Starting points for the cross-curricular final objectives outlined for secondary education.

Situation

Cross-curricular final objectives are minimum targets relating to knowledge, insight, skills and attitudes that do not specifically belong to a subject, but are sought after by means of various courses, educational projects, and other activities. Every school has the social task of striving for the cross-curricular final objectives in the pupils (obligation to perform to the best of one's ability). The school, when inspected, shows that they work at the final objectives using their own planning.

The final objectives for the first grade of secondary education were introduced in September 1997. Since September first 2002 the final objectives for the courses in basic education and the cross-curricular final objectives for the second and third grade were introduced.

In the cross-curricular final objectives the government establishes for the schools a number of tasks they find important for education and society. Society finds it important for instance that the pupils are taught civic responsibility, that they live healthily and take care of each other and their surrounding.

The first generation of cross-curricular final objectives is arranged in a number of themes. For the first grade those are: learning to learn, social skills, education for citizenship, health education and environmental education. Additional themes in the second and third grade are expressive-creative education and, for the general secondary education, technical-technological education.

The initiative to introduce cross-curricular final objectives had, amongst others, to do with a shift of emphasis from a subject-oriented order to a more integrated education. Additionally there was the finding that not all the contents and educational aspects important for a broad basic education were at least partially to be found in the courses. The cross-curricular final objectives therefore created a sort of 'safety net' in which valuable and socially relevant content could be structurally dealt with. In the period of the implementation of the cross-curricular final objectives the view on education in Flanders evolved to a greater focus on the functioning of the school as a whole. This was accompanied by the concept of quality control in which the education inspectorate made the transition from inspecting courses of individual teachers to the screening of a school as a whole. Introducing the cross-curricular final objectives was an expression of the same vision.

The motives for implementing the cross-curricular final objectives remain relevant Yet there have in the mean time been other social and educational evolutions, such as the growing importance of the schools' policy making power. Additionally, a number of years of experience was built up concerning the 'first generation' cross-curricular final objectives. This experience teaches us that there is a relatively strong consensus about the too large number of cross-curricular final objectives. There was also a growing body of opinion about vague and dated final objectives or ones that were difficult to achieve. As a consequence of pressure by organizations, politics, economics and social changes, the cross-curricular final objectives became over time too large a package. And finally there was the feedback on some missing elements.

The amount of cross-curricular final objectives especially was an important concern. The policy document Education and Formation 2004-2009 states: over the years the diversity of the cross-curricular final objectives has increased. This points to the fact that society relies more and more on the educational system to teach young people competences in widely divergent areas. However, the educational system cannot respond to all social and

educational questions'. This finding was immediately linked to an actualization of the cross-curricular final objectives: 'This is why we will evaluate the cross-curricular final objectives. Via an inquiry of different groups we will ascertain the social importance, the educational relevance and the feasibility of the cross-curricular themes and their development into final objectives. The evaluation will serve as a foundation for revising the cross-curricular final objectives. We want to make sure that the educational system takes its responsibility in realizing the objectives that are labeled as a priority from both the social and educational point of view. On the other hand, not all social claims must immediately find a current translation in education.'

The evaluation of the cross-curricular final objectives indicated in the policy document was put into practice via an OBPWO-project (educational policy and practice oriented scientific research). In this research, the social and educational relevance and the feasibility of the final objectives were evaluated. The Minister of Education Frank Vandenbroucke announced in his policy letter 2007 - 2008 that the cross-curricular final objectives would be reviewed based on the preliminary results of this research. These preliminary research results confirm amongst others the aforementioned feedback about the number of final objectives and about the vague wording and/or feasibility of some final objectives.

1 Accents of the revision

1.1 Objectives

The first objective when reviewing the cross-curricular final objectives is reducing the total number for the three grades, without decreasing the important function these final objectives have in guaranteeing a broad basic education. Making sure the total package is attainable for schools and teachers is a second objective. A third objective relates to clarifying final objectives that are, according to the respondents in the investigation, vague or too complex in their phrasing. A fourth point pertains to the actualizations of the contents of the cross-curricular final objectives. A number of objectives are dated or no longer relevant. At times certain pieces of knowledge, skills or attitudes that are considered to be important in this day and age, are missing. It should also be considered that the new, up-to-date final objectives have to aim for an application in the educational field during the next ten to fifteen years. This does not mean that all cross-curricular final objectives will change or disappear. When feasible, everything that is relevant and sufficiently clear will be kept as-is as much as possible.

1.2 Vision

Reviewing the cross-curricular final objectives should be a future-oriented exploration of basic education. In the decree on enforcing the final objectives and development goals in the first grade of the regular secondary education (1996), basic education has been defined content-wise from a social perspective as well as a perspective of personal development.

The European Union offers an important reference framework for the organization of the social part of basic education. In December 2006, a recommendation of the European Parliament on key competences and life-long learning was agreed upon. This European reference framework has been developed to "*support the members of the European Union in their efforts to offer both young people and adults the opportunity to develop their key competences in such a way that they are ready for a life as adults".*

Inspired by this European recommendation, and in concordance with ideas from the OESO-project 'The definition and selection of key competences', the revision of the final objectives should primarily offer an answer to the question which capacities every citizen in Flanders minimally needs to be able to participate actively in society, and to develop a personal life.

To review the cross-curricular final objectives the choice has been made to fall back on the definition as mentioned in the ratification decree of final objectives mentioned before, in which, in the starting points for the final objectives of the first grade of secondary education, a feasible and actual vision on basic education is defined as follows:

Every pupil has the right to a relevant basic education. Basic education prepares a pupil for a creative functioning in society in a critical way, and for the development of a personal life.

1.3 Structure

To give shape to these ideas, a new reference framework has been designed, which will be the test for the existing final objectives. This framework makes operational this vision on basic education in seven *contexts* or areas of application:

Development of the person in contexts or areas of application such as

- Physical health and safety
- Mental health
- Socio-relational development

In a multi-cultural, democratic society in contexts such as

- Environment and sustainable development
- Political-legal society
- Socio-economic society
- Socio-cultural society

Placing these labels on the prevailing final objectives showed that certain 'conditions' for self-development and participation in society were repeated a number of times. Essential skills such as thinking and acting autonomously, communication and cooperation, a positive image of self and resilience, functioning in a social context, exploration, initiative and creativity and so on, are mentioned in every package more than once and as such contribute to the impeding overlap and complex phrasing.

In order to achieve more transparency and simplicity, a common 'trunk' is created. This way a duality of a basis on the one hand, and seven contexts on the other hand is created, which have to be read and used in connection.

- The 'trunk' contains essential skills which have been formulated in a generic or common way, i.e. devoid of context. This way they become communal for all contexts, and what is more, they become transferable to (and realizable in) all matters pertaining to education and upbringing in the school (the subjects, projects, field trips, contacts with the personnel aiding in upbringing), fitting in the culture of the school.
- The seven '*contexts*' mentioned above contain only those final objectives that are specific and essential for that particular area of application of basic education.
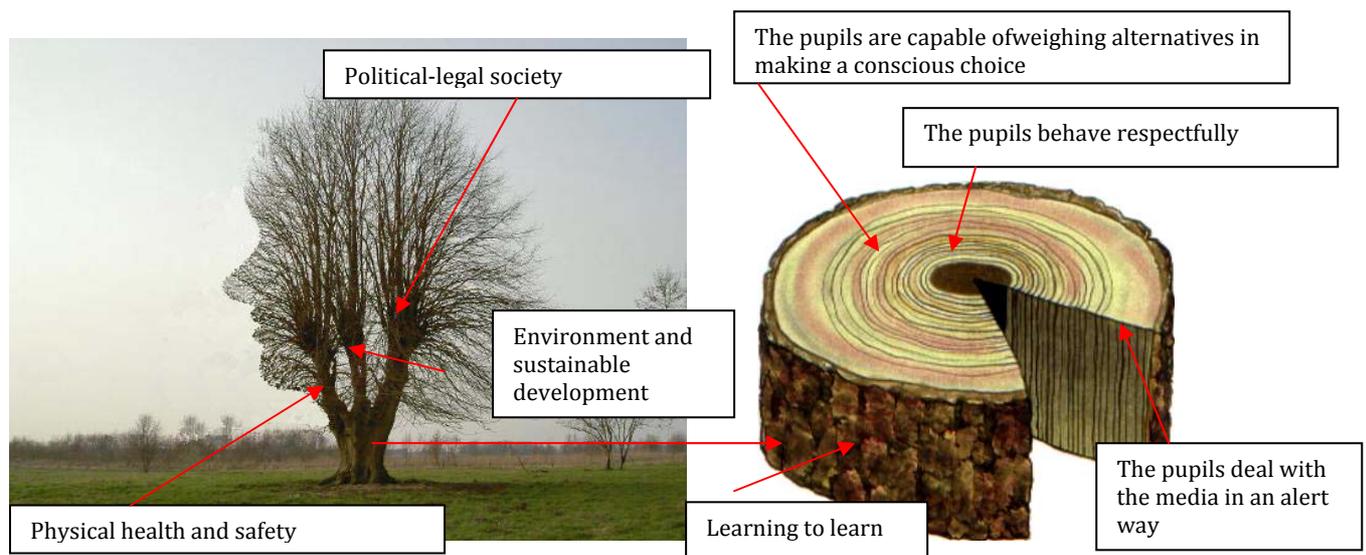
This way a conveniently arranged and coherent whole of one trunk and seven contexts arises, which, moreover, is not offered to one grade in specific. Learning to learn, in connection with this trunk and contexts-approach, will remain a package of its own, because of the specific character of these cross-curricular final objectives (see below).

The division between a trunk and (distinct) contexts on the one hand, and learning to learn on the other, is in this respect nothing more than a *framework of ordering*, which makes it possible to maintain the general picture whilst at the same time allowing for the control of being essential, complete and of number.

This division is, in other words, not meant to split up the development process of the basic education in different parts. The division is most likely too artificial and too arbitrary. Trunk, contexts and learning to learn have to be read in their coherence, so that they keep their dynamic nature and are not constricted. This way they can be regrouped in meaningful combinations as desired by the school and the teacher (see point 3).

The goals and coherence of this new structure could be represented schematically using the metaphor of a tree.

Figure 1: schematic representation of the structure of cross-curricular final objectives

Political-legal society

The pupils are capable ofweighing alternatives in making a conscious choice

The pupils behave respectfully

Environment and sustainable development

The pupils deal with the media in an alert way

Physical health and safety

Learning to learn

Comments to figure 1:
The trunk keeps track of the growth rings in the wood that represent the procurement of key skills, made concrete in final objectives. The seven branches represent the contexts, the final objectives themselves being leaves. The final objectives for learning to learn constitute the bark that protects the entire tree, which grows with it and looks different for every tree. As is usual for trees, the root system is not or only partially visible. The same often holds for the school policy in relation with the pedagogic project and the education it offers. However, the tree can only survive and bear fruit thanks to the quality of the soil and the work the roots perform to get the juice flowing.

Since the institution of the first generation of cross-curricular final objectives, schools have been able to get quite a lot of experience implementing them. Feedback from the schools on the feasibility of the final objectives, in combination with their wish to let their own mission and vision shine through more than is possible now, led to the proposition to no longer offer the cross-curricular final objectives on a per-grade base.

In any case, aspects from developmental psychology and the ever-changing environments in which the process of learning runs its course will always lead to differentiated moments of choice and a repeated approach.

The final objectives as they are in effect now are used globally for the secondary education: these objectives are strived for throughout the six years of secondary education. The final objectives refer to a 'final behaviour' that is aimed for when leaving the secondary education and to learning as a continuous process.

The new ordering framework for cross-curricular final objectives asks of the school to develop its policy autonomously whilst using the perspective of accountabilisation and policy-making ability. The expertise of the school board and the teachers, the cooperation, the consultation and school planning offer enough guarantees to do justice to the principle of subsidiarity. This means that many decisions pertaining to the implementation of cross-curricular final objectives can be made at the level of the schools and not at a higher echelon.

When, where, by whom and in which subjects or projects and at which opportunities efforts are being made to realise these final objectives is the responsibility of the school and all the teachers. Other contributing factors are the pedagogical project of the school, the expertise and the professional development of the teaching staff, the public of pupils, the school environment and current affairs. However, in striving for the final objectives the schools are not left to their own devices. Both parents and pupils play a key role in this respect. Next to all of the above there is informal learning, learning outside of the school and the civil context in which the pupils grow up to take into account.

Putting cross-curricular final objectives into words on a global (i.e. for the entire secondary education) level should not lead to the interpretation that all final objectives should be represented in all grades. This would lead to the unintentional aggravation of the efforts to be made. However, it can be expected that each grade in every school makes a reasonable effort in regard to the whole of the final objectives. The effort per grade should be in proportion to the total time the pupils spend in secondary education, though it is not possible or desirable to maintain strict quantitative criteria. Keeping the careers of the pupils in the schools in mind, it is important that the schools communicate the choices they make pertaining to cross-curricular final objectives. The principle of consecutiveness should be adhered to: the second grade builds on the teachings of the first grade, the third grade builds on the teachings of the second. The school communities have an important role to play in this communication.

1.4 Sources

A couple of important sources and reports inspired the elaboration of this set of cross-curricular final objects to a great extent.

- First and foremost there is the first generation of cross-curricular final objectives, ordered in the packages health education, social skills, environmental education, and education for citizenship. Overlap is being eliminated, whatever is missing is added and what is unclear is being reformulated.
- As far as the revision of the cross-curricular final objectives in art and creative education is concerned, the research of Anne Bamford (2007) as well as the findings of the 'commission of culture and education' (which was founded as a consequence of said research) has been used. The goal here is an art-related cultural education that starts from the environment of the pupils. These final goals are integrated in the trunk as well as in the contexts.
- As far as learning to learn is concerned, it has been decided to make this a package of its own. This decision was influenced by recent results in investigations of the brain. Learning to learn proves to have a character of its own as a cross-curricular feature. The package is closely related to the core tasks of the educational system, and is therefore in need of a more clearly defined interpretation, which has to be manifestly supportive of the evolution of the contents of the education, the educational psychological processes and of a growing complexity. Learning to learn is of a more imperative character than the other final objectives, as the goal here is that the pupils at the end of the secondary education have made a manner of learning adapted to their own way of learning. These final objectives are offered – other than the rest of the cross-curricular final objectives – on a per-grade basis as a separate package of final objectives. This is done on the one hand to focus on their 'core task

of the school' status, and to offer the teachers something to hold on to in their planning. In the tree metaphor, they could be considered to be the *bark* of the tree that protects the entire tree, growing with it and having a different appearance for every tree.

1.5 What has changed?[1]

These are the most important changes as compared to the first generation of cross-curricular final objectives.

- The new concept of cross-curricular final objectives will be offered in **a framework of ordering** which gives structure and an overview for the interpretation of basic education in its social definition.
- The final objectives are put in a **future-oriented** way, on the basis of contemporary reference frameworks and considering social developments in Flanders, Europe and the world. Examples of concepts that have made it to the trunk or branches – possibly in a different phrasing – are diversity and tolerance, remembrance education, media wisdom, self-sufficiency, esthetical competence and spirit of enterprise.
- Not all possible topics have been made explicit in the final objectives. Enumerating themes means excluding others. As a result, strict attention has been spent on making sure that there is a balance in the level of detail when **selecting** and phrasing the final objectives.
- The final objectives in the area of **expressive-creative education** of the second and third grade have been integrated in the both the trunk and the contexts. They no longer form a separate package.
- The total package of trunk and contexts has been reduced from the original 171 final objectives to 96 final objectives (27 in the trunk and 69 as contexts). This important **reduction** has been made possible by the combination of trunk and contexts, which allowed for the replacement of similar final objectives by a meaningful alternative, and for the elimination of overlap and of final objectives that are less relevant from a social point of view and unfeasible from an educational point of view.
- The final objectives **learning to learn** for the first grade have been reordered in accordance with the already existing example of the second and third grade, refining the line of learning in the process. The total package of learning to learn contains 48 final objectives.
- **Overlap** has been reduced as much as possible. Because of the mutual coherence of the trunk and contexts, partial overlap will necessarily still remain.
- Great effort has been put into making the phrasing of the final objectives **transparent**. 'Vague' final objectives have been put to the test as to what they really mean, and have been rephrased to eliminate ambiguity.
- The choice of **verbs** received special attention. These were the criteria that were used to make a choice:
  1. When the combination of knowing, being able to and wanting to (be) is meant, a *verb denoting act* will be used.
  2. '*being able to*' (or being competent at) will be used in case the final objective refers to a combination of 'having knowledge of something', 'having insight into something' and 'applying something'
  3. Attitude and intention will be phrased as '*being willing to*'
- With the exception of learning to learn, the renewed cross-curricular final objectives will be phrased as a **total package** for the total duration of six years that comprise the secondary education. This **approach on a non per-grade** basis holds both a

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[1]The final objectives for ICT that have recently been instated for the first grade of secondary education, as well as the final objectives for **technical and technological education** for the second and third grade of the ASO remain unchanged. The latter will later on have to build on the actualized final objectives for **technique** for the first grade.

challenge and a stimulus for the forming of a policy by the board of the school. The need for activities related to cooperation, planning and evaluation will create lots of opportunities for the development of the school.

The development of the cross-curricular final objectives for trunk and contexts and the final objectives for learning to learn took place in separate development commissions comprised of experts in the field of education (teachers and principals, coordinators, pedagogic advisors, teacher trainers and academic personnel).
Draft texts were given to a resonance group. The members of this group, representatives of the various social domains, provided both oral and written feedback, each from their own perspective on society.

2 Introductions: trunk and contexts and learning to learn

In order to guarantee a broad and harmonic basic education, in which essential knowledge, skills and attitudes have their place, the final objectives of the trunk, the seven contexts and learning to learn should be described and treated in cohesion. From what has been mentioned before, it appears that it is up to the schools to combine both the subject related final objectives and the cross-curricular final objectives into a (for them) meaningful whole.

2.1 A commonl trunk

In essence, the trunk is a list of *essential* skills or core skills, for which final objectives have been defined. These final objectives have to meet the following requirements:

- They have to be *transferable* – and as such applicable, realizable – in lots of activities, situations and contexts. Essentials skills are always a part of diverse living conditions.
- They have to be *multifunctional*, since they can be used to reach more than one goal, and since they can be applied in different situations or realized in diverse tasks.
- For the reasons mentioned above, the final objectives of the trunk are *context-free* and *not limited to one age group*. Making these objectives concrete for a certain age group, a specific situation or a specific target group is the responsibility of the school team.
- The final objectives should be *clear, simple and well-founded*, and, at the same time of a *higher level of abstraction* than the final objectives in the contexts, precisely because it should be possible to interpret them and to specify them in different ways, by different teachers and in various environments of learning. They are the so-called 'generic' final objectives.
- The *reference public* for the definition and selection of the cross-curricular final objectives is the group of (future) adults.

The final objectives in the trunk have their origins in a vision on basic education which also supports the interpretation of the contexts: *every pupil has the right to a relevant basic education. The basic education prepares the pupil to function in a critical and creative way in society and to develop a personal life.*
A detailed categorization and enumeration of essential skills has been avoided. The phrasing of the final objectives in the trunk relies as much as possible on a *generally accepted definition* of what is commonly understood for each of the selected key skills.

Below follows a description of these key skills (in bold). The final objectives of the trunk have been chosen in such a way that they, despite their general phrasing, cover what is meant by each of these key skills. In other words, working on the final objectives of the trunk is working

in the direction of the underlying descriptions.

- **Communicative ability** in the sense of verbal and non-verbal language and contact skills, having social contacts with other people without problems, approaching others and mix and mingle;
- **Creativity** in the sense of being enterprising and innovative, having a flexible mind and inventiveness;
- **Perseverance** in the sense of force of will, being able to make and justify decisions, being ambitious and brave;
- **Empathy** in the sense of sympathy and being responsive, the ability to tune into the conversation partner and a relational orientation;
- **A**esthetic ability in the sense of being able to appreciate beauty in expressions of culture and art, and to be able to create beauty according to one's own taste;
- **Exploring** in the sense of actively seeking out situations to give depth and width to one's own capacities, being keen to learn, daring and to actively find the limits of one's possibilities of acting;
- **Flexibility** in the sense of mental flexibility and resilience, the ability to see the relativity of things, a sense of humour and immunity to stress;
- **Initiative** in the sense of anticipating, act pro-actively, aim for desires and tackle tasks without being asked to do so or without being forced to do so by the circumstances;
- **Critical thinking** in the sense of being able to make distinctions;
- **Media wisdom** in the sense of a critical awareness in respect to the classical media (television, radio, press) and new media (internet applications, sms), and the ability to use the media from day to day, informally and creatively, to implicitly or explicitly focus on participating in the cultural public sphere (letters of readers, youtube, chat rooms, blogs, webcam, etc.);
- **An open and constructive attitude** in the sense of being open-minded whilst at the same time showing interest and being relationally oriented;
- **Respect** in the sense of being tolerant, polite, thinking and acting ethically, being connected to one's own environment and the wider context of society, responsibility;
- **Working together** in the sense of solidarity and genuine dedication for a public cause, constructive participation in initiatives that touch upon a local or larger community;
- **Responsibility** in the sense of engagement and involvement, as well as loyalty and a sense of the effect of one's own thinking and acting;
- **Self-image** in the sense of self-knowledge and a realistic sense of self-value, knowing one's limits and trusting one's capacities, being sincere and authentic;
- Self-reliance in the sense of being able to take care of oneself and being able to use the social network when necessary;
- **Meticulousness** in the sense of being accurate, precise and having organisational skills, the will to do a job in a satisfying way, show thoughtfulness in respect to means and goal;
- **Considerateness** in the sense of being caring and helpful, pro-actively giving care and services as an interpersonal, intercultural, social and civil skill;

2.2 Contexts

Following on the definition of health by the World Health Organization, contexts 1, 2 and 3 focus on physical health in connection to the mental and socio-relational well-being. The final objectives pertaining to the various areas of social life will be treated in contexts 5, 6 and 7. Context 4 pays attention to the relations between health and environment and between sustainable development and political-legal, socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects. This framework of ordering allows for a selection of a number of final objectives that are essential to the basic education of young people. As with every framework of ordering, this model has

its limits. The linear approach somewhat ignores the coherence between the final objectives. This coherence will be realized by the school, based on the vision and priorities of the school.

2.2.1 Physical and mental health and socio-relational development

Health is defined by the World Health Organization as follows: "*health is a situation of optimal physical, mental and social well-being, in which every individual should have the opportunity to develop and use their capacities as a human being, with a maximum number of choices and degrees of freedom*". (WHO, 2007) As we can see, this is a broad, dynamic, relative and emancipatory interpretation of health. This commonly accepted and internationally used definition of health is the basis of the health policy of the Flemish Community and the Flemish health aims.
It is therefore no more than logical that the choice and contents of the final objectives of secondary education are in concordance with this general social given and the most recent scientific research.
Instead of taking health problems and raw data on the main causes of death as a starting point, the option of prevention with a scientific basis was chosen. Rather than defining the final objectives in terms of commandments and prohibitions, the final objectives were specified positively in terms of healthy behaviour.
The crucial element in the preventive approach of these 3 contexts however, is a health-improving environment at the school: the class, the policy of the school and the relationship with the parents and the local community.
The schools are not able to avoid phenomena such as depression and suicide, but it can help young people to take care of their health, so that they can experience a minimal level of well-being and become ready and able in situations and relationships.

The final objectives were formulated around the following sub-themes:

- *Personal hygiene and hygienic behaviour* in a broad sense: limiting decibels, the usage of one's voice, cell phone radiation, a clean room, dangers of contagion, etc.
- *Attitude, a balance between work and recreation* with a focus on ergonomics and variation.
- *Food and exercise* as an essential combination, taken from the point of view from the model of the dynamic food triangle.
- *Stimulants, drugs* and assertiveness in situations when they are offered.
- *Safety* on the work floor and in traffic, as well as in contacts with humans and animals in general.
- *First Aid* and being able to administer CPR[2]. This can be a live-saving skill even in its most simple form.
- *Stress and emotions.*
- *Sexual health and sexuality.*
- *Self-image and resilience.*
- *Communication and relationships* in a broad sense: professional relationships of cooperation, friendships, intimate relationships, business relations, etc.
- *Impression and expression.*
- *Manners and diversity*, authenticity and *tolerance.*

Every one of these themes will be discussed in their coherence in the three contexts. What's more, the final objectives from the common trunk shouldn't be forgotten, because they only really get meaning by working on the themes mentioned above. The other way around is true as well: these themes from the contexts can get a deeper approach by taking the final

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[2] CPR is the abbreviation of cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (a combination of cardiac stimulation and mouth-to-mouth)

objectives from the trunk into account. The final objectives from the trunk make sure that the following points of attention come to their right:

- *The mutual influence between person an environment;*
- *The fact that the personal way of living influences both one's own health and the health of others;*
- *The fact that one needs to take responsible decisions in relation to health, relationships and the living environment, and this all his or her life;*
- *The awareness that everyone has an individual and collective responsibility as far as health is concerned, and has to act accordingly;*
- *The fact that living a healthy life is a dimension of quality of life.*

Partly because of the non-grade specific nature of the cross-curricular final objectives the school has a level of freedom to realize a health-improving policy. The school itself chooses when, on which occasion, by whom, how, in which combinations and how many times the final objectives of trunk and the various contexts in cohesion will be approached.

2.2.2 Environment and sustainable development

Ever since the rapport 'Our Common Future' by the 'World Commission on the Environment and Development' (WCED, 1987), better known as the 'Brundtland-rapport' appeared, people realized that matters and questions of sustainability are very complex, because social, economical and ecological aspects are tightly interwoven. It is possible to distinguish these aspects from each other, but in the quest for solutions it is often impossible to make that distinction.
One of the particularly new insights is the fact that activities of the current generation impose limitations to the future generations as far as the provision of their (basic) needs is concerned.
On the basis of these insights the Brundtland-rapport defined *sustainable development* as "*a development that provides for the needs of the current generation without endangering the needs of future generations*".

This definition contains the following core ideas:

- The social development has to focus on meeting the (basic) demands of every person, everywhere in the world. In particular this means closing the gap in wealth between the (wealthy) North and the poorer South, but also closing the gap between the rich and the poor in our own country.
- The supporting capacity of the planet earth is limited. This means, amongst other things, that there is a need to be cautious with raw materials (the so-called 'stewardship').

Some insight into the coherence and the mutual influence of economical, social and ecological aspects related to the question at hand is required to be able to look for possible solutions for questions of sustainability (global warming, the depletion of fossil sources of energy, the decrease in biodiversity, the unequal division of wealth, the loss of local artisanship, habits related to food and food products, forms of cohabitation, ...) This requires a certain form of a systems-based approach in which, besides knowledge and insight, the judgement of value of the user is a deciding factor in the actual and goal-oriented effort in sustainable solutions.

As mentioned by the VLOR and MINA-counsel in a joint advice to the minister of education, 'sustainable development' should be considered as a 'regulatory idea', which is aimed for when taking decisions (VLOR – MINA, 2007). The focus here is on 'aiming', because 'sustainable development' as a final situation does not exist, and because every change of a

current situation creates a new situation with its own challenges. 'Sustainable development' therefore implies per definition a continuous process of learning.

There is no need for the idea to arise that there are schools just to solve the issues of sustainability; what can be expected is that the schools offer the pupils opportunities to develop themselves in such a way that they are able to act and look for solutions together with others. The principle of participation and involvement in civil discussion and forums when looking for solutions is deemed crucial in all documents of policy on sustainable development.

The role of education in answering to the challenge of sustainable development is therefore considered to be of great importance, which also shows from the United Nations' resolution to proclaim the period between 2005 and 2015 as the decennium of Education for Sustainable Development.
In order to achieve this, the UNECE[3] developed a strategy of implementation (UNECE, 2005), which was signed on the 18th of March in Vilnius at the 'high-level meeting' of the ministers of Education and Environment of the various members states. Belgium signed the protocol as well. In his policy letter of 2006-2007, the minister of Education (Vandenbroucke, 2006) refers to the translation of the UNECE strategy of implementation in a Flemish Strategy for Education in Sustainable Development.

Bearing the characteristics of questions regarding sustainable development in mind, as well as the search for avenues to a possible solution, education in sustainable development should mainly focus on:

- Learning how to think in terms of *systems*, rather than approaching the issue of sustainability in a reductionist way;
- Sustainability issues have both *local* and *global* characteristics;
- Besides *knowledge* and insight, sufficient attention is needed for the development of *values* and *norms*; one shouldn't avoid ethical dilemmas;
- The importance of a change in the *individual way of life* if one sincerely wants to find a solution for issues in sustainability;
- The role of *participation* in the social debate to find avenues for solutions together with others;
- The realisation that striving for sustainable development entails a continuous *learning process.*

The final objectives then, in this context, are related both to the personal way of living and the consequences of acting in a sustainable or non-sustainable way, to one's own well-being, to the well-being of others, both here and in other places, today as well as tomorrow. What is more, both physical and mental health and the socio-relational well-being of people are heavily influenced by the quality of the natural living environment. In this respect, context 4 is closely related to contexts 1, 2 and 3.
In addition: a sustainable society can only be realised by the efforts of many and by thinking together as a team and reflecting critically on the possible avenues that might lead to a solution of these issues. This means that all citizens should realize that they can have an influence on both the national and the international institutions in order to realize sustainable development. In this respect these final objectives are in connection with contexts 5, 6 and 7. Above all else, there should be a realization that sustainable development is a continuous process. This 'learning to learn' is precisely the core task of education.

2.2.3 Political-legal, socio-economic and socio-cultural society

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[3] UNECE: United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, one of the five regional and economical commissions of the United Nations.

The final objectives meant to teach social co-existence and actively taking part in society in all its aspects were given a particular place in the overall structure, analogous to the procedure for the final objectives in contexts 1, 2 and 3.

Society changes continuously and social coexistence is a dynamic fact. Along with waves of migration and information, the growing tendencies of fragmentation and individualism on the one hand, and globalisation on the other, cause significant changes and have an enormous impact on social interaction, culture and climate in society. In the same way, living and learning together in schools continuously changes, and fundamentally so. The school as a practice field for democratic and active citizenship is confronted with questions and challenges brought on by growing multiculturalism and changing social interaction, by pluralism and global solidarity. Other challenges are the significant cultural differences between individuals and groups, the increase of ageing population, the job market and welfare, subcultures and the call for social cohesion, interculturalism and a positive way of dealing with a diversity of beliefs and outlooks on life. This call for intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding is described in "A wholesome challenge" (European Commision group of intellectuals for intercultural dialogue, 2008)

However, it is impossible to search for a new way of thinking and acting, without an introduction into existing ways of thinking and action patterns.

As far as the **political-legal aspect of democratic society** is concerned, special attention is paid to four related themes, i.e. active citizenship, human rights, democracy and the European/international perspective.

- A dynamic society can only exist through active citizenship. Involvement in society, in its most concrete form, does not only reveal itself in respecting a set of rules and agreements which allow people to live together in peace. It is also expressed by taking part in activities and initiatives which help constitute that society and by determining the course of policy. This requires a basic knowledge of rights and duties of existing public enquiry procedures, which are a democratic given, and of the importance and use of an active attitude. Active participation is explicitly organised in a democratic school as well, which is an outstanding training ground to alert young people to the meaning of citizenship. In addition, it should not be forgotten that young citizens can demand participation and chance of involvement in school as a right.

- Human rights and fundamental liberties as they are laid down in the constitution and in several international treaties are crucial to the democratic organisation of society. In addition, according to the International Treaty of the United Nations on economic, social and cultural rights (1966) and according to resolutions and recommendations of the Council of Europe, human rights education is mandatory. In Belgian law as well, human rights are considered to be important. Article 24, section 3 of the constitution reads: "Everyone has a right to education, with respect for the fundamental rights and liberties." The Treaty of the United Nations on the Rights of Children is of similar import. That agreement describes the right on education, the right through education and in education.

- Minimal insight into the *characteristics and functioning of democracy* is a fundamental condition for active citizenship. This includes the constitutional state, the separation of powers, state structure and political decision-making. Apart from some acquaintance with the facts, one also needs a basic insight into the procedures and mechanisms of democracy. Other institutions such as the media also play an important role in democracy. Civil activities such as consultation, protection of interests and translating power into rules and procedures are dealt with in this context. Each citizen has the right

to critically evaluate the realisations of a democratic regime, to rate and challenge them. A frame of reference, broader than that of one's own society allows people to compare characteristics of their personal democratic system with those of other democracies and other forms of government.

- The subject of the *European/international dimension* finally is expressed by the fact that every society is visibly and invisibly connected with Europe, as well as with the global community. It is the school's task to open young people's eyes to the *global dimension* of modern society. Article 29 of the Treaty on Children's Rights (1989) reads: "… preparing the child for a sound life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of the sexes and friendship between all people, ethnic, national and religious groups and members of the original population." For all members of the European Union this international dimension has *an explicit European meaning* as well. As the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of December 18th concerning lifelong learning demands, the cross-curricular final objectives pay attention to the European Union and Europe. Indeed, the European Union has a significant impact on the everyday lives of its citizens. Active citizenship is therefore important on a local, regional and national level, but also has a European and global dimension.

The final objectives concerning **socio-economic society** are about the social aspects of economy. Surely they are not intended to study economy as a science. Like with the political-legal and socio-cultural dimensions of social life, there are some essential socio-economic phenomena and mechanisms young people should become acquainted with in order for them to participate in society and fulfil themselves. We refer to topics such as:

- The role of the government, of companies, employer's organisations and trade unions
- Welfare and well-being
- Labour, economic activities, goods and services
- Understanding of poverty, characteristics, causes and consequences (for instance, living in poverty can be experienced as an obstacle to fully taking part in society)
- Aspects of consumer education with attention for rights and duties of the consumer
- Managing one's own budget, in relation to consumer behaviour and the ability to do things independently and critically

These final objectives aim at the dynamic character of socio-economic society, caused by the permanent interaction between economic and social mechanisms. The international perspective expressed in globalising economy has a clear impact on this dialogue. The final objectives put forward minimal understanding of and focus on public opinion and personal commitment. Finally, this topic focuses on young people's ability to live independently.

Socio-cultural co-existence can be described in themes which clearly refer to what is thought to be socially and educationally important for this particular context. Final objectives were introduced for each of the following themes.

The **socio-cultural coexistence** can be described in themes that explicitly refer to what is, socially and educationally, estimated to be valued as important for this specific context. For each of the four themes below, final objectives have been formulated.

- A culture of coexistence as something dynamic and as a result of a social interaction between people and groups and policy.
- A society as a reality of diverse subgroups and of mutual differences between people.
- Remembrance education as a means of instructively looking back to the own past and that of societies elsewhere in Europe or the world, in order to learn where society should go from here.
- Meaning of conflicts, both global and culture-related.

▪   Art-related exploration of culture as part of development of social identity, social interaction and social participation. Trying to get a grip on both individual and social learning processes by consciously dealing with art, media and patrimony.

However, a society can be made or broken by the 'being' of its citizens. The cross-curricular final objectives in these three contexts have been selected carefully so as to be able to give shape to the themes that are estimated to be essential for a thorough present-day and future-oriented basic education.

2.3 Learning to learn

Lifelong learning is an important aspect of self-development. Moreover, it is true that participation and active citizenship in a democratic society ask for autonomously acting and thinking citizens who are prepared to learn for the rest of their lives. This means, among other things, that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to plan, direct, evaluate and adjust their own learning, thinking and acting. Hence, the concept of 'learning to learn' implies more than 'learning to study'. Pupils acquire competence in a wide array of attitudes, insights and skills that enable them to learn goal-oriented and efficiently. The attention to learning to learn doesn't only support the learning at school, but is mainly meant to train pupils to learn autonomously and to be able to make decisions in changing contexts. So, learning to learn is by far the most important component of a basic education and can be called both encompassing and inherent with regard to basic education.

Learning is an active process and assumes an active participation of the pupil: he examines the subject matter or the project, selects information himself, builds up concepts, listens actively, practises, recommences, repairs, looks for alternative solutions, etc.
Moreover, learning is a constructive and cumulative process. New knowledge links up with already present foreknowledge and builds on it. For assimilating new knowledge, higher cognitive processes such as applying, integrating, analysing and creative thinking are important. Furthermore, to make lifelong learning really possible, it is necessary for pupils to learn to control and monitor their own learning process.
Learning is a social process as well: interaction with teachers or fellow pupils creates the opportunity to check the own thinking and learning process with that of others. Collaboration leads to insights in the own learning style and forms an essential part of social learning.

Actually, the selection criteria for cross-curricular final objectives for learning to learn haven't changed since their introduction in 1997. Moreover, during the past few years those selection criteria became even more relevant than they already were.
The set of final objectives for learning to learn is a complex whole. The knowledge, skills and attitudes to be developed are therefore grouped in the following six subthemes which stand for the different dimensions in learning.

▪   *Views on learning*
Personal views on learning and learning situations have an influence on the learning behaviour and help to determine the learning style and favourite learning strategies of a person. Because the actual learning behaviour is determined by personal opinions and motives, it is not always adapted to the learning objectives or to the changing learning contexts.
▪   *Acquiring information*
Because learning is an active and constructive process, pupils are demanded to show activity and participation. That way the learning process leads to a build-up of genuine knowledge and skills, which - as an added value - are sufficiently versatile and flexible in new learning and problem situations.
▪   *Processing information*

Apart from acquiring knowledge (as domain-specific knowledge and the skills of employing strategies and procedures) learning also implies, in other words, gaining skills in dealing with information. After all, learning is making sense of new information by comparing it to and integrating it with the knowledge and skills one already has.

▪ *Solving problems*

Pupils learn how to apply knowledge and how to operate strategies of solution that can be put into action in dealing with new problems. The thinking processes that can be taught with that are, amongst others, analysing, synthesising, (self-)assessing, giving feedback.

▪ *Regulating the learning process*

Cognitive and affective skills of regulation are, to a great extent, responsible for differences in learning performance. In doing so, the meta-cognitive knowledge is employed and both meta-cognitive and meta-affective skills are being used. However, learning also has to do with emotions and dynamics that force behaviour in a certain direction. Affective characteristics can influence the learning process in a positive or negative way.

▪ *Study- and profession-oriented decision making*

Decision-making competence enables people to take responsibility for their choices. The conditions to come to a decision-making competence are a clear self-concept, a broad and objective view on the options of choice, an understanding of processes of choice and an understanding of the external factors influencing the process of choice. Learning to choose as a dimension is specifically focussed on choice of study and profession and includes insight in strategies of choice, the course of processes of choice and the consequences of it for a future career.

3 Coordination

The different parts that are being distinguished in the structural concept rejoin in reality. The cross-curricular final objectives are being considered in their mutual coherence and as a whole. In what follows there are a few possible combinations of final objectives. By starting from a certain point of view, one lays a different emphasis on things.

3.1 Final objectives within one context are being clustered and treated in coherence with final objectives of the trunk

For example in context 1 (physical health and security), the knowledge about the own body and the skills to consider this (FO 1) are connected to finding a balance in ones daily activities (FO 3). Taking time for physical exercise (FO 7) and saying no to drugs and certain medication (FO 8) are a part of both. In striving for those final objectives one develops a critical mind and self-reliance (trunk). There is also the possibility to touch on communicative skills and information literacy (trunk) via the aforementioned final objectives from context 1. Starting form context 1, the stress is on these final objectives but the final objectives from the trunk are being aspired to as well because they are a necessary condition to stimulate the development of the envisaged targets.

In pursuing the abovementioned final objectives, the pupils employ different aspects of learning to learn. Acquiring and processing critical information is essential to build up new knowledge. Using and assessing problem solving strategies is also essential to the process itself. But even after the carried out activities for these final objectives, a moment of reflection can be built in when pupils work out what they have learnt, how it came about and if any improvement is possible in that learning process.

3.2 Final objectives from different contexts are being bundled and treated together, in connection with the trunk

Pupils learn how to apply democratic procedures at school (context 5, FO2) by cooperating in developing a health and security policy (context 1, FO 10). In that process they are able to admit they are in error, if necessary (context 3, FO 4), and they can help look for constructive solutions in conflicts that can occur during the debate (context 3, FO 9). Moreover, this situation gives them the opportunity to test in what way one can deal with differences between people and their views constructively (context 7, FO 2). Starting from those different contexts, the focus is on the abovementioned final objectives. That doesn't prohibit final objectives from the trunk, like e.g. critical reflection, an open and constructive attitude, exploring and being creative, being picked up in the process of development in this case as well.

It is also possible to emphasis just one final objective from the trunk. In the entire set of abovementioned final objectives, final objective 14 is the most obvious: pupils actively participate in realizing common goals (cooperating).

3.3 Starting from the final objectives from the trunk and treating them in connection with final objectives from one or more contexts

Another perspective arises when choosing one or more final objectives from the trunk to work with explicitly with the pupils. For example, one wishes to emphasise respectful behaviour with the pupils (trunk, FO 24). Depending on the activities one develops for that, it is also possible to combine it with FO 15 from the trunk. After all, respect for others implies a certain degree of empathy. The final objectives from context 3 (socio-relational development) are then the most obvious option to work at respectful behaviour and empathy. But final objectives from different contexts that only just indirectly have to do with relations can be used as well. Any form of participation (context 4, FO 1; context 1, FO 10; context 5, FO 2) or debate and cooperation (context 7, FO 2 and 3; context 6, FO 2) demands a respectful and sympathetic attitude and gives pupils the opportunity to work on that.

The layout of the revised cross-curricular final objectives reflects the new structural concept.

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