slo / Curriculum Perspectives

Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development SLO

Curriculum Perspectives

A curriculum is a coherent set of plans and practices related to student learning.

This brief definition can be elaborated in a number of ways. This SLO document on curriculum perspectives will help you to define more precisely:

- **What** a curriculum is – main focus on cards 1 2 3 4 9
- **How** to develop a curriculum – main focus on cards 5 8 10
- **Who** are involved in curriculum development – main focus on cards 6 7 11

Each card offers a specific perspective on the curriculum, visualized in a model on the front of the cards, with a brief explanation on the back.

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Table of contents

1. Curriculum levels

Level	Example activities	Examples of stakeholders	Example documents
International	International comparative research, reaching agreements	OECD, Council of Europe, UNESCO, EU	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, European Framework for Numeracy, PISA-, PIRLS- and TIMSS-frameworks
National and subnational	National curriculum dialogue, development and monitoring of mandatory educational objectives, development of example curriculum materials	Ministry of Education, curriculum experts, teachers' unions, school leaders, scientists, professional organizations, students, parents	Core objectives, attainment targets, examination programs, example learning trajectories
School	Developing a rationale on teaching and learning, sharing curriculum knowledge, making curriculum choices	Teachers, subject coordinators, school leaders, school boards, parents, students	School curriculum, subject curriculum
Classroom	Making decisions on implementing the curriculum, designing lessons	Teachers, students, parents	Lesson plans, series of lessons
Student	Making curriculum choices for individual students	Teachers, parents, students	Individual adjustments of the curriculum

1 Curriculum levels

Levels in curriculum development

It is possible to reflect on a curriculum as "a coherent set of plans and practices that relate to student learning" at various levels. This overview will help you identify these levels of curriculum development.

Relations between curriculum levels

The various levels at which people and organizations reach agreements about the curriculum are closely interrelated. "Higher" levels have an impact on "lower" levels. For instance, core objectives and attainment targets established at the national level affect classroom practice. Vice versa, classroom practice affects the curriculum at school level – for example, when a school team agrees to teach transversal skills in several subjects across grades.

Curriculum at school level

In the Netherlands, within the national frameworks, schools and teachers have the freedom to organize their education themselves. This Dutch tradition of freedom of education implies that the government has a reserved stance towards education at the school level. 7 When it comes to the **school-based curriculum**, several actors within schools reach agreements in mutual consultation: school boards, school leaders, subject coordinators, and teachers. Who is involved depends on how responsibilities are organized at the school level.

Manifestations of curriculum

Intended curriculum	Enacted curriculum	Attained curriculum
Aims and objectives of education, as established by the government, schools, or teachers	The actual teaching in schools and classrooms	Learning experiences and outcomes

2 Manifestations of curriculum

A model for clarification

This model helps to clarify what manifestation you are addressing when discussing curricular issues:

- intentions – *what do we aim to achieve?*
- enactment – *how do teaching and learning take place?*
- achievements – *what are students' experiences and what have they learned?*

Coherence between curriculum manifestations

Curriculum development requires extensive coordination within and outside schools. There are often significant differences between what the government, school management, or teachers aim to achieve on the one hand and how teaching and learning takes place in practice on the other. While this is not necessarily a problem, there is often a desire to reduce the gap between plans (intended curriculum), actions (enacted curriculum), and results (attained curriculum).

Further refinement

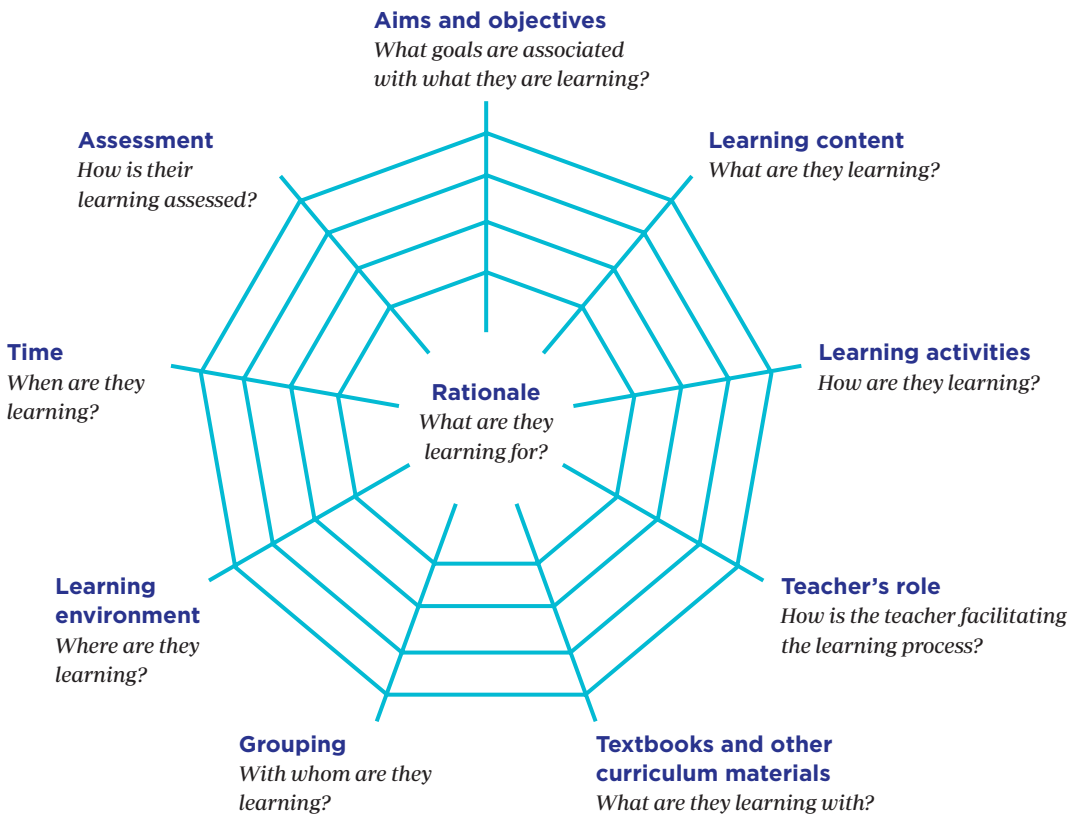
The intended curriculum can be divided into the ideal curriculum (views, expectations, and ideas about what needs to be learned) and the written curriculum (as it is formally laid down).

The enacted curriculum consists of the perceived curriculum (how teachers interpret the written curriculum) and the operational curriculum (how teachers enact the curriculum). Within the attained curriculum, a distinction is made between the experiential curriculum (learning experiences as perceived by learners) and the learned curriculum (learning outcomes). This detailed elaboration of six manifestations builds on the work of John Goodlad.

Note

Sometimes, implicit norms and values affect the way teachers perceive, operate, and realize a curriculum. This is known as the "hidden" curriculum.

Curricular spider web



3 Curricular spider web

Components of the curriculum

The curriculum spider web model specifies 10 interconnected components of a curriculum. These components play a role at all **curriculum levels** – national, school, and classroom level.

1

Rationale required for coherence

A shared rationale on education plays a central role in a curriculum. The values and principles that drive a curriculum tie all curriculum components – the threads of the spider web – together. Each component is based on a key question about student learning. In a coherent curriculum, choices regarding all components are aligned.

A coherent curriculum

You can use the curricular spiderweb to analyze a current curriculum or to describe a desired curriculum. The model reflects the vulnerability of a curriculum. A spider web is flexible, but if one thread is overburdened, you disturb the web, causing it to tear.

Rationale on teaching and learning

Student	What are students' needs and interests?
Subject	What learning content is crucial from a disciplinary perspective?
Society	What is valuable for contemporary and future society?

4 Rationale on teaching and learning

A shared rationale on education drives curriculum decisions

A rationale on education is essential. It ensures the curriculum development process is focused and prevents curriculum overload. A shared rationale provides an answer to the key question: which objectives and what learning content take priority in the teaching process, and why? Based on their rationale, schools can make choices regarding objectives, learning content, and the other components of the **curricular spider web**. 3

The three Ss

The more complex society becomes, the more pressure education will be under to do justice to diverging interests. According to Tyler, the wishes conveyed by:

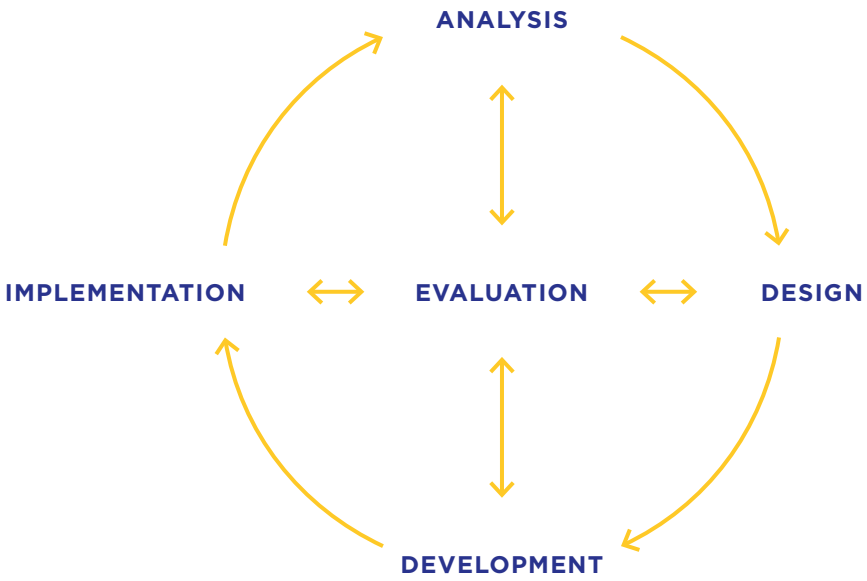
- students
- subject matter
- society

are decisive for the selection of educational objectives and learning content for a school or subject. In a sound curriculum, these three perspectives are in balance. Considerations based on educational philosophy and psychology support the process of further narrowing down and refining the "what and how" of education.

Main aims of Dutch education

- *Qualification:* acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competences to enable people to participate in society and in professional life and/or to pursue further education.
- *Socialization:* being or learning how to be a member of a greater whole and becoming acquainted with the values and standards of that greater whole (e.g., society, field of work, organization).
- *Subjectification:* the process by which students develop an independent and critical attitude, based on which they decide what is important to them and who they would like to be in relation to the social group they are part of, but also from which they distinguish themselves.

Curriculum development process (ADDIE model)



5 Curriculum development process (ADDIE model)

Five steps of curriculum development

Curriculum development is a cyclical process, which consists of five related key activities: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation.

1. Analysis

Curriculum development often starts with an analysis of the existing situation and formulation of the aim of the educational change or innovation:

- *Problem analysis:* what is the actual – underlying – issue?
- *Target group analysis:* what are the characteristics of the target group?
- *Context analysis:* in which context does the problem occur or does the desired situation need to be realized?
- *Needs analysis:* what are the needs of the target group and the initiator?
- *Analysis of the knowledge base:* what is already known about the problem at hand and possible, viable solutions? Are any good examples known? What guiding ideas can be found in (scientific) literature?

2. Design

The analysis leads to design guidelines for the curriculum to be developed regarding aim, form, and learning content.

3. Development

Based on the design guidelines, you can start designing the revised curriculum

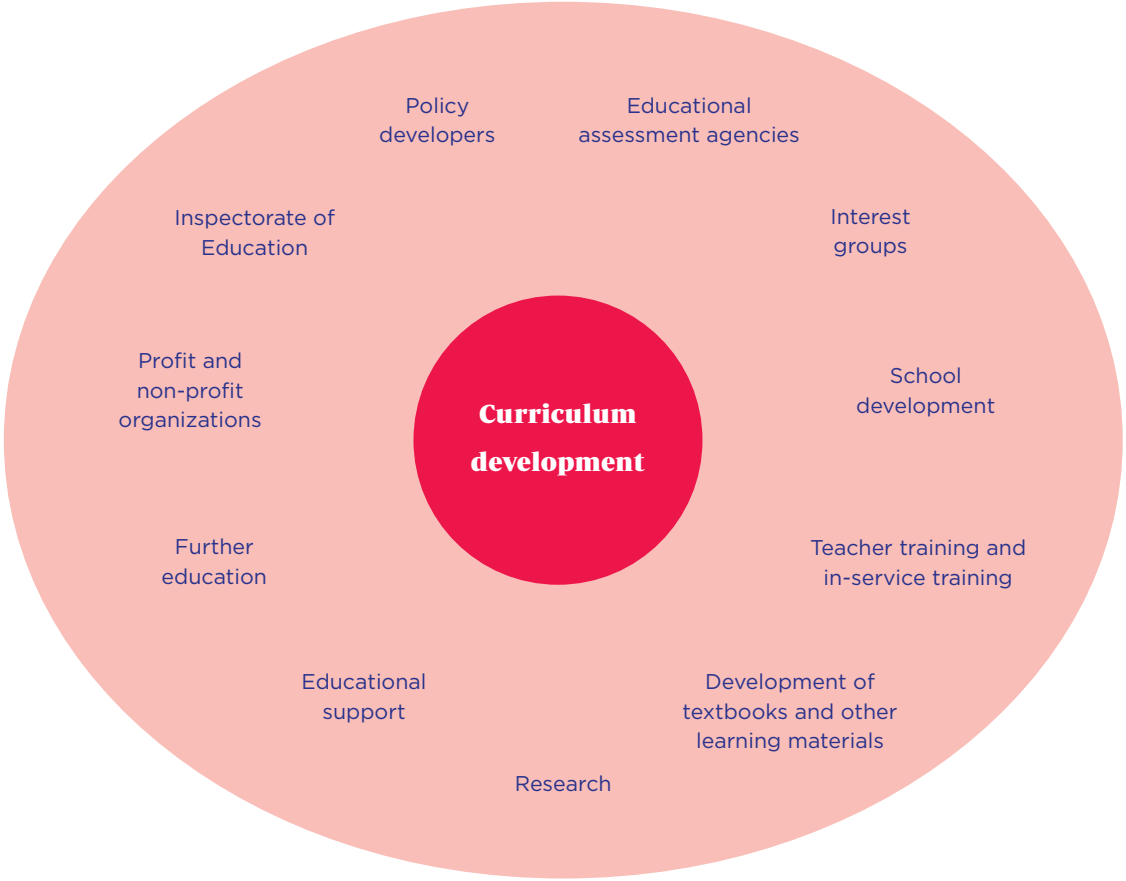
4. Implementation

The revised curriculum or initial versions thereof are used in practice, for example during trial sessions.

5. Evaluation

Evaluation is needed for each phase of curriculum development. Several **formative evaluation methods** can be used to gather information about the curriculum's **quality**. This may lead to adaptations to initial versions of the curriculum to be developed. Evaluation may also mark the start of a next development cycle.

Stakeholders in curriculum development



6 Stakeholders in curriculum development

Stakeholders in curriculum development

This model is a practical tool for determining which parties take part in the curriculum development process at **national or school level**.

Why partners are important

Reasons to involve partners:

- their expertise;
- to build **support**;
- their role in implementation, for example with regard to developing teaching materials or providing professional development.

An adaptive tool

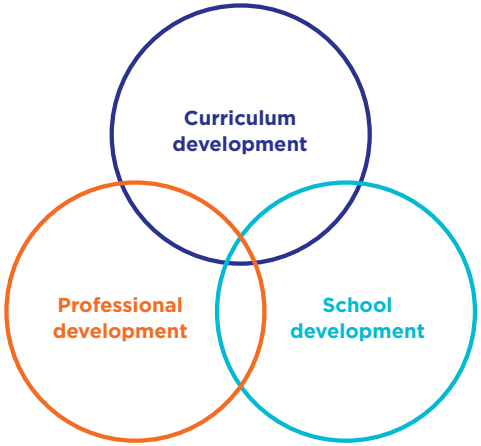
This model can be adjusted for curriculum development in particular situations by:

- adding and crossing out stakeholders to gain an overview of relevant stakeholders in the situation concerned;
- determining for each partner who the key contact persons are and how they should be involved at each stage of the development process.

Possible stakeholders to involve

- policy developers: Ministry of Education, municipality, school boards;
- educational assessment agencies;
- interest groups: educational councils, umbrella organizations, teachers' unions, professional organizations;
- **school-based curriculum development:** school boards, school leaders, internal quality assurance employees, school teams, teachers, subject coordinators, students;
- teacher training and in-service training: teacher educators, teacher-training institutes, school consultants;
- development of textbooks and other learning materials: educational publishers, software developers, authors;
- research: universities, research institutes, expertise centers;
- educational support: school advisors, school counselling services, school networks;
- further education: secondary education, vocational education, higher education;
- profit and non-profit organizations;
- Inspectorate of Education.

School-based curriculum development



Reasons, e.g.:
- subject innovation, mandatory and optional subjects;
- continuous learning trajectories;
- coherent educational programs;
- differentiation, talent development;
- formative and summative assessment.

Changes:
- ambition, rationale on education;
- curriculum at school, classroom, and student level.

Competencies:
- subject content;
- pedagogics and didactics;
- curriculum;
- design and research;
- collaboration;
- educational change management

And also:
- engagement;
- willingness to change;
- agency.

School culture:
- collaborative culture;
- shared curricular leadership;
- trust and respect;
- energy and leeway.

School infrastructure:
- time, budget;
- communication;
- consultation;
- the school as a teaching, learning, and designing environment.

7 School-based curriculum development

Comprehensive school development

For school-based curriculum development to be successful, it is important to address the school team's professional development as well as the school organization development.

School-based curriculum development

A school-based curriculum includes all 1 plans and agreements in a school related to student learning. These agreements may concern all components of the 3 curricular spider web.

5 During the development process, the stakeholders involved create a shared understanding of what they aim to design and how the 10 curriculum components relate to each other.

Professional development

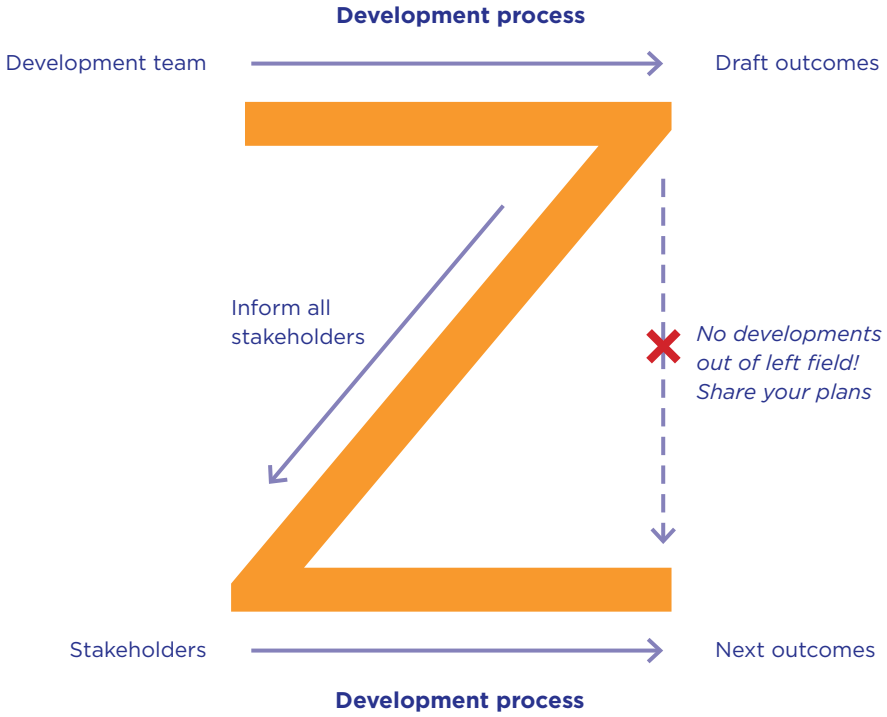
Curriculum development at school level strongly depends on the competencies of the school team, school leader, and school board. In addition to pedagogical and didactical knowledge and skills, curriculum development requires knowledge of design, change management skills, and curricular knowledge.

Teachers who have curriculum-related ambitions play a key role in the development process. Together with the school leader and the teachers involved, they help guide the development process.

School organization development

School culture includes the type of leadership that exists at a school, and the ways in which collaboration interaction within the school team takes place. To create an inspiring collaborative culture, certain conditions need to be met. For example, allocated time, an adequate budget, leeway, and regular consultations.

Support for curriculum change (Z-flow)



8 Support for curriculum change (Z-flow)

Commitment

This model visualizes how to involve others in the process of curriculum development. To ensure broad support for the curriculum development, it is crucial to include all stakeholders from an early stage. This also provides the development team with valuable input for further development.

Experience the thought process

A useful approach is to let stakeholders go through roughly the same thought process steps the development team has. This is referred to as the “Z-flow”.

Degrees of involvement

The stakeholders involved are collaboration partners in the development process (see **stakeholders in curriculum development**) and members of the intended target group. Sharing your plans may vary from informing stakeholders to letting them try out teaching materials or including them in the process of designing parts of the curriculum.

Curriculum quality criteria

Relevance	The curriculum meets the need and is based on state-of-the-art (scientific) knowledge
Consistency	The curriculum is designed logically
Usability	The curriculum is usable in the settings for which it is intended
Effectiveness	The curriculum results in the desired outcome

9 Curriculum quality criteria

Four interconnected criteria

A sound curriculum meets all four quality criteria. The effectiveness of a curriculum depends on its usability (can it be implemented as intended?) and its relevance and consistency.

At all curriculum levels

1 These four quality criteria play a role at all **curriculum levels**. Learning materials should be usable and effective for both teachers and students. At the national level, core objectives should, for example, be usable for educational publishers, which design textbooks.

Expected and actual usability and effectiveness

A distinction can be made between the expected usability and effectiveness of a curriculum and its actual usability and effectiveness. Experts can make statements about the expected usability and effectiveness based on a critical examination of the curriculum materials. To assess the actual usability and effectiveness, the materials will have to actually be used at school.

Cyclical development process

5 A cyclical **development process** helps reinforce the quality of a curriculum. Evaluation is part of each cycle to establish the quality of one or more criteria – relevance, consistency, usability, and effectiveness – and to formulate suggestions for improvement. At the start of the development process, the focus is on increasing the relevance and consistency of the curriculum being drawn up. Over the course of the development process, the focus shifts towards increasing usability and effectiveness.

Formative evaluation of curricular products

Screening
The development team compares the design to the required features of the curriculum product.

Expert appraisal
A group of expert respondents provides feedback on a prototype of the curriculum product.

Walkthrough
The development team and representatives of the target group go through the set-up of the curriculum product.

Micro evaluation
A small part of the target group uses parts of the curriculum product in a test situation.

Try-out
Part of the target group uses the curriculum product in practice.

10 Formative evaluation of curricular products

Five evaluation methods

Evaluation plays a vital role in the curriculum development process. Its purpose is to establish and increase the quality of the curriculum being drawn up. There are five evaluation methods.

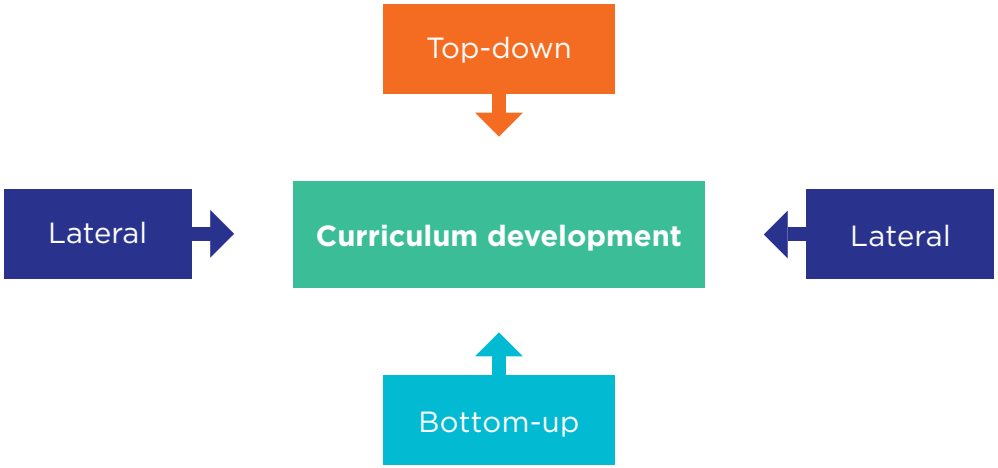
Choosing a method

The choice of an evaluation method depends on the development phase of the curriculum to be developed (initial proposal, prototype, draft curriculum) and on the **quality criteria** (relevance, consistency, usability, and effectiveness) that are the focus of the evaluation.

Suitability of evaluation methods

In the initial stages of the **curriculum development process**, the focus is primarily on relevance and consistency. This can be established with a screening and a focus group. As the curriculum plans evolve, the focus of the evaluation will shift towards the curriculum's usability. A walkthrough or micro-evaluation helps in assessing this.
A try-out session is usually the chosen method for determining the effectiveness of a fully elaborated curriculum.

Support in implementing curriculum change



11 Support in implementing curriculum changes

Support

Curriculum development and implementing curriculum change require support from all sides.

Bottom-up

A bottom-up process means that teachers, school leaders, and other stakeholders involved have the opportunity to pursue the school's own course. This ensures broad support and ownership of the change. In this context, it is essential that curriculum change goes hand in hand with **professional development and school development**.

Top-down

Top-down guidance is also required, for example in terms of a clearly formulated national rationale on education and clearly formulated curriculum frameworks (e.g., core objectives and attainment targets). Competence requirements for teachers and school leaders also help to acknowledge that school-based curriculum development requires specific expertise. It helps if the Inspectorate of Education takes the school-specific ambitions into account, and finally, time is needed to be able to work on the **school-based curriculum.**

Lateral support

In addition to the bottom-up process and top-down guidance, school curriculum development also benefits from lateral support. This support comes, or can be requested, from various **stakeholders**. Educational publishers, educational assessment agencies, partners for educational support and teacher-training institutes, teacher networks and expertise centers, and even parents can play a key role in providing support to teachers and school leaders in making choices concerning a school-based curriculum.

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As a national expertise center, the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development SLO focuses on curriculum development in primary, secondary, and special-needs education in the Netherlands. SLO supports schools, teachers, policymakers, and other educational professionals regarding matters of curriculum. SLO bridges the contexts of policy, research, society, and practice. A major characteristic of the work of SLO is the establishment of interaction between various levels of curriculum development, including the national level and the school.

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