



LA SECTION EUROPÉENNE IN FRANCE (EUROPEAN CLASSES)

European classes as well as classes for oriental foreign languages have been established since 1992. In 1996, there were 170 classes, in 1998 nearly 2000 and more than 3000 in 2003. This is an obvious success, especially as these classes can be found in nearly all schools. In the meantime, the original objectives have changed: language skills were the initial focus, but new demands have now arisen.

From year 10, the *sections européennes* have offered one subject, which is taught through a foreign language e.g. English, German, Spanish, Italian, etc. The related content subjects are usually History and Geography, but Physics, Mathematics and Biology are also possible choices.

French teachers of European classes (*professeurs de disciplines non linguistiques*) are teachers with a very high standard of foreign language skills but, mainly, without any specific methodological training in the foreign language.

The institutional framework of European Classes is defined in the following text which also contains comments on learning objectives and modules.

1. Institutional Objectives of the European Classes

1.1 Original Objectives

These are summed up in the following passage of 1992:

www.eduscol.education.fr/D0100/circ92-234.htm and especially in the following passage:

“The progression of European integration, the increasing opening of the world economy and the extension of cultural exchange makes the knowledge of one or several foreign languages an inevitable priority. It is therefore desirable that as many pupils as possible have access to the highest bilingual competence, complemented by a knowledge of different cultures .”

The highly demanding learning objectives of the European Classes are the result of these economic and cultural conditions. To reach these objectives, as well as the bilingual skills mentioned, it is necessary to find a way of selecting pupils and have a large number of teachers and teaching materials. Reality however, has changed the original objectives in certain ways.

1.2 Shift of original objectives

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of European Classes, the French Ministry of Education published a circular, announcing a shift of objectives:

“In addition to the linguistic dimension, which was the original idea aimed at a general educational renewal; the latest includes knowledge of the different cultures in various countries, an increase in exchanges and co-operation with schools abroad, and questions of European citizenship.”

In 1992 the idea of sensitising people to European citizenship had not yet been a declared aim. Now, ten years later, it was of high importance. This development can be traced in an



opening speech by Jack Lang, the former French Minister of Education, given at the *Lycee Louis le Grand* in Paris, 12th of March 2002:

(http://www.eduscol.education.fr/D0121/semSE_Lang.pdf)

“A sense of belonging to European culture and citizenship has to be the constant care of all schools and teachers.”

1.3 Organisation

European Classes are based on extended work in foreign languages from the fourth year at *Collège* in the form of two additional lessons per week.

At *Lycée*, the intensive language lessons are continued with one extra lesson in the foreign language and with an additional lesson in a content subject taught through the foreign language. This subject is taught through the language that has already been studied at *Collège*. In most cases, this subject combines History and Geography, taking the French tradition into account that both subjects are taught by the same teacher at *Collège* as well as at *Lycee*. However, all kinds of subjects are offered, e.g. Maths.

2. Choice of topics

2.1. Why History and Geography?

There are no rules why especially History or Geography are taught through a foreign language. It is often said that Geography can help to understand the country, whose language is studied in the European Class, whereas History allows deeper insights into historic dimensions. In other words, as History and Geography by their very nature seem to create an interest in oneself and in others, both subjects apparently offer an easy approach to questions concerning European citizenship.

1.2 Curricula of Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Theoretically, the curricula correspond to the pupils' level of knowledge (Years 10-12). Practically, however, there are many different patterns, since there are not as many lessons available for the subject taught through the foreign language than for the subject taught through French. For example, in History taught through German at the *Académie de Créteil*, the following topics are often taught in Year 12: the Second World War and its consequences (above all for Germany), international relations (the Cold War and the Division of Germany), the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the German reunification.

Due to the large amount of information available on the Internet, more audio-visual material seems to be used in the subject taught through the foreign language.

1.3. The position of the foreign language

Almost complete bilingualism might be the learning objective in some cases, i.e. with German / French in the Alsace. Generally however, language command is not an aim in itself. This was stated in a report by the French Ministry of Education in 2000. In content subjects the target language does not have to be perfect. Nevertheless it should be used correctly and it



should be varied enough to apply to different topics dealt with in class. (<http://www.education.gouv.fr/syst/igen/rapports/secteuro.htm>).

1.4. Exams in European Classes for the *Baccalauréat* History-Geography (IB)

Since May 2003, the certificate of the European Class can be obtained together with the French *Baccalauréat*, on condition that 10 out of 20 points are reached in the special exams of the subject taught through the foreign language, and 12 out of 20 points are reached in the traditional foreign language exam (instead of the previous 14 out of 20 points).

The CLIL-exam can be taken at various schools. The candidate has 20 minutes for preparation; and the oral examination also lasts 20 minutes. The candidate gives a short presentation of an unknown text. Afterwards, he/she is asked about a topic that has been prepared in class. In general, the examination starts with an informal conversation about the candidate's areas of interest and his/her ideas about his/her academic or professional future. The panel consists of one foreign language teacher and one teacher of a content subject. The candidate's linguistic competence is essential for his/her mark.

3. Conclusion

Within ten years, European Classes have moved from initial obscurity into the limelight. Nevertheless, many difficulties remain, especially the problem of motivating pupils to study foreign languages other than English. The decreasing number of learners of German gives reason for concern. However, we have to hope that there will be continuing and strong support for multilingualism in Europe.