

## Private Secondary Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### The Swiss Approach to French and English Programmes: A Case Study

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People make a lot of assumptions about education. Lessons should last for about an hour. Students should learn in classrooms. And, fundamentally, students come to school to learn, and teachers come to school to teach. Even though teachers are working as hard as they have ever worked, schools are struggling to engage young people in their National Curriculums. According to PISA, the problem is not only the lack of knowledge of basic theoretical skills; it is also that students do not have the 21st century required skills because they have not been embedded in their everyday teaching and learning.

Schools are also struggling to prepare young people for work. Businesses have complained that they are hiring employees who lack crucial basic 21st century employment skills - such as problem solving - and reported that they need to provide training to school leavers to prepare them for their jobs. With this in mind, French and English secondary programmes are compared trying to identify their advantages and disadvantages when fulfilling the goals of education in the 21st century and more specifically whether they achieve the education objectives related to: the role of secondary education, curriculum standardization, teaching methods and assessment, and 21st century skills

#### The Role of Secondary Education

The tension between providing a broad curriculum and sound general education

on the one hand, and encouraging specialization on the other, is an important indicator of the differing roles of secondary education for French and English programmes. According to their curriculums, the French section seems to increase opportunities to specialize at secondary level (Economics, Sciences, or Humanities), which could potentially facilitate the specialization in a certain range of working skills. Meanwhile, the English section starts its specialization at the age of sixteen and its more inclined to do continuous testing assessments in order to check that national educational standards are being met.

The French section is designed to facilitate transition from primary to secondary through both curricular continuity and the provision of records on student progress. This may result, in good collaboration and communication between the French primary and secondary sections as well as with teachers. Developing and encouraging that model of collaboration may benefit the English section.

The English section social adjustment in mind when considering transition from primary to secondary, which generally coincides with adolescence. The French section could benefit from including Health education as part of its programme.

#### Curriculum Standardization

The French and English National Curriculums have gone through many reform strategies trying to increase academic standards. But academic work is only a part of education. It mainly involves analytical reasoning in subjects like science, literacy, math, which are often thought to be remote from the real world, just pure theory. However, this subject-oriented instruction may not be sufficient. According to PISA, countries like France and England have sacrificed much in desperate drive to raise standards in literacy, science and

numeracy. Yet, scores in the targeted disciplines have hardly improved and it is also affecting student engagement and teacher morale.

Furthermore, National Curriculums might not be meeting the 21st century challenges students will be facing in the near future. According to PISA, most fifteen years old students are lacking problem-solving skills. In the last couple of years, there has been a shift away from the focus on just teaching subjects (subject-oriented instruction) to an understanding that school must first teach students, (interdisciplinary themes - "*Teach more than maths in maths class*"). Even the UK CBI (Confederation of British Industry) is saying that the British National curriculum is too narrow and that, although accountability is important - just testing memory does not reflect the wider range of children's ability.

### **Teaching Methods and Assessments**

Teaching methods for both programmes seem to favor direct instruction of factual information and skills and "whole class" teaching, rather than group-project based, design based, or problem based learning and teaching methods. In general terms, there seems to be a need to strengthen teaching methods related to creativity, personal expression and non-verbal, non-mathematical modes of work, and of learning by discovery and imaginative play.

Regarding assessments, most efforts appeared to be focused on raising standards through more competition and accountability. When it comes to assessment, both French and English sections emphasize formal written examinations and extensive use of multiple choices. Though testing has a positive impact as a tool to provide "*Just In Time*" student feedback, it could, under specific conditions, increase competition between students, teachers and schools. For this reason, it is important to improve assessment tools

to realize the full positive impact of testing in students and teachers.

### **21st Century Skills**

Secondary education that children receive during their teenage years has been recognized as crucial to development of job skills and other attributes that affect the ability to function productively as a member of society. To that respect, both the French and English sections have started to incorporate some of those skills as part of educational programmes. 21st century skills, simply embrace the idea that human intelligence embraces much more than academic ability. However, it is important to continue to develop an integrated on what 21st century skills mean for both sections, since each section mentions different ones. If Swiss Private Schools are to develop candidates who can hold their own on a global stage, it simply must get better at equipping them with not only the knowledge but also with the skills and attitudes to handle this uncertain future, by providing them the right 21st century school learning environment.

In conclusion, French and English programmes achieve the goals established by their respective National Curriculums. However, more innovative efforts towards achieving the 21st century education goals will be welcome. In general terms, it is important to continue to develop an integrated vision on what 21st century skills mean for both sections. Hence, there seems to be a need to strengthen teaching methods and students assessment tools related to 21st century skills that might help improve student engagement and achievement.