



# Neutrality and how to implement it

EU Convince conference

Warsaw, 14-15 November 2019.

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# Belgium – Flemish community

- Belgium is a very complicated country.
- Belgium is a federal state.
- 6 governments for 10 million inhabitants.
- We speak 3 different languages: Dutch, French and German.
- Part of the federal organisation is linked to the languages.
- We have 3 educational systems with 3 different ministers of education.
- There is no minister of education on the central level.

# Belgium - Flanders



# A complicated country: the networks

- In Flanders education is organised by networks.
- Networks can be privately owned or belong to a public authority.
- Basically there are 4 major networks:
  - the catholic network (owned by congregations, dioceses, parishes, ....)
  - the network of the Flemish community
  - the network of the provinces
  - the network of the local authorities (cities, municipalities, ...)



# A complicated country: autonomy vs. control

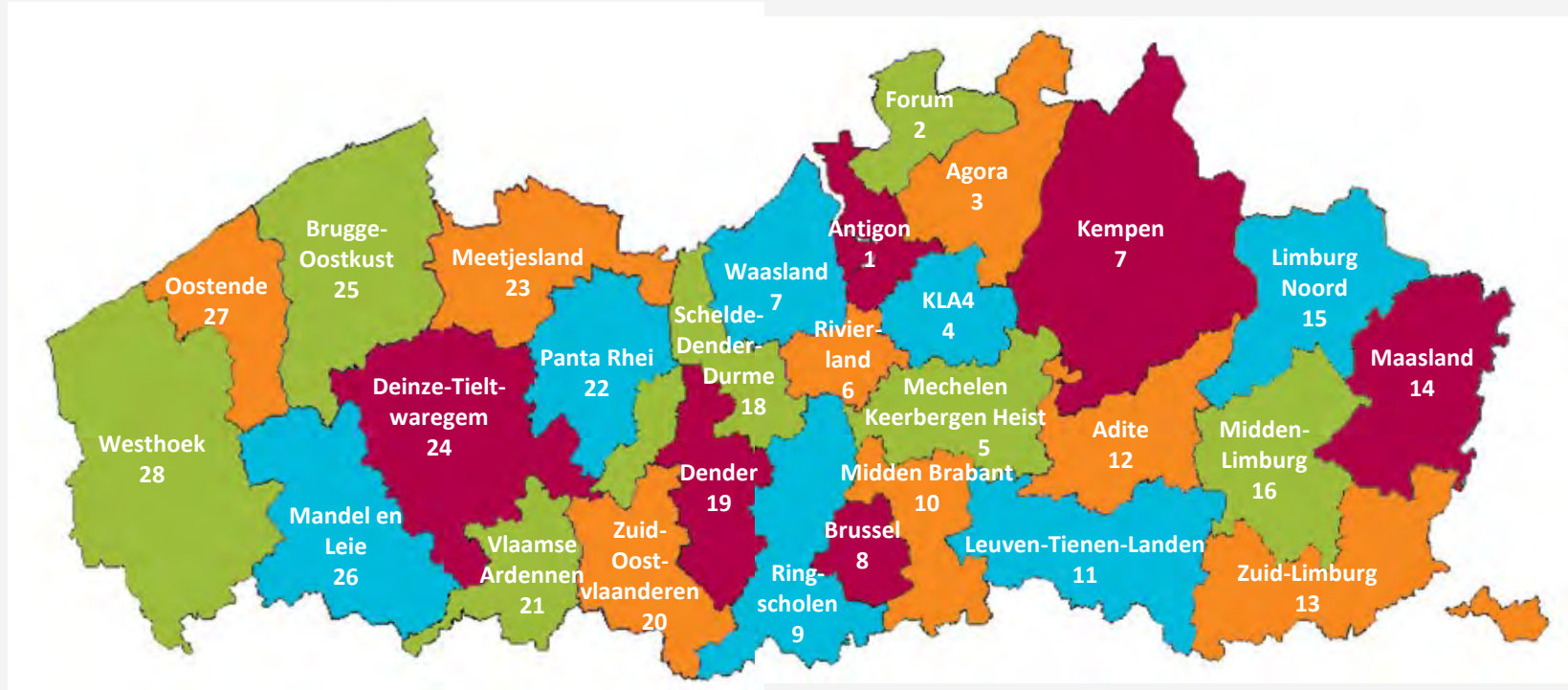
- The autonomy of local schools has become one of the key principles of the Flemish educational organization.
- But the autonomy only operates within certain bounds.
- The ministry defines the general rules and the financial means (buildings, wages,.....).
- The networks determine the pedagogical project and provide services for schools (legal service, pedagogical counseling,.....).



# GO!

- GO! is the public school network of the Flemish community
- The network is governed on two levels:
  - the central level
  - the level of 26 local boards
- Our network organises
  - 363 primary schools, 217 secondary schools, 27 schools for adult education, 58 schools for children with special needs, 15 academies for art education (part time)
  - Approximately 800 educational institutions
  - Approximately 300,000 pupils and trainees
  - 15 tot 20% of the total amount of students in Flanders and Brussels
  - Approximately 32,000 staff members

# 26 schoolgroups



# Art. 24 §1 of the Belgian constitution

## Art. 24

§ 1. Het onderwijs is vrij; elke preventieve maatregel is verboden; de bestraffing van de misdrijven wordt alleen door de wet of het decreet geregeld.

De gemeenschap waarborgt de keuzevrijheid van de ouders.

De gemeenschap richt neutraal onderwijs in. De neutraliteit houdt onder meer in, de eerbied voor de filosofische, ideologische of godsdienstige opvattingen van de ouders en de leerlingen.

De scholen ingericht door openbare besturen bieden, tot het einde van de leerplicht, de keuze aan tussen onderricht in een der erkende godsdiensten en de niet-confessionele onderricht.

§ 2. Zo e  
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§ 4. Alle leerlingen of studenten, ouders, personeelsleden en onderwijsinstellingen zijn gelijk voor de wet of het decreet. De wet en het decreet houden rekening met objectieve verschillen, waaronder de eigen karakteristieken van iedere inrichtende macht, die een aangepaste behandeling verantwoorden.

§ 5. De inrichting, erkenning of subsidiëring van het onderwijs door de gemeenschap wordt geregeld door de wet of het decreet.

## Art. 24

§ 1<sup>er</sup>. L'enseignement est libre; toute mesure préventive est interdite; la répression des délits n'est réglée que par la loi ou le décret.

La communauté assure le libre choix des parents.

La communauté organise un enseignement qui est neutre. La neutralité implique notamment le respect des conceptions philosophiques, idéologiques ou religieuses des parents et des élèves.

Les écoles organisées par les pouvoirs publics offrent, jusqu'à la fin de l'obligation scolaire, le choix entre l'enseignement d'une des religions reconnues et celui de l'enseignement confessionnel.

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§ 4. Tous les élèves ou étudiants, parents, membres du personnel et établissements d'enseignement sont égaux devant la loi ou le décret. La loi et le décret prennent en compte les différences objectives, notamment les caractéristiques propres à chaque pouvoir organisateur, qui justifient un traitement approprié.

§ 5. L'organisation, la reconnaissance ou le subventionnement de l'enseignement par la communauté sont réglés par la loi ou le décret.

The community organises neutral education. Neutrality implies, among other things, respect for the philosophical, ideological or religious views of parents and pupils.



# The application of art 24

GO!, is the education of and for the Flemish Community.

Nearly thirty years ago, the transferred constitutional authority for setting up the education of the Flemish Community was assigned to an autonomous body.

The education of the Flemish Community has the constitutional task of setting up **neutral education** and guaranteeing the free choice of parents, pupils and course participants.

GO! is a neutral education provider. Within this transferred authority, it is allowed to give its own interpretation to neutrality. This was confirmed by the Constitutional Court in 2011. Every staff member must sign the declaration of neutrality and a declaration of attachment to GO!

This pedagogical project is, by transferred authority, filled in by the GO! board.

With the declaration of commitment, each member of staff undertakes to protect the interests and to defend the values of the GO!

# The pedagogical project of GO! : PPGO

- From active pluralism to Learning together to live together

In 2016, GO! felt the need to update the existing pedagogical project. For ten years, the active pluralism component had been used. However, given the evolutions in society, this does not go far enough. It is not only necessary to valorise the richness of the diversity in the schools, but also to place greater emphasis on the active involvement and participation of young people. They must learn to live together.

That is why it is important to make a strong commitment to active citizenship and its components, such as active participation in society by all GO! pupils.

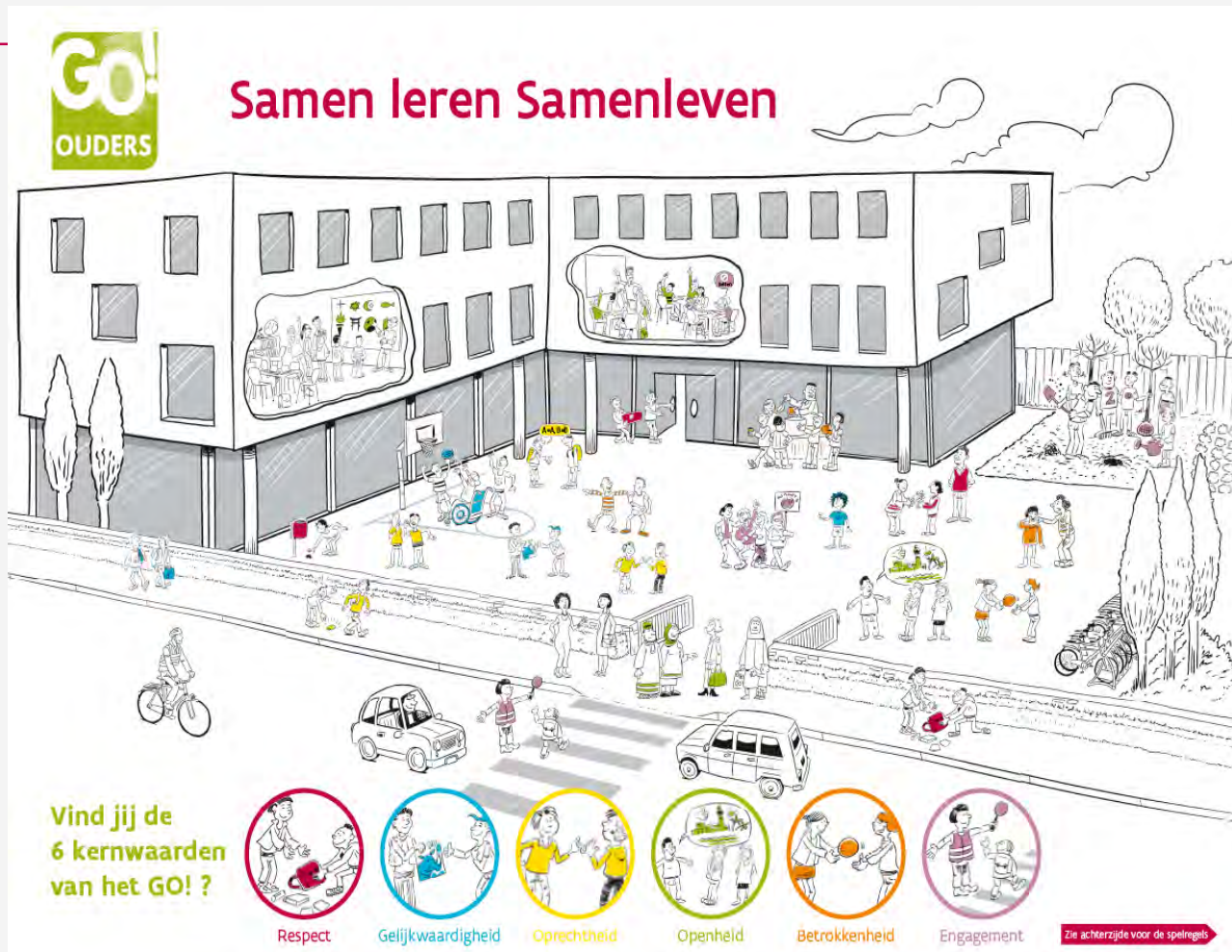
The educational project of GO! sees all pupils as future citizens of our society. Each pupil is involved in the active citizenship

# Neutrality in a diverse society

In our inclusive approach to diversity, we are actively seeking togetherness and commonality. What conditions are needed for this? And what does this commonality consist of? The condition is neutrality. Neutrality should not be confused with the colour blind approach. Nor does neutrality mean "value-free".

A democratic - neutral - GO! school therefore has no neutral pupils or teachers: it is a place where the multicoloured dialogue and a culture of impartiality are paramount in order to look beyond the differences on an equal footing. The GO! school is a school where living together is central. With its pedagogical project, GO! puts the emphasis on what unites us as human beings. Learning to live together presupposes not only openness and commitment to diversity, but also implies that this is a shared commitment. In other words: living together also presupposes the expectation that each person agrees with and endorses the conditions that make it possible to engage in conversation. These are the rules of the game that define the boundaries within which coexistence is possible: our 6 core values

# PPGO : 6 core values



Respect - Equity – Sincerity – Open mind – Engagement - Commitment

# How to apply this in the classroom?

The declaration of neutrality of the GO! expects all staff members of the GO! to take into account, from a respectful basic attitude, the living environment of the learners, namely the family, social, philosophical, cultural and social environment. The declaration of neutrality calls on all staff members to make every effort to ensure that school practice is in keeping with the different living environments of young people.

Such an approach is a challenge in practice. It takes teachers out of their comfort zone and implies a whole new way of thinking about education.

# Support : examples

- Secondary GO! schools can use the **active citizenship curriculum** to set up an active citizenship subject. They can also realise active citizenship on the basis of a strong school policy by means of projects or different subjects (clusters) from the core curriculum. With the 'active citizenship' curriculum, we want to involve society in the school and the school in society.
- **Manual 'Dealing with philosophical, ethnic and cultural diversity'**.  
The aim of this manual is to support schools and their educational professionals in dealing with philosophical, ethnic and cultural diversity. We regularly receive questions from the field on this subject.  
With this manual we offer a shared and connecting framework, we discuss how we can use this diversity as a strength and added value in classroom and school events and for the realisation of learning to live together, and we look at how we can deal with controversial and sensitive issues arising from philosophical, ethnic and cultural diversity.

# Questions?

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**<https://youtu.be/pe9P-nz4J8Y> & <https://youtu.be/kqf0p7GITa4>**



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**GO!** onderwijs  
van de Vlaamse  
Gemeenschap