

Additional 10th form for immigrant students in Itäkeskus Upper Secondary School for Adults

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Abstract in English

Young people in Helsinki who have completed their comprehensive school education but have not been admitted to an upper secondary school or to vocational training can get additional comprehensive school education of one extra school year. This education is provided in the so-called 10th forms. The 10th form classes are usually located in multicultural comprehensive schools.

After 10th class in Itäkeskus half of the students will go to upper secondary schools and they will achieve good results. The rest of the students will go to vocational schools. This Project is aimed at experimentation of special activities conducted by expert teachers who have special skills in the Finnish language teaching for immigrants. The 10th form is considered as a 1 year continuation of comprehensive studies for non Finnish speakers who can get minimum linguistic skills necessary for the upper secondary school. This activities has been set out in consideration of high level of drop out and underachievement among immigrant young students.

Abstract (in italiano)

I giovani di Helsinki che hanno completato la loro formazione scolastica obbligatoria, ma che non sono stati ammessi ad una scuola superiore o a una formazione professionale possono ottenere una formazione supplementare di un anno scolastico integrativo. Questa formazione è chiamata "10th form". I corsi del "10th form" si tengono solitamente in scuole multiculturali. Dopo questo anno la metà degli allievi si iscrive a una scuola superiore e raggiunge buoni risultati. Il resto degli allievi si indirizza verso le scuole professionali. Questo progetto è un esperimento costituito da attività speciali, condotte da insegnanti esperti che hanno un'abilità speciale nell'insegnare la lingua finlandese agli immigrati. La "10th form" è considerata come la continuazione degli studi di 1 anno per gli studenti che non sono di madrelingua finlandese e che in questo modo possono ottenere le abilità linguistiche minime necessarie per la scuola superiore-secondaria.

1. THE PROJECT

1.1 Description of the project

Objectives

The objectives of the additional education are to improve opportunities for further education, to provide information on working life, education and training and to help pupils to choose a place in secondary higher education and a career. In Helsinki the following 10th forms are available: basic 10th classes in comprehensive schools, vocational emphasis 10th classes cooperating with vocational schools and 10th class for students including Finnish as a second language, preparing for upper secondary school, which is offered in Itäkeskus.

The Project is meant at improving and strengthening migrant student's competence and performance in Finnish language, to develop students' learning and knowledge

acquisition skills and to provide additional supportive courses for students of immigrant background in upper secondary schools.

Activities

The Project, according to the national rules on education, offers basic education that can include a voluntary, one-year pre-school education as well as a voluntary, one-year additional comprehensive school education, the 10th form. This additional education is addressed to immigrant pupils, who can improve their opportunities for further education during one extra school year.

The activities carried out by the Project consist of courses for immigrant who have completed their secondary lower education. Courses concern Finnish language teaching, which is anyhow always included into the content of other subjects. There are three courses in Math, English language, History, Biology/Geography (in a unique course), and one course in Chemistry, Psychics and Health and Hygiene in the curriculum.

The students have more personal counselling than they have usually at the comprehensive school. This means that teachers give a relevant attention to all the needs that can be showed by the student, in reason of his/her own personal history of migration, of his/her family social and cultural condition.

Results

The 10th form was established in school year 2004 – 2005. The amount of students was 17, out of them 14 were entered into the studies which they had applied in joint application for entry, i.e. either vocational education or upper secondary education. 15 students attended school during year 2005 – 2006, out of which nearly all got into their first choice. In current school year 21 students are studying in the class.

The low level of drop out and of exit from the educational system testimonies the good result of this project. This shows how non-Finnish speakers can achieve good results at school if the school staff pays attention to their special needs.

1.2 Time, structure and steps of the project

The class was set up in the beginning of school year 2004-2005. In the beginning it was considered as permanent activity – depending of the coming results – but the organisational change in the Education Department complicated the idea of establishing the class. Since the project depend on the funding given by the Educational Department, the structural organisation of the 10th form depends on the choices made by the Department. This affected the possibility to establish, for the moment, a permanent activity.

1.3 Place and context

The educational system in Finland includes the pre-school education, comprehensive school, general and vocational secondary education, and higher education. The comprehensive school provides a nine-year educational programme with a voluntary 10th form for all school-age children, beginning at the age of seven. After completing their compulsory education students may go on to the upper secondary school, which provides three years of general education, or to vocational education lasting from two to six years. One out of two Finns has completed post-comprehensive school education and 23 per cent have a higher level qualification.

The students have either completed comprehensive school in Finland (their own country receive preparatory tuition (approximately one year) in Finnish comprehensive school. Some students have been in Finland over ten years, some one and half. The common problems for all students in academic language skills are

limited learning skills, difficulties to find the fundamental knowledge of the text, some syntactic problems of Finnish language skills, and difficulties in writing academic texts.

(For details:
http://www.mol.fi/mol/en/01_ministry/08_publications/02_monitori/02_monitori/mon2006_3_5_en.jsp, article of the Ministry of Labour about 19th form and attendance of upper secondary school by young immigrants).

1.4 Target

The target of this kind of supportive and additional education is mainly constituted by migrant or ethnic minorities students, aged 13-16, depending on their previous school past.

1.5 Methodology

The methodology is based on the idea of context based language tuition: it includes the tuition of theoretical subjects studied at the upper secondary school, Finnish language teaching integrated within the contexts of other subjects – i.e. Finnish in Maths/Maths in Finnish. Increasing students' motivation is also embedded into the teaching methodology and arrangements: opportunities to take upper secondary schools' courses in the evenings are possible for the students (for example three students are attaining the extended math course and two students Finnish as a mother tongue courses).

The intercultural approach is essential in the teaching and learning: the students practice the expression of their own opinions and ideas via given topics, mostly raised from the students' discussions and questions, in order to explore their identity/ies and hence participation into the social discourse. Topics are changing from Iraq war to school uniforms. Discussion is always coordinated by the teacher and this is also a discussion practicing situation.

1.6 Authors, Funding and Networks:

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Funding:

Municipal funding: costs of the class are included into the yearly budget of the education department.

Network:

Itäkeskus upper secondary school works in cooperation with the study counsellor Annantalo Arts Centre, during Finnish Language lessons in February (photography, video, music).

2. HINTS FOR AN EVALUATION

2.1. Strengths

2.1.1 The organisation's perspective

The project finds its strengths in the effort made for the Finnish language learning tuition; connection with Finnish language tuition inside other subjects. Also the Project gives possibilities for students to complete their knowledge in different subjects and to take upper secondary courses already during the 10th form (during the

evening). Teachers in upper secondary school for adults are experienced and very capable in teaching immigrant students.

2.1.2 Interculture map perspective

The project has developed a very efficient system capable to develop language competences in Finnish for immigrant students. In the additional form ethnic minorities students can overcome the main obstacle to school success. The Project considers the language difficulties as the principal problem that does not allow to young students to continue their studies in upper secondary school. Therefore the intervention is mainly based on the language learning, though it uses a variety of methods that implies not only the traditional teaching: Finnish as a second language is learnt also throughout experience-based approaches. This is a very useful approach because it allows students to understand some elements of ordinary life, of the community and of the territory where they live.

In particular the strongest aspect of the 10th form is related to the integrated approach that underlies language teaching: on the basis of this approach, Finnish can be taught also while coping with specific subjects, and, at the same time, other contents can be learnt while studying Finnish. This non-traditional method has increased the students' motivation. Therefore we can say that in this project, the language acquisition is embedded and integrated and this is the main cause of success, demonstrated by high rate of enrolment in further secondary education.

This kind of methods can be implemented if mother tongue or expert second language teachers are involved. The success of the Project is based on the high expertise and profile of teachers, and also on the necessary amount of resources that makes possible to offer intensive and continuous programmes for non Finnish speakers.

2.2.Critical points

2.2.1 The organisation's perspective

One of the teacher interviewed (Ilona Kuukka), affirms that the continuity of the class is the main concern at the moment. The contacts between the immigrant students and Finnish students remain minor during the school year. There are no opportunities to take advantage of peer assistance of native speakers.

Ilona Kuukka, the teacher interviewed for the completion of the case study, states:

“The Method of teaching Finnish language in the content of other subjects has been successful as well as the personal counseling during the year. In Itäkeskus School the students had identified themselves with upper secondary students although they still are at 10th. Because all the students are immigrants it has been easy to identify them with other immigrant students. That's why the School have planned more common courses for 10th grade students and Finnish students who study in Itäkeskus”.

2.2.2 Interculture map perspective

The Project shows the typical problems of Projects targeting specific needs only. During the time spent in the 10th form class, the ethnic minority student has few chances to interact with Finnish students of normal classes. It is certainly important to give students the instruments for communication and understanding, but the Project should find out solutions aimed at creating relations and links with native students. Possibly the 10th form should not been conceived as an interruption of normal school life: the continuity should be kept, in order to underline common elements and not to strengthen differences. At the same time, as described by the teacher interviewed, the

continuity of the Project is at risk, because of yearly-based funds that does not allow a long term view and wide perspectives.

2.3. Conclusion: what is “exportable” in the project

2.3.1 The organisation's perspective

The Project contents can be exported with no particular problems in other schools. The Itäkeskus school has decided to increase the number of 10th form common courses for Finnish and non-Finnish students. This is a successful element that must be taken into account in case of exportation, because otherwise the identification of 10th form with migrant students would produce prejudice and stigmatisation.

2.3.2 Interculture map perspective

Themes: Finnish language tuition and (one year) additional education for students who have to enter the secondary higher education or vocational training

Methodology: integrated language tuition can be exported with success if the courses are carried out by competent teachers who matured a high level of understanding of problems and needs of immigrant students and a excellent skills in of second language teaching techniques. This Project could be exported in other contexts by bringing a relevant innovation in teaching techniques concerning second language, that could be learnt from other teachers and experimented in schools.

3. LINKS

www.itakeal.edu.hel.fi/

Itäkeskus Upper Secondary School for Adults (Itäkeskuksen aikuislukio)