

In 2016 there is a lot of diversity with regard to life stance education (both in its situation and how it is dealt with) in the different European countries.

Across Europe there is huge variation in the treatment of religion and belief, including non-religious beliefs, in schools. This derives from the differences from place to place in religious, cultural and historical backgrounds. There are many ways in which these differences show themselves, including:-

***School legal or administrative structures**

Any of these may be wholly or partly paid for from public funds. Sometimes churches or other external bodies may be responsible for life stance education within an otherwise secular institution (e.g., a church may provide a course about Christianity in a public school).

***Scope of syllabus**

Another key distinction relates to the scope of the teaching provided. A school may offer no relevant teaching at all; a course about a single denomination of a single religion (e.g., Roman Catholicism); a course about a single religion (e.g., Christianity); a course about more than one religion (e.g., the “six great world religions”); a course about both religions and non-religious beliefs (e.g., world religions plus Humanism).

Pedagogical approach

An important distinction is between those courses that suggest that one particular life stance (or category of life stance, e.g. religious) is correct and those that adopt an open, objective, educational attitude.

Facts or morals

There is in addition a distinction between courses that concentrate on the ‘facts’ related to life stances (e.g., Bible knowledge, the history of religion) and courses that focus on moral teaching derived from life stances (e.g., Christian or humanist moral education).

Parental and pupil rights and options

Sometimes parents can choose between a range of alternative courses (which may or may not be comprehensive); Elsewhere parents are given the option to withdraw their child from the relevant teaching offered in the school ; Sometimes pupils at a certain age are themselves allowed to exercise these choices.

Worship

There is another question, separate from those regarding teaching: In some schools there are acts of religious worship in accordance with a single religion or religious denomination (and in this case they may be conducted by clergy or by teachers). In other schools there may be acts of religious worship that are syncretic or 'inter-faith' or that even try to accommodate the non-religious. Other schools may have no acts of worship or anything like it.

Where there is religious worship, it may take place- within the school day or- outside the normal teaching hours; and it may be- compulsory or- optional at the wish of either the pupil or the parents.

In real life, approaches will often be muddled and will usually not result from any consideration of the principles involved. However, an analysis on the basis of these paradigms will always be revealing.

In some countries teaching about religious and non-religious lifestances can be done by teachers employed and trained by the state. In this case, a representative humanist organisation(s) is consulted on what is included in the syllabus about Humanism.

Where parents or young people are offered an option of instruction in a particular lifestance, this must be a voluntary option. Such education should be the responsibility of the relevant religious and humanist organisation(s). They should take responsibility for the teacher training and the syllabus, which must include a standard pedagogy and didactic approach.

In some countries there is a combination of these two approaches – one subject for everyone and a optional choice for parents and/or children as to the voluntary instruction in a lifestance. There are several good examples of lifestance education in Europe, including some of specific

humanist education developed as an alternative to the education in a specific religion that is found in some countries.

There is also the question in some countries **whether more attention should be paid** to the preparation for democratic citizenship.

Should there be a link between the formation of citizenship and life education?

With its verdict of March 2015, Belgium's constitutional court has made it clear that neutrality with regard to life education, is a myth.

Yesterday we **saw** how Non Confessional (NC) Ethics in Flanders, Belgium, **prepares** children for complex responsibilities in a multicultural and pluralist world. This Humanist Free Thinkers Education is one possible choice for parents and their children among various choices for religious education in Flanders, Belgium

Today we **will learn** about some other good practices

- HVO (Humanistisch Vormingsonderwijs) Humanist ethical education in the Netherlands
- Lebenskunde und the Hum. schüle
- England with the British Humanist Association

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