

Final objectives for philosophy-of-life education in the Flemish education system

In Belgium subjects regarding life views and moral issues are strongly linked to the religion or the moral system one belongs to. Firstly, the schools are split up according to the type of philosophy-of-life education they offer. We can distinguish 4 different types:

- **Denominational schools** which offer religion-based education (Catholic education, Protestant education, Jewish education, etc.);
- **neutral schools** which by means of a subject philosophy-of-life education offer the choice between classes in one of the official religions or non-confessional ethics;
- **Non-denominational schools** which only teach non-confessional ethics;
- **Alternative schools** which vary according to their pedagogical project.

Secondly, the Constitution guarantees all pupils, who are by law deemed to be of school age, two teaching periods per week of moral or religious education at school as part of the curriculum. These subjects are by no means subjected to any form of government control – as long as the basic democratic principles of society are respected.

The inspection of philosophy-of-life courses and its educational-support system are regulated by a separate Decree of 1 December 1993 and the executive decision BVR of 15 December 1993. The recognized bodies of the recognized religions (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant Evangelical, Anglican, Israeli and Islamic religions) and the recognized association of the non-confessional community specify the operations of the inspectorate and the guidance for the religions concerned and for non-confessional ethics. They are moreover in charge of the curricula of these subjects and the in-service training of the teachers concerned. The appointed inspectors-advisors have amongst others the following tasks and responsibilities:

- checking that the timetable and the statements regarding the choice of religion or non-confessional ethics are adhered to;
- checking the learning tools;
- checking the habitability, didactical suitability and hygiene of class rooms;
- issuing policy advice;
- checking that the curricula are implemented and supervising the standard of education;
- providing external support and evaluating the vocational and pedagogical competences of the teachers in question and stimulating initiatives to enhance professional quality;
- developing initiatives to enhance the quality of education of the subject of study concerned and guarding and stimulating the pedagogical project which was adapted to accommodate the philosophy of life within the subject of study;
- any other tasks assigned to them under the terms of laws and decrees.

The inspectors-advisors furnish information to:

- the recognized bodies of the recognized religions and the recognized association for non-confessional ethics on the contents, the curricula and the vocational competence of teachers;
- the senior chief-inspector – who heads the inspectorate, on the application of the statutory and administrative regulations.

In contrast to the inspectorate, the offices of the members of the philosophy-of-life courses inspectorate and guidance teams will remain level-of-education dependent.

Within the philosophy-of-life courses inspectorate, a Commission on Philosophy-of-Life Courses was set up. It:

- is a negotiation organ comprising representatives of the inspectors and advisors of the different recognized life views;
- negotiates on new developments and problems for the establishment of new religious or moral courses

- reports to the Inspector-General, Education Administration and recognized instances from the different life views
- gives policy advise on matters related to moral education and life courses.

The Commission was given the task by the inspectorate to write final objectives for moral education:

Final Objectives

1. Me and my life view

Knowledge

The student discovers and determines

1. the characteristics of his life view in his developed identity
2. the uniqueness of the life view which he/she practices.
3. the internal plurality of the life views which he/she practices.

Skills and attitudes

The student

4. articulates open and thoughtful ideas, feelings, experiences, norms and values from his own life view.
5. is respectful and open towards the uniqueness of his own life view.
6. is respectful and open towards the diversity within his own life view.
7. develops a positive self-image and takes initiative based on the perception of his own life view.

2. Me, my life view and that of others

Knowledge

The student discovers and determines

8. the uniqueness of other life views.
9. the uniqueness of a life view as presented by a privileged witness or a relevant representative.
10. the equalities and differences between life views.
11. the internal plurality in different life views.

Skills and attitudes

The student

12. recognizes and names the life determining coloring of thoughts, feelings, experiences, values and norms within himself and others.
13. respects the existence of other life views.
14. listens emphatically to peers with other life views
15. can place himself in the perspective others have on life.
16. is constructively critical towards his own and others' life views.
17. is respectful and open towards the uniqueness of other life views.

3. Me, my life view and society

Knowledge

The student discovers and determines

18. the differences between stereotypes linked to a life view and the reality of the life view.
19. difficulties and opportunities of dialogue and collaboration between life views.
20. the role of life views for himself and society.

Skills and attitudes

The student

21. distinguishes between life view stereotypes and life view identity.
22. constructively handles difficulties and opportunities of dialogue and collaboration between life views .
23. practices dialogue and collaboration between life views as a necessary skill to live in the reality of a society with many life views.
24. recognizes agreements and rules necessary to make cohabitation in a society with many life views possible.

In order to reach the final objectives practical agreements will need to be made. The commission offers a practical framework in which teachers can work:

Practical framework

Teachers

Teachers are encouraged to first discuss the final and listening to each other, asking information without

Also the chosen methodology needs to be applied gradually. Dialogue includes: exchanging information and listening to each other, asking information without

objectives amongst each other before starting any discussion, initiating conversation, ... Establishing a projects involving students. Perhaps the discussion can deep conversation is the ultimate goal.

be centralized (school community?) in order to allow

teachers who work less hours and those who work in aThe developmental and psychological capabilities of the school without a large variation of life views to take part age groups need to be taken into consideration of course.

in the conversation. Teachers need to learn the final

objectives themselves before bringing them to the **Frequency**

students. If they don't collaborate and start up a dialogue

themselves, it won't be possible to bring students to do A practical agreement on the frequency is important to avoid extremes going from those who don't work on the

subject, those who constantly work on it and those who are pushed by the school management to organize projects.

Initiation

We respect the tempo of students and schools. Not all To initiate the implementation of the final objectives we

schools/teachers have a tradition of 'collaboration'. start with at least 1 mutual project and a time investment

Some teachers have a spread out schedule and can't put of maximum 6 teaching hours throughout the school

much time in projects. Implementation needs to happen year to work on mutual projects. Spending more time on

gradually. Teachers/schools need to show they are it needs to be motivated through the realization of goals

working on it. Inspection-guidance will check-up on included in the teaching plan.

them and offer support where necessary.

Distinction per grade is possible. The number of teaching hours and the number of projects will be filled

Of course the tempo of students is also significant. Not in differently in primary and secondary education. The

everyone finds it easy to listen to other opinions and to proposed frequency will be evaluated and if needed

express their own. They will be encouraged to improve. changed. It is important to indicate how much time is

spent on dialogue and collaboration throughout the curriculum.

Gradual work

It is advised not to start with projects on delicate or **Projects and your own subject** explosive subjects but from communal and general

themes like celebration, feelings, sadness, mourning, The tension between 'projects' and the 'own subject'

suffering, love, ... Start from themes which can form taught needs to be balanced. It is possible to continue

bridges and not those which will blow up bridges. Also and elaborate upon a mutual project within your own

take into consideration the generation difference class. Within a class all final objectives should be given

between the students and the teachers. Some young attention. During teaching hours they should receive

people don't see the problem older generations might more attention than during the 'mandatory' projects. The

have in some cases. Some youngsters find differentiation quality of projects is more important than the quantity.

very normal since they grew up in a society which is Moral education final objectives should be part of each

much more diverse than it used to be. subject where possible, while also be realized through

projects outside of the regular teaching plan.

Sources:

Eurydice:

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