

Teaching soft skills in primary school

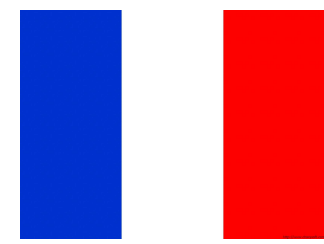
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Soft skills

Soft skills are “desirable qualities that do not depend on acquired knowledge, they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude” (Collins English Dictionary).

In France



French schools are very academic in their way of teaching: they focus on hard skills such as reading, counting, learning dates, facts and so on.

French parents tend to think that children go to school to learn such skills, to gain knowledge which can be measured, tested.

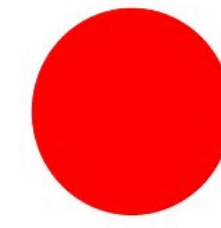
Even though the importance of teaching soft skills is becoming more recognized in France, the methods used to achieve this goal are still very academic: to teach the children to be good citizens, they are taught historic dates and facts, symbols of the republic and such things, which they have to learn by heart.

Our aim is to find better ways to teach young students these essential skills : respect, solidarity, team working and so on.



Figure 1: A typical classroom in France

In Japan



Because of its history: a farming people, suffering from earthquakes and tsunami quite often, and with many enemies, the Japanese people have always watched over one another, understanding that the group is stronger than the sum of the individuals. They try to teach their children that philosophy since preschool, with a very peculiar educational system.

The most outstanding method used is called **O-soji**, where all students participate in a basic housekeeping. As well as maintaining their classroom, they are responsible for the state of the halls, restrooms and school grounds.

O-soji
Children clean their school and have a scale of service
Helps to build their self-confidence and prepare them for life
Stimulate respect and integration: kids only start to eat their lunches after everyone else has been served
Kids are taught how to respect the nature with activities as growing vegetables and taking care of animals



Figure 2: Children cleaning their class

Other information about the Japanese educational system:

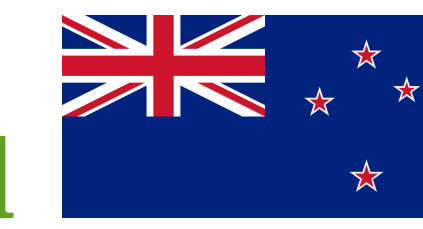
The curriculum of preschool is largely non academic.

Strong cultural and parental commitment to education

Classes average anywhere from thirty to forty-five students per class

Teachers do not rush to intervene or correct occasional misbehavior

In New Zealand



The importance of teaching soft skills has been taken into account in 2007 with the implementation of a new education program: The School Curriculum.

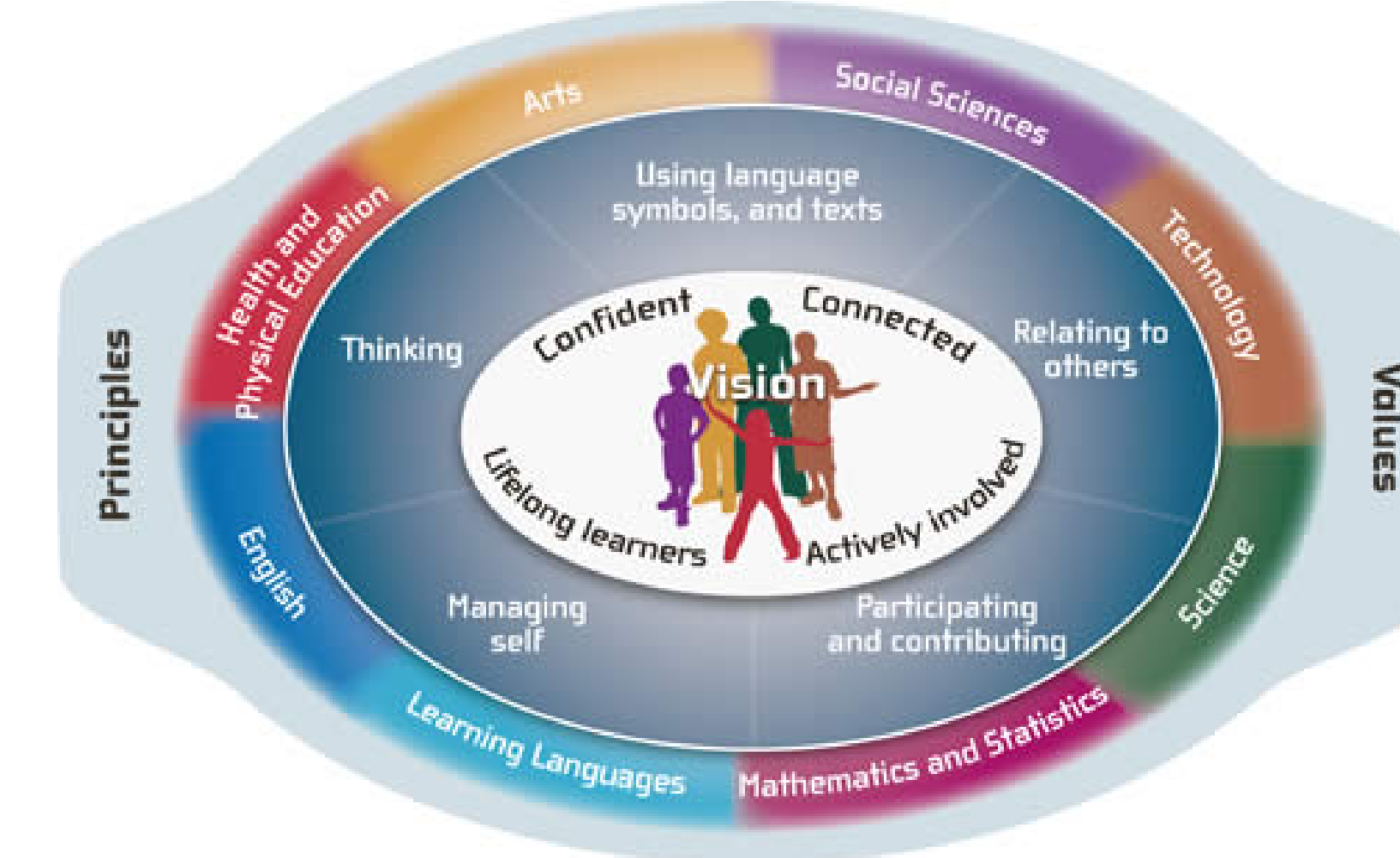
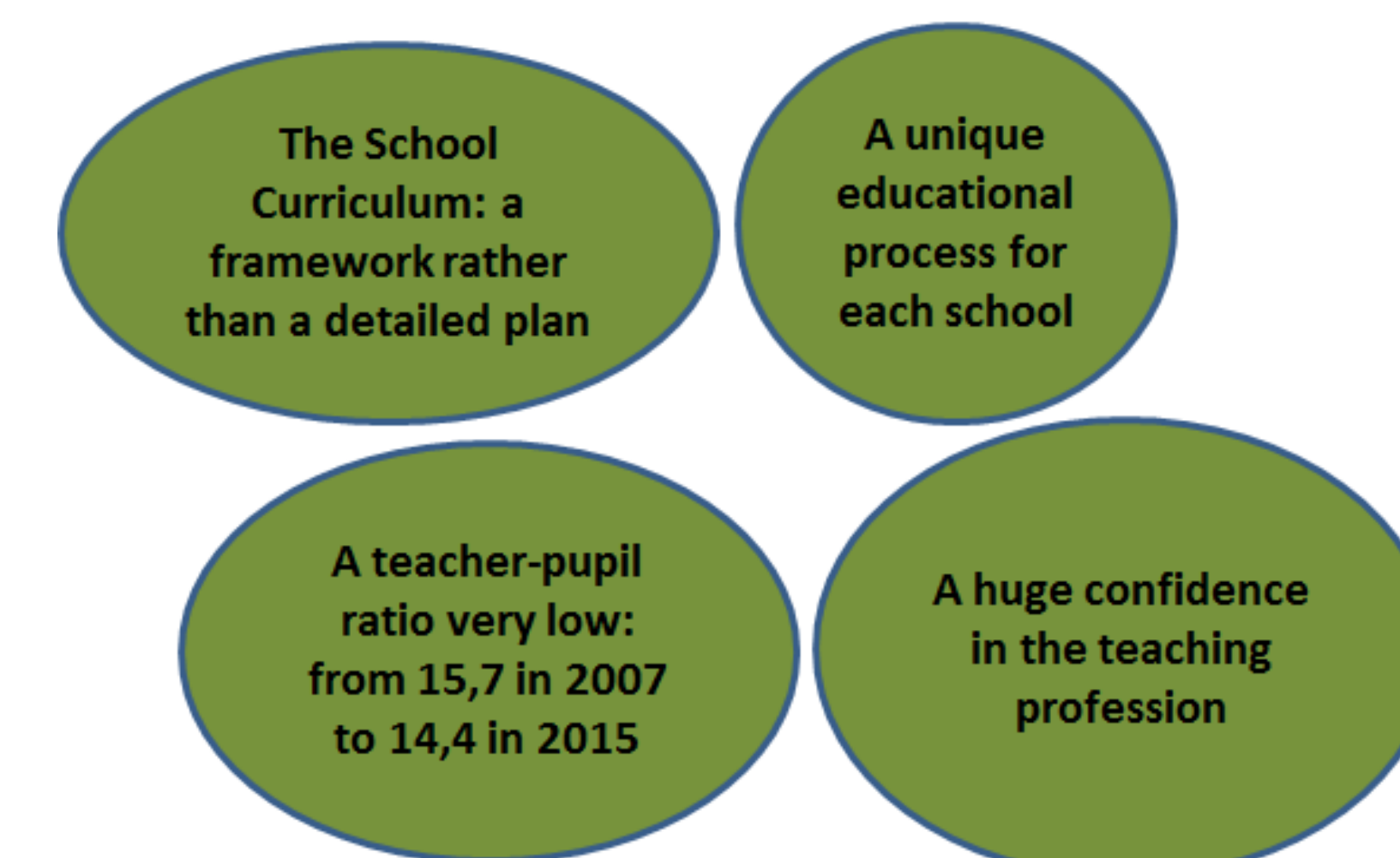


Figure 3: The School Curriculum

Each school has to create its own educational process. Teachers have to think about **key competencies** when planning their teaching program, the resources they use, their choice of language and topic, and the role that they get children to take in their own learning. They take on both a teaching role and a coaching role.



How do they teach key competencies in New Zealand ?

- For example to teach "Using languages, symbols and texts": Teach maths, science, but also dance drama and kapa haka
- Mix different key competencies by doing some school projects such as developing a video game, putting a vegetable garden in place into community, setting up new homes for penguins or setting up a TV show in the school



Figure 4: CamEast on Camera

How to implement it in France?

Implementing such ideas and projects in France would require the French parents to understand that the role of school is to prepare the children for their life, and so to provide them the skills which are going to be useful for them growing older.

Many parents, and probably teachers, might be afraid that trying to teach these skills to children will take time away from the learning of more academic knowledge, the importance of which is never underestimated in France.

To reassure the parents, we must show them how successful these methods, and how necessary these skills are, first with foreign examples, than by implementing it step by step in our own schools.

References

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