

# Multiculturalism in Belgium

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## 1. Multiculturalism in Belgium

If we look today to our classroom and compare it with fifty years ago, a lot has changed. Not only in the big cities as Brussels, Gent and so on, but also in the smaller towns, we noticed that the classroom is filled with kids with another culture, identity or faith. 50 years ago, not everyone was ready or knew the possibilities to emigrate to other countries for a permanent stay. This is a recent phenomenon. Let's say between 10 and 15 years ago it started and it's increasing ever since. What can possibly be the problem in this, you might ask? Well, as easy as it seems, multiculturalism brings a lot of obstacles into the classroom. Today we'll present you some of those obstacles.

## 2. Bullying and intolerance: No respect for each other culture and language

A mix of different cultures in the classroom, means a mix of values and norms for each culture. That can cause a lot of conflicts between the students. Nowadays, as teachers in training, we noticed that children are very intolerant towards each other because of their differences. No matter how hard we try, our traditional education system fails in preventing the obstacles such as racism and bullying. The cause of their conflicts are usually translated into subjects as differences in culture, skin color or faith. Respect is not the norm, but became an option in the communication between students.

## 3. Our educational system fails on the matter of multiculturalism

Recent studies showed us that a lot of Belgian students with other ethnical background fail to graduate without a certificate or graduate in technical and professional divisions. Most common causes are:

- A language delay: their mother tongue is different instead of the spoken and written language they use in school
- A difficult situation at home, most of the times caused by: financial problems, divorces, stepfamilies, parents without degrees, psychological problems, violence, ect.
- Self fulfilling prophecy: If people tell you that you're not capable of doing anything and keep repeating that, after a while you'll start believing it. Eventually you lose your motivation, that is isn't worth the trouble and energy.

In facts, the system fails for every student that can't achieve the provided goals, as mentioned in our educational program. Instead of adapting the educational system to the needs of the student, we expect from the students that they adapt themselves to our system.

#### 4. How do teachers experience multiculturalism in and outside the classroom?

Ever since the beginning of our education, teachers are taught to teach in a very classic way. The teacher provides information, the pupils absorb it. This has been the way of teaching for at least 50 years. Just a couple of years ago, specialists started inventing other ways to teach with an eye on differentiation. We already have implemented some of those methods, but not every school in the country is applying them because it asks more efforts and time. The schools that do apply those methods don't get enough support from the system, which implicates that the results aren't always visible to parents and outsiders.

Another obstacle is the contact with the parents. The parents usually don't speak Dutch. So on a parent evening, where they can ask information about the progress and study of their child, the communication is rough. As a result, the parents doesn't get the feeling of being involved in school matters.

#### 5. Which initiatives are already available and why aren't they enough?

- OKAN: OKAN classes are specific for students who're just immigrated. It is an immersion program that can last max 2 years. After that the pupil is being integrated in the year he or she normally spend before he moved. After those 2 years all help stops and the pupil is on his own. That's why this fails. It is possible to receive extra hours of support. This contains a private coach who helps students to manage the Dutch language.
- GOK: GOK stands for equal educational opportunity. This is a general program who helps families on the matter of support at school. This contains extra hours that the school receives to provide that support. You don't get those hours easily. The school has to provide a lot of information to the system about their pupils. Because of the paper work, a lot of the good intentions get lost.

General conclusion: There's still a lot of work to be done!

Thank you for your attention. Are there any questions?