugee status or not being eligible for access and residence in the territory as determined by law*<sup>13</sup>". Even though the MENA are officially divided in three groups, the asylum seekers (DAMENA), the non-asylum seekers, and the victims of trafficking in human beings, this study shall only refer to the issue of the DAMENA.

, Ministry of Social Integration and its agency "Fedasil" cater to these persons<sup>14</sup>. Fedasil has opened 16 federal facilities and 2 orientation and observation centers for the MENA, one of which is located in Florennes in the Namur Province<sup>15</sup>.

The program law of the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 2002 instituted a guardianship service for MENAs under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice<sup>16</sup>. The guardian is intended to provide to minors protection, assistance, and representation of minors. This includes making sure that the MENA are able to go to school and get psychological and medical assistance as well as ensuring that the minor "*benefits from adequate housing and that his or her political, philosophical, and religious beliefs are respected*"<sup>17</sup>."

In theory, the guardian plays an important role for the minor. Often it is the administrators of MENA facilities who are the tutors of minors who live in those facilities. However, certain institutional tutors (Director of the MENA Facility, youth judge, etc.) are responsible for close to 40 minors, whereas other guardians are only responsible for a single minor! The relationships that the minors have with their guardians thus vary largely according to the number of MENAs that the guardian is responsible for. Some minors, especially those who are soon no longer minors, find that the system is complicated and avoid contacts with their guardian. In order to better understand and evaluate the practical effectiveness of the guardianship service, the students from the University of Liège conducted a study based on observations and discussions with various minors<sup>18</sup>.

In general, the staff of the MENA in Florennes feels positively about the education of youths: rate of absenteeism is low, and progress is undeniable. The adolescents are aware of the importance of a good education for their future. Fedasil is in charge of the expenses for tuition and (often second hand) school materials. Nevertheless, the majority of the non-accompanied minors feel badly about how they are considered by their fellow students in school: their clothing and materials are often old and worn-out and as a consequence they are immediately identified as coming from a MENA facility.

In the public library in downtown Florennes, three educators are available in the evening to help MENA students with their homework after school. Apparently, this service has not been very successful to date, but there are plans to extend the hours during which this service is provided in order to establish more personalized support. Those who work with MENA youths in the facility in Florennes are very discouraged by the situation as they are powerless in the decision making process of the "Office des Etrangers" (Foreigner's Administration) which determines where and how long the youths are allowed to remain in Belgium. The social workers that support MENAs also are required to maintain a certain emotional detachment, whatever the situation of a particular youth might be, and the relationships he or she may have developed during the stay in the Florennes facility.

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<sup>13</sup> Title XIII, chapter 6 « Guardianship of immigrant non-accompanied minors » of the law-program of 24 december 2002, M.B. (Official Bulletin) of 31 december 2002 and Royal Decree of 22 decembre 2003 (Title XIII, chapter 6 « Guardianship of immigrant non-accompanied minors » of the law-program of 24 december 2002 (see Desmet, S., 2005, p. 11-14).

<sup>14</sup> Created in july 2001 by the Federal Government, Fedasil, described as, « *providing material support to asylum seekers and organizing directly our through its partners, welcoming quality support. Fedasil contributes to the design, implementation, and execution of immigration welcome policy.* » URL : [http://www.fedasil.be/fr/home/over\\_fedasil](http://www.fedasil.be/fr/home/over_fedasil)

<sup>15</sup> Fedasil, *Rapport d'activité*, 2006, p. 11. If Fedasil coordinates and manages a network of structures set up in Belgium to ensure the reception of asylum seekers, the Red Cross and the Public Center for Social Assistance of municipalities also provide home and accommodation, especially for MENA.

<sup>16</sup> Note, however, that the law on the protection of MENA is only in application since the May 1st 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Desmet, S., 2005, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> According to a survey conducted by Fedasil between 1 January 2003 and 1 September 2004 and published in July 2005, the majority of minors "non-disappeared" are enrolled in bridging classes. By evaluating the minors during five months (which was only possible for half of the minors, thus revealing their precarious and unstable condition), the survey showed that in Belgium as a whole, the majority of minors feel "moderately good" to "good" in school and get along "moderately well" to "well" with other students. The vast majority of these young people had never shown any disruptive behavior at school and showed a good level of motivation (low absenteeism, awareness of the importance of schooling and learning of French / Dutch, etc.).

From an academic perspective, the facility in Florennes gives access to two bridging classes, one in the public school in Florennes (primary and secondary) located in the town itself, and the Technical Institute in Namur (secondary professional education) located more than an hour away from Florennes by bus.

Following a request by Fedasil and the Belgian Red Cross, the Technical Institute of Namur (ITN) took up with great enthusiasm the challenge of welcoming MENA students<sup>19</sup>. Since 2001, this institute also organizes a bridging class whose program adapts with flexibility to the number, origin, and understanding of French, of newly arrived immigrant students. The bridging class is divided in five sub-groups: four for different levels of French and one for teaching basic literacy. Finally, the school also experiments with a transition group to give ex-newly arrived immigrant students the opportunity to learn other skills. Each new student is tested and assigned a group depending on the results of the testing. Based on further testing, the student advances within the groups.

An assigned teacher supervises each group. The French teachers of the ITN have developed their own methodology (*Voyage*, developed in 2000-2001). This methodology consists of a repertoire of linguistic and cultural objectives, theme-oriented vocabulary, grammar refreshers, etc.

The teachers have undergone specific training for FLES in both specialized institutions and universities. Specific subject teachers give classes in mathematics, technology and sciences that they have attempted to adapt for non French-speaking students. A weekly, two-hour class also exists which brings together the various groups of newly arrived students as well as all the teachers of the bridging class. The objective of this class is to create a common dynamic, develop friendships between students and establish links between the different groups.

The schedule is as follows: 20 periods of French, 8 periods of science, 2 periods of religion and intercultural awareness, 2 periods of physical education and 5 periods dedicated to coordination. On average, the ITN receives about 120 newcomers a year, but only about 60 of these remain over the course of a full year<sup>20</sup>.

The teachers, the administrators and the extra-curricular staff meet twice a month to coordinate the groups as best as possible, and to exchange best practices as well as lessons learned. These meetings are a useful supplement to the daily communication that the teachers have. It is also during these meetings that the decisions are taken to move students between groups as they progress and successfully pass their tests. Movements between groups usually take place after each school holiday (Christmas, Easter, etc.).

The public school in Florennes, in contrast to the secondary professional school, only has two bridging classes destined for a few students who are asylum seekers. The students are divided in two groups depending on their aptitudes. Teachers who were consulted agree that the time given to the students to learn French is generally too short. The result is that great importance is given in the school to formal grammar and vocabulary, at the expense of developing communication skills. The thinking behind this is basically to familiarize the students to the vocabulary they will have to deal with later on. Unofficially, the school keeps the students beyond the two six-month periods stipulated by the legislation for bridging classes, in order to isolate them from the mainstream classes. According to the administrators of the school in Florennes, children who are asylum seekers have difficulties in the regular classes: they observe a high rate of absenteeism (which according to the teachers is due to the lack of parental supervision and control by the staff of the MENA facility). Cases of students expelled due to disciplinary reasons were also reported. With regards to after-school supervision by both guardians and the educators of the facility, the teachers also

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<sup>19</sup> That has not been the case for other schools. For instance, a local Catholic school justified its refusal to receive MENA children by invoking several unsatisfactory attempts to integrate these students. The main obstacle that arises regarding the reception of asylum-seekers appears to be the « *lack of motivation, as well as the reluctance on the part of parents and other students.* »

<sup>20</sup> For example, between 2004-2005, ITN welcomed 137 students, including students enrolled in 1B, coming from 32 different countries and aged between 12 and 18 years of age. The majority of them originated from hosting facilities in Yvoir, Florennes, Maillen, Gembloux and Rixensart. Others resided in a municipality close to Namur and depended on the Public Center for Social Aid (CPAS).

expressed dissatisfaction. The teachers interviewed in the public school in Florennes, claim to have never met the guardians of MENA students.

Indeed, the study conducted by students of the University of Liège in Florennes shows a lack of communication between the MENA facility and the schools as well as between schools with MENA students and schools without MENA students. The social workers in the Florennes facility seem to face significant difficulties in establishing an appropriate framework to supervise and support the school education of the MENAs. Perhaps seeking the assistance of local organizations involved in social work could solve some of the problems. The fact remains, however, that the options for schooling for MENAs in Florennes are very limited within the region, so much so that students often must commute large distances on a daily basis to have access to schooling in Namur. The teachers and the staff lack resources particularly with regards to psychological and pedagogical support. The legal definition of the support provided by the bridging classes is in fact too restrictive.

This study also shows that with regards to the educational framework, the condition of immigrant un-accompanied minors does not differ much to that of accompanied minors also living in Florennes. The main differences between these two categories of youths are on the one hand, being able to benefit from the support provided by parents, and on the other hand, not having to deal with the numerous and tedious administrative hurdles which an asylum seeker faces over the course of several years. The family red tape to apply for immigrant status often lies on the shoulders of the minors, as their French is often the most fluent of the family.

## **5. INTERACTION BETWEEN NON-FRENCH SPEAKING NEWLY ARRIVED IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND TEACHERS IN LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION**

This section of the paper is dedicated to the pedagogical and relational dimensions of the integration of newly arrived students in lower secondary schools of the French-speaking Community of Belgium. Of particular interest are the problems experienced by those students confronted to the learning of the French language, which constitutes a critical element of their academic and social integration. In a context, which generally provides few *ad hoc* mechanisms for the education of these youths, the objective is to determine the means and tools which schools and teachers concretely have to their disposal, namely: *what are the heuristics implemented by the teachers to deal with newly arrived immigrant students? How important is the contribution of social interaction, both within the school and between the school and other environments, to the learning of the French language for these youths?*

As we have been able to see earlier, set aside the contribution of rather limited number of bridging classes, Belgian teachers are poorly equipped to deal with non-French speaking students. Their challenge is to be able to successfully continue teaching their normal French-speaking classes whilst also teaching French to the immigrant students. They are also faced with the challenge of having to deal with the integration of these students within the class, not to mention within the society at large.

The research-training in which the students of the FLES program of the University of Liège participated, concerned itself with (i) newly arrived adolescents, defined as having resided in French-speaking Belgium since less than 3 years and not being to able to speak French upon their arrival in the country, and (ii) their teachers. The research-training team was composed of twenty students who interviewed ten teachers and eleven students of several secondary schools in Liège and its surroundings, between October and December 2006. Within that small sample, the students interviewed were paired up with their own teachers so as to obtain two different perspectives (teacher and student) over the same time period, namely the first school year experienced in Belgium. Two students-observers used a questionnaire with open-ended questions the students had prepared collectively, to interview the individual each for over an hour on average. The questions cover for example the profile of the youths and their teachers, positive and negative recollections of their experience, factors that facilitated or complicated their experience, as well as advice that they would give to other teachers and students who face similar situations.

Amongst the teachers interviewed, there were as many men as women and these were aged between 24 and 56 years of age. Most have extensive professional experience and most have worked with numerous newly arrived immigrant students. The overall impression by the research-training team was that this was a group of motivated and engaged persons, strengthened by the fact that a number of other teachers refused to participate in the study for a number of reasons. Therefore, the experiences and actions that they shared with the interviewers can be considered as being “good practices”. Although the observations made cannot be generalized to the whole educational system, they fully satisfy the objective of the study, which is to identify useful practices that can be transferred to other schools and classrooms.

The group of students interviewed is composed of seven females and four males, aged between 15 and 19 years, having arrived in Belgium with their families between 2000 and 2005. They are originally from Romania, Italy, Dagestan, India, Ghana, Thailand and Turkey, and all have already had a school education prior to their arrival in Belgium. The group of students participating in the research-training, analyzed the results according to a common grid.

One of the observations which is closely linked to the issue of school education is the context in which the students immigrated and settled in Belgium: a great deal of variety was observed in the reasons which led the different youths to settle in Belgium. Some came to join one or more members of their family already settled in Belgium, and thus were not lost, without assistance, and faced with a completely unknown environment. Before enrolling in school, they were able to settle and get help from their relatives to discover their new environment (street, neighborhood and city). For others who did not already have relatives in Belgium, help came from a neighbor whose child went to the same school. Finally other new immigrant students who had to discover their new school on their own or with their parents, received help from the “CPAS” (Public Center for Social Assistance) or the PMS to guide them in their choice of a school. The other newly-arrived immigrants and their families also received help from these organizations.

Most of the teachers interviewed are self-taught with regards to FLES. Often these teachers personally requested to be able to teach immigrant students, finding personal and professional satisfaction in that activity. Few teachers stated that they were obliged to do so, and the overall impression was that the teachers wished to help the students to the best of their abilities, demonstrating goodwill in doing so.

Both teachers and students agreed that there was a lack of teaching resources (theory and exercise books, common databases, information regarding training programs, etc.). The educational infrastructure is often inadequate and insufficient to support the teachers in their work with immigrant students. This makes it all the more difficult for teachers to prepare for their classes and leads them to use improvised methods: *“I decided to use a reading methodology dating from 1967 which I judged to be the most adequate to help the students to read. The methodology was based on the progressive association of syllables to pictures”* (quote from a teacher).

The most engaged teachers attempt to plan and theorize on the methods to be used before actually meeting the new students in an effort to determine the best method for welcoming these students and to help them to adapt and learn French as best as possible. Some go to considerable lengths and have begun to publish the results of their methodologies (“Centre d’Autoformation et de Formation continue des Enseignants” or “Center for Continuing Education of Teachers” is an example). According to the teachers, a common database for all the schools confronted to the issue of newly arrived immigrant students would be a very useful tool.

When the student arrives in his or her new school, the principal and the teacher of FLES and/or supervisor are there to greet him/her. In case the student does not speak French or English at all, a translator is made available to help with initial introductions and to visit the school. The translator can either be external to the school, a student of the same nationality as the newcomer, or even a teacher. In the majority of the cases, the non-French speaking student is immediately immersed in a new classroom. The student and the teachers are at this point unprepared, having not had the opportunity to first exchange information regarding each other. In some cases students arrive at a school in the middle of the school year without any prior notice given to the school.

After the initial contact, whether planned or not, the newcomer is introduced to his or her classmates, which is one of the first challenges: *"When I arrived, the other students were rather friendly with me, but I did not dare to speak, as I was afraid they would make fun of me."* (17-year-old boy). The task of the teacher, beyond the teaching of French itself, will also be to facilitate the integration of the newcomer vis-à-vis the other students in the school. To do so, an emphasis will have to be given to group work, giving the newcomer the opportunity to develop relationships with others. Unfortunately, this contact is not always easy. Even though most students interviewed did not experience any particular problems, some had to deal with racism or indifference. This leads to a feeling of loneliness which the newcomer has difficulty overcoming: *"I felt anxiety: in addition to being exiled, to being far away from my home and my country...., I felt as if I was intruding."* (19-year-old male).

Faced with this situation, pupils react in two different ways: some increase their efforts to integrate with their peers and to learn French, while others withdraw and turn only to students of their same culture. In the case of the latter, learning French and successfully integrating socially a posteriori becomes all the more difficult. Ultimately, all the youths interviewed recognized that by improving French, their circle of friends grew. The feelings of inclusion evoked earlier even tended to disappear once the language barrier was crossed.

It also became apparent that the integration not only depends on the principal and the teachers, but also on other students who have had to learn to understand and accept the differences of the newcomers. Without friends, the newcomer loses interest in his new school and learns nothing. It is therefore crucial to try to open the minds of the local students to the newcomers and to the value of their diversity. Some teachers understand this well and include in their classes the discovery of the culture of the newcomer in order to create an interest for the Other and a new intercultural perspective: *"It is important to avoid as much as possible biases and misunderstandings between students so that they respect and understand each other mutually"* (teacher).

In class, the teachers rarely resort to English or other languages, preferring to speak only French, repeating, using synonyms, or even using signs if necessary. Their objective is also to create a climate of confidence and in so doing, establish solid groundwork that will allow the newcomers to feel more comfortable in their initiation to learning French. Thanks to the teacher's efforts, most newcomers remain grateful to their teachers, , for having helped them in their attempts to integrate to Belgium, even after several years : *"The teachers of my school were always friendly and patient with me, they were motivated and always tried to help me work things out."* (16-year-old girl).

For certain newcomers, the learning of French and the discovery of the new culture do not limit themselves to the classroom or playground. A neighbor or another student of the school (usually speaking the same language) helps the newcomer discover his or her new environment: who lives in the neighborhood? What activities are there? What forms of entertainment are available? Some teachers organize field trips (a visit of a cultural attraction, a bike trip, a hike...) allowing the youths to discover places that they otherwise would not have gotten to know. Some teachers even go further in providing individual French classes to accelerate learning. On their own initiative or upon recommendation of their teachers, the newcomers watch television in French, typically cartoons or serials, and they also listen to the radio.

It was observed that most of the students and teachers interviewed came from Catholic schools. Although this private network of schools tends to limit the enrollment of immigrant children (see further below), it appears through this small sample, that in the schools where immigrants were enrolled, their care benefited from the greater degree of autonomy of these institutions (faster decision making, greater freedom in day-to-day organization, increased degree of exchanges with external parties, engagement of teachers, etc.).

Nevertheless, the observations confirm that all of the schools have to improvise to a certain extent when faced with the newly-arrived immigrant students. Positive measures such as the creation of literacy classes are often taken as a last resort once a school finds itself suddenly confronted with a massive arrival of immigrants. The welcome and integration of young newcomers depends thus entirely on the goodwill of the school and its teachers. We must, however, increasingly take into account the new realities of immigration, as immigrant school children are no longer an exception in schools. If efforts are not made to

rethink the new educational context, it will become impossible to find a solution to the numerous problems that will result from not taking into account the new realities<sup>21</sup>. As an example, until recently, FS/FL was not recognized in the French-speaking Community and did not appear in the programs of teacher-training schools. This is the reason why the teaching of FLES has only recently begun. Only in 1999 did universities begin to organize education around this issue.

Care should be taken, however, not to institutionalize in an overly rigid manner the handling of newcomers. At worse, the measures established in view of receiving and educating these children could alienate them from others and unwittingly contribute to their isolation. It appears that some newcomers prefer “*to not get noticed, remain autonomous and adapt on their own*”. A responsible way to handle newcomers would be based on an acknowledgement of their presence and needs without creating alienation, and which would help them integrate in their new schools and ultimately follow a normal curriculum.

The study has allowed to identify the existing weakness with regards to the integration of newcomers, but also highlights the high level of motivation of certain teachers. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases, the teaching of French to the newcomers can be considered as a failure of the school system. As a result, these students are sidetracked to less desirable educational programs. This is due to the inadequacies of the existing frameworks for integrating newly-arrived immigrant students rather than deficiencies of the students themselves. Belgium seems to be particularly weak in this regard, and appears as an outlier compared to other French speaking countries (Québec, Switzerland) or non-French speaking countries (i.e. Italy). Indeed in those countries, one of the key stated objectives of the educational institutions is intercultural education, on which the successful integration of young immigrants depends. These countries are developing mechanisms, programs and tools that contribute to facilitating the linguistic, educational and social integration of youngsters.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS IN TERMS OF PEDAGOGICAL AND POLICY PROPOSITIONS**

The research-training concluded on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2007 in Brussels, with the organization of an information session during which best practices and conclusions were discussed. A preliminary version of the following synthesis, approved a priori by the research-training group composed of students of the University of Liège, was proposed to a small group of teachers of FS/FL in the Brussels region. The objective was to further debate, and discuss the findings and recommendations of the study with regards to the education of non native students in the francophone secondary education system. This led to formalizing a set of recommendations that were approved by the teachers, and even to launch a pilot program aimed at implementing and evaluating some of the pedagogical recommendations.

The host school for the pilot program was the “Institut Cardinal Mercier” in Schaerbeek, an area of Brussels that has a large non-European immigrant population. The group of teachers teaching FLES in this school, comprised of four young teachers, accepted to assume the role of the “test-team” to reflect the results of the research-action and the practical objectives that it entails.

Overall, the teachers agreed with the observations made by the researchers from the University of Liège: namely that one of their main challenges in Schaerbeek is to manage the initial contact and integration of newcomers arriving throughout the year. These often-unannounced arrivals of students disturb the organization of the school and teachers. The teachers therefore structure the teaching of French in different “levels of mastery” with a new class that starts every trimester, as is done in certain language schools for adults. They provide incentives for the students to join one of these classes as soon as they are started, depending on their level of French. In this way, the students enter into a standard system that motivates them, and speeds up the learning process. Nevertheless, there are students who need to wait several weeks until a class starts up which corresponds to their specific level and needs. This shortcoming can, however, be mitigated by the progressive integration of the student in his or her new school environment, for example by inviting them in general classes such as physical education or art classes with other children volunteering to translate. In this way, the newcomer can get to know the school better and experience a first

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<sup>21</sup> Betinelli E. G., 2006, p. 167-175.

immersion in French in a more carefree setting, before the actual formal and systematic learning of French begins. Obviously, this kind of system is only possible in large schools set in an urban context.

The encounter with the team in Schaerbeek also helped to clarify certain issues with regards to the professional status of teachers of FLES. The teachers expressed their frustration with regards to the lack of recognition of their work in the schools (namely low salaries and lack of professional stability) despite the additional university degrees that they acquired to better perform their work.

With regards to the practicalities of pedagogy, the encounters in Brussels built on the data and findings of the research-training, and led to proposals for concrete methodologies that could inspire and help the teachers operate in secondary schools, who are confronted on a daily basis to the needs of youths who do not understand the language medium. Further work remains to identify useful resources and convey them to practitioners who are often isolated in their respective schools.

The main objective is to propose to non-French speaking students a selection of a series of activities that can rapidly improve their mastery of the French language. The choice of activities must be balanced in order to propose varied immersion contexts to the youths catering to skills such as oral communication, listening, reading and writing. The recommended approach is “indirect” such as suggested by the “Pourquoi Pas?” methodology of Drèze et al. in which the teaching of grammar and vocabulary are the underlying objective of more playful activities proposed in the curriculum which allow the teacher to assess the pupil’s progress.

The underlying idea of the proposed project, which will be tested in 2008 in Brussels with the participation of the authors of the study, consists in a series of common tasks assigned to the students. These tasks focus on oral and written skills organized according to four categories of literary genres, namely theater, poetry and song, journalism, and finally narrative prose. The tasks which are classified in this manner take the form of mini-projects to be undertaken in small groups of newcomers, accompanied in some cases by a teacher, a coordinator or a supporting parent, or even an older French speaking student. For instance in the case of the “journalistic” genre or non-fiction prose, the newly-arrived immigrants could conduct a small “ethnographic study” of their day-to-day life in their new environments looking at observations and anecdotes which surprise them, awaken their curiosity, etc. By sharing amongst themselves the mini-projects in their classes and groups, the students can produce a compilation that can be published on the school’s web site or newspaper, on bulletin boards, or during a school party, etc<sup>22</sup>. Beyond the fact that these activities contribute to the learning of the French language, one understands easily the contributions of these types of more dynamic and interactive methods towards the motivation of the students and the development of skills that relate to their new environment and relationships. Furthermore, for those students who only have a very limited understanding of the language, these methodologies allow the integration of multimedia (electronic photographs, posters, magazine images, drawings, do-it-yourself collages, pictograms etc.) and other forms of communication (corporal, musical and culinary expressions for example) that facilitate interaction.

The participation of teachers with multi-disciplinary backgrounds, local organizations, as well as artists, has obvious benefits. This collaboration must be planned in advance in such a way as to offer integrated activities to students where different skills and disciplines are complementary to each other. As such, it is important for the teachers and other parties involved to share their projects, resources, lists of reference books, multimedia products, suggestions, etc. Meetings must be scheduled in order to exchange ideas. In addition, there needs to be specific criteria to determine in the progression from one level of mastery to another and from one school year to the next. Certain choices of books and movies to be covered have a strategic dimension within a multicultural environment. Thus in the FLES classes of intermediate and advanced level, the works of international francophone authors, or international authors translated into French, can be introduced in order to exchange perspective on migration paths and the road to integration versus assimilation<sup>23</sup>. Wherever possible, teachers of foreign languages, translators, teachers who have been immigrants themselves, volunteers and other social partners should contribute to building bridges between

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<sup>22</sup> Lopez, 2007, p. 100.

<sup>23</sup> Collès, 1994.

other languages and French as this appears to be a good way to complement the teaching of French and to better fathom the cultural difference of non-francophone children (Crutzen and Manço, 2002). With regards to partnerships on pedagogical best practices, links between other Belgian or foreign schools (Switzerland, Quebec) which face similar challenges should be further encouraged. Those links are rendered easier today thanks to new technologies for communicating and to the increasing numbers of international exchange programs.

There do exist examples of the methodologies proposed in this paper, which have been conducted in schools in the francophone schools of Belgium. Albeit isolated and of modest scope, these schools serve as role models in terms of the new strategies they have developed for welcoming and integrating incoming immigrant students, and involving teachers in ways that have led to successful experiences for these children. A good example is the theatre project conducted each year by the Royal Athenaeum Victor Horta in Saint-Gilles (Brussels) or the theatre-action method proposed in Visé (Liège) since several years to promote the understanding between children and teachers of diverse backgrounds<sup>24</sup>.

On a more macro level, the recommendations of the research-training that were validated during the final information session held in Brussels, point in the direction of rendering more flexible the decree of June 2001 concerning the integration of newly-arrived immigrant students. Indeed, it is worthwhile to modify the concept of a “bridging class” to an “integration / welcoming class” and a FLES class designed around clearly defined multidisciplinary tasks, and to propose these classes to all students for whom French is not the native language. FLES classes should be offered to all students who have a need for this support, whether they be immigrants originally from developing countries or not (second generation immigrant youths, Dutch-speaking students, expatriates from Western countries, etc.). The Convention of the Council of Europe of 1977 regarding the status of immigrant workers gives children the rights to access to the educational system under favorable conditions: “*Host States must facilitate the teaching of the national language to immigrant students*”<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, the decree should provide for proposing this specific class for at least three years as is offered in Canada and the United States (English as a Second/Additional Language), rather than for a mere year as is currently offered. The adaptation classes should be provided in several consecutive levels of proficiency and focus on smaller groups to improve efficiency. The responsibilities of the schools, the refugee facilities, and the after-school programs should be defined in clearer terms in order to facilitate the development of local partnerships. Even though all of these measures entail additional costs, one would do well to heed the recommendations of the OECD which says “*the cost of inaction is infinitely higher*”<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that the large-scale failure of school education for immigrant children poses serious problems for countries. A policy that gives equal opportunities to all students and values the diversity of immigrants, also benefits local children by enriching them and giving them the opportunity develop skills to live in harmony in a pluralistic society. We shall conclude with the words of Dan Van Raemdonck, president of the Human Rights Association of Belgium: “*Condemned to his own imagination, [the teacher of FS/FL] complicates his own life to further enrich it, and it is this wealth which he is able to fructify in an extraordinary manner that must contaminate the mainstream classes otherwise it is the latter which will remain sadly ordinary.*”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Parthoens, 2007, p. 106-110.

<sup>25</sup> Eurydice, 2004, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Jacobs, D., Rea, A. et Hanquient, L., p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Hendrickx, M., 2004, p. 10.

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