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Advice concerning the operationalization of Flemish
cross-curricular attainment targets: remembrance and
peace education

1 Introduction

On 22 April 2009, the Flemish Parliament adopted a Parliamentary Act introducing new attainment targets and development goals in primary and secondary education.¹ Two of the new cross-curricular attainment targets in secondary education focus on avoiding intolerance and racism, and on insight into the role of conflicts:

- “students learn from historical and current examples of intolerance, racism and xenophobia”
- “students give examples of the potentially constructive and destructive role of conflicts”

Two elements are of importance in this precise formulation of cross-curricular attainment targets. First, various time perspectives are opened up. Reference is made more specifically to lessons from *historical* and *current* examples of intolerance, racism and xenophobia. This means that the attainment targets can be operationalized through two separate approaches: a diachronic approach that seeks to learn lessons from history, and a synchronic approach that pursues the same goal by focusing on contemporary phenomena. The second attainment target also contains these two dimensions, as the potentially constructive and destructive roles of conflicts can be explained by examples from both past and present.

Secondly, the formulation of cross-curricular attainment targets focuses on aspects of what we tend to call ‘negative’ peace. ‘Negative peace’ refers to avoiding or ending war, direct violence or discrimination. It focuses on conflicts, intolerance and racism, and on how efforts may be made to eliminate them through training and education. The counterpart of ‘negative peace’ is ‘positive peace’, which refers to a situation of stability, justice and non-violence that realizes and safeguards the presence of a culture of peace.²

Taking these two elements as a starting point, the present advice of the Peace Institute draws attention to a number of important elements related to operationalizing the cross-curricular attainment targets in question. It first deals with the importance of the historical *and* contemporary approaches, then draws out a few key points regarding the historical approach (remembrance education). Finally we shall discuss whether, in the process of operationalizing cross-curricular attainment targets, projects for promoting the conditions of a (‘positive’) peace culture may complement projects dealing with the avoidance of all types of violence (‘negative’ peace),.

2 Operationalization of cross-curricular attainment targets: remembrance and peace education

In the preambular points of the 2009 Act on the establishment of new attainment targets and development goals for primary and secondary education, the cross-curricular attainment targets mentioned are concretized by referring to remembrance education. In the explanatory text on the Act, remembrance education is described as a “future-oriented means to learn how to go forward in society by learning lessons from a retrospective look at our own society as well as societies

elsewhere in Europe and the world”.³ How to operationalize remembrance education was further elaborated through a definition provided by the Special Committee for Remembrance Educationⁱ. The Committee defines remembrance education as “working towards an attitude of active respect in today’s society, based on the collective memory of human suffering that was caused by human activities such as war, intolerance, or exploitation and that must never be forgotten”.⁴

Remembrance education thus manages to operationalize the attainment targets on the basis of a historical approach, more specifically by inciting students to learn from *historical* examples of intolerance, racism and xenophobia. Going back to the abovementioned features of cross-curricular attainment targets as described in the 2009 Act, however, we find that remembrance education operationalizes the attainment targets only partially. As mentioned before, the precise formulation of the cross-curricular attainment targets also opens up a *contemporary* dimension. The latter can be implemented through educational projects that teach students to learn from *current* (synchronic) examples of intolerance, racism and xenophobia. The study ‘*On positive and negative peace*’, in which the Flemish Peace Institute analysed the concept and provision of peace education at primary and secondary levels in Flanders, shows that many projects are being set up that focus on peace education from exactly this perspective.⁵ The related projects address the issues of avoiding or ending wars, direct violence, or discrimination on the basis of current themes. According to the typology of peace education used in the studyⁱⁱ, these projects form part more specifically of ‘international education’, ‘human rights education’ and ‘conflict management education’.⁶

It is important to add that the concept and practice of peace education also includes educational projects directed at ‘positive’ peace - at realizing and maintaining a culture of peace. In section four we shall return to these types of peace education, which can also contribute to realizing the spirit of the cross-curricular attainment targets.

The foregoing shows that there are many roads leading to the operationalization and realization of the cross-curricular attainment targets in question. Both remembrance education and forms of ‘contemporary’ education about ‘negative’ peace can contribute to the implementation and realization of these targets. This view of operationalization rests on a holistic interpretation of the attainment targets that points to realizing the targets through a conceptual distinction between the historical and the contemporary approach.

ⁱ The Minister of Education established the Special Committee for Remembrance Education to support remembrance education in the Flemish schools system. The committee encompasses the four Flemish educational umbrella structures as well as the persons responsible for education at six representative institutions that have helped teach the story of war in Flanders. The not-for-profit organization Kazerne Dossin takes a coordinating role on the Committee. See www.herinneringseducatie.be

ⁱⁱ Based on the Ian Harris typology, the study distinguishes five types of peace research: international education, human rights education, development education, environmental education and conflict management education. See Castryck, G. and Duquet, N. (2010), *On positive and negative peace. Peace Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in Flanders: conceptual demarcation and analysis of provision*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute.

3 Points to note on remembrance education

The potential and the importance of remembrance education in the operationalization and realization of cross-curricular attainment targets are obvious. However, a conceptual examination of remembrance education brings out several issues that need proper attention in practice, to avoid unnecessarily compromising the remembrance education project.⁷ That is why we call for caution in implementing remembrance education and for awareness of the potential tensions and problems associated with this form of education.

First of all it must be noted that the commemoration and remembrance of atrocities like those committed during the world wars have a purpose of their own, which can exist independently of possible contemporary – educational – goals. The primary aims of remembrance, reflection and respect can, in other words, exist as isolated issues without being subordinated to educational goals directed at today's society. While they can effectively contribute to the wished-for interpersonal behaviour (democracy, freedom and tolerance), commemoration and remembrance are best not reduced to a mere tool for promoting that behaviour. In other words: contemporary attitudes are not the sole or primary objective of commemoration. Of course, commemoration and the deep-seated conviction that the atrocity must never be repeated can constitute a strong motive for working towards everyday attitudes that leave no breeding ground for such horrors. The topical pedagogical value of commemoration, however, lies much more in creating the *motive* to work towards contemporary societal objectives than it does in offering a *method* of work towards that goal.

A second point to note is that while the attainment targets in question have a cross-curricular character, the skills embedded in remembrance education are closely related to the discipline of history. Two aspects need to be stressed in this context. First, there are other ways to target the cross-curricular attainment targets in question than through remembrance education alone (see above and below). Second, putting cross-curricular remembrance education into practice involves the risky assumption that others besides history teachers will also have the specific expertise required. The Special Committee for Remembrance Education acknowledges the complex relationship between remembrance education and teaching history. Although the Committee insists on adopting the cross-curricular approach as a starting point, and believes that remembrance education does not coincide with history education, it recognises the special tie between remembrance education and teaching history. The Committee therefore argues for interpreting remembrance education as a broad pedagogical construct that includes various subjects and teachers, but that still needs the input of history teachers in order to supply adequate teaching materials and to support other teachers in addressing subjects outside their specialization.⁸

A third point to note relates to the conclusion above that cross-curricular attainment targets can be operationalized not only through remembrance education, but also through other forms of education about avoiding or ending war, direct violence, or discrimination. This conclusion can, however, be further developed by exploring the riches and variety of peace education, both in concept and practice, and more particularly by also considering education about the various

'positive' aspects of peace. We shall investigate this type of education and its relevance to Flemish cross-curricular attainment targets in the next section.

4 Education on positive peace

As mentioned earlier, the cross-curricular attainment targets as currently defined start out mainly from the negative aspects of peace (conflicts, violence, intolerance, xenophobia, racism). Both in explanations and concrete descriptions of cross-curricular attainment targets, and when operationalizing them through remembrance education, the lessons to be learned from the past are usually limited to examples that should not be followed. They concern 'examples of intolerance, racism and xenophobia', lessons from conflicts, and 'human suffering caused by human actions such as war, intolerance or exploitation'. This amounts to a significant limitation of the scope of application, not only of remembrance education, but also of peace education in general.

After all, peace education involves more than just 'negative' peace. As shown in the research report *'On positive and negative peace'* of the Flemish Peace Institute, the Flemish education system is actively working on peace education in the broader sense of the word, more particularly on teaching peaceful coexistence and realizing and maintaining a culture of peace.⁹ That peace education is a concept capable of being invested with many different meanings also becomes clear from the description supplied by UNESCO in the frame of the *United Nations Year for Tolerance* (1995) and its *Culture of Peace* decade (2001-2010). According to UNESCO, the aim of this kind of education is "to integrate (...) education for peace, human rights and democracy in the perspective of sustainable development". The objective of peace education in this sense is to develop a peace culture, in other words the durable integration of physical and structural non-violence, human rights and democracy. This relatively broad concept of peace education, referring not only to what we described as 'negative' but also to 'positive' peace, also closely relates to what the then Minister of Education put forward in various statements as the ultimate objective of remembrance education, namely the universal values of democracy, freedom and tolerance.¹⁰

Although a broad concept that spans both 'negative' and 'positive' peace may not operationalize the existing attainment targets according to the letter, it is certainly in line with their spirit. When implementing and realizing these attainment targets in practice, therefore, it will make sense to take due note of the rich variety of peace education in conceptual and project terms, and more specifically of projects aimed at 'positive' peace. This conceptual and operational broadening can only help to optimize the cross-curricular nature of the attainment targets in question.

5 Advice

The Flemish Peace Institute wishes to draw attention to three key elements regarding the cross-curricular attainment targets in secondary education that are focused on avoiding intolerance and racism, and on insight into the role of conflicts:

- The formulation of the cross-curricular attainment targets combines a historical and a contemporary approach. This means that for their operationalization, *current* examples of intolerance and racism can be used in addition to historical examples. Both remembrance education and other forms of education about avoiding and ending war, direct violence, or discrimination can thus contribute to realizing the cross-curricular attainment targets.
- An important point relating to operationalization of the attainment targets through remembrance education is that commemoration and remembrance carry an intrinsic value of reflection and respect. The topical pedagogical value of commemoration lies much more in creating the *motive* to work towards contemporary societal objectives than it does in offering a *method* of work towards that goal. Further, the relationship between the cross-curricular approach to remembrance education and the discipline of history is complex and anything but self-evident.
- Aside from working on examples that should not be followed, types of peace education focussing on positive conditions for peaceful coexistence can also contribute to realizing the intent of the cross-curricular attainment targets. After all, peace education involves not only projects about avoiding various types of violence, but also a wide array of projects that aim at realizing and maintaining a culture of peace, based on values such as justice, freedom and sustainability.

In view of these points to be noted on the cross-curricular attainment targets in question, the Flemish Peace Institute advises the Flemish Parliament, the Flemish Government and actors in the educational area as follows:

- **In addition to the historical approach embodied in remembrance education, other contemporary forms of education about avoiding or ending war, violence or discrimination should also be included when operationalizing the attainment targets;**
- **In the practice of remembrance education, attention must be paid to the intrinsic value of commemoration and remembrance, and to the complex relationship between the cross-curricular approach to remembrance education and the discipline of history;**
- **Operationalization of the attainment targets should not be limited to focusing on examples that should not be followed and the avoidance of intolerance and racism; it should also take due note of projects aiming at the development of a culture of peace, based on positive values such as justice, freedom and sustainability.**

End notes

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- ¹ Act for ratification of the Flemish Government Decree of 13 February 2009 on the attainment targets and development goals in primary and secondary education, Flemish Parliament, 22 April 2009, document 2124 (2008-2009) - No. 1-3.
- ² Castryck, G. and Duquet, N. (2010), *On positive and negative peace. Peace Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in Flanders: conceptual demarcation and analysis of provision*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute.
- ³ Act for ratification of the Flemish Government Decree of 13 February 2009 on the attainment targets and development goals in primary and secondary education, as note 1 above.
- ⁴ See <http://www.herinneringseducatie.be/ADVISEERT/tabid/95/Default.aspx>, consulted on 31 May 2010.
- ⁵ Castryck, G. and Duquet, N. (2010), *On positive and negative peace*, as note 2 above.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 28 ff.
- ⁷ Castryck, G. (2009), *Remembrance education in Flemish education: an argument in favour of Holocaust remembrance, history teaching and peace education?*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute.
- ⁸ See <http://www.herinneringseducatie.be/ADVISEERT/tabid/95/Default.aspx>, consulted on 31 May 2010.
- ⁹ See Kavadias, D., Stouthuysen, P. and De Mayer, S. (2008), *On micro and macro peace. Peace Education in Primary and Secondary Schools in Flanders*, Brussels: Flemish Peace Institute, and Castryck, G. and Duquet, N. (2010), *About positive and negative peace*, as note 2 above.
- ¹⁰ Castryck, G. (2009), *Remembrance education in Flemish education*, as note 7 above.

The Flemish Peace Institute was founded by Flemish Parliamentary Act to serve as an independent institute for the purpose of conducting research on peace issues. The Peace Institute engages in scientific research, documents relevant information sources, and informs and advises the Flemish Parliament and the public at large on questions of peace.

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