UNIVERSITY OF MONTPELLIER

European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation
A.Y. 2020/2021

Enlightenment comes when ideas collide
About the freedom of expression of teachers in primary schools
and the impact on pupils' ability to think critically

Author: Lauwers Dominic
Supervisor: Blay Grabarczyk Katarzyna

Acknowledgements

After many years of wandering in vain and searching for an educational programme which combines social engagement with academic aspirations I stumbled upon the EMA programme. A master curriculum which focuses both on academic performance as well as personal and professional commitment to change the world into a better place. Notwithstanding the difficult times due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I was able to learn, grow and meet passionate fellow students and driven professors. Therefore, in a world in which we are often confronted with harsh words, it must be stressed that it brings me great joy to express my gratitude and appreciation to everyone connected to EMA.

I would like to thank the teachers who completed the surveys and the interviewees who donated some of their precious time. Without them, this research would not exist.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, who guided me through this task and adventure, and for giving me the support in developing this research.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my fiancé and my family. Without their support, understanding and not in the least their endless patience, I would not have been able to follow my dreams and start this master programme in the first place.

To change the world, you must start with yourself. If you want to impact the world, start by helping the person next to you. I hope that with everything I have learned in the past year, it enables me to have such an impact.

"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world". -Eleonore Roosevelt-

Abstract

Research has shown that enhancing critical thinking skills is important in the prevention of radicalisation. Recently this objective is implemented in all curricula in Flanders, although it does not say how this should be achieved. Therefore, we wonder whether teachers know how to teach critical thinking skills. Even more importantly is the question what impact free speech of teachers have on the pupils' ability to think critically when having conversations and discussions about (sensitive) topics. Therefore, this research investigates to what extend the freedom of expression should be in order to obtain the best results in enhancing the pupils' ability to think critically. To answer this research question, both surveys and interviews were conducted. The surveys had to be completed by teachers from primary schools in Antwerp. In addition, two principals from Antwerp primary schools and an expert were interviewed. First, the results of this study shows that teachers in primary education better stay neutral and maintain a professional attitude to obtain the best results in enhancing pupils' critical thinking skills, which is the opposite of what research says about academics in higher education. Secondly, this study also observes that the objectives as prescribed in the curricula are not sufficiently put into practice. Although teachers reported that they know how to teach critical thinking, some insights and facts indicate the opposite. Our recommendation is therefore that further research should develop a general teaching method on how to enhance critical thinking skills, and consequently education should adopt this approach and provide training for teachers.

Table of contents

1. <u>Introduction</u>

Polarisation and globalisation

"*If freedom of speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter*" – George Washington –

As support for illiberal led governments is on the rise and the concept of democracy is being questioned, we must ask ourselves, what norms and values do we consider as quintessential to live in peace as a group of individuals? Must the emphasis lie on the safety of the group as a social necessity or do we believe that individual development eventually always leads to a better community where all men and women will prosper.

The social contract in the Western world has been roughly based on concepts such as "*liberté, égalité et fraternité*". These principles, although universal in scope and character, are commonly associated with the Age of Enlightenment. These concepts and values which form the structure of the Occident, are being defendant by a strong legalistic culture whereby the separation of powers as well as the separation of church and state formed a protective shell against the arbitrary powers which ruled during the Ancien Régime. In this context the importance of freedom of thought and expression cannot be underestimated

In a democratic society, the right to express oneself, to freely speak out and even protest against the predominant views without fear of being persecuted, forms the backbone of such a societal model. Without a doubt, freedom of expression is therefore a crucial right in a democratic society as this right concerns everyone.

However, it is said that this right is under attack. The emergence and success of a country such as China, both economically and military, with its primary focus on stability instead of personal development, brings fear into the hearts and minds of liberal politicians and scholars all around the world. The economic success of China masks the political suppression of both individuals and communities who are being silenced through fear of oppression. Nonetheless, this new type of hybrid political and economic opportunism which focusses on stability rather

than on individual freedom, has proved to be the inspiration of many, including European countries, such as the Visegrad-countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia).

Such strong "law and order"-type of politics have been amplified by a failing politics regarding migration and integration. Due to their colonial past, countries such as France and Belgium have had a strong influx of migrants in the last five decades, especially from Maghreb-countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and/or sub-Saharan countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo. Although the number of people who migrated to Western Europe is relatively small in comparison to certain regional movements in Africa or the Middle East, this migration has triggered in a way a clash of civilisations, whereby a deficient governmental structure and lack of integrational triggers have left many lost and searching for a community, outside the scope of the hosting society.

Religious radicals saw this as an opportunity to exploit the weak and preach an illiberal and dogmatic view on society. As a result, thousands of young men and women are attracted by the idea of salvation and liberation, by submitting themselves to fundamental and strict rules on how life should be lived, far away from the ideas of "liberté, égalité et fraternité". As these rules conflict with the freedoms and rights which form the basis of a democratic society, the clash of civilisations becomes reality and turns into a negative spiral whereby all opposing sides only see what they believe.

These dogmatic views are stripped from any critical thought and self-doubt, and are reinforced and confirmed by a small group of like-minded people. This regrettable evolution has been exacerbated by the evolution of technological possibilities regarding communication.

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter or other platforms such as 4-Chan and 8-Chan spawn a group of extremists and fundamentalists who enflame radicalisation and violence and feel connected by their resentment against the powers that be and the underlying principles that created these powers, such as democracy and civil liberties.

The death of Samuel Paty

To illustrate this with a recent case, we can take a look at the gruesome attack on the French history professor Samuel Paty who was beheaded by an extremist in October 2020 due to a

cartoon of Mohammed he had shown in class. This incident shocked many. Not only was this perpetrator a complete outsider, the way in which the professor showed the cartoon is said to be impeccable and not at all polarising. What ought to be an attempt to have an interesting class discussion about the limitations and difficulties regarding the right to freedom of expression, turned out to be the very end of his own freedom of speech.

Regardless of the personal drama and horrendous impact such a heinous crime has on relatives and friends on a micro-level, society must ask itself if such violence is part of a bigger problem on a macro-level or simply bad luck.

Was this an action of a lone wolf, an outsider who maybe struggled with mental issues or brainwashed by others, or was the killer in fact a product of our society, maybe neglected, ill-treated and/or misguided? Does society and our educational system in particular need to be more active and assertive in recognising and identifying the risks of the globalisation of ideas and thus conflict?

Whatever the answer may be, without a doubt this incident has raised many questions and concerns among other teachers.

The freedom of expression

The debate about freedom of expression is dateless, as it is a very complex and abstract matter. Although many legal research has been conducted already, the use of this right by people in today's changing society should be more investigated. Definitely after the invention of the Internet and social media, social behavior has changed. For example, with the help of social media, the spread of hate speech has more than doubled. This has without a doubt an effect on people and on the society as a whole. How should teachers and schools cope with this threat?

The question to be asked in this regard is whether teachers are prone to capitulation. Are they afraid to speak up and to give their opinion, or do they not dare to speak at all about certain controversial and sensitive topics with pupils? As Loobuyck defines: "*Some secular thinking professors in schools with a majority of Islamic migrant pupils are afraid to express their opinion about religion or (homo)sexuality, because they are immediately labelled 'haram'*

(impure). And the ones who still dare to rub Allah up the wrong way, receive the message that they better keep it to themselves – for the sake of peace. This is capitulation"[1]. In other words, do teachers have the full enjoyment of their right to freedom of expression, or not?

Radicalisation

The debate about freedom of expression also concerns the debate about radicalisation, as the term freedom of expression is often used in connection with certain expressed radical statements. Since 9/11 research about radicalisation is booming. The demand for more conducted research to all kinds of aspects of this notion, such as possible causes and solutions, is high and comes from a variety of actors, both governmental and state independent, as well as educational institutions. Both guidelines for the prevention of radicalisation, as well as deradicalisation methods and procedures are fundamental in our struggle to form a peaceful society and are necessary to be investigated. As schools are sometimes being confronted with radical statements from young pupils and as youth radicalisation is defined to be applicable for 15 to 22 year old persons, it is necessary not only to investigate the possible deradicalisation protocols and procedures, but also, and maybe even more importantly, to investigate the possible guidelines in order for young people not to radicalise. Although preventing people from radicalising is not an easy task, deradicalisation is even more difficult to achieve.

Notwithstanding the fact that most radicalised people have not harmed anyone in a violent and physical way, the reality is that harm can already be done. By definition, deradicalisation is a process that will be initiated after the fact and thus must be avoided. Due to the central role our educational system plays in the guidance of children, the role and impact of teachers cannot be emphasised enough.

Critical thinking

One of the solutions for the prevention of radicalisation that is being investigated is the ability to think critically. It is assumed that when people have difficulties in thinking in a critical way about all kinds of topics and about themselves, then they are more prone to radicalisation. If

---

[1] Loobuyck, P. (2014). Maak van diversiteit een schoolvak, *Samenleving & Politiek*, Vol. 21 (3), pp. 5-8.

this is to be true, it is of the utmost importance to do thorough research on how teachers should teach critical thinking and logic in a rational manner to their pupils.

As this ability to be taught is not an exact science, its teaching method consist of oral and conversation technics in which teachers use speech rather than via written exercises. We might assume that what teachers say and how they say it, has an impact on the ability of pupils to think critically.

The research

In this regard, one should investigate whether the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression for teachers is necessary for the good fulfillment of their task to teach critical thinking.

In addition, it must be investigated if and how the formulation of a suitable definition of the right to the freedom of expression of teachers is necessary and what the possible additional limitations of this right are for teachers.

If we want that the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of speech is still obtained for all in the future and that citizens will use this right properly, then we have to educate the youngest generation well in order for them to use and to regard all kinds of information, disinformation and different statements and opinions with a critical eye. Critical thinking and the formulation of ideas based on substantiated arguments might be a key instrument to obtain the goal of both a free and safe society.

Concerning critical thinking skills as a tool in the fight against radicalisation, research states that preventive tools against radicalisation should already be applied in primary school, if not even in kindergarten. Although youth radicalisation consists of young adults with an age of 15 to 22 years old, for some radicalised youth using the preventive tools only at the age of 15 might be too late. In this sense, research should not only focalise on secondary schools, but also on primary schools. Also taken into consideration the limited time, this research focuses on primary education only. In doing so it acknowledges the importance of critical thinking skills for very young children.

In sum, teaching critical thinking is said to be an important method to prevent young people from radicalising. However, the way in which critical thinking should be taught is not yet sufficiently investigated. Therefore, this research first of all wants to investigate whether the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression of primary school teachers has an impact on enhancing critical thinking skills of pupils, and if so, what impact do we notice. Secondly, this research also investigates what policies and practices concerning the freedom of expression of teachers exist currently in primary schools and if these policies and practices are in line with the advice from experts on the matter.

In order to provide for scientific answers on these questions, surveys were spread among teachers and primary schools in the region of the city of Antwerp. In addition, a few interviews have been conducted by principals from primary schools in Antwerp, and by an expert in radicalisation. The entire methodology of this research is discussed more in detail in section 4.

Further, it is important to already mention shortly the limitations of this research. Although many actions have been undertaken to reach out to primary teachers to fill in the survey and although some teachers expressed and acknowledged the importance of this research, only a small dataset could be collected, because only a limited number of teachers took their time to fill it in. This might be a consequence of the quite controversial and sensitive topic that is being discussed in the survey, namely freedom of speech and critical thinking as a preventive tool against radicalisation, or possibly due to a high number of requests to fill in all kinds of surveys that teachers receive.

In addition to the surveys, three interviews were conducted. It should be mentioned that although many principals from primary schools in Antwerp were reached by email, only two replied positively and devoted a bit of their time to answer some questions. In line with previous mentioned possible reasons for the small dataset of the surveys, concerning the few positive responses for an interview, this might also be due to the sensitive topic discussed during the interview. Another explanation could be the busy schedules of the school principals during the final months of the school year, also taken in consideration the additional amount of work load due to the current pandemic. The high amount of requests for interviews that they receive should also be considered. A detailed explanation of the limitations of the entire research are further discussed in section 3.

Before elaborating on the aspects of the conducted research, the existing literature concerning the right to freedom of speech and critical thinking as a tool in the prevention of radicalisation is reviewed and discussed in the next chapter (chapter 2). In chapter 3 the limitations of this study are treated. In the following chapter (chapter 4), the methodology of this research is discussed in which detailed information is given about how the surveys and interviews are conducted and analysed. Chapter 5 elaborates on the results of the completed surveys and interviews. Then last but not least, the entire discussion and analysis of the results are presented in chapter 6, which finally will lead to the conclusion of the researched hypothesis which is formulated in the very last chapter (chapter 7).

2. __Literature review__

2.1. __Critical thinking and its importance to counter radicalisation__

2.1.1. What is the concept of critical thinking

According to the Foundation for Critical Thinking, "*critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action*"[2]. Or more simply, the ability to look at sources of information and assess their value and credibility for oneself without blindly trusting in them at first glance.

2.1.2. Why is critical thinking important for the prevention of radicalisation?

According to Ben Lowings, there are different reasons why critical thinking is important, of which two are described as follows: "*Firstly, conventional educational strategies that attempt to undermine extremist ideologies directly, or promote their opposite, risk a backlash from young people who already feel alienated and patronized by state institutions they do not trust. Developing critical thinking skills gives the power back to young people to make the decisions for themselves. Secondly, critical thinking skills assist in the overall development of young people as good citizens. These skills are transversal, and applicable in multiple contexts beyond the issue of countering violent extremism*"[3].

Hedayah, an international organization for expertise and experience to counter violent extremism, also addresses the importance of developing critical thinking skills to counter violent extremism[4]. In addition, the EU has also noted the importance of critical thinking skills in education and countering violent extremism in the 2015 Paris *Declaration on*

---

[2] Lombardi, L. (2021). *Are you a critical thinker – and can you teach critical thinking to students?,* School Education Gateway.
[3] Lowings, B. (2018). *Education and violent extremism: teaching youth to think for themselves*, Brussels Institute Centre.
[4] Hedayah Center (2016). *Guidelines and good practices. Developing National P/CVE Strategies and Action Plans*.

Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education. They noted that critical thinking skills are paramount in developing "*resistance to all forms of discrimination and indoctrination*"[5].

Fenton and Smith stress the importance of critical thinking skills with reference to the work of John Stuart Mill stating: "*Mill also saw critical thinking as a stronghold against state tyranny. He considered lack of critical thought as a common sense belief in an ideology of truth in terms of conformity. In addition, according to Mill, those who seek to silence dissenters do themselves an injustice. They should welcome debate; if they are confident in their arguments, they ought to allow their possible refutation as this process of contradicting and disproving one's opinion is the very condition which justifies us in assuming its truth for purposes of action*"[6].

Hannah Arendt holds a similar view on critical thinking when she states that she disapproves those beset by the "*mere habit of holding fast to something. Much more reliable will be the doubters and skeptics, not because skepticism is good or doubting wholesome, but because they are used to examine things and to make up their own minds*"[7].

Fenton and Smith observe that "*Increasingly, the literature on professional formation identifies the importance of the Aristotelean intellectual virtue of practical reasoning, which involves critical thinking but also the development of a certain kind of person, one 'disposed towards questioning and criticizing for the sake of more informed and responsible engagement'. Qualities of critical reasoning are especially important in social work where workers are daily confronted with issues where there are no formulaic or easy answers. Properly, then, most social work programmes list 'critical thinking' as an explicit learning outcome*"[8].

---

[5] 2015 Paris Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education

[6] Fenton, J., Smith, M. (2019). 'You Can't Say That!': Critical Thinking, Identity Politics, and the Social Work Academy, *Societies*, Vol. 9 (4), juncto, Mill, J.S. (2011). *On liberty*, London: The Walter Scott Publishing Company.

[7] Arendt, H. (1964). Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship.

[8] Fenton, J., Smith, M. (2019). 'You Can't Say That!': Critical Thinking, Identity Politics, and the Social Work Academy, *Societies*, Vol. 9 (4).

2.1.3. How to teach critical thinking skills?

According to Lombardi et al., "*education systems recognise the importance of strengthening children's capacity to think critically, with the aim of exercising judgement using fact-based knowledge on the one hand and adopting an open and inquiring mindset on the other*"[9]. However, in this article they also mention that "*schools need to better integrate critical thinking into their curricula, as there is still no agreement on what the concept entails and how teachers should be trained to put into practice*". The teachers interviewed in that research stressed that their experience in promoting critical thinking is limited and that there is a need for additional support in this area through peer learning and the exchange of best practices during teacher training[10].

So although it is widely accepted that improving students' critical thinking skills is an important educational goal, pupils' ability to perform it from primary school is lacking, according to Lombardi[11]. She also mentions that research on efficient and appropriate teaching methods for developing critical thinking skills is scarce[12].

It is interesting to look at the analysis of Fenton and Smith regarding identity politics and the way social workers should interact and engage when confronted with extremist ideas. Although a distinction should be made, since social workers and teachers are two different professions, many similarities can be found regarding the topic. In this context Fenton and Smith argue that "*social workers need to be aware of and to engage with identity politics and not fall back on default positions that they may feel pressured or socialised to adopt in respect of what is the right thing to say or do in particular circumstances. Rather, they ought to approach complex social issues with a critical spirit, recognising that there are rarely easy answers and around which a variety of positions might be taken*"[13]. In addition, they suggest that "*identity politics are compatible with a neoliberal worldview and its focus on*

---

[9] Lombardi, L., De Backer, F., Lombaerts, K. (2020, October 6). Teachers' perceptions on critical thinking in primary education, *Foundation for Critical Thinking*.
[10] Lombardi, L., De Backer, F., Lombaerts, K. (2020, October 6). Teachers' perceptions on critical thinking in primary education, *Foundation for Critical Thinking*.
[11] Lombardi, L., De Backer, F., Lombaerts, K. (2019, June 4). Primary teachers' perceptions about and methods to promote students' critical thinking skills, *Foundation for Critical Thinking*.
[12] Lombardi, L., De Backer, F., Lombaerts, K. (2019, June 4). Primary teachers' perceptions about and methods to promote students' critical thinking skills, *Foundation for Critical Thinking*.
[13] Fenton, J., Smith, M. (2019). 'You Can't Say That!': Critical Thinking, Identity Politics, and the Social Work Academy, *Societies*, Vol. 9 (4).

individualism rather than on society. They also create victims among those who feel their particular identity positions are not respected, and this culture of victimhood has deleterious implications for erstwhile assumptions of the importance of free speech. We go on to re-state classical assertions of the need and justification for free speech and academic freedom. We argue that free speech is a prerequisite for critical thinking, a skill that is consistently called for in social work education, but which is often lacking in academic engagement and in professional practice. We conclude by asserting the need for social work academics to engage with and to engage their students in a range of heterodox ideas where contentious and difficult issues can be freely debated"[14].

This brings us to the next topic to be discussed in this research, namely the importance of the freedom of expression in order for teachers to teach pupils to think ccritically.

2.2. The importance of the right to freedom of expression

In this section, the existing literature concerning the reasons why the right to freedom of expression in a democratic society is important will be discussed below. First the importance of the right to freedom of expression, as established in national and international laws, will be set forth. In this first section the importance of freedom of expression is approached by giving a legal perspective. Secondly, the importance of the right to freedom of expression for educational purposes will be clarified.

2.2.1. A legal perspective

Without a doubt, freedom of expression is a crucial right in a democratic society and this right concerns everyone, including teachers. Nevertheless, in this research we want to focus on the best interest of the child, as mentioned in many international legal sources, such as article 3 §1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which states that "*In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration*", and as mentioned in the Belgian Constitution (Article 22bis): "*The best interests of the child are the first consideration in any decision affecting the*

---

[14] Fenton, J., Smith, M. (2019). 'You Can't Say That!': Critical Thinking, Identity Politics, and the Social Work Academy, *Societies*, Vol. 9 (4).

child.". This said, although freedom of expression is a right that belongs to everyone, the interpretation of this right of teachers can play a crucial role in the development of the child. We therefore prioritise the possible positive outcomes for the child as a result of the given interpretation of the right to freedom of expression of teachers above the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression for teachers. Of course, when discussing freedom of expression for teachers in this research, we are talking about this right used during their role as a teacher and not during their leisure and private life.

The right to freedom of expression is a political and civil right that is covered by the main international legal sources. Both article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) cover the right to freedom of expression.

Article 19 of the ICCPR states the following:

> *1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.*
>
> *2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.*
>
> *3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:*
>
> *(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;*
>
> *(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.*

Article 10 of the ECHR states the following:

> *1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, teleview or cinema enterprises.*
>
> *2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of*

national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

As one can observe, this right includes not only the "*right to hold opinions*", but also the "*right to freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas*". Important is that this right is acquired without interference from government, in other words, without censorship.

As these treaties are binding, Belgium has to comply with these laws. Besides these laws and relative court decisions, the Belgian Constitution contains some additional particularities[15]. Therefore, it is legally prescribed that when there is a clash between international and national (Belgian) laws, the highest protective law must be applied. The reason why Belgium provides more protection of the right to freedom of speech than the protection under the ICCPR and the ECHR results from Belgian history and the Belgian constitutional tradition[16]. Due to the repressive Dutch regime of king Willem I that took place before the Belgian independence in 1830, the right to freedom of expression in its broadest sense, as mentioned in the Belgian Constitution of 1831, became a priority of the new regime and since then it receives special protection[17].

Article 19 of the Belgian Constitution mentions freedom of expression as follows:
> *The freedom of worship, the free public exercise thereof, and the freedom to express opinions in any media shall be guaranteed, subject to the punishment of offences committed in the exercise of such freedoms.*

When examining freedom of expression for teachers it is important to explore the legal aspects and societal grounds for the importance of freedom of speech. Basically, freedom of expression (as mentioned in international law) is one of the main fundamental rights and one

---

[15] Lemmens, K., Vrielink, J. (2018). 'De censuur kan nooit worden ingevoerd': vrijheid van meningsuiting en *hate speech* als uitdagingen voor het EHRM en de Belgische rechtspraktijk. In S., Rutten, E., Ramakers, M., Lenaerts (Eds.). *Recht in een multiculturele samenleving*, (1st ed., pp. 125-156), Mortsel (Belgium): Intersentia.
[16] Lemmens, K., Vrielink, J. (2018). 'De censuur kan nooit worden ingevoerd': vrijheid van meningsuiting en *hate speech* als uitdagingen voor het EHRM en de Belgische rechtspraktijk. In S., Rutten, E., Ramakers, M., Lenaerts (Eds.). *Recht in een multiculturele samenleving*, (1st ed., pp. 125-156), Mortsel (Belgium): Intersentia.
[17] Lemmens, K., Vrielink, J. (2018). 'De censuur kan nooit worden ingevoerd': vrijheid van meningsuiting en *hate speech* als uitdagingen voor het EHRM en de Belgische rechtspraktijk. In S., Rutten, E., Ramakers, M., Lenaerts (Eds.). *Recht in een multiculturele samenleving*, (1st ed., pp. 125-156), Mortsel (Belgium): Intersentia.

that has played an essential role in the development of the modern idea of human rights. Traditionally it contains three basic elements: it is the freedom of individuals and groups (1), to express themselves (2), without any hindrance from government (3), as explained by Lemmens and Vrielink[18].

Authors and philosophers are generally defending three categories of foundations in favor of freedom of expression. Namely, self-expression or -development, the argument of truth, and arguments with regard to democracy[19].

According to Lemmens and Vrielink, the argument of self-expression and self-development suggests that because of this freedom of choice, individuals can express themselves freely, but it indicates also that they can take freely cognizance of everything that people say. Therefore, the importance of an offer as varied as possible from which people can choose to develop themselves further, is also essential[20]. When we take the situation of a teacher talking to pupils, this indicates that it is important for pupils, who are in a crucial stage of self-development, to not only be able to speak freely, but also receive freely, without censorship, everything what a teacher has to say in order for them to develop.

The second argument that they suggest, namely the argument of truth, indicates the expectation that the freedom of speech together with the freedom to receive speech will have positive consequences in the future, such as development in the field of science, culture and economics. More importantly, the so-called 'contrast functioning' is relevant in this case. It implies that "*when you prohibit a certain 'wrong' opinion, then those that cannot find out about this fallacy or deviation, will miss the 'clearer insight and the more vivid impression of the truth, that arises due to the clash with the deviation', and further, the 'wrong' opinions keep the (better) ideas of other people vivid*"[21]. A society in which one prevents the explosion to extreme and 'wrong' ideas can be dangerous. People will lose their ability to offer

---

[18] Lemmens, K., Vrielink, J. (2018). 'De censuur kan nooit worden ingevoerd': vrijheid van meningsuiting en *hate speech* als uitdagingen voor het EHRM en de Belgische rechtspraktijk. In S., Rutten, E., Ramakers, M., Lenaerts (Eds.). *Recht in een multiculturele samenleving*, (1st ed., pp. 125-156), Mortsel (Belgium): Intersentia.
[19] Lemmens, K., Vrielink, J. (2018). 'De censuur kan nooit worden ingevoerd': vrijheid van meningsuiting en *hate speech* als uitdagingen voor het EHRM en de Belgische rechtspraktijk. In S., Rutten, E., Ramakers, M., Lenaerts (Eds.). *Recht in een multiculturele samenleving*, (1st ed., pp. 125-156), Mortsel (Belgium): Intersentia.
[20] Lemmens, K., Vrielink, J. (2018). 'De censuur kan nooit worden ingevoerd': vrijheid van meningsuiting en *hate speech* als uitdagingen voor het EHRM en de Belgische rechtspraktijk. In S., Rutten, E., Ramakers, M., Lenaerts (Eds.). *Recht in een multiculturele samenleving*, (1st ed., pp. 125-156), Mortsel (Belgium): Intersentia.
[21] Mill, J. S. (1859). Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion, In J.S. Mill (Ed.). *On Liberty* (2nd ed., pp. 31-99), London: John W. Parker, and Son, West Strand.

resistance (content wise) to 'wrong' or even 'dangerous' ideas when they are being confronted to one[22].

Thirdly, the argument with regard to democracy implies that freedom of expression is an essential precondition for a democracy[23]. As Lemmens and Vrielink explain, on the one hand, freedom of expression is vital for the participation in the democratic forming of the public opinion and the setting of the political agenda. On the other hand, a free press is also essential to inform the citizens. Democratic control by the citizens (voters) is only feasible when citizens are being informed freely and when they can judge by knowing one's facts[24].

In this regard, the obtainment of the right to freedom of expression does not only have an important role in favor of democracy; it also has a very important role for society more generally. E.g. the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) focuses on this vital societal role of freedom of expression. It not only recognises its important role for citizens of the right to freely express themselves, but also of the right to receive opinions and ideas from others in order to be informed, as stated by Lemmens and Vrielink[25].

2.2.2. A pedagogical perspective

The most difficult aspect of freedom of expression is when this speech becomes a crucial factor in the development of a big part of society. This is the case for teachers and education in general. "*The school can be seen as a microcosmos, a community where pupils and teachers intensely, directly and frequently interreact with each other*"[26]. So when teachers are speaking daily to pupils in class, in which the pupils associate the class and school with learning, then the question of freedom of expression has a more broad meaning, a broader

---

[22] Lemmens, K., Vrielink, J. (2018). 'De censuur kan nooit worden ingevoerd': vrijheid van meningsuiting en *hate speech* als uitdagingen voor het EHRM en de Belgische rechtspraktijk. In S., Rutten, E., Ramakers, M., Lenaerts (Eds.). *Recht in een multiculturele samenleving*, (1st ed., pp. 125-156), Mortsel (Belgium): Intersentia.
[23] Lemmens, K., Vrielink, J. (2018). 'De censuur kan nooit worden ingevoerd': vrijheid van meningsuiting en *hate speech* als uitdagingen voor het EHRM en de Belgische rechtspraktijk. In S., Rutten, E., Ramakers, M., Lenaerts (Eds.). *Recht in een multiculturele samenleving*, (1st ed., pp. 125-156), Mortsel (Belgium): Intersentia.
[24] Lemmens, K., Vrielink, J. (2018). 'De censuur kan nooit worden ingevoerd': vrijheid van meningsuiting en *hate speech* als uitdagingen voor het EHRM en de Belgische rechtspraktijk. In S., Rutten, E., Ramakers, M., Lenaerts (Eds.). *Recht in een multiculturele samenleving*, (1st ed., pp. 125-156), Mortsel (Belgium): Intersentia.
[25] Lemmens, K., Vrielink, J. (2018). 'De censuur kan nooit worden ingevoerd': vrijheid van meningsuiting en *hate speech* als uitdagingen voor het EHRM en de Belgische rechtspraktijk. In S., Rutten, E., Ramakers, M., Lenaerts (Eds.). *Recht in een multiculturele samenleving*, (1st ed., pp. 125-156), Mortsel (Belgium): Intersentia.
[26] Lancksweerdt, E. (2016). Bemiddeling in het onderwijs en burgerschapsvorming, *Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2016-2017 (1-2), pp. 7-15.

effect and therefore a broader functioning within society. So in favor of the development of young people, it is interesting to investigate the right to freedom of expression of teachers or of education in general.

In this regard, Bill Durodie strongly defends the right to freedom of expression for all working within education. He suggests that "*the inability of the authorities to hold the line in support of absolute freedom of expression, within academia and beyond, tacitly encourages the very people the government would hope to detract*"[27]. He argues that "*the solution of authorities to impose restrictions on free speech and to monitor presumed perpetrators undermines the very role of the institution, which ought to be where engagement with unpalatable ideas is most expected*"[28]. It should be mentioned that his research is about universities and not primary schools.

More importantly, Bill Durodie presumes that "*the culture of not causing hurt or offence is not a solution against radicalisation*". In contrast, he argues that it might be the cause of radicalisation, as he states that "*contemporary forms of radicalisation and extremism need have little to do with religion, race politics and foreign policy, or any form of grievance and exclusion. These developments are consequences, not causes, of an unstated and largely unnoticed cultural drift that is affecting mainstream society. It is a drift whereby individuals and institutions in positions of authority appear no longer willing to argue the positions they are held to stand for*"[29].

He also argues that "*in the educational sector, many working there have also abandoned the agenda of a true spirit of education, which necessarily confronts individuals with discomfiting aspects of reality, for a less challenging existence namely by avoiding such confrontations. This trend in both the educational sector and the entire society, finds its most extreme reflection in the horrible acts of a few. Unlike the acts of previous terror groups, these actions lack a coherent purpose or direction. They are the product of the societal drift to which the*

---

[27] Durodie, B. (2016). Securitising education to prevent terrorism or losing direction?, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 64 (1), pp. 21-35.
[28] Durodie, B. (2016). Securitising education to prevent terrorism or losing direction?, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 64 (1), pp. 21-35.
[29] Durodie, B. (2016). Securitising education to prevent terrorism or losing direction?, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 64 (1), pp. 21-35.

elites and authorities, including those in education, appear to have increasingly succumbed"[30].

Fenton and Smith share this view and state that "*a victimhood culture has academic implications. For some, the mission of universities has been redefined, moving away from critiquing and advancing knowledge towards promoting the claims of particular identity groups. In this context, opinions that might be at odds with a person's own account of themselves are amplified to 'hate' (phobia) of the group the person belongs to, and concomitant calls for protection from said 'hate' and the harm that might be said to result*"[31].

Concerning the consequences, they argue that "*such protectiveness helps nobody, least of all those who would wish to be protected from views they do not like. It does not prepare students for the real-life situations they will have to face as they enter the working world. It certainly does not prepare them for social work, where personal slights and value clashes are everyday occurrences. Moreover, it is not good for students' mental health, encouraging them to operate in states of anxiety verging on depression. So, while protecting them from words and ideas that may or may not cause some kind of emotional discomfort is only a momentary solution, in the long run, it actually harms the students and, ultimately, the profession they enter into*"[32].

In this regard, "*the essence of free speech is that we open up our views to others in (what Habermas identifies as) the public sphere, which accommodates a multiplicity of viewpoints*"[33], as Fenton and Smith state. They assume that "*Failing to do so teaches students to stick to the 'language rules' whilst not critically thinking about the complexity of human experience. Merely sticking to the 'language rules' in social work practice may be understandable in an increasingly regulated professional landscape, but it does not make for good social work*"[34].

---

[30] Durodie, B. (2016). Securitising education to prevent terrorism or losing direction?, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 64 (1), pp. 21-35.
[31] Fenton, J., Smith, M. (2019). 'You Can't Say That!': Critical Thinking, Identity Politics, and the Social Work Academy, *Societies*, Vol. 9 (4).
[32] Fenton, J., Smith, M. (2019). 'You Can't Say That!': Critical Thinking, Identity Politics, and the Social Work Academy, *Societies*, Vol. 9 (4).
[33] Fenton, J., Smith, M. (2019). 'You Can't Say That!': Critical Thinking, Identity Politics, and the Social Work Academy, *Societies*, Vol. 9 (4).
[34] Fenton, J., Smith, M. (2019). 'You Can't Say That!': Critical Thinking, Identity Politics, and the Social Work Academy, *Societies*, Vol. 9 (4).

Further, Tatiana Feitosa de Britto concludes in her research, in which she investigated the scope given to teachers' freedom of expression in case law in Canada, that "*Exposing students to different ideas and values might be an essential pedagogical tool for promoting critical thinking and developing tolerance and respect in a democratic society, where diversity and pluralism are to be respected and cherished. Therefore, addressing sensitive and controversial topics in the classroom might be an intrinsic part of the job of an educator, even when it produces clashes with the views espoused by parents*"[35]. In fact, she states that "*The protection of curricular speech addressing controversial topics – in a responsible and pedagogically appropriate way – opens up room for recognizing children as subjects distinguishable from their parents and bearers of their own learning rights*"[36].

Uten and Sunaert suggest that "*confessing (political) color, on condition that this happens openly and explicitly, forces pupils to take up a certain position (pro or contra), and stimulates pupils to support their own position on the basis of workable arguments*"[37].

Although the focus of this research is not on universities and colleges, it is nevertheless useful to refer to academic research regarding higher education. According to Marlies Sas et al. "*Several universities have already drawn up guidelines so that lectures which could provoke contradictory reactions from the public due to the content or tone of the message are prohibited. In addition, the Prevent strategy is blamed for creating an atmosphere of distrust within higher education institutions. By not clearly defining what is meant by extremism or radicalism, this would prevent students and staff from speaking freely during classes or debates for fear of being targeted. Recent attacks, such as the one on Charlie Hebdo, show how controversial freedom of expression can be. It is therefore important that students and staff can speak and discuss freely within a safe school environment. It is therefore necessary to focus on these themes in policy plans*"[38].

---

[35] Feitosa de Britto, T. (2018). Neither Hired Mouth nor Class Monarchs, *Canadian Journal of Education*, Vol. 14 (3), pp. 783-807.
[36] Feitosa de Britto, T. (2018). Neither Hired Mouth nor Class Monarchs, *Canadian Journal of Education*, Vol. 14 (3), pp. 783-807.
[37] Uten, T., Sunaert, W. (2018). *Workshop burgerschapseducatie: burgerschap en vrijheid van meningsuiting*, Universiteit Gent: Gent.
[38] Sas, M., Hardyns, W., Ponnet, K., Reniers, G. (2019). Radicalisering op de campus: welke rol kunnen hogeronderwijsinstellingen opnemen bij het voorkomen en aanpakken van radicalisering bij jongeren?, *Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2018-2019 (3), pp. 221-230.

However, Sas et al. state that "*Taking into account the existence of terrorists with a high level of education, researchers and politicians are convinced that higher education can play an important role in preventing and addressing radicalisation among young people. Their role is clarified in the policy plans of the European initiatives discussed. The comparison of these plans shows that mainly freedom of expression and debate are considered important preventive measures. By creating an environment where both students and staff members are free to say what they think, conflicting thoughts can be discussed.*"[39].

2.3.   Institutional frame of Belgian education

2.3.1. The purpose of education in general

Interesting in this discussion, is the purpose of education as from the 19th century. With reference to the work of Foucault, Wouters et al. explain very well what the purpose of education was during the Age of Enlightenment: "*Whereas education was initially a privilege for certain higher classes or groups, in the 19th century, with the emergence of the modern state, education became a means of educating all people and developing them in autonomy and empowerment. Popular education or the mass schools in the 19th century arose precisely from this 'liberal idea'. Enlightenment philosophers, such as Emmanuel Kant, saw education as an opportunity to shape people into free and reasonable ('sensible') citizens. This body of thought is known in literature as 'Bildung', a term attributed to the German philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt. Education was seen as the means to self-development and general humanisation. The 'enlightened' human being is the prototype: the person who develops the ability to appeal to his or her own reason and intellect, the person who can lay down the law for himself or herself and think critically*"[40].

"*From the 20th century onwards, education was no longer seen merely as a matter concerning the individual, but as a social issue*", explains Wouter et al. "*Education was increasingly seen as a means of emancipation and of community building with a view to creating a social welfare state. Education was seen as the means par excellence to eliminate*

---

[39] Sas, M., Hardyns, W., Ponnet, K., Reniers, G. (2019). Radicalisering op de campus: welke rol kunnen hogeronderwijsinstellingen opnemen bij het voorkomen en aanpakken van radicalisering bij jongeren?, *Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2018-2019 (3), pp. 221-230.

[40] Wouters, R., Haven, R., Winters, A., De Fraine, B., Henkens, B. (2014). *Laat leraren schitteren. Inspiratiegids voor leraren en lerarenopleidingen van morgen*, LannooCampus: Leuven.

class differences and inequality"[41]. In this regard, Marc Depaepe, a historical educationalist, states that: "*By raising awareness of the prevailing social inequality and lack of freedom (...), the youth had to be educated 'critically' with a view to the fundamental improvement of society. The goal of this education was that of the emancipated or 'mature' human being*"[42].

Regarding a trend in the 21st century, Tobias Reijngoud argues in his book that "*In combination with increased individualisation, a trend towards 'economisation' is also evident in our society. Everything must pay off, all talents must be utilised, investments must yield a clear and demonstrable return. Quantity, efficiency, return and measurability seem to be the new values, often at the expense of depth, care and quality. Within this framework, we are increasingly creating a system in which everyone is each other's potential competitor and competition is the primary motive for our actions*"[43]. One might assume that this trend is also visible within the field of education.

Indeed, another shift in the purpose of education is made in the 21st century. Education is also seen as a means of promoting economic prosperity[44]. Or as Peter Drucker, a professor of management, states: "*Education as a 'knowledge industry', as the main provider of knowledge and useful knowledge workers and therefore the most important part of the 'knowledge economy'* "[45]. Yet, according to Wouters et al., "*Some authors indicate that education today must especially guide young people in the acquisition of their own (social, emotional, philosophical) identity and the formation of an authentic personality now that the great (sense) stories have fallen away. In this respect, freedom through education refers to a more determined view as fully developing as a human being; being able to be and become who one is and wants to be. Focusing on talents aims at exactly this kind of freedom: the*

---

[41] Wouters, R., Geerinck, I., Lievens, J. (2017). Waar spreken we (niet) over als we het over 'vrijheid van onderwijs' hebben? Een analyse van 'onderwijsvrijheid'als sensitizing concept, *Tijdschift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2016/17 (3), pp. 125-133.

[42] Depaepe, M. (1998). *De pedagogisering achterna. Aanzet tot een genealogie van de pedagogische mentaliteit in de voorbije 250 jaar*, Leuven: Acco.

[43] Reijngoud, T. (2012). *Weten is meer dan meten: Spraakmakende opinieleiders over de economisering van de samenleving*, Hilversum: Uitgeverij Lias, pp. 137-138.

[44] Wouters, R., Geerinck, I., Lievens, J. (2017). Waar spreken we (niet) over als we het over 'vrijheid van onderwijs' hebben? Een analyse van 'onderwijsvrijheid'als sensitizing concept, *Tijdschift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid,* Vol. 2016/17 (3), pp. 125-133.

[45] Drucker, P. (2004). *De Werkbare Maatschappij. Essays over gemeenschap, politiek en management*, Business Contact.

freedom to get the best out of each child, to grow in what one is good at and to use that goodness for the benefit of social and economic development"[46].

Patrick Loobuyck argues that "*People have moral and rational faculties that enable them to think, evaluate and judge things. We can imagine how we want to live, who we want to be and what we want to mean to others. We make choices, change our minds from time to time and can explore new things*"[47]. Or as Rawls state: "*In a free society it is about respect for everyone's capacity to frame, revise and pursue a conception of the good*"[48].

In this regard, Loobuyck considers the following purpose of education: "*It is in function of this capacity that education is important. What good is freedom of expression to people if they have never learned how to express themselves and how to form and evaluate an opinion? What good is the freedom for people to travel, to go wherever you want, if you do not know that Florence and Paris are beautiful cities, if you cannot read a map and do not know how to take a train? What good are political freedoms for people if they do not know what political system they live in, how power works, what society is like, what rights they have and what citizenship means?*"[49].

In addition, "*Education can help teach and cultivate democratic attitudes and dispositions. Young people learn that they form a society with people whose opinions may differ from their own on essential points. A mutual acceptance of this state of affairs and a democratic-cooperative attitude are minimum conditions for living together peacefully. Education may therefore focus on the political democratic virtues that are necessary to make society possible as a fair cooperative society*", as Loobuyck suggests[50].

[46] Wouters, R., Geerinck, I., Lievens, J. (2017). Waar spreken we (niet) over als we het over 'vrijheid van onderwijs' hebben? Een analyse van 'onderwijsvrijheid'als sensitizing concept, *Tijdschift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2016/17 (3), pp. 125-133.
[47] Loobuyck, P. (2019). Burgerschapseducatie in Vlaanderen. Het politiek liberalisme als filosofisch kader, *Tijdschift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2018/19 (4-5), pp. 310-322.
[48] Rawls, J. (1993 [1996]). *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
[49] Loobuyck, P. (2019). Burgerschapseducatie in Vlaanderen. Het politiek liberalisme als filosofisch kader, *Tijdschift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2018/19 (4-5), pp. 310-322.
[50] Loobuyck, P. (2019). Burgerschapseducatie in Vlaanderen. Het politiek liberalisme als filosofisch kader, *Tijdschift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2018/19 (4-5), pp. 310-322.

However, Stephen Macedo argues that people are not born with a democratic disposition[51]. Therefore, Loobuyck suggests that "*Democracy needs to be explained, taught, advocated and practised. This can be done at home, in the youth movement or through the media, but it is not guaranteed. The only place where society can address all its citizens is education*"[52].

In this regard, Loobuyck defends the purpose of education and citizenship education more specifically: "*The democratic attitude, the critical dialogue and openness of mind cannot be forced, but the school can invite and encourage it. Citizenship education should enable people to maintain themselves as independent citizens in a society, but in principle it does not make a statement about how to do so. The aim is not to create left-wing or right-wing, progressive or conservative, nationalistic or federalistic, republican, or other forms of citizenship.*
or federalist, republican or royalist, committed, activist or rather withdrawn citizens. The aim is to enable young people to position themselves politically and to take up, substantiate and discuss positions"[53].

By contrast, some authors defend a different view in which they prefer tolerance above autonomy and critical thinking. Chandran Kukathas for example state that the state should not interfere with education at all[54]. A more moderate suggestion comes from William Galston. He argues that education and information are important, but attaches particular importance to minority groups being able to be themselves[55]. "*They are critical of education that puts too much emphasis on autonomy and critical thinking because it can stifle diversity and threaten traditional, religiously inspired forms of life*", as Loobuyck concludes[56].

2.3.2. How education is structured in Flanders

First and foremost, it is important to note that the education system in Flanders is organised in three educational networks. First, there is the GO! education. This is the official education

---

[51] Macedo, S. (2000). *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
[52] Loobuyck, P. (2019). Burgerschapseducatie in Vlaanderen. Het politiek liberalisme als filosofisch kader, *Tijdschift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2018/19 (4-5), pp. 310-322.
[53] Loobuyck, P. (2019). Burgerschapseducatie in Vlaanderen. Het politiek liberalisme als filosofisch kader, *Tijdschift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2018/19 (4-5), pp. 310-322.
[54] Kukathas, C. (2001). Education and Citizenship in Diverse Societies, *International Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 35, pp. 319-330.
[55] Galston, W. (1995). Two Concepts of Liberalism, *Ethics*, Vol. 105 (3), pp. 516-534.
[56] Loobuyck, P. (2019). Burgerschapseducatie in Vlaanderen. Het politiek liberalisme als filosofisch kader, *Tijdschift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2018/19 (4-5), pp. 310-322.

organised by the Flemish Community and this network is mostly known for its strict neutrality, which is also mentioned in the Belgian constitution (BE Const. art. 24, §1)[57]. The second educational system is the government-aided public education. This system comprises schools run by the municipal or authorities. And finally, there is the government-aided private education. This is formed by a private person or organisation. This network consists primarily of Catholic schools which form one of the biggest networks in Flanders. It includes also schools not linked to a religion, such as alternative schools. Such schools apply specific teaching methods on the basis of Freinet, Montessori or Steiner.

Freedom of education is interpreted on the basis of the constitutionally anchored freedom of direction and organisation. In other words, educational networks and/or school instructors are free to offer education based on a philosophical conviction or according to a specific pedagogical method[58]. In Belgium, freedom of education is enshrined in article 24 of the Constitution:

> *Article 24 § 1. Education is free; any preventive measure is forbidden; punishment of offences is only regulated by law or decree. The community shall guarantee the freedom of choice of the parents. The community organises neutral education. Neutrality implies, among other things, respect for the philosophical, ideological or religious views of parents and pupils.*
>
> *Schools run by public authorities offer, until the end of compulsory education, a choice between the teaching of one of the recognised religions and non-denominational ethics.*

The Belgian schooling system is legally established on four principles: "*(1) the recognition of public (state) and private schools; (2) the parental choice between a state or a private school; (3) state subsidies for private schools; and (4) pupils in (primary and secondary) state schools have the right to choose between 'education in Catholic, protestant or Israelitic (sic.) religion, and in non-confessional ethics' (art. 8)*".[59]

---

[57] Eurydice (2020-2021). *Belgium – Flemish Community Overview*.
[58] Veny, L. (2010), *Onderwijsrecht I. Dragende beginselen*, Brugge: die Keure.
[59] Franken, L. (2016). The freedom of religion and the freedom of education in twenty-first-century Belgium: a critical approach, *British Journal of Religious Education. Vol. 38* (3), pp. 308-324.

From a policy and organisational perspective, the "*freedom before education*" as Wouters et al. refer to, is an important explanatory concept for the current educational structure. Prompted by the summary description of freedom of education in the Constitution, a complex educational landscape has emerged with educational networks, educational umbrellas and organisations[60].

"*Whereas in the rest of the world, confessional education is often private education, the Belgian Constitution, together with the School Pact, has initiated the phenomenon whereby confessional - and especially Catholic - education is the largest subsidised network, despite the secularised society*"[61].

Isaiah Berlin, a political philosopher, speaks about two conceptions of freedom, namely positive and negative freedom[62]. According to him, negative freedom stands for the absence of coercion, domination and dictatorship, and positive freedom implies that people can define themselves and develop, and that they are free to do something or not to do something, that they can guide their lives.

Following the idea of Berlin, Wouters et al. apply the notion of negative freedom on education and conclude that "*When applied to the freedom to organise education, negative 'freedom in education' is about the non-interference of others in the actions of a teacher, in the learning of a pupil, in the project of a school. The pupil, the teacher and the school are free in the sense of 'not dominated' or 'controlled' by others or by something else. For teachers, it means, for example, that they do not have to follow a fixed script as in some schools in the United States where teachers teach by scripted instruction, by a strictly defined script with precise timing, instructions and questions*"[63].

---

[60] Wouters, R., Geerinck, I., Lievens, J. (2017). Waar spreken we (niet) over als we het over 'vrijheid van onderwijs' hebben? Een analyse van 'onderwijsvrijheid'als sensitizing concept, *Tijdschift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2016/17 (3), pp. 125-133.

[61] Wouters, R., Geerinck, I., Lievens, J. (2017). Waar spreken we (niet) over als we het over 'vrijheid van onderwijs' hebben? Een analyse van 'onderwijsvrijheid'als sensitizing concept, *Tijdschift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid,* Vol. 2016/17 (3), pp. 125-133.

[62] Berlin, I. (1996). *Twee opvattingen van vrijheid.* [Original text from 1958, *Two concepts of Liberty*, Oxford University Press.], Amsterdam: Boom.

[63] Wouters, R., Haven, R., Winters, A., De Fraine, B., Henkens, B. (2014). *Laat leraren schitteren. Inspiratiegids voor leraren en lerarenopleidingen van morgen*, Leuven: LannooCampus.

2.3.3. Existing policies concerning critical thinking and freedom of expression

The official statement of the intention, principles and organisation of a given school or school network is the curriculum. Every school or network of schools has its own curriculum that is under control of the Flanders ministry of education. In other words, the curriculum is a grouping of the objectives enforced by the government on the one hand, and the objectives defined by the school network on the other. As a consequence, when investigating aspects of the educational system in Flanders, different curricula should be investigated. The largest educational networks in Flanders are the GO! and Catholic Education Flanders. Most of the insights of this research also came from these two networks. Therefore, the curricula of the GO! and Catholic Education Flanders are being discussed below.

Community education (GO!)

In the curriculum of the GO!, critical thinking is mentioned as follows: "*The pupils can be critical and formulate their own opinions. This involves: (1) perceiving a situation critically and expressing it in such a way that it can be discussed; (2) confronting a fellow pupil with the effect of his/her behaviour; (3) expressing in a polite way to elderly people what they think they are doing wrong; (4) Thinking critically about certain social situations; (5) listening critically; (6) disapprove of unjust situations in an appropriate way*"[64]. Critical thinking is also shortly mentioned in almost all sections of the curriculum, so critical thinking is seen as an aspect that is important for various subjects.

The pedagogical project of the GO! (PPGO!) contains the basic principles, the values and the general objectives of the GO! education of the Flemish community which all GO! schools have to comply with. In this document is written among other things that critical thinking is one of the skills that should be developed among pupils. Pupils should be able to think critically of themselves and of society. In addition, it is also mentioned that the GO! has the constitutional task to offer neutral education. In this regard, it states that "*the values that GO! supports provide the certainty of a framework of neutrality that is necessary to enable a dialogue between different philosophies of life on an equal footing: freedom, equality and solidarity*"[65].

---

[64] Curriculum primary education GO!. Retrieved from https://pro.g-o.be/blog/Documents/lpalgemeendeel1.pdf
[65] Pedagogical Project GO!. Retrieved from https://g-o.be/media/1542/pedagogisch-project_2016_def.pdf

Further, teachers have to sign a declaration of neutrality before starting to work in a GO! school. In this neutrality declaration, objectives for the teacher concerning critical thinking are written: "*A critical spirit: (1) I want to contribute to the mutual understanding between people with different philosophical and social views by pointing out differences and similarities to learners and using them to work on connection. (2) I guide and stimulate the critical sense and freedom of knowledge and conscience of learners. (3) When dealing with facts and opinions, I strive for the utmost objectivity and impartiality and remain intellectually honest. (4) I commit myself not to shy away from differences of opinion, but to actively use them to contribute to learning to live together on the basis of basic democratic values. (5) I know that I can and may make my personal commitment known if the upbringing or educational situation requires it. But I do so cautiously and carefully, which means that I certainly refrain from any form of indoctrination and/or zeal for conversion*"[66].

Catholic Education Flanders

In the curriculum of Catholic Education Flanders, critical thinking is also entailed. In this document critical thinking objectives are defined as follows: "*Being critical of oneself and others: (1) Being critical of oneself when playing, working, living together; (2) Giving his opinion to someone; (3) Daring to not agree with the opinion of another; (4) Giving constructive feedback to another with an eye on working points and elements for improvement; (5) Recognising, analysing and naming a social problem.*"[67]. Further, when discussing ideological traditions, critical thinking is entailed in this topic as follows: "*From a respectful exchange with others, critically examine one's own values and standards - critically question the other about his or her values and standards*"[68]. Like GO!, Catholic Education Flanders regards critical thinking skills as an aspect that is necessary for many different subjects, as critical thinking is also shortly mentioned in other topics, if not all.

In sum, critical thinking is part of the objectives in both curricula. However, there is no clear definition of critical thinking in the curricula, and it is also not mentioned how to teach this,

---

[66] Neutrality declaration. Retrieved from https://g-o.be/media/1543/neutraliteitsverklaring_2016_def.pdf
[67] Curriculum Catholic Education Flanders. Retrieved from https://zill.katholiekonderwijs.vlaanderen/#!/leerinhoud/SE/rv/4
[68] Curriculum Catholic Education Flanders. Retrieved from https://zill.katholiekonderwijs.vlaanderen/#!/leerinhoud/IK/wn/3

which is due to the freedom of education as mentioned earlier. As Lombardi also states: "*Critical thinking is explicitly mentioned as a fundamental set of skills to be developed, but it is not defined how to teach this. Too much emphasis is placed on "what to think" instead of "how to learn to think*"[69].

In addition, teachers who wants to teach in a school belonging to a certain network, such as community school or a catholic schools, have to comply with the views and values that the school propagates.

Having said all that, do teachers know how to teach critical thinking? Do they receive training about critical thinking? Do they know what they can say or cannot say? Or do they know what they better say to develop critical thinking skills for pupils? Is there a gap between what research know and what teachers know in this regard? Many questions arise.

In sum, this research focuses on the question to what extend the right to freedom of expression of teachers should be in order for them to enhance the pupils' ability to think critically. Before elaborating on the research method of this study, the limitations will be discussed in the next chapter.

---

[69] Lombardi, L. (2021). Are you a critical thinker – and can you teach critical thinking to students?, *School Education Gateway*.

3. <u>Limitations of the research</u>

As the right to freedom of expression and its impact on critical thinking can be applicable to all teachers in all schools, few restrictions have been made for the respondents. The research is only restricted by scope given the focus on primary schools and geographically.

Concerning the geographical limitation of this research, this research focuses only on the city of Antwerp (Belgium), which is the city of Antwerp and its neighboring districts[70]. The reason why this research focuses only on Antwerp, is because of the problem of radicalisation that Antwerp has. As from 2013, many Belgian Foreign Fighters left Belgium to fight in Syria for IS. The city of Antwerp is known to have delivered quite some IS fighters[71].

Another reason is the time constraint. Due to limited time, the focus of this research is only on Antwerp. More interesting would be to conduct a Flanders-wide research in which a comparison between city-based schools and village-based schools could be made. Also the capital of Brussels in which the terrorist attacks of 2015 took place might also be an interesting territory to be investigated. Not only its huge multiculturality[72], but also its relative high threat to terrorist attacks, can be an interesting aspect of a possible impact on the right to freedom of expression of teachers. However, as mentioned above, because of the limited time, this research focuses only on the region of the city of Antwerp.

Besides a geographical restriction, the surveys had to be filled in by teachers from primary schools only. Concerning this restriction, it should be mentioned that the freedom of expression of teachers of both primary schools and secondary schools are interesting and equally important to be investigated. Research on preventive measures against radicalisation so far has been conducted mostly using data from secondary schools, as the radicalised youth that has been detected so far was at the age between 15 and 22 years old, this is the so called youth radicalisation, as already mentioned in the introduction. Although most of the researches investigating preventive measures for youth radicalisation focused on secondary

---

[70] Districts : Antwerpen (zip codes 2000, 2018, 2020 and 2030), Linkeroever (2050), Antwerpen-Noord (2060), Deurne (2100), Borgerhout (2140), Merksem (2170), Berchem (2600), Wilrijk (2610), Hoboken (2660).
[71] Colaert, L., et al. (2017). *'Deradicalisering'. Wetenschapelijke inzichten voor een Vlaams beleid*, Vlaams Vredesinstituut, pp. 13.
[72] Brussels counts 166 different nationalities in 2017 :
https://www.statistiekvlaanderen.be/sites/default/files/docs/LIIMBR-Brussel.pdf

schools and higher education, it is useful to gain insights on what the preventive measures against radicalisation are in primary schools. Moreover, Lombardi argues that developing critical thinking skills are especially essential for primary education[73].

Another important limitation of this research is the range of respondents. Although e-mails were send to all the primary schools of Antwerp – 159 in total – and messages were send regularly on social media platforms and have been shared by others, only 38 respondents have filled in the survey. It would have been more interesting if more teachers would have filled in the survey. As a consequence, only a small dataset could be analysed. As mentioned already in the introduction, this might be a consequence of the quite controversial and sensitive topic that is being asked about in the survey, namely freedom of expression and critical thinking as a preventive tool against radicalisation. Another possible reason for the small number of completed surveys, might be the assumption that teachers receive many requests to fill in all kinds of surveys for the purpose of educational research. I addition, a very careful presupposition might be that teachers are simply less interested in this research topic. Yet, without further research this assumption cannot be considered in a general way. Moreover, in contrast with this presupposition, the few positive comments on this research topic from teachers received during this research shows that there is an interest. Therefore the first two mentioned assumed reasons are more likely to be the reason for the small dataset.

The respondents of the completed surveys are all teachers from primary schools in Antwerp. Moreover, the respondents were mainly teachers who teach in Catholic schools. Only four surveys were filled in by teachers who teach in a community school (GO! school), only one respondent teaches in a provincial school and another respondent teaches in a Steiner school. No teacher from a Jewish school could be reached, which would have been interested as well. As a consequence, not one significant correlation could be established between the answers of the teachers of different kinds of schools in Antwerp, which would have been very interesting. As already mentioned, all these schools follow their own curriculum – drawn with respect to the official obligated guidelines for the curricula – and have a slightly different pedagogical perspective and way of teaching. Not being able to have investigated this part of this research – namely the differences between the different networks of schools – can be seen as one of the most unfortunate limitations of this research, and therefore this should be investigated more

---

[73] Lombardi, L. (2019). Primary teachers' perceptions about and methods to promote students' critical thinking skills (conference paper), *The 39th International Conference on Critical Thinking*.

deeply to be able to conclude whether there are differences between the different policies concerning the right to freedom of expression of their teachers.

The second part of this research consists of the interviews that have been conducted among principals from primary schools in Antwerp. As most of the surveys were completed by teachers from Catholic and GO! schools, only Catholic and GO! schools were contacted for the interviews. As a consequence, principals from 29 GO! and Catholic primary schools in Antwerp were contacted. Yet, only two principals agreed to fix an appointment for an interview. This of course has influenced the weight of the evidence coming from the analysed interviews. The initial intention was to use these qualitative data to compare it with the results of the surveys. As a consequence of the fact that not many principals of primary schools could be interviewed, the interviews of the two principals of community primary schools are rather used and analysed as supplementary evidence that has to be regarded with a critical eye, because its significance is hard to proof. In other words, a very solid comparison between the quantitative data and the qualitative data could not be made. Nevertheless, due to their practical view on the matter, interesting qualitative insights on this topic were gained for this research and also for further research.

It is hard to make conclusions about the reasons why only two principals responded, as most of them did not respond at all, although even a reminder was send a few weeks after the first e-mail. One possible reason might be the tight schedules of the school principals during the final months of the school year. Besides their regular tasks and duties, due to the current covid pandemic a number of additional responsibilities were merged with their daily work load. This is a valid reason, as some of them replied that they did not have time until the summer holidays. Another possible reason could be that some principals were reticent and did not want to express their view on the matter due to the sensitivity of the topic being questioned during the interview. Further, the high number of requests for interviews that they receive should also be considered. One lady principal replied indeed that due to her busy schedule and the many requests for interviews she receives, she only agrees to be interviewed by former pupils of the school.

As a consequence of the very limited amount of interviews, a few experts on the matter were contacted in order to obtain additional qualitative data and insights. As a result, a third interview was conducted by a qualified person who has a lot of expertise in radicalisation.

4. **Methodology**

For this study a mixed research approach is used. Both surveys to collect quantitative data and a few interviews to collect qualitative data were conducted.

4.1.   Surveys

The surveys had to be filled in by teachers from primary schools in the region of the city of Antwerp. They had to answer questions concerning their experience on the right to freedom of expression used within the school, their experience on how to hold class conversations and dialogues with pupils, and their knowledge on how to teach critical thinking (see annex 1 for all the survey questions).

As this is a quantitative method, the answers were statistically analysed via SPSS. Before doing so, numbers were given to the possible answers in order to analyze the results statistically. After this cleaning of the data, the categories were first separately analysed. In other words, for the descriptive statistics, the means and standard deviation were calculated. For the other questions, the percentages of the answers were calculated in comparison with the total amount of answers. Secondly, many possible correlations between the different categories were analysed in order to retrieve the significant correlations. Only the significant and interesting results will be discussed in the discussion in section 6.

A consequence of the small data set is that only a few significant correlations were found. Nevertheless, the correlations that are significant, gave interesting insights on the matter. Due to this small dataset, the statistical tests that are used in order to identify significant correlations are all nonparametric tests. The test that is mostly suited and therefore very often used for this specific small dataset is the Kruskal-Wallis test, a basic nonparametric test. This test is used when a correlation has to be calculated between one numerical variable and a ranking variable. In this research there are four numerical variables, namely sex, grade, amount of years of work experience and type of school. Ranking variable refers to the responses on a question in which respondents had to answer by giving a score, mostly going from one to five.

Only four correlations have been calculated via three other types of tests. The Fisher's Exact test (Pearson Chi-Square test) is used when a correlation has to be calculated between two categoric variables, and with a small data set. Another test, the Mean Whitney U test is used to calculate a correlation between two yes/no-questions. The last type of test that is used is the Spearman's Rho test. The latter is used when there are two scores to be compared, so two ranking variables.

4.2.   Interviews

Besides these quantitative data, qualitative data were collected via interviews. Three interviews in total were conducted with the aim to compare these answers with the quantitative data retrieved from the answers of the surveys and with the existing literature. All respondents in the interviews remain anonymous, as it is not relevant for this research to mention their names.

The two first interviewees are principals from two different primary community schools in Antwerp. They had to answer questions about their policy concerning the right to freedom of expression of the teachers, the existing guidelines concerning dialogues and class conversations with pupils, and their view on the matter. All the orientation questions used during these two interviews are listed in annex 4.

A third interview to gain more insights from another perspective has been conducted. Its respondent is an expert in radicalisation – Islam radicalisation to be more specific. To proof his expertise, it is relevant to give a short description of his work and the aim of the organisation. Among other things, the organization he works for explains and gives guidance on how to deal with ideological and religious diversity, how to handle concrete cases concerning ideologies in a school environment, and concerning the 'how' and 'why' young people radicalise. This respondent gives guidance during class conversations, and informs and coaches teachers on how to hold a conversation with pupils and parents. Although this research focuses on radicalisation in general – and not specifically radicalisation with a religious motivation – his practical experience and scientific view on the matter is rather important, as the organisation works with teachers and schools, but is not part of the institutions and therefore can be seen as a more objective approach. In addition, his work

focuses only on radicalisation and therefore he is an expert. Schools on the contrary have many other operational tasks, and do not only focus on the prevention of radicalisation of their pupils. Therefore, his insights and his experience on the matter is of great importance for this research. An outline of the orientation questions can be consulted in annex 5.

The analysis of the interviews is done as follows: the interviews were first transcribed manually, and then the transcriptions were coded. During this phase, different codes were given to the relevant statements of the respondents. Afterwards, the different answers in the interviews were compared with each other by means of these codes. Via this approach, both similarities and differences in opinion and information on the matter were discovered, which are discussed and compared with the literature in the discussion (section 6).

5. Results

5.1. Results of the surveys

First and foremost, the results of the frequency tables of the four numerical variables, namely sex, type of school, grade and working experience, of the in total 38 respondents will be presented.

5.1.1. The four numerical variables

The first numerical variable to be discussed is the variable sex (fig. 5.1.1.). Only 13,2% of the in total 38 respondents are men. The other 33 respondents are all women.

Sex				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Man	5	13,2	13,2	13,2
Woman	33	86,8	86,8	100,0
Total	38	100,0	100,0	

Fig. 5.1.1. – Numerical variable sex

Concerning the grade in which the respondents teach (fig. 5.1.2.), we notice that half of the respondents teach in the 3rd grade of primary school, namely 52,6% to be exact. The percentage of respondents of the 1st and the 2nd grade are similar, namely respectively 21,1% and 26,3%. The 1st grade contains pupils between 6 to 8 years old, in the second grade pupils are between 8 to 10 years old, and pupils from the 3rd grade are between 10 and 12 years old.

Grade				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1st grade	8	21,1	21,1	21,1
2nd grade	10	26,3	26,3	47,4
3rd grade	20	52,6	52,6	100,0
Total	38	100,0	100,0	

Fig. 5.1.2. – Numerical variable grade

Another variable is the type of school in which the respondents teach (fig. 5.1.3.). As mentioned earlier, the Flemish educational system is divided in different educational types of institutions. In this research, the biggest part of the respondents that filled in the survey teaches in a Catholic school, namely 76,3%. Only 10,5% of the respondents teach in a Community school. Thirdly, only 2 respondents work in a municipal school. And concerning provincial schools, non-aided schools and Steiner schools, only one respondent filled in the survey for each of these types of schools.

Educational type of school				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Catholic	29	76,3	76,3	76,3
Community (GO!)	4	10,5	10,5	86,8
Municipal	2	5,3	5,3	92,1
Provincial	1	2,6	2,6	94,7
Non aided/ subsidized	1	2,6	2,6	97,3
Steiner	1	2,6	2,6	100,0
Total	38	100,0	100,0	

Fig. 5.1.3. – Numerical variable educational type of school

The final numerical variable to be discussed relates to the amount of years of work experience that the respondents have (fig. 5.1.4.). This variable has more dispersion, and therefore significant correlations between this variable and the answers on certain questions of the respondents could be found, which will be discussed later. The biggest group of respondents is the one of which the teachers gained work experience for between 5 to 20 years, namely 52,6% in total. The smallest groups are the group of teachers that teaches for 1-5 years (10,5%) and the group that has for over 30 years of work experience (15,8%). The other group with a work experience of between 20-30 years represents 21,1% of the respondents. Therefore, all the groups are sufficiently represented.

Work experience				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-5 years	4	10,5	10,5	10,5
5-10 years	10	26,3	26,3	36,8
10-20 years	10	26,3	26,3	63,1
20-30 years	8	21,1	21,1	84,2
> 30 years	6	15,8	15,8	100,0
Total	38	100,0	100,0	

Fig. 5.1.4. – Numerical variable work experience

Before revealing the results of the significant correlations that were found, the results of the statistical analysis of the questions separately will be given.

5.1.2. Descriptive statistics of the responses

The following results are observed for the different types of questions.

For a start, the results of the descriptive statistics will be discussed (see annex 2). The number of answers indicates the amount of respondents that gave an answer, as they could only give one answer. The answers "not applicable" and "no opinion" are left out. As a consequence the number of answers is sometimes lower than 38, which is the total amount of respondents. The minimum response indicates the minimum response that the respondents gave. In the third column, the maximum response indicates the maximum response that the respondents gave. The mean indicates the average response that the respondents gave. And finally, the standard deviation indicates the dispersion between all the given answers.

The results of the descriptive statistics indicate that the respondents answered averagely "rather yes" (mean = 4,13) on the question "Do you know exactly how to teach pupils to think critically?" (Q5). The same positive result is observed for the question "Do you think that it is okay to talk about all kinds of topics with pupils in class? (Q9) and for the question "Do you think that talking and/or debating about all kinds of topics with pupils has a positive impact on their ability to think critically and on their amount of resistance against all kinds of opinions and disinformation?" (Q10). In contrast, the respondents answered averagely between "no" and "rather not" (mean = 1,47) on the question whether they ever received

training about how to teach pupils to think critically and how to strengthen their ability to resist deviating opinions and disinformation (Q8). Further, the pupils' critical thinking skills is averagely sometimes (mean = 2,82) being discussed during parent-teacher meetings (Q7).

The result of the descriptive statistics of the question whether the respondents ever avoided to talk about a certain topic with pupils (Q16) is the following: they answered averagely "yes" (mean= 1,19). Not one respondent answered "no". The standard deviation for this answer is also very low (St. Deviation= 0,397). In contrast, the respondents answered averagely "rather no" on the questions whether they would avoid talking about a certain topic because of fear for possible physical and/or verbal aggressive reactions from pupils, parents or others (Q19; mean= 3,84), because of fear for sanctions from superiors and government (Q21; mean= 3,86), because of their own different opinion on the matter (Q22; mean= 4,08), and because of a different opinion of a pupil (Q23; mean=4,11). In addition, they answered averagely between "maybe" and "rather no" on the other three reasons why they would avoid talking about a certain topic, namely because of a certain political, religious, social or ethnic background of a pupil (Q17; mean= 3,53), because of fear for possible complaints from pupils, parents or others (Q18; mean= 3,42), and because of fear to offend or disrespect a pupil (Q20; mean= 3,66).

On both questions about whether the respondents think that the kind of topic which is being debated about in class depends on the age of the pupil (Q11; mean= 4,05) and whether they adjust their language to the age of the pupil during class conversations (Q12; mean= 2,79), the average answer was "(rather) yes". They also answered averagely between "sometimes" and "yes" on the question "Do you ever ask your pupils whether they want to talk about a certain topic?" (Q15; mean= 2,38).

Furthermore, according to the average answer of the respondent, class conversations about sensitive/controversial topics are held "a few times a month" (Q14; mean= 3,79). In contrast, the average answer on the question whether it is clear about what topics they can or cannot talk and how class conversations should be held (Q29) was "maybe" (mean= 3,03). The respondent responded rather positive on the question whether they felt supported by their superiors in case of discussions whether to hold class conversations about certain topics (Q24), namely the respondents answered averagely between "yes" and rather yes" (mean= 4,24). The respondents also responded quite affirmative, namely averagely "rather yes"

(mean= 3,82), on the question whether they notice a change in reactions from pupil, parents or others compared to the past (Q27). On the question whether they sometimes express their own opinion about certain topics in class, they responded averagely between "maybe" and "rather yes" (Q28; mean= 3,50).

In addition to the questions in the descriptive statistics (annex 2), also other types of questions that had to be analysed differently, were implemented in the survey. In one particular question, the respondents were asked which categories of topics were mostly being discussed about during class conversations (Q13). The categories were given, so they had to check the relevant given options. They could check one to three categories. Some gave one answer; other respondents gave two or three answers. The category "(empty)" stands for the respondents who only checked one or two answers. The given answers are presented in the table below (fig. 5.1.5.). In this table, we notice that the kinds of topics that are being discussed the most in class are racism and religion, namely 46,5% in total. Money and sexuality are also being discussed in class, but less frequently: 25,4%. The categories radicalisation/extremism/terrorism and politics are not often being discussed during class conversations, namely only in 9,7% of the cases.

Q13 – What categories of topics are mostly being discussed during class conversations?				
Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Racism	29	25,4	25,4	25,4
Religion	24	21,1	21,1	46,5
Money	17	14,9	14,9	61,4
Sexuality	12	10,5	10,5	71,9
(empty)	12	10,5	10,5	82,4
Other	9	7,9	7,9	90,3
Radicalisation, extremism and terrorism	6	5,3	5,3	95,6
Politics	5	4,4	4,4	100,0
Total	114	100,0	100,0	

Fig. 5.1.5. – Q13

The survey also contained another type of question, namely a question in which the respondents had to answer with yes or no. Three questions of this type were implemented in the survey. The first yes-no question is about whether respondents ever received a complaint as a consequence of what they had said in class (fig. 5.1.6.). 31,6% of the respondents responded yes, which implies that 1/3rd of the respondents ever received a complaint because of what they had said.

Q25 – Did you ever receive a complaint of a pupil, parents or others as a consequence of a statement or class conversation?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	12	31,6	31,6	31,6
No	26	68,4	68,4	100,0
Total	38	100,0	100,0	

Fig. 5.1.6. – Q25

Another polar question is about whether respondents were ever physically or verbally approached in an aggressive way because of what they had said in class (fig. 5.1.7.). 39,5% of the respondents had ever experienced an aggressive reaction from a pupil, parent or others, which is more than 1/3rd of the respondents.

Q26 – Did pupils, parents or others ever physically and/or verbally aggressively approach you as a consequence of a statement or class conversation?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	15	39,5	39,5	39,5
No	23	60,5	60,5	100,0
Total	38	100,0	100,0	

Fig. 5.1.7. – Q26

In the last yes-no question, respondents had to answer whether they ever had training about how to hold conversations about sensitive topics with pupils (fig. 5.1.8.). 84,2% of the respondents never had such a training.

Q30 – Did you ever receive training concerning technics about how to hold class conversations about certain controversial/sensitive topics?				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	6	15,8	15,8	15,8
No	32	84,2	84,2	100,0
Total	38	100,0	100,0	

Fig. 5.1.8. – Q30

In contrast, if we take a look at the results of the descriptive statistics (see annex 2) of the question whether such a training would be useful/necessary for teachers (Q31), we notice that the respondents answered averagely "rather yes" (mean = 3,97).

5.1.3. Significant correlations

In the next phase of the statistical analysis, a few significant correlations between certain categories were found. Before presenting the significant correlations, it is important to note that some correlations were not significant. Not one significant correlation was found between the educational type of school in which the respondents teach and the results of the content questions, because almost all respondents teach in Catholic schools and so some groups contained not enough respondents to produce a significant correlation. Nor was there found a significant result between the sex of the respondent and the answers of the content questions for the same reason, namely almost all respondents are women. Only few men have filled in the survey. In contrast, for the variables work experience and grade some correlations were significant. The significant correlations are discussed below.

The first significant correlation is found between the amount of years of work experience and the question whether they know how to teach pupils to think critically. We notice in the table (see annex 3, page 88) that the p-value is less than 0,05 (p= 0,043). A correlation of which the p-value lies between 0 and 0,05 is significant, which means that this correlation is significant. For this correlation and most of the correlations in this research, the p-value was calculated via the Kruskal-Wallis test. On the boxplot (annex 3, page 88), we notice that teachers with more than 30 years of experience know less well how to teach their pupils to think critically than teachers with fewer years of work experience.

The second correlation is detected between the grade and the question whether they think that the kind of topic being talked about depends on the age of the pupil (see annex 3, page 89). This correlation is also calculated via the Kruskal-Wallis test. The p-value is 0,002, which means that it is very significant. In general, the teachers of the 1st grade state that the kind of topic depends on the age of the child, compared to the teachers of the 2nd and 3rd grade.

Via the Kruskal-Wallis test, a correlation was also found between the teachers' work experience and the question whether they received training about how to teach critical thinking and how to build resistance among their pupils (see annex 3, page 90). The p-value here is 0,011. According to these results, most of the teachers did not receive any training. However, the teachers who rather received such training are those with 5-10 years of work experience.

Further, there is a significant correlation between the grade and the frequency of class conversations about sensitive topics (see annex 3, page 91). Via the Kruskal-Wallis test, the p-value was calculated and amounts to 0,010. Class conversations about sensitive topics are more often held in the 2nd grade, and they appear to be less frequent in the 1st grade.

Another interesting correlation is found between the variable work experience and whether teachers would avoid talking about a certain topic out of fear for possible complaints from pupils, parents or others (see annex 3, page 92). The p-value, calculated via the Kruskal-Wallis test, amount to 0,032. Teachers with more than 30 years of experience are more likely to avoid such conversations because of fear for complaints.

Via the Fisher's Exact test, another significant correlation was found between the work experience and whether teachers ever received a complaint from a pupil, parents or others (see annex 3, page 93). The p-value is 0,047. Almost half of the teachers with a work experience of more than 10 years ever received a complaint. In contrast, teachers with a work experience of maximum 10 years received barely any complaint. The teachers with the highest amount of complaints are those with 20-30 years of teaching experience.

The Mann-Whitney test is used to calculate the correlation between on the one hand the question whether teachers ever received training about how to hold class conversations about sensitive topics, and on the other the question whether they believe that such a training is

useful and/or necessary (see annex 3, page 94). The p-value for this test is 0,004, which means that this correlation is highly significant. All the teachers that ever had such training state that this training is useful and/or necessary for teachers.

Results gained via the Spearman's Rho test shows a significant correlation between the question whether teachers know how to teach critical thinking, and the question whether they think that talking about all kinds of topics with pupils has a positive effect on the pupils' ability to think critically and their resistance (see annex 3, page 95). The p-value is 0,011. For this type of correlation, the correlation-coefficient was also calculated and gives us additional insights. This coefficient amounts to 0,409 (between 0 and 1), which signifies that there is a positive association between the ranks. In other words, the teachers that answered positively on the one question also answered positively on the other. This means that teachers who think to know how to teach critical thinking are likely to believe that a possible way in doing so is by talking about all kinds of topics with their pupils.

In addition, two marginal significant correlations were also found. Although they are only marginal significant, it is nevertheless interesting to mention and to discuss them. The first one is calculated via the Kruskal-Wallis test and shows a marginal significant correlation between the grade and the question whether the ability to think critically is being discussed during parent-teacher meetings (see annex 3, page 96). The p-value is slightly more than 0,05 (p-value= 0,053). Most of the teachers of the 3rd grade state that it is rather being discussed during parent-teacher meetings. In contrast, in the 1st and 2nd grade, this is rather not being discussed during meetings with parents.

Finally, a second marginal significant correlation is detected between the amount of work experience and whether teachers would avoid talking about a certain topic out of fear for sanction from superiors or government (see annex 3, page 97). The p-value, calculated via the Kruskal-Wallis test, amounts to 0,062. Teachers with more than 30 years of work experience are more likely to avoid talking about a certain topic out of fear of sanctions from superiors or government.

Subsequently, the results of the interviews will be represented below.

5.2.   Results of the interviews

During the interviews several questions about teaching critical thinking and freedom of expression of teachers were asked to the respondents, named hereafter the "expert", "principal 1" and "principal 2". The most relevant insights, quotes and results of these interviews have been summarised and are set forth hereafter. Firstly, the relevant insights concerning critical thinking are explained and secondly views about the freedom of expression of teachers are elaborated on. However, the distinction between the insights about critical thinking on the one hand and freedom of expression on the other is sometimes unclear. Overlap might occur, because insights were often given about how to have discussions and conversations with pupils which relates to both critical thinking and freedom of expression.

5.2.1. Critical thinking

Critical thinking and radicalisation

First of all, the expert explains his views why critical thinking is important for the prevention of religious radicalisation. "*Critical thinking is of course very important. The reason is that when young Muslims regard the source texts in a one-dimensional black-and-white way, then there is the risk that these texts incite these young people to do anything. Then you need only one wrong person that provokes young adults to see these texts as a justification to use violence. By contrast, if young people can reflect critically about the source texts and its interpretations and can balance the strong and weak arguments against each other, then they won't be so easily convinced by someone, a recruiter or jihadist extremist ideologist, who has wrong intentions*". In other words, if a person can think critically, he/she won't be so easily radicalised, because he/she can better balance all the arguments against each other.

Critical thinking and the role of education

The expert also expresses the following critique on education: "*I have the feeling that education today is more aimed at achieving certain skills to be fit for the job market later on. By contrast, I believe that educational institutions should not only deliver pupils who are competent (only the economic profitability is important nowadays), but also pupils who are*

dignified and kind. Education today lacks the fact that it gives pupils only few skills in order for them to reflect about our democratic system as critical mature and responsible citizens". In sum, although we can assume that critical thinking skills are important, education does not focus enough on teaching such important skills.

Critical thinking as a concept

Now that it is assumed that critical thinking skills are important, the question is how such skills should be taught. In order to do so, an adequate description, both in scope and goal of what these skills are, is necessary. The expert gives his explanation and insights on what critical thinking actually means in a religious context. He states that "*Critical thinking is about looking at the source texts from a certain distance and especially about understanding that the reality is much more complex than reducing a source text to some literal interpretations which are being used as justification for violence*". In sum, critical thinking is keeping a distance from information that one obtains. He also mentions that "*Thinking critically means also that the teacher him/herself does not give ready-made opinions, what the pupils have to think or believe, but the teacher should teach pupils to think about their own believes and opinions, so that they draw conclusions themselves. Teachers cannot give the conclusions for them*". So critical thoughts cannot be taught. The pupils themselves have to learn to think for themselves in a critical way. Critical thinking in this regard does not refer to certain critical thoughts, but it refers to the action that happens before these thoughts, namely the action of thinking in a critical way and the drawing of conclusions as a consequence of thinking critically, which should be done by the person him/herself.

Critical thinking and the (neutral) role of the teacher

Knowing the importance and some insights on the notion of critical thinking, the respondents elaborated on the question how these skills are best taught to pupils taking into consideration their quite young age. Interesting insights and positions of the respondents on all aspects concerning teaching critical thinking are exposed below.

The importance of the way in which discussions with pupils should be held and the main task of the teacher during such conversations become clear via the following statements. The expert elaborates on the importance of a professional role of teachers as follows: "*For a*

teacher it is important to know the difference between his/her fundamental attitude and his/her professional attitude. The fundamental attitude of the teacher reflects his/her own state of mind and idea of man and society. The professional attitude is the attitude in which the teacher restrains from expressing value judgements, in other words an attitude in which the teacher stays neutral. The question is what attitude teachers should have in class. In my opinion, they should show their professional attitude in class. Teachers should not step in the conversation between pupils and choosing sides, because he/she is then teaching ideologically driven. By contrast, the teacher should stand above this with his/her professional attitude and should ask pupils critical questions. If a pupil is convinced about a certain opinion, the teacher should ask this pupil to put forward his/her arguments, and should maybe even learn the pupil how to adduce arguments and that the teacher takes out the errors in reasoning".

The principals agree that teachers should have a neutral attitude towards children as much as possible, as outlined in the neutrality declaration of the GO!. Principal 1 gives her reason as follows: "*Teachers have to adopt the neutrality clause, because it can be dangerous when a teacher expresses an opinion, as a certain pupil might adopt this opinion only because he/she is the teacher. So I think that active neutrality means that teachers have to eliminate their opinion, but you can explain it in different ways. It can also mean that people have different opinions, but they respect the opinions from others*". Principal 2 agrees and explains that "*Active neutrality means that we can debate actively and have discussions, but these have to be broadminded. Teachers have to engage in providing the pupils an openminded view. Therefore I want teachers to broaden the view of the pupils. They rather need to facilitate the conversation instead of giving their own opinion on the matter. Because children are very sensitive to that. To them, the teacher is often an example, as well as their parents. If they only hear one opinion from their example, then it easily looks like brainwashing*".

During discussions and conversations, asking pupils (the right) questions is an essential task of the teacher when teaching critical thinking skills, as stated by principal 1: "*Critical thinking is mostly taught by first asking questions or by teaching them to question everything, to ask what the reason can be behind it. That is also what we do when we teach them how to deal with media, advertising, Facebook, Instagram and other social media platforms, how to use these in a critical way*". Principal 2 confirms his statement: "*A teacher is a facilitator during a debate or discussion and he/she fulfils his/her role by asking the right questions.*". Yet, the

expert mentions also that "*Of course there are also moments and situations in which a teacher can be a participant in a discussion when this feels right. But in general, they should have a professional (neutral) attitude*".

To illustrate this, the expert mentions the following: "*During biology classes sometimes there is a discussion between the evolutionary theory and the story of the Creation, during which biology teachers often have the tendency to disprove this scientifically. Now, in the final attainment level of the biology classes it is not written that pupils have to believe the theory, but only that pupils should know the theory and should be able to use the knowledge. Therefore it is important that the teacher imparts the theory to the pupils and that he/she incites them to think critically about the theory, but the teacher should not make and give the conclusions for them*".

Methodology

This leads us to the way in which such discussions should happen. The expert argues that "*The teacher should use the Socratic method during discussions. This means that the teacher is an interested listener who thinks critically. In this way, he/she makes the pupils think without giving them the feeling that the he/she denies what they believe in. Even if a believe or conviction of a pupil is wrong, the teacher should always give this pupil the feeling that he/she acknowledges this believe or conviction*". As a reason, he indicates that "*If a pupil has the feeling that the teacher shows sincerely interest and that he/she does not want to undermine the reference frame of the pupil all the time, then that pupil will open up. And maybe after a while, the teacher can ask questions that are even more critical to spur the pupil to think about his/her own conviction(s)*".

In addition, the expert gives an example of an effective exercise that can be used when teaching critical thinking and the purpose of this exercise: "*A way in which debates can be held is by presenting a certain supposition that serves as the subject for debate. Then each pupil receives a different role, such as pro and contra, that they have to play during this debate. In this way pupils will see the world from different angles and perspectives. As a consequence pupils will learn to adopt a more empathic attitude, because they will learn to better understand the motives and reference frames of others in the super-diverse society*".

The reason why dialogues and debates are important is because those bring enlightenment, as assumed by both principals. Principal 2 argues that "*I completely agree with the idea 'Enlightenment comes when ideas collide'. That is why one has to dare to engage in dialogue. Because I can consider one thought, but if a very critical person makes me think otherwise, why not. That brings indeed enlightenment*". Principal 1 agrees, but in order for this to happen two conditions should be met: "*If the teacher is a good moderator and the pupils have enough language skills (this might be a problem for immigrant children), and together they engage in a debate and express their different views, then there is enlightenment indeed*".

Obstacles in teaching critical thinking

When discussing how to teach critical thinking, it is useful to mention how not to approach this. Firstly, all respondents agree that teachers cannot give the right answers and conclusions for the pupils. Principal 1 states for example that "*Teachers cannot say 'you have to look through this window', they can only say that the pupils can look through another window*". On top of that, the expert adds that "*convincing rhetoric is out of the question*". Secondly, he argues that "*If pupils have the feeling that the teacher denies and does not acknowledge whatever the pupil believes in or is convinced about, then that is enough for the pupil to be close-mouthed and not to have conversations again*". So teachers should also not give the feeling that they do not acknowledge whatever conviction of a pupil.

In response to the issue concerning the necessity of knowledge used by teachers during discussions and conversations about certain topics, the expert states the following: "*Proceeding from the professional attitude, it is not important whether teachers have enough knowledge about certain topics, such as theology. A teacher can have discussions with pupils starting from critical thinking skills. The teacher can ask critical questions without having a lot of knowledge*". However, he adds that in some cases when discussing theology this approach might not work, because "*some pupils might not accept anything from a (non-Islamic) teacher because of the fact that this teacher is not Islamic*", and in such cases his advice is to appeal to an (Islamic) mediator who can make sure that the dialogue between the teacher and these pupils keeps on going by having conversations with them.

Critical thinking as an antidote for radicalisation

As we already mentioned that teaching critical thinking skills is a way to counter radicalisation, we can assume that teaching critical thinking skills are even more important for those pupils who tend to think more radically, in other words who risk to become radicalised. In this regard, it is important for teachers to know how to deal with certain radical statements. Principal 2 explains her view on how teachers should deal with radical statements pronounced by pupils: "*When a pupil expresses a radical view, then the teacher should first ask the pupil 'why', and afterwards engage in a discussion. The reason is that when children make certain statements, the reason behind it is often quite innocent. For example, if a child would say 'I am against democracy', then the reason might be that he/she does not feel like going to vote*". So she states that the teacher should first detect whether there is a risk of radicalisation or not by asking questions. The expert proposes a slightly different approach: "*If a pupil expresses a radical view (for example 'I am against democracy'), then the teacher can for example give a lesson about democracy in this case. They often do not really know what it is, definitely young pupils in primary schools. They might just have heard it from someone else. Such expressions can be a sign that the teacher should teach and inform pupils about this topic. I believe this is the best way to approach such an expression*".

In such a situation an important aspect that should be taken into account is the frequency of an expressed radical statement. The expert advances that "*In case of a repetitive character, in other words if the pupil expresses a radical view frequently, then the teacher should start all kinds of official protocols. Because then we can assume that the pupil has thought about this and that there is a certain conviction behind it. Another approach is to have a conversation with the pupil in question and/or his/her parents to ask where these statements come from*". Thus, when teachers are being confronted with a radical opinion of a pupil, this teacher should take the frequency of the expressed opinion into account when deciding over his/her approach. Choosing the wrong approach can have consequences, as the expert explains: "*The wrong way to approach a random radical expression of a pupil would be to start all kinds of protocols and to go to the given institutions to report a radical behaviour right away. If the expression was random and not repetitive, then the chances are high that the relation between the teacher and the pupil is at risk when starting protocols. In case of a pupil who expressed a certain (not repetitive) radical statement, the teacher does better not have a conversation with the pupil in question, as this pupil might realise to have expressed a view that should not be*

expressed, and so this pupil might decide to only express social desirable behaviour in class as from that moment".

Critical thinking as a unifying factor in a multicultural society

One particular interesting insight came from principal 1 who argues that "*Even in a small school there will always be different opinions and other views that can collide with each other. However, in a multicultural school like ours in which there are more than 40 different nationalities, more than 70 different ethnicities, 30 language groups and 6 different religions, there are even more different opinions that can collide. In this regard, the added value of such a multicultural school is that children are exposed to the diversity of the world. As a consequence, such a school is the ideal meeting point for children to receive different views that can collide. Due to the fact that pupils are being confronted with each other, these schools bring about a kind of solution for the prevention of radicalisation. One has to know that children always start from what they have in common. And they are more open to discover the differences between them, because they start from their similarities. In a multicultural school they can discover their similarities*".

Critical thinking in practice

Concerning the assessment of critical thinking skills of pupils it should be mentioned that this is not an easy task, because "(*teaching critical thinking skills) is a very slow process of which one will only observe at the end of a generation whether it has served its purpose*", as principal 1 states. Nevertheless, principal 2 claims that "*Although critical thinking skills are not being assessed in the school report, it will be discussed during the parent-teacher meeting when a pupil has difficulties in thinking critically*".

An additional problem occurring during such conversations between the teacher and the parents is that "*We often notice that the parents also show opposition and reluctance. Therefore we approach such conversations very prudently. In any case, such meetings are always very difficult for a teacher. They are often not sufficiently confident or they do not dare to approach this alone and then of course a care teacher or care coordinator will attend the meeting too. But such conversations are never easy*", as states principal 2.

For example, an issue of stigmatisation is currently slowly aggravating among pupils in the school, explains principal 2. She acknowledges that "*Everything concerning sexuality, homosexuality and gender themes are being quite stigmatised at the moment. Not only in primary school, but also by infants in kindergarten. And now we notice extreme reactions during sexuality conversations among pupils of the 6th school year, such as leaving the class, yelling at the teacher, etc. When discussing this during parent-teacher meetings afterwards, we notice that the parents are often against homosexuality as well*". Principal 1 also mentions the parents as an aspect that should be taken into consideration when talking about teaching critical thinking. Principal 1 explains that "*If a teacher participates in a debate with young children, then he/she is easily walking on thin ice because of the parents*".

Yet, regardless of the parents, principal 2 formulates a possible approach for the issue of stigmatisation: "*We wonder whether we do not have enough time for open dialogue about this topic already as from kindergarten. Do we have a learning pathway for this from kindergarten until the 6th school year? So we have to think about how we should better engage in a dialogue with our pupils already as from kindergarten. We are currently working on this*".

We already mentioned that teachers can have an impact on pupils' ability to think critically. In addition to teachers, other people can also have a great impact on the critical thinking skills of pupils. Although this research is about the role of teachers and their impact, it is nevertheless interesting to mention it, as this also has an effect on the role of the teacher. Principal 1 acknowledges in this sense that "*The adult whom a child looks up to is the adult that will have the biggest impact on this child. And this child will adopt whatever this adult says. This adult might be a teacher, a brother or sister, the parents or others. So in this regard, this adult is decisive for the development of the child*". At the same time, he adds that the difference between older and younger pupils is that older pupils have their own view, whereas younger pupils adopt the view of their parents, roughly speaking. As a consequence of all this, he observes an important frontier of the impact of teachers concerning the critical thinking skills of pupils, and states that "*Teachers can stimulate pupils to think critically and feed it. But it also depends very much of the person him/herself and his/her upbringing at home. So education can lay the foundation of a critical mind, but cannot make a profound difference*". In sum, he acknowledges the important role of teachers, but also an equally important role of the parents.

Concerning the neutral attitude of teachers, principal 1 admits that "*For a teacher it is difficult to be objective due to the age and own conviction of the teacher him/herself. All the teachers (from different generations) already start subjectively, and then one has to be very strong-minded to approach this objectively*". So although a neutral attitude is important when teaching critical thinking skills, it is said to be difficult for teachers to do so. In addition to this, the expert acknowledge that "*I notice in the last few years that teachers often do not make the distinction between their fundamental and professional attitude well due to the sensitivity of the debate*". In this regard, principal 2 admits that once there was an incident between a teacher and some pupils: "*Once, a teacher had a heated discussion about radicalisation. Some pupils from the 5th school year said that they understood the war in Syria and the Muslim extremists who went back to commit terrorist suicide attacks, etc. The discussion escalated, the teacher got very emotional and was send home*".

A few shortcomings are determined by the respondents. The expert mentions that "*I am very much in favor of courses in which discussions and debates are being held. However, I believe that debating is something that is uncommon, something that happens rather rarely in education and in some schools it maybe even does not happen at all. I notice often that it is not part of the culture in the school*". Principal 2 admits that "*We do have a children's parliament in which debates take place, but debates are not structurally build in the classes. Though it is part of our curriculum, so we will implement debates now and then.*" However, she acknowledges that "*I do not know whether the teachers have enough framework to lead a good debate. By contrast, the teachers in the children's parliament did receive a training, so they have enough framework*".

Unfortunately, a recent event has shown that teaching critical thinking involves risks. "*In France there was a teacher who opened a window, and although he did not say that pupils must look through that window, only the fact that he opened a window caused his own death*", states principal 1.

This brings us to the second notion to be discussed, namely the freedom of expression of teachers when teaching critical thinking. How far does their freedom of expression reach when talking to pupils? In a pedagogical perspective, what is the advice of the respondents?

5.2.2. Freedom of expression

The importance of a no-taboo policy

First of all, both the expert and principal 2 express that there should not be any taboo when talking about certain subject in class. The expert states that "*Teachers should be allowed to talk about all kinds of topics with pupils*". Principal 2 agrees that "*There is no taboo about certain topics in the school. All topics are discussable*". She also mentions why a no-taboo-policy has only positive outcomes for pupils: "*No taboos will remove barriers, so pupils will dare to speak about anything. This will broaden their view and will remove narrow perspectives. So a no-taboo-policy will only create positive outcomes for children. Yet, we might create a conflict with the parents, but that is another story*".

To illustrate this no-taboo-policy, she also gives a relevant example: "*Once, some teachers of the 5th and 6th school year asked me whether they could have a class discussion about sexual orientation, how far they could go along with this topic and to what extend they could oppose against the opinions of the pupils. I answered that they could go all-in*".

The controversy of showing a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed

Concerning the question whether showing a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed should be allowed or not, all three respondents agree that this is something that should be allowed and that can even be interesting to do so.

Principal 2 explains her view and states that "*Although cartoons about religion and the discussion about religion is very difficult, showing a cartoon of Mohammed should be allowed. In this way non-Muslim pupils can also hear the other side of the story, namely why such a cartoon is offensive. As this is often a hot topic in the news, a discussion about this can be interesting*". The expert agrees and mentions that "*With reference to the death of Samuel Paty and as a response to the question whether he had better not shown a cartoon of Mohammed, there are enough reasons why it is good to show such a cartoon. In this way the teacher can show pupils the frontiers of freedom of expression without expressing his/her own view on the matter. Consequently, pupils can discuss with each other about the frontiers of*

freedom of expression and express their own views on this matter. These can be very interesting discussions".

Principal 1 also agrees and mentions that "*Something can be offensive for some, and for others it is not offensive at all. So there will easily be a conflict situation. Yet, in a pedagogical perspective, I think that we have to open this window*". However, from the perspective of a person who has to maintain harmony in a school, he adds that "*As a principal who has to maintain the harmony of an organisation, you acknowledge that you do not always benefit from putting the harmony at risk, and so you might advise teachers to be more careful with showing certain cartoons. 'Think first, act later'. In this regard, the planning and preparation of showing a certain cartoon are also important*".

Yet, principal 2 adds one important condition when using cartoons or images for class discussions: "*If a cartoon or image used in class to provoke a discussion is age adequate, then I am not opposed to showing it. It is important that it fits in the social world of the children. But the discussion must come from the children themselves. I do not want a teacher to only express his/her view and show whatever he/she wants to show. So it depends on the way in which an image or cartoon is being engaged and what the intention of the teacher is*".

Limitations to the freedom of expression of teachers

The guideline that teachers should not express their views and opinions is frequently mentioned. Principal 2 defends and explains this rule as follows: "*In my opinion, a teacher has to elucidate as many different sides of a topic as possible, so not only his/her opinion. Moreover, when talking about politics I don't want them to give their opinion at all to pupils. Then I want them to discuss the programmes of all political parties. A teacher has a social duty to broaden the view of the pupils, so if they would only give their opinion, then that won't happen*".

The expert agrees and adds a few more limitations of the freedom of expression for teachers in his elaborate explanation: "*There is a common framework which is established in the constitution and international treaties, in which there are written a few limitations to the right to freedom of expression, such as one cannot push someone to hate and/or to use violence, and racism is also prohibited. These legal limitations are also applicable on teachers. But I*

don't think that this frame is enough to be used within education. The reason is on the one hand that teachers should also take into consideration the pedagogical project and its view during teaching, so teachers cannot express their own views and opinions on a matter. In this regard teachers are limited in their freedom of expression. On the other hand, there is also the fact that teachers are working with vulnerable people, namely young pupils from primary education. In this sense, whatever they would say to adults, they cannot do that with such young pupils. For example, the topic sexuality cannot be openly discussed with very young pupils as with adults, so the obscene character of something can also be a reason to restrict certain speech. Consequently, teachers are being limited in their speech. Another reason is the curriculum that teachers have to follow. They cannot teach whatever they want. They can only teach what is written in the curriculum. So in this regard, their speech is also partly being limited due to the curriculum".

Existing policy and guidelines

Concerning the view of the school that teachers should adopt, both principals mention the pedagogical project of the GO! and the neutrality declaration that teachers have to sign before working in a GO! school. Principal 1 states that "*Every teacher who teaches in a GO! school has to sign documents at the start of his career, such as the pedagogical project of the GO! and the declaration of neutrality. In these documents they declare that they will always comply with the values and norms mentioned in the documents and that they will stay neutral despite their different opinion. And they shall not convince pupils of a certain view*". He even mentions that actions have to be taken by the principal when a teacher deviates from this neutrality clause.

In addition, principal 2 explains that "*Guidelines and rules concerning about what teachers can or cannot talk with pupils are written in the pedagogical project of the GO!. Those are not school-related. Teachers have to sign this document and the declaration of neutrality before working in a GO! school. The description of their function is also written somewhere in those documents that they have to sign*".

Thus, guidelines and rules concerning what teachers can say and cannot say exists indeed for GO! schools. Principal 1 confirms hereby that "*Teachers should know what they can say and what they cannot say*".

Defining freedom of expressions of teachers

Principal 1 questions the functionality of a specific definition of the right to freedom of expression of teachers. He explains himself: "*When trying to define the freedom of expression for teachers and to determine its restrictions, then one has to go into so much detail that it is not functional. At the same time, when it is not enough specified, each teacher gives his own interpretation to the vague rules. And this can cause trouble, because everyone has a different opinion on what offensive speech is*".

Although he questions the consequences of vague rules, the expert on the contrary defends this freedom to teach by giving the example of showing a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed: "*Not every teacher shows a cartoon of Mohammed in class. Some think that this is not necessary in order to teach their pupils the concept of freedom of expression. Showing the cartoon of Mohammed is not part of the curriculum. Having discussions about freedom of expression is part of it, but it does not say how to interpret the curriculum or which form has to be used, nor does it say what teaching material should be used in order to explain the concept of freedom of expression. The teacher him/herself chooses and decides all this. As a consequence, there is a lot of diversity between teachers. And it would be a shame if this diversity would disappear in favor of more rules and restrictions concerning the freedom of expression because of one incident (Samuel Paty). One has to protect those that wants to use a cartoon of Mohammed to teach freedom of expression. But at the same time, one cannot take away the freedom of teachers to choose how to teach this by obligating to show such a cartoon*". In sum, he also suggests not to invent more rules every time an incident takes place, because you cannot foresee completely that another crazy person commits ever such a crime.

Concerns about the freedom of expression of teachers

Further, the respondents also express their thoughts on possible concerns of teachers about their freedom of expression. The expert says the following: "*After the incident of Samuel Paty, there were concerns among teachers. We received many questions from teachers, such as 'How far can we go in discussing the Islam and showing cartoons?', 'Is it okay to show a cartoon of Mohammed?', 'How do we have to organise a lesson concerning freedom of expression?', 'What is important to mention and what not?'. In fact, I believe that now some teachers might think twice when considering showing a cartoon of Mohammed and so they*

are more afraid. By contrast, others might be even more militant than before and say that they won't ever capitulate in favor of people with a very radical interpretation of religion". Principal 1 affirms this experience: "*The incident of the French teacher who was beheaded has definitely caused an impact on people who work in the educational field. When teachers receive a certain reaction from a parent, for example during a parent-teacher meeting, and depending on how the reaction is being expressed (angry, loud, etc.), the one teacher will more easily feel intimidated than the other*".

He also affirms that aggression towards teachers is mostly verbal and not physical. However, he concludes that "*Not showing a cartoon or not talking about a certain topic due to fear of possible consequences is a restriction of the right to freedom of expression of teachers*".

Principal 2 claims that "*In our primary school we did not notice a degree of concern among teachers after the incident of Samuel Paty. Yet, in the secondary school it was a hot topic*". However, she also acknowledges that she doubts whether teachers dare to show such a cartoon.

She explains this statement as follows: "*I think that some teachers do not dare to have big discussions about religion in general. Also because our teachers maybe lack knowledge about the different religions. Therefore, I believe that religion is the most difficult topic to have discussions about*". So she suggests that showing cartoons about Mohammed might be difficult for some teachers due to the religious context.

Skills, experience and training as important factors

Besides lack of knowledge, skills and experience are also aspects that should be considered, as principal 2 states: "*We are a very young team, which is a bit of a disadvantage. We used to have some teachers with a lot of experience and they engaged very well in such discussions and conversations. But I believe that the talent and skills are rather personal than age-related. Some teachers can facilitate discussions about controversial subjects (such as religion) very well, in which they make sure that everyone is free to choose their own religion, but also that everyone listens respectfully and openly to the stories of others. Some teachers are simply talented by nature*".

Apart from skills and experience, principal 2 also acknowledges the lack of training needed to engage in a discussion with pupils. In this regard, she mentions that "*In the 5th and 6th school year, the teachers are great facilitators, but I don't know whether teachers of the 1st and 2nd grade are well trained to do so*", although she admits that dialogue and discussions are already needed in the 1st and 2nd grade due to the stigmatisation of for example, sexuality, nudity, personal hygiene, etc. as mentioned above.

Therefore, she suggests that "*I think that courses in which conversation techniques are being developed among future teachers should be implemented in the teacher training, so that these teachers are more sure of one's ground when they start teaching. I do receive questions sometimes from starters, such as 'this happened, how should I approach this', etc. And then I sometimes see the fear in their eyes*". She adds hereto the need for a manual: "*A kind of manual about how to better hold debates with children would be very useful. Maybe it already exists. But also for very young children in kindergarten. And also other conversation techniques than we already use today*".

In this regard, the expert affirms that he does receive certain questions from teachers and states that "*Until now I have not received any questions whether they can talk about a certain topic with their pupils. By contrast, some teachers do ask me sometimes how to bring a conversation about a certain topic, how to approach this, so that the effect of the discussions is neither counterproductive nor polarising*".

The freedom of expression of pupils

Now, having said all that, in comparison with the freedom of expression of teachers, the expert also mentions the freedom of expression of pupils. He defends the policy that pupils shall never be censored, which is in contrast with the advice for teachers to better not express their views.

His statement reads as follows: "*It is not because teachers better don't participate in discussions, that pupils themselves cannot express all kinds of opinions and views during heated discussions. I believe it is important that the opinions that exist in society should be ventilated by the pupils in class. I notice that some schools do have the tendency to sometimes censor its pupils, which should not be done. For pupils, their school should be the platform*

where they have the feeling that they can express their opinion in a safe environment. When they have the least perception that they are being censored and that they cannot speak openly, then they will search for other platforms – often secret and illegal ones – where there is no teacher or educator who can jump in and asks critical questions. If there is one place where children can be radical and completely themselves, then it is at school. If pupils are not being censored and they can speak openly, then the school environment is a reflection of society".

The expert explains the reason why prohibiting censorship of pupils is important, and states the following: "*'Enlightenment comes when ideas collide': this can only happen on condition that ideas are not being censored. I sometimes have the impression that we evolve towards a society in which uniform thinking becomes more dominant. This is quite paradoxical, as the society becomes more diverse qua ethnicities and cultures, but at the same time we have to think almost the same way qua ideas. If people depart from the norm, then these people are regarded inferiorly. So the frontier of the right to freedom of expression is clear: no incitement to hate and violence, no discrimination and no racism. But anything that falls outside of these limitations is food for discussion and debates*".

He adds that "*This tendency is actually an attack on the right to freedom of expression. In the past, an argument was valid and legitimate when it stood up to the test of criticism. Nowadays, an argument can already be declared invalid when it only hurts or offends someone else. In my opinion, this is a very dangerous trend. It is good that people stand up for their rights and that they fight for their identity. But it shall never go so far that it restricts the right to freedom of expression of others. If this tendency evolves even more towards a one-dimensional thinking, then there is the risk that this leads to a situation in which no one can speak openly anymore. After a while, people will not continue to accept that situation and this might lead to conflicts and polarisation*".

The undervalued freedom of thought

Finally, the expert also explains the importance of the freedom of thought by means of the phrase "*People demand freedom of speech as a compensation for the freedom of thought which they seldom use*", written by Søren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher. "*As from the Age of Enlightenment until May '68, the reason and scientific methods were central. The reason leads to the truth. Since May '68 and its protests the reason is under attack. Since then*

it became more important for people to be able to express what and how they feel. This also had an effect on education: a good pupil is a pupil who can express him/herself spontaneously. The idea that you take time to reflect about something was almost seen as problematic. More recently, massively expressing your own opinion is also a trend that we observe on social media. In education it is said that both 'knowledge' and 'skills' are important, although I have the impression sometimes that 'skills' have priority over 'knowledge'. However, then the idea is missing that people sometimes also need knowledge to develop skills. So I have the impression that many people tend to express their opinion without first acquiring the necessary knowledge and insights, without first reflecting about the matter so that they can eventually form a certain view on the matter. In sum, people should use their freedom of thought more often".

Subsequently, both the results of the surveys as well as the results of the interviews will be compared and discussed in the next chapter.

6) <u>Discussion</u>

Hereafter, all the results of the interviews and the surveys are being discussed critically and compared with each other and with the existing literature.

First of all, it should be noted that due to the fact that overlap exists between the insights from interviews concerning critical thinking and the insights from interviews concerning freedom of expression, already shows that there is indeed an impact of the freedom of expression of teachers on their task to teach critical thinking skills to pupils.

This is in line what all three respondents of the interviews often mention indirectly, namely that what a teacher says can have an impact on the pupils' ability to think critically. The detailed discussion of what they better say or better not say, in other words what their freedom of expression more precisely should be, in order to obtain the best results for their pupils' ability to think critically will be discussed below.

Do teachers know how to teach critical thinking?

As a start, we wonder whether teachers know how to teach critical thinking. And we observe that although Lombardi states that "*there is no agreement on what the concept of critical thinking entails and how teachers should be trained to put this into practice*"[74], and notwithstanding the curricula do not explain how to teach critical thinking and although teachers mostly responded that they did not receive training concerning teaching critical thinking, teachers did respond averagely that they know how to teach critical thinking skills. So one might ask where their knowledge and expertise come from. It is possible that they obtain knowledge and insights through their experience gained when working daily with pupils and showing them how to approach something more critically.

In addition, as teachers were not asked in the survey to answer a question on exactly how they teach critical thinking skills, we cannot make assumptions on whether their teaching method is suited and whether they all approach it in the same way. Concerning the latter, one might assume that the teachers do not adopt the same teaching method due to the fact that apparently

---

[74] Lombardi, L., De Backer, F., Lombaerts, K. (2020, October 6). Teachers' perceptions on critical thinking in primary education, *Foundation for Critical Thinking*.

there is still no agreement on how to approach teaching critical thinking skills. However, it should be mentioned that of course there does not exist one general teaching method that is suited for all children. In this regard, the freedom to teach is important, as teachers know best what teaching method suits for which pupil. Though, we suggest that it is still necessary to devise one teaching method that is suited for the majority of the pupils.

Moreover, the teachers responded generally that they believe that talking and debating about all kinds of topics has a positive impact on the pupils' ability to think critically. In this regard, they admit that having conversations and discussions with children is a good method. However, they also admitted that they sometimes did avoid talking about a certain topic with pupils. This can be due to several reasons, such as the possibility that teachers might not dare to talk about certain topics, as principal 2 stated or because of the fact that religion is a difficult topic and some teachers might not dare to talk about it with pupils.

In addition, teachers also responded generally that it is "maybe" clear about what topics they can or cannot talk about and how class conversations should be held. So, they state that they know how to teach critical thinking skills, and they agree that talking and debating about all kinds of topics is a way in teaching these skills, but they are not quite sure how to have these conversations. Now, it is clear for this research that there is a gap between the answers. The main question remains unclear: do teachers know exactly how to teach critical thinking? Of course, the limited amount of teachers that filled in the survey has to be taken into account. More completed surveys can provide more clarity on this.

Moreover, knowing how to have conversations with pupils might not only be important for teaching critical thinking skills. It is also very useful, because teachers state that they hold class conversations about sensitive and/or controversial topics a few times a month, which is quite frequent. So it is important that they can lead such conversations and discussions well.

Concerns about freedom of expression

Apparently teachers do not have concerns, as they responded in general that they would not avoid talking about a certain topic because of fear for possible physical and/or verbal aggressive reactions, according to the results of the survey. In contrast, about 30% affirmed that they ever received a complaint due to what they had said in class, and almost 40%

affirmed that they were ever physically or verbally approached in an aggressive way due to what they had said in class. In addition, they also affirm that they notice a certain change in reaction from pupils, parents or others compared to the past. Taken into consideration the low amount of responses of the survey, one has to regard these numbers with a very critical eye. Nevertheless, these numbers show that although reactions from people have changed and although recently teachers are being approached more aggressively, teachers do not have concerns in general. That is only to be applauded, though it was not the answer that was expected.

Quite the opposite, it was assumed that the incident of Samuel Paty might have caused more concern among teachers. In this perspective, both the expert and principal 2 assumed that some teachers might have concerns or do not dare to show a certain cartoon about the Prophet Mohammed in class. Principal 2 stated even that the topic religion in general is a difficult topic to talk about, also possibly due to the lack of knowledge teachers have about religion.

Yet, the survey showed otherwise. This might be due to the fact that this survey was conducted in April and May 2021, already a few months after the incident of Samuel Paty which was in October 2020. According to the expert, shortly after the incident teachers have had some concerns and questions about their freedom of expression, but it is possible that they might already have forgotten about the incident when completing the survey. Also because it was only one incident until now, fortunately. If there would be more incidents yearly, then the concerns might increase.

Another reason might be the question itself, namely whether teachers would avoid talking about a certain topic out of fear for possible aggressive reactions. If the question would have been whether they dare to show a cartoon of Mohammed in class, other answers might have been obtained, but as we did not ask this question, we cannot make this assumption for sure.

Lack of knowledge

Concerning the lack of knowledge, the expert mentioned in this regard that teachers better not engage in discussions about religion, as generally they do not have sufficient knowledge about the Islam, as he explained. Yet, it is hard not to have discussions about religion, since religion is a topic which is often talked about in school, according to the teachers.

As a solution for this, the expert suggests that teachers do not necessarily need knowledge to have a discussion with pupils about this, as teachers better not engage in a discussion themselves with pupils, but they can ask questions in order for pupils to think critically about the discussed topic and so that pupils have discussions with each other.

Skills, experience and training

Teachers with more than 30 years of teaching experience responded rather not to know how to teach critical thinking. However, this is not in line with what principal 2 stated, namely that in her school there used to be very experienced (older) teachers who were very good in engaging in conversations with their pupils. So we cannot make conclusions about the impact of experience and/or age on teaching critical thinking. We assumed that the teaching methods of older teachers might deviate from the younger teachers, due to the fact that the teacher training evolves and that younger teachers might have had training concerning critical thinking in contrast with the older teachers who had their teacher training a long time ago, in which the debate about critical thinking was not booming as it is now. Reversely, we also assumed that teachers with more teaching experience also gained more experience and expertise on how to talk to and with children. Unfortunately, with these results from the completed surveys, we cannot make any conclusion. And as principal 2 mentioned, skills are rather personal instead of age related.

Training can provide a solution to this. Yet, unfortunately, teachers responded in the survey that they rather not received any training about how to teach critical thinking, and also not about how to have class discussions. Principal 2 also mentioned that there is a lack of training. She affirmed that the teachers of the 5th grade and of the debate team in her school received training and can facilitate well. By contrast, she questions whether teacher of the 1st and 2nd grade received sufficient training to have class discussions and debates. However, according to her, dialogue and discussions about certain topics, such as sexuality, are already needed in the younger school years. She mostly stressed the importance of conversation techniques and knowledge on how to better engage in debates already for very young children, as aspects that should be implemented in a training or manual. Also the expert mentioned that he often receives questions from teachers about how to bring a conversation on a certain topic and how

to approach this. In sum, apparently teachers do not have concerns about what they can say or cannot say, but they do have questions on how to approach conversations and discussions.

Evaluation critical thinking skills

Although critical thinking is said to be very important for the development of pupils and in the prevention of radicalisation, we observe that not enough attention is being paid to this objective which is recently implemented in the curricula. Critical thinking is namely not being assessed in the school report. However, principal 2 states that when pupils have difficulties in thinking critically – whatever those difficulties may be – this is being discussed during parent-teacher meetings. In addition, the teachers answered that critical thinking skills are sometimes being discussed during meetings with parents. Sometimes might refer to the cases in which pupils have difficulties with thinking critically, as mentioned by principal 2.

We can only conclude that although the objective to teach critical thinking is often mentioned in the curricula, this is clearly mostly a theoretical objective. Of course, principals and teachers are trying to implement this into their daily work. Yet in practice, we can conclude that without a proper teaching method, without a proper manual, without proper training and a without a true debate culture in the school, pupils do not sufficiently learn how to think critically. In sum, this objective has not been adequately implemented in practice.

Limitations of the freedom of expression of teachers

Although research about the freedom of expression of teachers, professors and social workers in pedagogical perspective argue generally that the full enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression is crucial. Bill Durodie is one of those researchers who defends strongly the right to freedom of expression in a pedagogical perspective. However, most of these researches focus on young adults and higher education, such as universities. When research is focused on primary education on the other hand, another approach has to be used. One cannot use the same teaching method for both students between the ages of 15 and 22, which is the age of youth radicalisation, and for very young children between the ages of 6 and 12. This age gap demands different approaches for both age groups.

An important difference between the age of youth radicalisation and much younger children is that the latter often regards teachers as their role models, as principal 1 and 2 mentioned. In this regard, if teachers would express their views and opinions, the pupils might just adopt them without thinking for themselves. Young children often adopt the opinions of certain adults, such as parents and teachers, whom they look up to, without thinking critically. They still have to learn to think for themselves.

Another reason is mentioned by the expert. He stated that when a teacher gives a pupil even the slightest feeling that the teacher does not acknowledge his/her beliefs and convictions, then it is possible that the relation between the teacher and this pupil becomes under treat. Moreover, it is possible that this pupil might search for other platforms (whether illegal or not) to express his/her views. In this regard, when a teacher expresses an opinion, this may already pose the risk that a pupil perceives this differently and thinks that the teacher might not recognise his/her conviction.

So as a limitation of the freedom of expression of teachers, we can assume that in a pedagogical perspective it is better for pupils that teachers do not express their views and opinions during class conversations or discussions.

Besides the fact that teachers better not express their views and opinions, other limitations of the freedom of expression of teachers were mentioned, mostly by the expert. He said that the legal limitations – such as not causing hate, violence, discrimination or racism – have to be respected by all of course, but they are probably not enough to be used within education. He added that teachers are also restricted in their speech due to the fact that they are obliged to comply with the pedagogical project of the school network, i.e. the view and values. Teachers are not allowed to express deviating views and opinions, i.e. other views than the ones described in the pedagogical project.

In addition to this, the expert also stated that a teacher should take into consideration the age of the pupil. Teachers are working with vulnerable people, namely young children from primary education. For example, a cartoon which is quite obscene should be not be shown to very young pupils. Principal 2 stated in this sense that teaching material should be age adequate, as it has to fit in the social world of the child. So teachers cannot say whatever they want.

Another limitation posed on teachers concerns the curriculum. They cannot teach whatever they want, they have to follow the curriculum as the expert mentioned. As a consequence, one can say that their speech while teaching is being restricted indirectly.

In sum, we conclude that the freedom of speech of teachers is being restricted in several ways, but that these restrictions all have pedagogical reasons. Of all restrictions, neutrality is the most important one, as not being neutral can have negative consequences for the development of the pupil. However, all three interviewees doubt whether teachers always maintain their neutral and professional attitude when having conversations with pupils. Being objective and neutral is not an easy task.

Facilitating discussions and debates

It is clear that having conversations, discussions and debates is an efficient way to teach critical thinking skills. The way in which such discussions and debates should be held was also mentioned.

As indicated above, teachers should be facilitators during discussions and debates. They cannot express their own views and opinions, but they have to facilitate the discussions between pupils, in order for these pupils to express their opinions and views in a correct way. It is important that teachers guide pupils on how to argue about topics, so not on what they say, but how they say it and what the argumentation is. In other words, teachers have to guide them in learning how to adduce arguments pro and contra and how to participate in discussions and debates. The teachers' role is therefore not to engage in these discussions and debates, but to facilitate these conversations and debates, and to make sure that the pupils engage well in these discussions and debates.

Of course, one important condition is that teachers themselves have to be able to think critically in order for them to ask (neutral) critical questions. They also have to be able to keep their professional attitude and stay neutral, which is said to be a difficult condition for teachers as mentioned above. Yet, sufficient training can help a lot.

In addition, both principals stressed the importance of broaden the view of pupils, and of showing different views of a topic instead of only one. They both mentioned that asking questions (especially why questions) is the right way when discussions certain topics and also when approaching radical thoughts.

Further, although teachers hold class conversations quite frequently (namely a few times a month), from what the expert and principal 2 said about debates, we can only suggest that a true debate culture does not exist in schools and should be more often held between pupils in classes. During debates, pupils have to defend a certain position (pro or contra) and in doing so they learn how to argue and how to form their views and opinions.

In sum, we suggest that, after teachers received sufficient training on how to hold class debates, debates should be implemented in all classes in primary schools.

Censorship is prohibited

Although teachers better not express their opinions, the pupils on the contrary have to be able to talk very openly about all kinds of topics. This is a very important, if not the most important condition to be obtained in all schools in order for pupils to develop themselves. Self-expression and self-development are said to be the main reasons why the right to freedom of expression is so important in a democratic society. Therefore, censorship shall be forbidden at all times.

Without censorship, the school is a reflection of society in which pupils engage in discussions and debates with each other. During these debates, all opinions and arguments can be expressed. It is very important that pupils have the feeling that the school is a safe environment in which they can say anything, even radical thoughts, an environment in which they can be completely themselves. When in such an environment teachers guide and learn them how to argue, how to think critically about themselves and about society as a whole, this can only have positive outcomes for their self-development. And their self-development should always be a priority within education.

7) <u>Conclusion</u>

To conclude, it is clear that there is a big difference between the way in which critical thinking should be taught for the prevention of radicalisation in primary schools, and the teaching method used in higher education, such as universities. Whereas in higher education research stresses the importance of the full right to freedom of expression of professors and academics, in primary schools we observe that this is not the best way in teaching pupils' ability to think critically. Both principals and experts acknowledge the exemplary role that teachers have. Them expressing opinions can be dangerous. However, it is also very important that primary schools are a reflection of society, in other words that the freedom of expression as obtained in society is also present in schools. For that reason, pupils can never be censored. Censorship for pupils should be prohibited at all times. So in contrast with the pupils who can express all kinds of opinions and convictions, the teachers should stay neutral and adopt a professional attitude. Their role is to facilitate the conversations, discussions and debates between the pupils.

In addition, we observed that although critical thinking is recently implemented in all curricula, the practical implementation of this objective within education has not sufficiently been achieved so far. The main reason is that teachers lack practical training and knowledge to teach critical thinking skills properly. Both teachers and school principals confirm this.

In sum, this research tried to provide an answer on the question how the freedom of expression of primary teachers should be defined in order for them to enhance their pupils' ability to think critically. Although assumptions and suggestions have been delivered, it is clear that a solid evidence and sure conclusions could not be made. It is easier when having all the answers, to think critically, but then probably the latter becomes useless. Therefore, we can conclude that critical thinking is about asking questions, and not having answers. Moreover, answers can change over time. In this sense, it is important to keep asking questions about oneself, about others and about the entire global community. So although solid conclusions could not be made, it is nevertheless a step closer towards the truth.

Last but definitely not least, next to the freedom of expression, which is widely used, the importance of freedom of thought is wrongly underestimated. The way in which you

experience and perceive the world, your way of thinking, your very own thoughts, are the restrictions that you pose on yourself and those are the most difficult to be freed. Only a very critical mind can make you be truly free.

Bibliography

Akhmad Asyri, K. (2020). Counter-radicalization in early childhood through effective communication between education stakeholders in Bima, *Jurnal Pemikiran dan Penelitian Pendidikan*, Vol. 18 (1), pp. 1-21.

Arendt, H. (1964). Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship. Available online: https://grattoncourses.files. wordpress.com/2017/07/arendt-personal-responsibility-under-a-dictatorship.pdf

Berlin, I. (1996). *Twee opvattingen van vrijheid.* [Original text from 1958, *Two concepts of Liberty*, Oxford University Press.], Amsterdam: Boom.

Catholic Education Flanders: Curriculum primary education. Retrieved from https://zill.katholiekonderwijs.vlaanderen/#!/

Cloots, E. (2019). Het recht om (andermans) mening niet te hoeven uiten: over klimaatmarsen, huwelijkstaarten en nieuwkomersverklaringen, *Tijdschrift voor Bestuurswetenschappen en Publiekrecht*, Vol. 2019 (7), pp. 375-384.

Colaert, L., et al. (2017). *'Deradicalisering'. Wetenschapelijke inzichten voor een Vlaams beleid*, Vlaams Vredesinstituut, pp. 13.

Community education Flanders: Curriculum primary education. Retrieved from https://pro.g-o.be/blog/Documents/lpalgemeendeel1.pdf

Community education Flanders: Pedagogical Project GO!. Retrieved from https://g-o.be/media/1542/pedagogisch-project_2016_def.pdf

Community education Flanders: Neutrality declaration. Retrieved from https://g-o.be/media/1543/neutraliteitsverklaring_2016_def.pdf

Depaepe, M. (1998). *De pedagogisering achterna. Aanzet tot een genealogie van de pedagogische mentaliteit in de voorbije 250 jaar*, Acco: Leuven.

Drucker, P. (2004). *De Werkbare Maatschappij. Essays over gemeenschap, politiek en management*, Business Contact.

Durodie, B. (2016). Securitising education to prevent terrorism or losing direction?, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 64 (1), pp. 21-35. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2015.1107023

Eurydice (2020-2021). Belgium – Flemish Community Overview. Retrieved from https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/belgium-flemish-community_en

Feitosa de Britto, T. (2018). Neither Hired Mouth nor Class Monarchs, *Canadian Journal of Education*, Vol. 14 (3), pp. 783-807.

Fenton, J., Smith, M. (2019). 'You Can't Say That!': Critical Thinking, Identity Politics, and the Social Work Academy, *Societies*, Vol. 9 (4). Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.3390/soc9040071

Franken, L. (2016). The freedom of religion and the freedom of education in twenty-first-century Belgium: a critical approach, *British Journal of Religious Education*, Vol. 38 (3), pp. 308-324. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2015.1113934

Franken, L. (2017). Leren samenleven: levensbeschouwelijke vakken en symblen op de openbare school in Vlaanderen en Quebec, *Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2017-2018 (3), pp. 162-173.

Gillett-Swan, J., Sargeant, J. (2018). Assuring children's human right to freedom of opinion and expression in education, *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, Vol. 20 (1), pp. 120-127.

Hedayah Center (2016, September). *Guidelines and good practices. Developing National P/CVE Strategies and Action Plans*. Retrieved from https://www.hedayahcenter.org/resources/good-practices/guidelines-good-practices-developing-national-p-cve-strategies-action-plans/

Lancksweerdt, E. (2016). Bemiddeling in het onderwijs en burgerschapsvorming, *Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2016-2017 (1-2), pp. 7-15.

Lemmens, K., Vrielink, J. (2018). 'De censuur kan nooit worden ingevoerd': vrijheid van meningsuiting en *hate speech* als uitdagingen voor het EHRM en de Belgische rechtspraktijk. In S., Rutten, E., Ramakers, M., Lenaerts (Eds.). *Recht in een multiculturele samenleving*, (1st ed., pp. 125-156), Mortsel (Belgium): Intersentia.

Lenos, S., Krasenberg, J. (2018). *Free speech, extremism and the prevention of radicalisation in higher education*, RAN Centre of Excellence: Manchester, UK.

Lombardi, L. (2019). *Primary teachers' perceptions about and methods to promote students' critical thinking skills,* The 39th International Conference on Critical Thinking.

Lombardi, L., De Backer, F., Lombaerts, K. (2019, June 4). Primary teachers' perceptions about and methods to promote students' critical thinking skills, *Foundation for Critical Thinking*. Retrieved from https://researchportal.vub.be/en/publications/primary-teachers-perceptions-about-and-methods-to-promote-student

Lombardi, L., De Backer, F., Lombaerts, K. (2020, October 6). Teachers' perceptions on critical thinking in primary education, *Foundation for Critical Thinking*. Retrieved from https://researchportal.vub.be/nl/publications/teachers-perceptions-on-critical-thinking-in-primary-education

Lombardi, L. (2021). Are you a critical thinker – and can you teach critical thinking to students?, *School Education Gateway*. Retrieved from https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/viewpoints/experts/a-critical-thinker-.htm

Loobuyck, P. (2014). Maak van diversiteit een schoolvak, *Samenleving & Politiek*, Vol. 21 (3), pp. 5-8.

Lowings, B. (2018). Education and violent extremism: teaching youth to think for themselves, *Brussels Institute Centre*. Retrieved from https://www.bic-rhr.com/research/education-and-violent-extremism-teaching-youth-think-themselves

Mill, J. S. (1859). Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion, In J.S. Mill (Ed.). *On Liberty* (2nd ed., pp. 31-99), London: John W. Parker, and Son, West Strand.

Mill, J.S. (2011). *On liberty*, The Walter Scott Publishing Company: London, UK, 1859.

Ming-Kuok, L. (2013). *Freedom of Expression Toolkit: A Guide for Students*, UNESCO: Paris.

Perry-Hazan, L. (2015). Freedom of Speech in Schools and the Right to Participation: When the First Amendment Encounters the Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Brigham Young University Education and Law Journal*, Vol. 2015 (2), pp. 421-452.

Powell, L. (2016). Counter-Productive Counter-Terrorism. How is the dysfunctional discourse of Prevent failing to restrain radicalisation?, Journal for Deradicalisation, Vol. 2016 (8), pp. 46-99.

Reijngoud, T. (2012). *Weten is meer dan meten: Spraakmakende opinieleiders over de economisering van de samenleving*, Hilversum: Uitgeverij Lias, pp. 137-138.

Sas, M., Hardyns, W., Ponnet, K., Reniers, G. (2019). Radicalisering op de campus: welke rol kunnen hogeronderwijsinstellingen opnemen bij het voorkomen en aanpakken van radicalisering bij jongeren?, *Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2018-2019 (3), pp. 221-230.

Schuermans, N., Vandenabeele, J. (2016). Durven onderbreken: soidariteit en burgerschap op de speelplaats. *Tijdschrift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2016-2017 (3), pp. 147-157.

Sjoen, M. M., Jore, S. H. (2019). Preventing extremism through education: exploring impacts and implications of counter-radicalisation efforts, *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, Vol. 40 (3), pp. 269-283.

Uten, T., Sunaert, W. (2018). Workshop burgerschapseducatie: burgerschap en vrijheid van meningsuiting, Universiteit Gent: Gent.

Veny, L. (2010). *Onderwijsrecht I. Dragende beginselen*, Brugge: die Keure.

Wouters, R., Geerinck, I., Lievens, J. (2017). Waar spreken we (niet) over als we het over 'vrijheid van onderwijs' hebben? Een analyse van 'onderwijsvrijheid'als sensitizing concept, *Tijdschift voor Onderwijsrecht en Onderwijsbeleid*, Vol. 2016/17 (3), pp. 125-133.

Wouters, R., Haven, R., Winters, A., De Fraine, B., Henkens, B. (2014). *Laat leraren schitteren. Inspiratiegids voor leraren en-lerarenopleidingen van morgen*, LannooCampus: Leuven.

Annex I : survey questions

<u>Section 1: background information</u>

Q1: You are a …

- Man
- Woman
- X

Q2: You teach in a …

- Community school (GO!)
- Municipal school
- Province school
- Catholic school
- Other: …

Q3: In which grade do you teach?

- 1st grade
- 2nd grade
- 3rd grade

Q4: How many years of experience in teaching do you have?

- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- 10-20 years
- 20-30 years
- More than 30 years

Section 2: critical thinking and resistance

Q5: Critical thinking is part of the curriculum. Do you know exactly how to teach pupils to think critically?

- Yes   (5)
- Rather yes   (4)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (2)
- No   (1)
- No opinion   ( )

Q6: The current/new curriculum gives more freedom for teachers and schools to shape the end terms and goals. Do you find this approach better? (score from 1 to 5)

- 1: much worse
- 2: rather worse
- 3: equal/neutral
- 4: rather better
- 5: much better

Q7: Is the ability to think critically of pupils being discussed during parent-teacher meetings?

- Always   (5)
- Mostly yes   (4)
- Sometimes   (3)
- Mostly not   (2)
- Never   (1)
- Not applicable / no opinion   ( )

Q8: Did you receive during your teacher training a course about how to teach pupils to think critically or how to strengthen their ability to resist against other opinions and disinformation?

- Yes   (5)
- Rather yes   (4)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (2)
- No   (1)
- No opinion   ( )

Section 3: debates and class conversations (freedom of expression)

Q9: Do you think that it is okay to talk about all kinds of topics with pupils in class?

- Yes   (5)
- Rather yes   (4)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (2)
- No   (1)
- No opinion   ( )

Q10: Do you think that talking and/or debating about all kinds of topics with pupils has a positive impact on their ability to think critically and on their amount of resistance against all kinds of opinions and disinformation?

- Yes   (5)
- Rather yes   (4)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (2)
- No   (1)
- No opinion   ( )

Q11: Do you think that the kind of topic which is being debated about in class, depends on the age of the pupil?

- Yes   (5)
- Rather yes   (4)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (2)
- No   (1)
- No opinion   ( )

Q12: Do you adjust your language to the age of the pupil during class conversations?

- Yes   (3)
- Sometimes   (2)
- No   (1)
- No opinion   ( )

Q13: What categories of topics are mostly being discussed during class conversations?

 (Please check minimum 1 and maximum 3 subjects)

- Politics
- Money
- Racism
- Sexuality
- Religion
- Radicalisation/extremism/terrorism
- Other: …

Q14: How often are class conversations about sensitive/controversial topics being held?

- Never   (1)
- Less than once a year   (2)
- A few times a year   (3)
- A few times a month   (4)
- A few times a week   (5)
- A few times a day   (6)

Q15: Do you ever ask your pupils whether they want to talk about a certain topic?

- Yes   (3)
- Sometimes   (2)
- No   (1)
- No opinion   ( )

Q16: Did you ever avoid to talk about a certain topic with pupils?

- Yes   (1)
- Maybe   (2)
- No   (3)
- No opinion   ( )

Q17: Are there certain topics that you would avoid due to a certain political, religious, social or ethnic background of a pupil?

- Yes   (1)
- Rather yes   (2)

- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (4)
- No   (5)
- No opinion   ( )

Q18: Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic out of fear for possible complaints from pupils, parents and/or others?

- Yes   (1)
- Rather yes   (2)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (4)
- No   (5)
- No opinion   ( )

Q19: Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic out of fear for possible physical and/or verbal aggressive reactions from pupils, parents and/or others?

- Yes   (1)
- Rather yes   (2)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (4)
- No   (5)
- No opinion   ( )

Q20: Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic out of fear to offend or disrespect a pupil?

- Yes   (1)
- Rather yes   (2)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (4)
- No   (5)
- No opinion   ( )

Q21: Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic out of fear for sanctions from superiors and governmental administrations (director, management team, board of directors, government, etc.)?

- Yes   (1)
- Rather yes   (2)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (4)
- No   (5)
- No opinion   ( )

Q22: Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic because of your own different opinion on the matter?

- Yes   (1)
- Rather yes   (2)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (4)
- No   (5)
- No opinion   ( )

Q23: Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic because of a different opinion of a pupil? (In other words, when a pupil would have a different opinion on the matter, then you would talk about it).

- Yes   (1)
- Rather yes   (2)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (4)
- No   (5)
- No opinion   ( )

Q24: Do you feel supported by your colleagues and/or superiors if there would be (internal/external) discussions whether to hold class conversations about certain controversial/sensitive topics?

- Yes   (5)
- Rather yes   (4)

- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (2)
- No   (1)
- Not applicable / no opinion   ( )

Q25: Did you ever receive a complaint of a pupil, parents or others as a consequence of a statement or class conversation?

- Yes
- No

Q26: Did pupils, parents or others ever physically and/or verbally aggressively approach you as a consequence of a statement or class conversation?

- Yes
- No

Q27: Do you notice a change in reactions of pupils, parents or others compared to the past?

- Yes   (5)
- Rather yes   (4)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (2)
- No   (1)
- No opinion   ( )

Q28: Does it happen sometimes that you express your opinion about certain topics in class?

- Yes   (5)
- Rather yes   (4)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (2)
- No   (1)
- No opinion   ( )

Q29: Do you think that the guidelines concerning class conversations are clear? Is it clear about what topics you can talk or about what topics you are not allowed to talk, and how class conversations should be held?

- Yes   (5)
- Rather yes   (4)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (2)
- No   (1)
- No opinion   ( )

Q30: Did you ever receive training/education/workshop concerning technics about how to hold class conversations about certain controversial/sensitive topics?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable / no opinion

Q31: Do you think that such a training is useful/necessary for teachers?

- Yes   (5)
- Rather yes   (4)
- Maybe   (3)
- Rather not   (2)
- No   (1)
- No opinion   ( )

Annex II : descriptive statistics

	Number of answers	Minimum response[75]	Maximum response[76]	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q5 – Do you know exactly how to teach pupils to think critically?	38	2	5	4,13	,704
Q6 – Do you find the new approach of the curriculum better?	38	2	5	3,53	,830
Q7 – Is the ability to think critically of pupils being discussed during parent-teacher meetings?	38	1	4	2,82	,865
Q8 – Did you receive during your teacher training a course, seminar or workshop about how to teach pupils to think critically and/or how to strengthen their ability to resist against all kinds of opinions and disinformation?	38	1	4	1,47	,830
Q9 – Do you think that it is okay to talk about all kinds of topics with pupils in class?	38	1	5	4,42	,948

---

[75] See annex I (survey questions) for the meaning of the minimum responses

[76] See annex I (survey questions) for the meaning of the maximum responses

Q10 – Do you think that talking and/or debating about all kinds of topics with pupils has a positive impact on their ability to think critically and on their amount of resistance against all kinds of opinions and disinformation?	38	2	5	4,58	,683
Q11 – Do you think that the kind of topic which is being debated about in class, depends on the age of the pupil?	38	1	5	4,05	1,114
Q12 – Do you adjust your language to the age of the pupil during class conversations?	38	1	3	2,79	,474
Q14 – How often are class conversations about sensitive/controversial topics being held?	38	2	5	3,79	,875
Q15 – Do you ever ask your pupils whether they want to talk about a certain topic?	37	1	3	2,38	,639
Q16 – Did you ever avoid to talk about a certain topic with pupils?	37	1	2	1,19	,397
Q17 – Are there certain topics that you would avoid due to a certain political, religious, social or ethnic background of a pupil?	38	1	5	3,53	1,246

Q18 – Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic out of fear for possible complaints from pupils, parents and/or others?	38	1	5	3,42	1,266
Q19 – Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic out of fear for possible physical and/or verbal aggressive reactions from pupils, parents and/or others?	38	1	5	3,84	1,346
Q20 – Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic out of fear to offend or disrespect a pupil?	38	1	5	3,66	1,097
Q21 – Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic out of fear for sanctions from superiors and governmental administrations?	37	1	5	3,86	1,206
Q22 – Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic because of your own different opinion on the matter?	38	1	5	4,08	1,100
Q23 – Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic because of a different opinion of a pupil?	37	1	5	4,11	1,197

Q24 – Do you feel supported by your colleagues and/or superiors if there would be discussions about whether to hold class conversations about certain topics?	38	1	5	4,24	1,051
Q27 – Do you notice a change in reactions of pupils, parents or others compared to the past?	34	1	5	3,82	1,290
Q28 – Does it happen sometimes that you express your opinion about certain topics in class?	38	2	5	3,50	,688
Q29 – Is it clear about what topics you can talk or about what topics you are not allowed to talk, and how class conversations should be held?	35	1	5	3,03	1,382
Q31 – Do you think that a training concerning technics about how to hold class conversations about certain controversial/sensitive topics is useful/necessary for teachers?	38	2	5	3,97	1,052
Valid N (listwise)	27				

Annex III : significant correlations

A) Results of the significant correlations
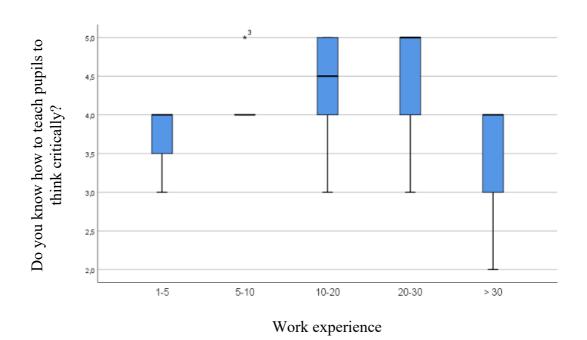
Correlation 1

Q4: work experience

Q5: Do you know how to teach pupils to think critically?

Test: Kruskal-Wallis test

p-value= 0,043

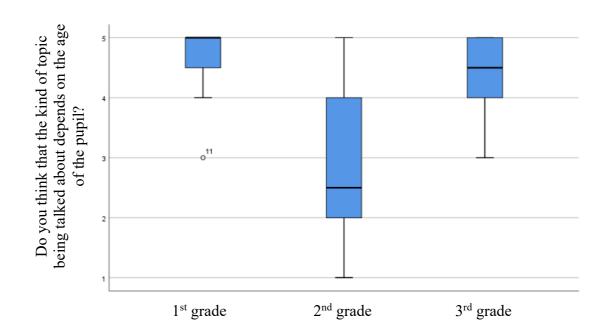| Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary	
Total N	38
Test Statistic	9,845
Degree Of Freedom	4
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	0,043

Correlation 2

Q3: grade

Q11: Do you think that the kind of topic being talked about depends on the age of the pupil?

Test: Kruskal-Wallis Test

p-value= 0,002

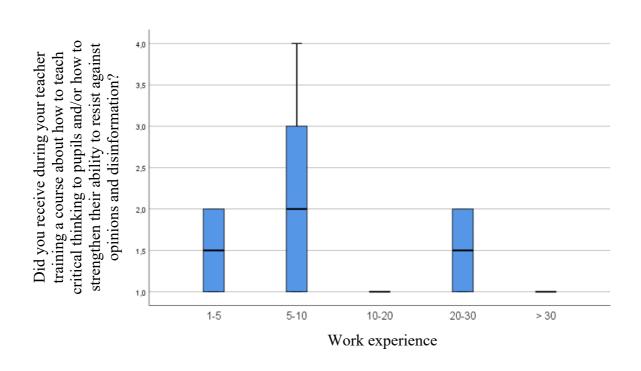| Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary	
Total N	38
Test Statistic	12,164
Degree Of Freedom	2
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,002

Correlation 3

Q4: work experience

Q8: Did you receive during your teacher training a course about how to teach critical thinking to pupils and/or how to strengthen their ability to resist against opinions and disinformation?

Test: Kruskal-Wallis Test

p-value= 0,011

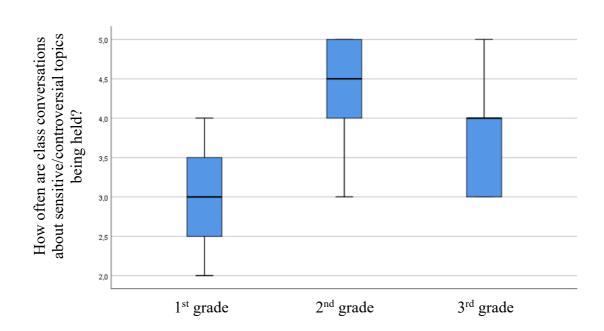| Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary	
Total N	38
Test Statistic	13,121
Degree Of Freedom	4
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,011

Correlation 4

Q3: Grade

Q14: How often are class conversations about sensitive/controversial topics being held?

Test: Kruskal-Wallis Test

p-value= 0,010

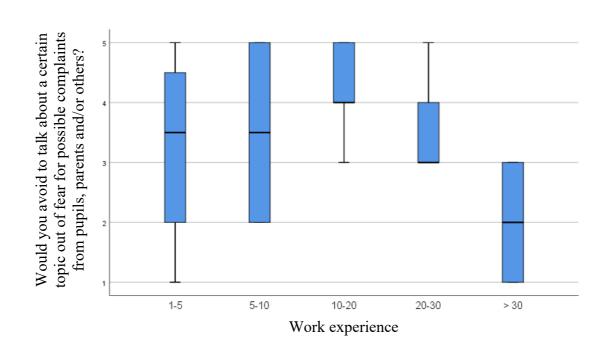| Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary	
Total N	38
Test Statistic	9,212
Degree Of Freedom	2
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,010

Correlation 5

Q4: Work experience

Q18: Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic out of fear for possible complaints from pupils, parents and/or others?

Test: Kruskal-Wallis Test

p-value= 0,032

Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary	
Total N	38
Test Statistic	10,551
Degree Of Freedom	4
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,032

Correlation 6

Q4: Work experience

Q25: Did you ever receive a complaint of a pupil, parents or others as a consequence of a statement or class conversation?

Test: Fisher's Exact Test

p-value= 0,047

Chi-Square Tests				
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8,572	4	,073	,069
Likelihood Ratio	11,216	4	,024	,046
Fisher's Exact Test	9,057			,047
N of Valid Cases	38			

		Did you ever receive a complaint of a pupil, parents or others as a consequence of a statement or class conversation?		Total
		Yes	No	
Work experience	1-5	1	3	4
	5-10	0	10	10
	10-20	4	6	10
	20-30	5	3	8
	>30	2	4	6
Total		12	26	38

Correlation 7

Q30: Did you ever receive training concerning technics about how to hold class conversations about certain sensitive/controversial topics?

Q31: Do you think that such a training is useful/necessary for teachers?

Test: Mann-Whitney U Test

p-value= 0,004

Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary	
Total N	38
Mann-Whitney U	27,000
Wilcoxon W	555,000
Test Statistic	27,000
Standard Error	23,717
Standardized Test Statistic	-2,909
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,004
Exact Sig.(2-sided test)	,004

Did you ever receive training concerning technics about how to hold class conversations about certain sensitive/controversial topics?
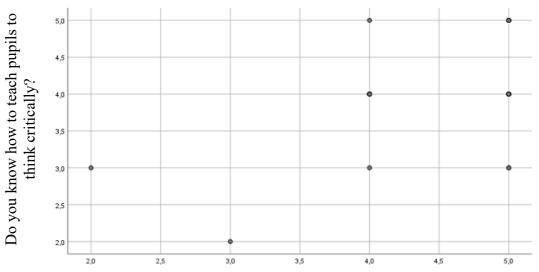
Correlation 8

Q5: Do you know how to teach pupils to think critically?

Q10: Do you think that talking about all kinds of topics with pupils has a positive impact on their ability to think critically and to resist against opinions and disinformation?

Test: Spearman's Rho test

Correlation coefficient: 0,409

p-value= 0,011

			Do you know how to teach pupils to think critically?
Spearman's rho	Do you know how to teach pupils to think critically?	Correlation Coefficient	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.
		N	38
	Do you think that talking about all kinds of topics with pupils has a positive impact on their ability to think critically and to resist against opinions and disinformation?	Correlation Coefficient	,409
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,011
		N	38

Do you think that talking about all kinds of topics with pupils has a positive impact on their ability to think critically and to resist against opinions and disinformation?

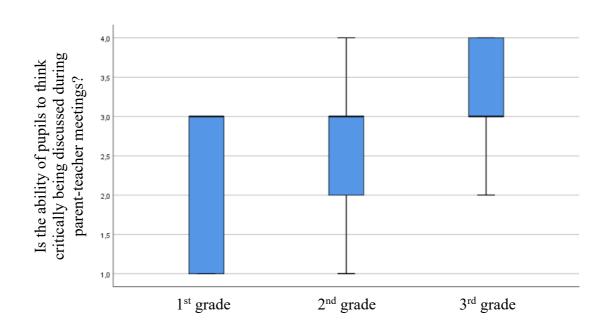## B) Results of the marginal significant correlations

Correlation 9

Q3: grade

Q7: Is the ability of pupils to think critically being discussed during parent-teacher meetings?

Test: Kruskal-Wallis Test

p-value= 0,053

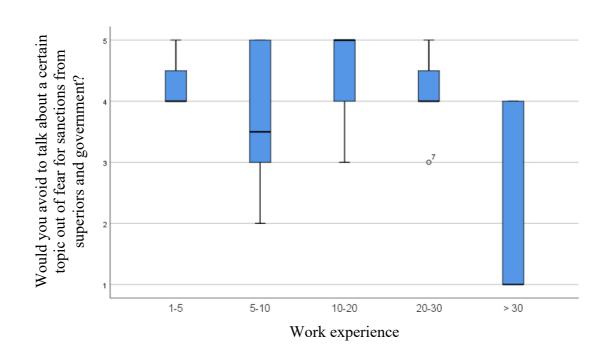| Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary	
Total N	38
Test Statistic	5,888
Degree Of Freedom	2
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,053

Correlation 10

Q4: work experience

Q21: Would you avoid to talk about a certain topic out of fear for sanctions from superiors and government?

Test: Kruskal-Wallis Test

p-value= 0,062

Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test Summary	
Total N	37
Test Statistic	8,955
Degree Of Freedom	4
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,062

Annex IV : interview questions (principals)

<u>Questions concerning teaching critical reflection to pupils</u>

1. Improving pupils' critical thinking skills has recently been included in the final attainment levels of the curriculum, but it is not mentioned how it should be taught. According to you, how should teachers improve their pupils' critical thinking skills?

2. Have the teachers in your school had any brief or extensive training on this subject? Did teachers ever ask questions about this?

3. Research has shown that improving and developing pupils' critical thinking skills has a positive effect in preventing them from radicalising. However, research also states that teachers often do not know exactly how to teach this. What do you think is still lacking in terms of knowledge, skills and/or guidelines for teachers to improve their students' critical thinking skills?

4. Research also suggests that developing a debate culture in the classroom/school could be a way to teach critical thinking. Is this currently being done in your school Why or why not? If yes, how are such debates organised?

5. During debates, should teachers act as mediators or participants?

6. Does there exist teaching material that teachers can use while teaching critical thinking skills?
   a. If not, why is this not done? Do you consider this necessary?
   b. If yes, what teaching materials do teachers use when teaching critical thinking skills?
   c. Are these teaching materials primarily aimed at students or teachers?
   d. Do these teaching materials include guidelines for teachers on what to say/not to say?

7. Are there any conditions that teachers must meet in order to teach their students to think critically?
   a. If yes, explain these conditions.

8. Is the ability to think critically evaluated and discussed during parent-teacher meetings?

9. Are there certain topics that teachers are not allowed to discuss with their students?

    a. If not, why?

    b. If yes, which topics?

10. Are there certain words, statements or a certain use of language that cannot be used by teachers in the classroom?

11. Do you notice an evolution in the number of sensitive/controversial topics discussed in class? How do teachers deal with this?

12. How should teachers engage in dialogue with pupils when dealing with sensitive issues?

13. Have there ever been a problem or discussion concerning certain statements or topics of conversation? Have there been a conflict between management, teachers, pupils, parents and/or third parties?

14. In October last year, Samuel Paty, a French history teacher, was beheaded as a result of showing a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed in class. Have you noticed an increased concern among teachers after this event? This could be about certain teaching methods, about their freedom of expression and/or about their own safety.

15. If so, what was your response to these concerns? How were these concerns addressed? (Any guidelines formulated?)

16. If not, did you anticipate possible future concerns and questions from teachers after this event?

17. Shortly after the murder of Samuel Paty, the council suspended a teacher in a primary school in Molenbeek because he was showing a rather obscene Charly Hebdo cartoon of the prophet Mohammed in class. What is your position on this?

    a. What have you learned from this event?

    b. If this happened in your school, what measures would you take?

18. Some people have the opinion that not showing a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed because of the conviction or fear is at the expense of the right to freedom of expression. How do you feel about this in relation to education?

19. To what extent do you consider the right to freedom of expression of teachers important?

20. The right to freedom of expression is not an absolute right. It involves a few limitations, namely discrimination and incitement to hatred or violence are not allowed. In the case of teachers and their essential role in the development of pupils,

what is your view on the right to freedom of expression for teachers? Do you think that this provision also applies to them?

    a. If not, how would you define their right to freedom of expression?

    b. What are the conditions for teachers' freedom of expression?

    c. What does their freedom of expression imply in the classroom/school? Why?

21. Does the full (almost unlimited) right to freedom of expression among teachers have a positive or negative impact on improving critical thinking skills among pupils? What positive or negative effects could a no-taboo policy have on critical thinking?

22. There exists a beautiful French saying, "Du choc des idées, jaillit la lumière". Through the clash of ideas, enlightenment comes about. What is your position on this?

23. Do you think that it should also be possible to achieve this in education? But then maybe teachers should have the full right to freedom of expression, or not?

24. Since 1989, GO! has been carefully fulfilling its mission to offer 'neutral' education, as enshrined in the constitution. This concept has become increasingly broad because of the diversity. Recently, one speaks of 'active neutrality' (instead of 'neutrality'). What does this mean exactly?

25. How should teachers deal with fairly radical statements pronounced by pupils. For example, if a pupil says "I am against democracy", in your opinion how should the teacher react to this?

26. Do teachers teach the concept of freedom of expression?

    a. If so, what does such a lesson look like?

    b. Within which lesson and in which classes is this taught or discussed? What is the reason for this?

    c. What importance do you attach to this lesson?

Questions concerning the school's policy

27. Returning to the example of a pupil who says "I am against democracy" and the way teachers should react to this statement. Is this stipulated in the policy? Is this written down in any guidelines? Do teachers know they should respond in this way? How do teachers find out?

28. Is the way in which teachers should speak (or not speak) to their students laid down in guidelines and rules?

    a. If so, how?

29. What does the school policy say about whether or not teachers express an opinion in class?

30. If teachers have questions or concerns about their right to freedom of expression, to whom can they ask questions?

31. Are there guidelines that are still missing? Are there policy gaps? Are there unanswered questions for teachers that should be addressed in the future?

32. Are there certain partnerships with particular stakeholders regarding the teaching of critical thinking skills to pupils and/or the freedom of expression of teachers? For example, to gather knowledge, or to realise certain projects, etc.

Annex V : interview questions (expert)

Questions concerning teaching critical thinking

1. First of all, I would like to ask what you think about this. What implies critical thinking, and to what extent does it have an impact on whether or not young people become radicalised?

2. Research also suggests that building a culture of debate in the classroom/school could be a way to teach critical thinking. What is your opinion about this? Do you think this has a positive or negative effect on the prevention of radicalisation?

3. In your opinion, should teachers act as mediators or participants during class discussions with pupils?

4. Are there any conditions teachers should meet in order to engage in dialogue or debate with their pupils? If so, what are they?

Questions related to teachers' freedom of expression

5. Do you think that teachers should be able to talk about all kinds of subjects in class? Why? Regardless of the age of the pupils?

6. How should teachers engage in dialogue with pupils when dealing with sensitive issues?

7. What are the challenges for teachers today in engaging with students on sensitive and controversial issues?

8. Do you notice any concerns that teachers have about having conversations with pupils?

9. Have teachers ever asked you about certain statements or subjects for discussion? If yes, what advice did you give them?

10. In October last year, Samuel Paty, a French history teacher, was beheaded for showing a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed in class. Have you noticed an increased concern among teachers after this event? This could be about certain teaching methods, about their freedom of expression and/or about their own safety.

11. Shortly after the murder of Samuel Paty, the town council suspended a teacher at a primary school in Molenbeek because he was showing a rather obscene Charly Hebdo cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed in class. What is your position on this?

12. Some are of the opinion that not showing a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed or not showing an image of a swastika because of fear is at the expense of the right to freedom of expression. How do you feel about this in relation to education?

13. To what extent do you consider the right to freedom of expression of teachers important?

14. The right to freedom of expression is not an absolute right. It involves a few limitations, namely discrimination and incitement to hatred or violence are not allowed. In the case of teachers and their essential role in the development of pupils, what is your view on the right to freedom of expression for teachers? Do you think that this provision also applies to them?

15. What does their freedom of expression in the classroom/school imply? Why?

16. Does the full (almost unlimited) right to freedom of expression among teachers have a positive or negative impact on improving critical thinking skills among pupils? What positive or negative effects could a no-taboo policy have on critical thinking?

17. There exists a beautiful French saying, "Du choc des idées, jaillit la lumière". Through the clash of ideas, enlightenment comes about. What is your position on this?

18. Do you think that it should also be possible to achieve this in education? But then maybe teachers should have the full right to freedom of expression, or not?

19. How should teachers deal with fairly radical statements pronounced by pupils. For example, if a pupil says "I am against democracy", in your opinion how should the teacher react to this?

20. Nowadays, does an almost unlimited right to freedom of expression tend to contribute to radicalisation? Or is it precisely the safeguarding of the right to freedom of expression that is important to counter radicalisation?

21. In an article you said, "People are massively claiming their freedom of expression, but would do better to use their freedom of thought a little more often before expressing that opinion". Do you think education can play a role in this?

22. Finally, are there any issues that might be important to mention for my research and that I have not asked about? Suggestions? Problems? Relevant examples?

23. Do you have any questions for me?