



Core affairs

The Netherlands

Case studies basic education in Europe

SLO • national institute for curriculum development

A comparative study into the motives, functions, sources, design and implementation of common aims and contents of basic education in Europe

slo



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Colophon

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SLO

SLO is the national institute for curriculum development in the Netherlands. SLO was founded thirty years ago by the Dutch government to give independent, professional advice on, and support for, curriculum innovation, development, and implementation. In performing its tasks, SLO takes into account the developments in society in general, both nationally and internationally, and in education in particular. SLO operates in virtually all education sectors, including primary education, secondary education, special education, vocational education and teacher education, and covers all subject areas. The institute's central task is to advise the government on important education reforms and new curricula. SLO supports and coordinates curriculum development in collaboration with schools and universities, carries out curriculum evaluations, and provides information about teaching materials.

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1. Introduction: objectives of the study and research methods used

Within the context of its constitutional task, the national Institute for Curriculum Development in the Netherlands (SLO) carries out a comparative research project regarding the motives, functions, sources, design and implementation of common aims and contents of basic education in Europe. Basic education is understood to be primary education and the first phase of secondary education. Depending on specific national and system conditions, it concerns the age group between approximately 3/4 and 14/15 years old. The research is carried out by an SLO project team, in collaboration with the University of Twente, the faculty of Curriculum Design and Innovation of Education. The research activities are based upon the results of a previous project, focused on curriculum development in a (de)centralised context in some European countries.

Curriculum and curriculum development are not just issues that concern schools and teachers; both have a broad impact on and relevance to the sustained development of communities. More than ever, curriculum is, or should be, at the centre of daily life and the responsibility of the society in general. The concept of curriculum has changed over the years. Traditionally *curriculum* is connected to a more or less prescriptive book or syllabus, defined on a central level. Today, it is increasingly interpreted according to the evocative nature of education. Curriculum provides process-oriented challenges for schools to define their own policies within a global, national framework. The national framework is the point of departure for the research project on 'core affairs'. As the name suggests, we are particularly looking for what determines the common core of content.

In almost every European and western-oriented country, a debate is going on concerning the core of education and what objectives should be striven for. This debate is not a specific educational one; it takes place in several layers of societies, concerning a variety of stakeholders. The debate addresses the formative and qualifying values of education for individuals as well as society. It relates to talent development, equal opportunities, preserving and transferring meaningful knowledge and valuable aspects of cultural heritage, social abilities and respect for and fulfilment of common values and societal standards. The debate also concerns the wish of stabilisation and reinforcement of the economic position by means of effective and useful investments in competence and knowledge development. In the debate, we sometimes see contradictions in the weighing of interests of

distinguished stakeholders and concerning supposed functions of education. In this turbulent environment, governments and other authorities have to make their decisions, which should be relevant and supporting to the sustainable quality of education.

Some elements of the common content of education are steered by mutual agreements in the European context, such as the European framework for foreign language learning, or are influenced by results of international comparative research, including PISA, TIMSS, and IGLU. Other aspects can or will be national or regional.

Dutch education policy is facing a number of dilemmas. After a period with a strong focus on social relations and emphasis on equal opportunities, designed in a uniform structure with a common content, society is changing into the direction of accepting and even preferring social diversity, with the associated consequences for educational policy. What we now see in the Netherlands, is a movement towards deregulation and increasing autonomy of schools. Development of individual talents is supported and schools are looking for ways to design learning environments in which these talents will flourish. At the same time, there is a continuous concern for quality and social stability, among other things infused by societal values and common standards. Knowledge development is required, as well as broad competence development. Education has to care for the well-being of individuals and for the sustainable development of society. These perspectives cause educational policy to be located at cross roads concerning the choices for objectives to aim for and contents to offer, and how reasonable demands for quality are to be fulfilled.

Determining the core of educational content or objectives takes place particularly on the basis of diverse sources and strategies of selection, designing and validation. This diversity also concerns methods of implementation and legislation. Common objectives and common content have distinctive profiles in a variety of countries and a variety of design features, appearances and status. Sometimes they are rather global, at other times very specific. They describe expectations or demands. They vary in their names: attainment targets, core objectives, standards, canon, etc.

1.1 Research question

The research project 'Core Affairs' investigates the development, the determination and the maintenance of a common core in education, in a more or less (de)centralised policy context. More specified the researchers in the project look at:

- what are considered to be the common core and objectives in several European countries;
- what sources are being used;
- what considerations take place;
- what motives for choices are used;
- what design features can be discovered;
- what structure is used for describing;
- what strategies play a part in developing, validation, support, implementation, legislation and maintenance;
- what does the common core look like;
- which stakeholders are involved, their level of commitment and ownership, and
- what are the intended and realised effects of common content and mutual objectives.

Research is done by literature and internet search, by case studies and by expert questioning. The research is focused on the influence and role of three issues: policy - research - practice, and three dimensions concerning curriculum and curriculum design and development:

- main and coherent curricular components:
visions, aims, contents, arrangements for learning, teaching and assessment, and the environment in which learning and teaching takes place.
- relationships or gaps between systemic layers:
international or federal level (supra); national level (macro); institute or school level (meso); group or class level (micro); individual level (nano).
- competences of actors in processes of curriculum development:
selecting, (re)designing, validation, implementing, valuing.

1.2 Research design

A main part of the research takes place by *case study research*. A case study is a particular method of qualitative research. Rather than using large samples and following a rather fixed protocol to examine a limited number of variables, case

study methods involve an indepth, longitudinal examination of a single instance or event: a case. They provide a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analyzing information, and reporting the results. As a result, the researcher may gain a keener understanding of why things happen as they do, and what might be important to look at in more detail in future research.

Case studies lend themselves especially to generating (rather than testing) hypotheses. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin 2002).

The cases in this study refer to the phenomenon of a core or a common curriculum in a selection of European countries. The research design is focused upon three perspectives: policy - research - practice. Standaert (2003) describes variants in comparative pedagogics and cautions about making too superficial observations based on short working visits. It is because of this apt warning that other research methods are used besides the visiting of cases. Besides case studies, data is collected by Internet search, literature search, document analyses, expert interviews, etc.

For reasons of manageability some restrictions are built into this research. The first restriction concerns the research area. The research is focused on some European countries, especially those countries with interesting and instructive developments in curriculum policy in relation to the research question. Geographic spread is not a leading argument. International literature (outside Europe) on the research topic will be used. A second restraint concerns the target group. The focus is basic education, taken to be the period of primary education and the first phase of secondary education.

2. Research question, the general question aggravated to the specific case

In this case we investigate the motives, functions, sources, design and implementation of common objectives and contents of basic education in the Netherlands. Three perspectives (Goodlad, 1994) are central in the research:

- *Substantive*: focusing on the classical curriculum question about the knowledge most worthwhile to be included in teaching and learning.
- *Technical-professional*: how to address the task of curriculum development, in this case with regard to core content.
- *Social-political*: curriculum decision-making process, where values and interests of different individuals and organisations are at stake.

The substantive, technical-professional and socio-political perspectives with curriculum issues lead to the following set of research questions:

A. What are the features of the Dutch core curriculum for basic education?

Research topics:

- *sources for content*;
- *motives for selection*;
- *priorities*;
- *procedures and strategies for development, validation and legislation*;
- *design*.

B. What are the features of curriculum policy in this case?

Research topics:

- *involvement of stakeholders*;
- *role of school inspection*;
- *role of educational publishers*;
- *ownership of stakeholders, especially schools/teacher*;
- *assessment/examination and evaluation arrangements*.

C. What are the factual effects of curriculum policy with regard to core content and aims at the school level, and what are the perceptions of stakeholders according to these effects in the case?

Research topics:

- *perceptions and expectations of stakeholders;*
- *relation with and influences of assessment/examination and evaluation procedures and strategies;*
- *manageability of the core curriculum.*

3. Survey of researchers and respondents involved in the case

3.1 Researchers

The case study is a cooperative activity between researchers from SLO, the National Institute for Curriculum Development in the Netherlands, and the University of Twente, especially the faculty of Behavioural Sciences, Department Curriculum Design & Educational Innovation.

Specific literature research with regard to developments in secondary education has been carried out by drs. Frank Studulski and drs. Alfons Timmerhuis from SARDES, a Dutch research institute for knowledge development about practice and policy.

The case study and literature research started in the autumn of 2006 and continued until the spring of 2007. The case study of the Netherlands is the first case study and can be seen as a prototype for following cases.

The case study has been carried out by:

- Prof. Dr. Jos F.M. Letschert, SLO, University of Twente. Project manager 'Core Affairs';
- Drs. Jeroen Bron, senior curriculum officer SLO;
- Drs. Hans Hooghoff, project manager Special Projects SLO.

4. Context; country; features

The Dutch - all 16 million of them - live on 41,528 square kilometres, a little over half the size of Scotland. The Netherlands is thus one of the world's most densely populated countries. The Netherlands is a kingdom. Its full name is the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It comprises the Netherlands itself and six islands in the Caribbean Sea: Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles. The Netherlands is also sometimes called "Holland". The word features in the names of the two western coastal provinces, North and South Holland, which have played a dominant role in the country's history. The 16th century Reformation split the Netherlands into Catholic and Protestant parts. The border between them runs roughly diagonally across the country from the southwest to the northeast. The part to the north was mainly Protestant, and the part to the south mainly Catholic. The Protestant community divided further into the Reformed Church and many other denominations ranging from orthodox to liberal. Since the 17th century, the Netherlands has been a home to Jews, mainly descendants of refugees from Spain and Portugal. And it was in the 17th century that the country received many Huguenot refugees from France. In the 20th century, Hindus and Muslims arrived from the former Dutch colonies of Indonesia and Suriname. And since the 1960s, they have been joined by more Muslims from Morocco and Turkey. The Netherlands is now home to almost one million Muslims. Dutch society used to be strictly organised along religious or ideological lines with every denomination having its own schools, newspapers, trade unions, clubs and so on. The traces can still be seen today in the media, interest groups and the education system (www.minbuza.nl).

| | | |
|---|---|-------|
| System of government | Constitutional monarchy | |
| National language | Dutch | |
| Population | 16.336.000 (2006) | |
| Capital city | Amsterdam | |
| Seat of government | The Hague | |
| Number of municipalities | 458 | |
| Number of provinces | 12 | |
| Total area | 41.500 km ² | |
| Land | 33.800 km ² | |
| Water | 7.700 km ² | |
| Population by age (2006) | 0 - 19 | 24,3% |
| | 20 - 49 | 26,9% |
| | 40 - 64 | 34,5% |
| | 65 and older | 14,3% |
| Religion (2006) | Catholic | 30% |
| | Protestant | 21% |
| | Muslim | 6% |
| | Hindu | 1% |
| | Other religions | 2% |
| | None | 41% |
| Educational attainment (15 - 64) (2006) | Primary only | 9% |
| | Junior general secondary | 10% |
| | Pre-vocational | 14% |
| | Senior general secondary/ pre-university | 11% |
| | Secondary vocational | 29% |
| | Higher professional | 16% |
| | University | 9% |
| Gross domestic product (GDP) (2004) | 488.360 billion euros | |
| Unemployment rate (2005) | 6,5% | |

Source www.minbuza.nl

The level of participation in education in the Netherlands is high. 3.5 million people of the nearly 16 million inhabitants attend some form of educational programme. One out of three school leavers will complete a first university degree. Nevertheless, as a traditional centre of knowledge, the country is facing a number of challenges over the coming years, the most important of which are the need to make further improvements to the quality of education and to provide equal opportunities for everyone, variety of choice in education and specially tailored content and counselling (www.minocw.nl). The Dutch Education Council (Onderwijsraad), an independent governmental advisory body that advises the minister, parliament, and local authorities, published a report about the necessity of reinforcing knowledge in education (Onderwijsraad, 2006). According to the Council, the position of knowledge in education is under pressure. The Education Council has formulated five recommendations to strengthen the priority given to imparting knowledge in education:

- *Provide better monitoring of students' level of knowledge;*
- *Rectify knowledge gaps in Dutch and mathematics;*
- *Improve the system for establishing and recording of educational content;*
- *Make the content of education the centre of focus, in the reforming process as well;*
- *Maintain and strengthen the teachers' level of knowledge.*

4.1 Primary education

Primary education in the Netherlands comprises general primary education, special primary education and (advanced) special education for children with learning and behavioural difficulties and children with learning disabilities. Primary education is intended for all children aged four to approximately twelve years. Dutch primary education policy is based on providing children with made to measure curricula. Schools are given free reign to spend their budgets as they see fit, for example on personnel or ICT. However, the increased flexibility is coupled to assuming responsibility for the results achieved and established by core objectives (www.minocw.nl).

As in most countries, education in the Netherlands is compulsory. In the Netherlands, a child is obliged to go to school on the first day of the new month after his/her fifth birthday. If, for instance, a child's fifth birthday is in March, he/she must go to school on 1 April. Most children, however, attend school from the age of four. Compulsory education lasts until the school year when the child reaches the age of sixteen. A young person who has reached the age of sixteen in

March, for example, is obliged to finish the school year. The Compulsory Education Act was introduced to give children from five to sixteen the opportunity to follow education.

The first phase in compulsory education is primary education. It consists of eight years of education, from the age of four until the age of twelve. In the Netherlands, some seven thousand primary schools are funded with tax money. These include public-authority and denominational schools. Besides these, there is a small number of private schools not financed by the government.

Public-authority schools are open to all children, no matter what their denomination or philosophy of life may be. Public-authority schools do not work on the basis of a denomination or philosophy of life. A public-authority school is mostly run by the local authorities, by a school board, a foundation or by a legal person appointed by the city council. About one third of all children go to public-authority schools.

There are all sorts of denominational schools. Most of the denominational schools are Roman Catholic or Protestant. In addition, there are Jewish, Islamic, Hindu and humanistic schools, as well as the so-called free schools, which teach according to a certain educational philosophy.

There is also non-denominational private education, which does not depart from a special philosophy of life.

Finally there are schools that organise their education according to certain pedagogical principles, such as Montessori, Jenaplan, Dalton and Freinet schools (these can be either public-authority or denominational schools). Denominational (private) schools are run as an association, of which parents can become members, or as a foundation. About two thirds of all children go to denominational schools.

4.2 Secondary education: the basic secondary curriculum

There are about 700 secondary schools for 900.000 pupils. Secondary education prepares pupils for their future place in society. Many changes have taken place in secondary education over the last few years, also in the first stage that follows primary education: the new basic secondary curriculum. There are several reasons for change in basic secondary education.

In 1999, the school inspectorate concluded that the existing programme was

overloaded and cluttered. In addition, the inspectorate stated that the curriculum did not do sufficient justice to the differences between pupils.

With reference to these conclusions the Dutch Educational Council recommended a certain approach for changes. The Council suggested formulating a new curriculum in close collaboration with schools. This curriculum should give schools more freedom to develop tailor-made programmes and to create a distinct profile for their school. The formulation for this new curriculum was commissioned to the Task Force for the Reform of Basic Secondary Education.

The new basic secondary curriculum

We now talk of a 'new basic secondary curriculum'. Many schools collaborate with the reform in basic secondary education. They transform subjects into broader learning areas, which are more interesting to pupils.

5. State of the art

The supposed direction of development should be.

5.1 Primary education

The latest version of core objectives for primary education in the Netherlands was published in April 2006 (Greven & Letschert, 2006). The set consists of a rectangular cardboard box, the logo of the ministry on a blue sky with white clouds and 58 numbers scattered across the photograph (58 corresponds to the number of core objectives). The box contains a square booklet with a foreword by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, an introduction, a preamble, 7 chapters with core objectives, a chapter with ideas how to cope with the core objectives, and finally, a colophon. Also included in the box is a poster with all of the core objectives and a set with small cards with a core objective on each one.

In the foreword, the minister writes that society is changing rapidly. Education wants to cater for these changes. That is why, from time to time, there is a need to change core objectives. She also writes that it is important for schools to have sufficient room for own choices, matching the needs and the local environment of the school concerned. That is why the set of core objectives was reduced to 58. The new core objectives are global where possible and explicit where needed.

In the introduction, three important functions of core objectives are mentioned:

- Personal development of pupils;
- Transfer of societal and cultural achievements;
- Equipment for participation in society.

Core objectives are goals to strive for. They make up a framework for the school to facilitate the development of pupils. In addition, they provide a frame of reference for public accountability. In the preamble, the necessity of broad development is underlined.

Core objectives provide guidelines for primary schools. They describe in broad outlines the educational programme a school should adhere to. Not everything that goes on in a school, is prescribed in it. Core objectives concern the basic programme schools have to offer. On top of that, schools have the freedom to

design their own, specific educational programme. In order to be able to actually use core objectives in education, methods should be devised. This is done in different ways. The school itself determines in what ways their pupils will reach the level of the core objectives.

Core objectives have been determined for:

- Dutch language: oral and written language use; linguistics, including strategies.
- English language: no subdivisions. The emphasis lies on communication skills.
- Frisian language: oral and written language use; linguistics, including strategies.
- Maths/arithmetic: mathematical insight and operation; numbers and calculations; measuring and geometry.
- Personal and world orientation: social studies; nature and technology; space; time.
- Art education: no subdivisions. The emphasis lies on personal expression, reflective skills, and knowledge of and appreciation for cultural heritage.
- Physical education: no subdivisions. The emphasis lies on participation in the presentday exercise culture.

The Dutch text for the primary-school core objectives is available from: <http://kerndoelen.kennisnet.nl> and the English translations of these are included in the Appendix of this study.

5.2 Secondary education

For the first phase of secondary education, a new set of 58 core objectives was introduced in 2006. The new core objectives were particularly developed thanks to teachers and school principals and concern mainly global core objectives. Schools have the freedom to determine their own innovation levels. Scenarios have been formulated to help them in this area.

As a result, a more varied field will be created, in which it will be rather difficult to determine the comparative qualities. Because the global core objectives exist next to an amount of free space, more will have to be developed at school level (school development). At the moment, the schools' innovative and improvement capacity is being capitalised on. As yet, however, it is not quite clear to what extent schools are equipped for this.

While the 58 core objectives of 2006 were determined upon, the most important actors in the decision-making process included the Dutch Ministry of Education,

Cultural Affairs and Science, the Dutch Advisory Council for Education, the Task Force Basic Secondary Education, and the field (teachers and principals). Contrary to the former situation, intermediate organisations and trade unions played only a minor part in the considerations and decisions.

More than ever before, the factors determining the choices for certain core objectives exist at a practical level: i.e. what would be recognisable, concrete objectives for schools. Next to these, the Advisory Council for Education and the Task Force designated factors that are preconditional for the content of the core objectives: cohesion between core objectives, a continuous line (correlation with core objectives of primary education), insight in the development of competences, collaborative learning, independent learning.

Core objectives have been determined for:

- Dutch language: the emphasis lies on the communicative function of language and strategic skills, as well as on cultural and literary aspects.
- Frisian language and culture: the emphasis lies on participation in Frisian culture
- English language: the emphasis lies on the communicative function of the language. A relationship exists with the European frame of reference.
- Mathematics and arithmetic: the emphasis lies on arithmetic skills.
- Man and nature: the emphasis lies on physical, technological and care-related subjects.
- Man and society: the emphasis lies on the ability to ask questions and do research, to place phenomena in space and time, to use resources.
- Art and culture: the emphasis lies on making and presenting own work, experiencing the work of others, report activities, and reflect.
- Physical education and sports: the emphasis lies on a wide orientation on different types of physical activities.

The text for the core objectives for the lower school in secondary education is available from: www.minocw.nl/documenten/kerndoelen_onderbouwvo.pdf and the English translations of these are included in the Appendix of this study.

6. Historical background, genesis and design features of the core curriculum in the Netherlands

6.1 Primary education

For a long time it has not been quite clear in the Netherlands what education was all about. Of course there was an Education Act. With the introduction of primary education in 1985, this was the Primary Education Act (Dutch: WBO) (1985-1998). The act provided a framework for educational content, but what happened in the classroom was left to the schools, or to put it more precisely, to the authors and publishers of educational resources and course packages. The 1985 Primary Education Act did not give any further guidelines for educational content than earlier acts pertaining to preschool education and the former primary education. There are differences between the former primary education, preschool education and the new primary education in the choice of the learning areas, but the amount of reserve with respect to prescribing the content of the learning areas, however, remains the same.

Why this reserve? This is because in the Netherlands freedom of education, especially of denominational education, is of the utmost importance. It is regarded undesirable that the government issues central regulations concerning the content of education.

Freedom of education was the essence of the historical school funding controversy, a fierce political debate, which lasted throughout a large part of the nineteenth century. Freedom of denominational education is laid down in article 23 of the constitution, which originates from 1917. Thus pacification became a fact, which marked the political and judicial end to the controversy.

Meanwhile the former Primary Education Act (WBO) has been replaced by a new one (1998). As far as the prescription of the content is concerned, there are only minor changes. Content wise both acts can be characterised as legislative frameworks: the framework is given, while the precise interpretation of the framework remains open. The only thing the 1985 Act determines is that primary education must include to the following eight learning areas:

- a. Sensory coordination and physical education;
- b. Dutch language;

- c. Arithmetic and mathematics;
- d. English language;
- e. Several knowledge areas;
- f. Expressive activities;
- g. Social and life skills, including road safety;
- h. Promotion of health care.

Parts of these learning areas have been reasonably elaborated. Within the learning areas attention must be paid to geography, history, nature including biology, social relations including politics, religious and ideological movements.

Expressive activities must pay attention to the promotion of language use, drawing, music, handicrafts, sports and physical exercise.

And then there are some conditions concerning the content of primary education, which do not apply to all pupils. Schools in the province of Friesland must teach the Frisian language. There are also some conditions concerning pupils who do not have a Dutch background, as well as conditions for the realisation of religious and ideological education.

What goes for all pupils, though, is that primary education should give some consideration to the multicultural society pupils grow up in; it should be aiming at a continuous and broad personal development of all children.

6.1.1 Clarity or reserve with regard to content regulations

The Primary Education Act, which was the origin of primary education, is an elaborate and detailed act in all areas except educational content. It regulates different aspects of the realisation of primary education. The regulations on educational content compare unfavourably with those aspects. Similarly to legislation on preschool education (1955) and former primary education (1920) this act does not lay down the available teaching time spread over the different learning areas. Nor are there any rules on the use of educational resources to realise the educational programme. It does, however, contain one article that indicates that schools should elaborate organisational aspects as well as content in a ‘school work plan’. Later the ‘school plan’ and the ‘school guide’ replaced this obligation.

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The Minister of Education, Culture and Science asked the Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) to develop a curriculum to clarify the intentions of new primary education. In 1984, after a long process of validation, SLO published a

curriculum proposal called: ‘Wat krijgen ze op de basisschool?’ (What do they learn in primary education?) (Gorter et al., 1984). It was presented as a book of ideas for the new schools, not as a prescription.

‘Wat krijgen ze op de basisschool?’ can be considered as a curriculum proposal, a proposal with no obligation. However, soon after the introduction of new primary education in the Netherlands, the relative freedom with regard to educational content in primary education became a political and societal issue. On the one hand, there was this typically Dutch need for non-interference with educational content; on the other hand there was an increasing desire to determine educational content more precisely than had been the case to date.

Apart from being a pedagogical discussion this was an issue of political policy pur sang. A greater control of educational content by the central government goes to the heart of the concept of educational freedom. It is remarkable that the Minister of Education at the time, a Christian Democrat, went ahead and took the initiative to specify educational content. Remarkable, because the Christian political parties are specifically the ones defending freedom of education. The minister’s consideration was that a lot of tax money is involved in education, and that some steering and parliamentary control of the quality of education is therefore justified. In 1987, he therefore asked SLO to develop proposals for what, at the time, were called ‘attainment targets’.

6.1.2 Attainment targets: specified demands

In the explanatory memorandum that accompanied the bill of change for the existing Education Act, attainment targets were defined as follows: the description of pupils’ qualities with respect to knowledge, insight and skills a school should at least pay attention to in its educational activities. The arguments for introducing attainment targets in primary education were as follows:

- Attainment targets ensure that all pupils complete the same core programme.
- Attainment targets enable parliament and society to control the content of primary education. This is an expression of our social responsibility to assure quality in education.
- Unambiguous phrasing of the objectives of the programme will ensure the alignment of primary education and further education.
- The formulation of attainment targets offers the possibility to strive for a general increase in standards.

The idea of formulating attainment targets did not come out of the blue.

International developments played an important role. The mainly Anglo-Saxon dominated 'effective school movement' with prominent figures such as Edmonds (1981), Brookover et al. (1977) and Rutter (1979) stressed the importance of clear objectives for quality improvement in education. There was an international trend to develop 'core curricula' with the American researcher John Goodlad as the most important spokesman. The American commission on Excellence in Education came up with the controversial report 'A nation at risk' (Mortimer et al., 1988).

The Netherlands followed this movement, but the process turned out to be tough and lengthy. The required unambiguous formulation of attainment targets resulted in a proposal consisting of 464 objectives. For Parliament and some groups in society this was one step too far. In a revision the number of objectives was reduced to 122, which were eventually adopted and laid down in 1993. In the concept amendment of the Primary Education Bill of March 1990 the term 'attainment targets' changed into 'core objectives'. This term was believed to reflect the intention of the objectives more precisely: no learning targets to be achieved at the end of grade 8, but rather a description of the educational programme throughout eight years of primary education. With the official adoption in 1993 the first generation of core objectives became reality.

6.1.3 Core objectives: global expectations

In the core objectives, the educational content has been worked out more precisely, as could or had been done in the Act of Primary Education. The degree of precision of core objectives is an item of constant discussion. This is not only the case in the Netherlands, but it is an international phenomenon leading to different designs. In Flanders, for instance, one of the Dutch neighbours, the core objectives are much more detailed than in the Netherlands. Case studies in different European countries will make clear the variety of positions, choices and underlying motives. In the Netherlands, looking at the three generations of core objectives (1998, 2003, 2006) there is a recognisable trend to globalisation. This trend is related to societal and political opinions about responsibility at a central level and the level of local authorities.

6.1.4 Core objectives: indicators of common content

Core objectives in the Netherlands may be considered as general indicators of common educational contents. They sketch the outlines of a basic educational programme schools should offer their pupils. Schools have the freedom to make their own specifications and to choose their own didactical approach, textbooks and other educational materials. Core objectives are descriptions of knowledge, insight and skills that should be offered to all pupils in primary schools. Core objectives are learning targets for the schools to strive for. They are not requirements for pupils. They are requirements for teachers to offer pupils all that is described in the core objectives. Sometimes, this seems contradictory to the way in which core objectives are generally formulated. A core objective for language education in the Netherlands is: 'Pupils can consult frequently used written sources of information'. Phrased in this way, core objectives are described in terms of expected pupils' behaviour. This is in conflict with the intentions of core objectives as being a curricular programme. Core objectives are requirements made by the government of the educational system. They are included in the educational policy by means of a general administrative measure. The school inspectorate supervises the realisation of this programme in schools.

6.1.5 Why core objectives?

There are many different opinions on what education is about exactly, or what it should be about. There is a consensus that education should contribute to the personal development of children and that it should transfer important social and cultural achievements and that children must be prepared to participate in and contribute to the society they grow up in. A society that is becoming more and more complex. Personal development, the development of competences, attention to cultural heritage, good citizenship and the sustainability of society are keywords in Dutch education. Core objectives offer a framework for these intentions. However, schools will realise these intentions in their own way.

Core objectives provide an anchor for teachers to hold on to when making their choices and elaborations of educational content. Core objectives provide the basis for a consecutive learning process, for a line in primary education that continues into secondary education. Core objectives guarantee a broad educational programme for all pupils and avoid the children's possibilities and talents from being underexposed. Core objectives also provide a frame of reference for (public)

accountability. They make visible what education is about, and make it possible to find out whether the objectives have been achieved. This will enhance the children's opportunities.

6.1.6 Functions of core objectives

Core objectives fulfil a number of functions. On the basis of research among several groups involved (politicians, teachers and school inspectors) Letschert (1998) distinguishes the following five functions:

- Criterion function: touchstone of quality assurance;
- Aligning function: among primary schools (horizontal) and with secondary education (vertical);
- Transparency for society;
- Emancipatory function: clear objectives are especially useful for poor achievers;
- Self-referential function: mirror for the school to determine the relevance of new educational content and own educational designs.

The 2002 advisory report 'Verantwoording delen' (Sharing responsibility) by the committee that was charged with the preparation of the third generation of core objectives for primary education, also called the Wijnen Committee, after its chairman professor Wijnen, lists four functions, which partly match the functions listed above. The Committee states that core objectives can fulfil different functions, which does not mean to say that it is desirable or possible to fulfil all functions in the same way and with the same instrument. The Committee regards the following four functions as possible functions (Kuiper & Letschert, 2002):

- Mastery function;
- Target function;
- Operational function;
- Accountability function.

The mastery function

28 Core objectives may lay down what the pupils will have to master at the end of primary education. To a certain degree the present core objectives are of this nature. The Committee is wondering, though, whether the core objectives in their present form fulfil the mastery function in an optimum way. If we want to do justice to the mastery function, it would be better to develop tests that must be passed. Tests and model tests do more justice to the mastery function than core objectives alone. The aspect of mastery is often the starting point for discussions about the rephrasing of the core objectives as 'learning standards'.

The target function

Core objectives may lay down what might be desirable to be realised at the end of primary education. In this case core objectives are 'target objectives' that are an evident guideline for the school in the development of an educational programme. They describe the efforts a school has to put in to achieve the objectives. By virtue of the target function the core objectives in the first place regulate the educational programme rather than the behaviour of the pupils. The Wijnen Committee thinks that educational vision and school plans represent more suitable instruments than the core objectives in order to realise the target function. This target function matches Letschert's emancipatory function of the core objectives.

The operational function

Core objectives may indicate the educational content offered in primary education. According to the Wijnen Committee the present nature and extent of the core objectives (1998) do not seem to fulfil such a function easily. To this purpose they are too compact and too generally phrased. According to the Committee, the function of making programmes operational demands more detailed descriptions in order to clarify which contents should be offered during primary education. The short typifications of the present core objectives are not adequate for this purpose. For the function of making a programme operational, school textbooks are a useful alternative for a compact phrasing of core objectives.

The accountability function

According to the Wijnen Committee, core objectives are excellent instruments to fulfil the accountability function. After all, they can put into words, succinctly and expressively, the ambitions society pursues with primary education. The core objectives express what this society expects all pupils to achieve during primary education. As such they form an effective steering instrument. They do not only help the government to steer, but also the schools. From the Committee's point of view core objectives must support the accountability of the choices that schools have made in their school policies.

In her letter to Parliament in 2004 (po/kb/04/8526) on the occasion of the presentation of the third generation of core objectives, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science speaks of the following three essential functions of the core objectives:

- Guarantee of a continuous learning line;
- Guarantee of a broad educational programme for all pupils;
- Frame of reference for (public) accountability.

6.1.7 Functions the core objectives do not have in the Netherlands

In the public debate, misunderstandings sometimes arise about the functions of core objectives. Here, we describe some of these misunderstandings by formulating functions core objectives do not have.

‘Core objectives must promote innovation.’

This is not the case. Core objectives in the Netherlands are not a means to implement ideas and products still in development. They are not ahead of events. That does not mean that core objectives should have a preservative function in the Netherlands. Core objectives do include new insights and contents as soon as they are generally accepted (in educational practice, educational resources) and schools are able and facilitated to realise them. The introduction of the concept of ‘reading strategies’ in core objectives is an example of such an approach.

‘Core objectives should also indicate the teaching methodology.’

It is not the function of core objectives in the Netherlands to indicate a teaching methodology. Core objectives describe what the school must offer, but not how it should be done. The ‘how’ question is the responsibility of the school itself.

‘Core objectives restrict education.’

It is true that core objectives intend to offer a standard, but this is a minimum standard. They help schools to avoid a cluttered, overloaded programme. Schools are free, however, to add objectives of their own. Core objectives merely denote common content for all pupils.

6.1.8 Changes in successive generations of core objectives in the Netherlands

30 In 1993 the first generation of core objectives was introduced, the second generation in 1998, and the third generation in 2006. During that period, national curriculum policy in the Netherlands shifted from a belief in the necessity of solid steering at macro level to a belief in the power at meso level, the level of school policy. The central curriculum policy has turned into processes of decentralisation and an increase in the allowance of local autonomy. This affected the design of core objectives.

The second reason for the revision of core objectives is to keep pace with changing times and societal developments. Pedagogical insights and subject knowledge, as well as social circumstances, are constantly subject to change.

The third reason to revise core objectives has to do with overload in the curriculum and the need for coherence and a new structure of educational content, instead of the traditional subject approach. There had been a growing desire for larger learning areas. This is how, for instance, a learning area such as ‘personal and world orientation’ came into being as a cluster of what was formerly called the ‘factual subjects’ or ‘knowledge areas’. In this process cross-curricular objectives played an important role. These objectives occurred in the 1998 generation of core objectives in the Netherlands. They disappeared again in the third generation of 2006.

6.1.9 Comparison of the 1998 and the 2006 core objectives

The number of core objectives is an essential difference. The 1998 version contains 103 core objectives, the 2006 version contains only 58. The number has been substantially reduced. This has been a noticeable trend for quite some time. Figure 1 shows how the number of core objectives has decreased over the years. The first number of 464 relates to an early SLO proposal, developed at the request of the then Minister of Education.

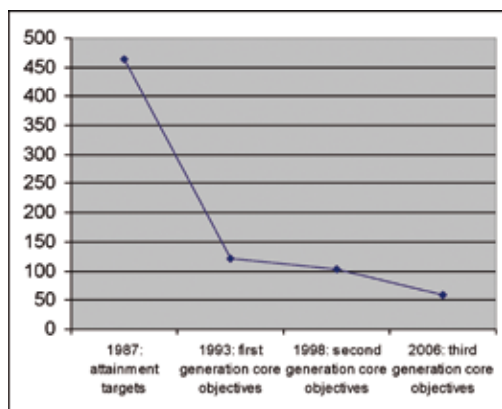


Figure 1: The increasingly general nature of the core objectives

A difference between the 1998 version of the objectives and the version of 2006 is that the cross-curricular objectives have disappeared. This is a remarkable phenomenon. In the 1998 version these objectives still had a prominent place and were regarded essential for the realisation of good primary education. Cross-curricular objectives included competences that could not be specifically attributed to one learning area, and could not be realised in its context. They had to be realised by primary education as a whole. They also contained pedagogical elements, which were not made explicit as such in the different learning areas. The intentions of those cross-curricular objectives reappear, though in a mitigated form, in an introduction to the core objectives, the so-called preamble.

In the latest version of core objectives in the Netherlands the verb 'to learn' is consequently used in formulations of targets. In earlier variants the variation of activities for children in primary education were expressed by means of different verbs. The verb 'to learn' clearly indicates that we are talking about acquisition by children. The old core objectives were formulated in terms of skills children had to acquire, even if the objectives were regarded as requirements the educational programme had to meet.

Another difference in the latest version of core objectives is the prominent place of the so-called 'characterisation', foregoing all learning areas. Characterisation provides a learning area with a profile. For Dutch language, for instance, characterisation emphasises the social importance of mastery of the Dutch language. This choice does justice to what core objectives are supposed to be, a framework for the government to test the educational programme, and for schools to choose their educational content and to account for their choice. This does not take away the freedom schools have in attributing other functions to their (language) education, such as personal development, emancipation of individuals and groups, consolidation of one's own identity, social and emotional development, and cultural transfer. In a school plan, all of these functions can be described and substantiated.

6.1.10 Core objectives and their role in 'a canon'

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Nowadays, we often come across the term 'canon' in discussions about education and curricula. The word 'canon' was borrowed from Greek, but originates from Semitic languages meaning 'reed', 'ruler', 'criterion', 'standard'. In the second half of the fourth century this term began to be applied to texts from the bible. A verb

was derived from it: 'to canonise', which means something like 'incorporating something in a list of acknowledged written documents'. So many written texts were published, and there was so much confusion about 'what was genuine' and 'what was not', that there was a need for a standard, a 'canon' (source: www.lamplicht.nl).

The question that arose with respect to the holy scriptures of the church also applies to education. There is so much you can teach and learn that you cannot see the wood for the trees. So there is a need to weed in the garden of possible educational objectives to give room for those plants that are commonly understood as important and attainable in the available time (Letschert, 1998). Educational context is thus canonised, as it were. We are talking about generally acknowledged content and objectives. In the Dutch educational system we may regard the core objectives as a canon. They describe what should be offered to all pupils in all cases. Core objectives are part of what society considers important to offer to its youngest participants across the board. It also means that there is a lot more to offer. Core objectives are part of 'the canon', a term that could be defined as 'all that is regarded essential for the pupils' personal development, their social competence and the transfer of the cultural heritage'. Doorman (2004) gives a more cultural definition for the word 'canon'. The word 'canon' implies all texts, pictures, works of art and historical events meant to form a frame of reference for a shared culture.

In a report on the state of education in the Netherlands, the Dutch Educational Council (Onderwijsraad, 2005) argued the necessity of the development of a cultural canon.

The basis of their argument was the wish to pay more attention to the socialising task of education, to which the development of a cultural identity belongs.

According to the Council two important components of this task are:

- a contribution of education to modern citizenship, and
- a contribution of education to the transfer and further development of the cultural heritage.

The Educational Council's intention is to strengthen the relevance of education for society by means of a new canon. They mean valuable parts of our culture and history which they want to pass on to new generations via education. According to the Council, the canon is important for the whole of society, not just for the elite. The canon has a preserving as well as an innovating nature.

The Council distinguishes three parts in the canon:

- a set of contents;
- an argumentation around these contents;
- a method to perform a periodical adjustment of the contents and the argumentation.

The Council emphasises that the formulation of the canon in learning contents does not necessarily mean that these contents must be prescribed in education. Part of the canon will find its expression in the core objectives and in the examination programmes. The canon, however, is broader than that. In fact, the Educational Council in their advice raises the question of which contents should be part of the common component and which ones should be part of the optional component of the programme. They also raise the question of what can be learned outside school, and what should be the sources of information and the argumentation. The latter question is not raised for the first time, but is a basic and age-old question in curriculum debates. In the last few decades many have tackled this question and offered different proposals to answer it. In their study entitled 'Wat gaan we leren?' (What are we going to learn?) (Klep, Letschert & Thijs, 2004) the authors deal extensively with issues like sources of information, arguments, derivations and proposals for the structure of objectives and educational content.

In compliance with the Educational Council's advice the Minister of Education, Culture and Science set up a committee called 'Committee for the Development of a Dutch Canon', whose task it is to present proposals at three levels:

1. The canon itself.
2. Advice on responsibilities and those responsible with respect to the canon with a proposal for the division of tasks.
3. Advice on frequency and evaluation/revision of the canon.

The Minister clarifies her motives and expectations in the letter accompanying the commission (Van de Hoeven, 2005). Her concern is a canon aiming at a shared (cultural) historical knowledge and besides that, a broader cultural and social knowledge of the Netherlands in an international and especially a European context. 'Valuable parts of our history' can then relate to both the positive and negative aspects of it, since both have contributed to the formation of Dutch culture. There must also be explicit attention to the influence of other cultures on Dutch culture and vice versa. The core of her motivation is historical and cultural awareness. Therefore a certain overview of knowledge is necessary, part of which

is a relevant framework of facts. On the other hand an excess of testable facts and names must be avoided, because it will tend to harm the required overview and insight and will not have a motivating effect. The primary request is to sort out which elaborations can be useful to help schools and other institutions with the implementation of the new core objectives and examination programmes in such a way that justice is done to the canon. In the autumn of 2006 the 'Canon van Nederland' has been published in two parts: the factual canon and the justification of the process of development.

The debate about the canon reveals a remarkable discord in curriculum policy. On the one hand there is the tendency to give schools more freedom and to let the core objectives evolve into more and more general, overall instruments. At the same time there is a trend to restrict this freedom partly as a result of other needs and considerations. In the Netherlands, we see this in the areas of Dutch language and mathematics. A specified framework from primary education up to the higher educational levels will be developed in order to guarantee the continuous learning line.

6.2 Secondary education

6.2.1 Brief history of the development of basic secondary education and its core objectives

The concept of a basic secondary education developed from ideas about an intermediate school, as described in an outline memorandum (1975) by the then minister van Kemenade. This intermediate, comprehensive school would remove the traditional division between vocational and general education. An important argument for the intermediate school was to stimulate equal opportunities for everybody. In 1986, the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) published an advice about basic secondary education (although the advice had already been requested in 1979). In 1989, the proposed final attainment levels were announced. In 1991, the Basic Secondary Education Act was passed. In 1993, it was decided to implement the basic secondary curriculum and its core objectives for a period of five years. Initially, it concerned the following fourteen subjects:

- Dutch;
- English;
- A second foreign language (German or French);
- Mathematics;

- Biology;
- Physics;
- ICT;
- History and politics;
- Geography;
- Economics;
- Technology;
- Art education;
- Music, and
- Physical education.

Initially, the subjects would be offered in two final attainment levels and rounded off with a nation-wide examination (Prick, 2006). However, upon the implementation in 1993, a single level was opted for and the final attainment levels were reduced to core objectives. Concerning the development process of these core objectives, Prick (2006, p. 12) observes that it is odd, to say the least, that these were created after a joint effort of trade unions, administrative organisations and pedagogical centres, while parents' opinions were not heard. He also finds it rather peculiar that everybody seems to be in favour of this intermediate school concept, except for the teachers themselves.

The objectives of basic secondary education finally include: to offer a broad educational programme for pupils, to postpone the moment of choosing further studies, and to place more emphasis on skills, for example by means of TVS, a Dutch acronym meaning Application, Skills, and Interrelation.

The struggle over the introduction of basic secondary education has also had major repercussions for facility planning. After all, broad comprehensive schools were aimed for, causing a wave of mergers, which, in turn, caused a lot of unrest.

The introduction of compulsory tests in basic secondary education was very confusing and chaotic.

In 1998, renewed core objectives were determined for basic secondary education. These core objectives replaced the first generation of objectives, those from 1993, which turned out to have a number of shortcomings:

- Insufficient correlation among subjects: gaps and overlap.
- Inconsistencies in terminology.
- Insufficient matching to the core objectives of primary education.
- Insufficient matching to the programmes of continued secondary education (vbo/mavo and havo/vwo).
- Insufficient correlation to the three characteristics of desired secondary education, i.e. 'broad', 'active' and 'differences'.

In order to solve these shortcomings, the Ministry of Education commissioned SLO to revise the core objectives. The SLO was asked to take into account the obtained response to the first generation of core objectives and to ensure a broad basis. The revision should concentrate on reformulation and rearrangement of the existing core objectives, with focus on: better internal consistency, explicit correlation of related subjects within a cluster, a separate set of core objectives for general skills, explicit attention to the skill-oriented nature of basic secondary education, explicit attention to facets and educations, matching of content to those of primary and continued secondary education. While drawing up the new core objectives, social developments and the abovementioned characteristics of secondary education also had to be taken into account.

The core objectives delivered by SLO were brought into effect in 1998 and were intended to be in force for a period of 5 years.

The Task Force Reformation Basic Secondary Education (2004, p. 15), which was commissioned to provide the revised core objectives, is critical about the development process of core objectives in the past. 'Experts on subject matter, organisations and specific interest groups thereby gained great influence on decisions concerning the number of subjects, their contents, and the specifications of the core objectives for each subject. (...) The result is obvious: an overloaded, minutely detailed, and fragmented programme, which, in addition, barely does justice to the differences between pupils'.

The core objectives of 1993 and 1998 are determined upon after close collaboration between policy makers, politicians and experts (Letschert and Radstake, 2000). Core objectives are a focal point of many of society's wishes and claims. The matter of overloadedness of the curriculum had, for example, already been raised by the Advisory Council for education (1994). The Council believes that schools should be given an instrument with which to handle the multiplicity of claims to education and therefore proposes to organise basic education into a core curriculum, with a limited number of subjects, and an amount of free space in which the school is to make its own choices. In addition to this organisation of the curriculum, the advice also calls for attention to learning to learn, in the form knowledge-as-a-tool and out-of-school learning.

After the implementation of the core objectives in 1998, and especially after the evaluation of basic secondary education in 1999, the notion grew that this overloadedness should be dealt with by reducing the number of core objectives.

The Commission Wijnen (2002) made proposals for the revision of core objectives in primary education. The commission was founded in 2001. It was asked to limit the core objectives and to draw up a proposal for core objectives that should be a part of the core curriculum, which should cover no more than 70% of the total teaching time. The commission proposed to reduce the core objectives to six learning areas, i.e. Dutch language, maths / arithmetic, exploratory social studies, exploratory physics and technology, art education, and physical education and sports. A distinction is made between a core part and a differential part. Core objectives that go beyond a learning area are removed. The Advisory Council for Education (2002) responds in a positive way to the proposals by the commission Wijnen. The development of the core objectives for primary education may be regarded as a prologue to the development of the core objectives for secondary education, considering the fact that the commission Wijnen also advised to make sure that core objectives are better attuned to each other.

In 2002, the minister considers basic secondary education to be outmoded and commissions the Task Force Reformation Basic Secondary Education to revise the basic secondary curriculum. In 2004, based on extensive feedback from the field, the commission Meijerink (2004) made recommendations for the revision of the core objectives ('During the past two years, we have kept close contact with secondary schools. We have visited hundreds of schools and talked to thousands of teachers. Via regional platforms, we carried out extensive consultations among all sections of education. Sizeable questionnaires, packed conferences.' - Task Force, 2004, p. 5). The 15 uniform subjects for all pupils are replaced by a guiding set of core objectives. Here, also, the total number of core objectives was substantially reduced. In this case from 300 to 58. This means that core objectives have become more general. They are less prescriptive as to what pupils have to learn. The care subject disappeared from the core objectives. Subsequently, the core objectives for the lower school in secondary education are implemented as per 1 August 2006, simultaneously with those for primary education.

6.2.2 Evaluation of basic secondary education and the core objectives

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The first generation of core objectives for secondary education and the implementation of a basic secondary curriculum are distinctly related. Therefore, the evaluation of basic secondary education directly affects the further development and the effect of core objectives and their present form. In 1991,

upon request of the Dutch Lower Chamber, the basic secondary curriculum was laid down in an educational act. The implementation of basic secondary education would be evaluated in 1999. The report by the inspectorate called 'Werk aan de basis' (free translation: 'Laying the foundation') gives body to this legal precondition.

The main conclusion is as follows: 'The Dutch secondary schools offer sufficient core quality during the lower school. In the five years since the introduction of the basic secondary curriculum, education has been adapted according to the legal form requirements. They have, as yet, however, made insufficient progress regarding content and didactic adaptations according to the requirements of basic secondary education'. (p. 119).

A number of central problems occur:

- The overloadedness;
- Insufficient attention for the whole of core objectives and the general objectives concerning skills;
- Lack of innovation in didactic approach;
- Fragmentation of the programme;
- Insufficient educational leadership;
- Failure to properly conclude the period by means of a final examination;
- Insufficient matching of basic secondary education to continued secondary education;
- Various problems in the vmbo school (lower vocational and lower general secondary education).

In the Basic Secondary Education Act, three objectives were laid down, which determine the educational reformation schools have been trying to pursue since 1993:

1. General raising of the educational level in junior schools.
2. Postponement of the moment for compulsory educational and professional career choices.
3. Modernisation and partial synchronisation of the educational programme in secondary schools.

'Werk aan de basis', freely translated as 'Laying the foundation', describes the extent to which these three objectives have been realised after five years of development of basic secondary education.

The general quality

Concerning the core quality of the lower school, the inspectorate concluded, on the bases of a representative random survey among 120 schools, that it is adequate.

The organisational preconditions were sufficiently met and the general results were satisfactory. Besides excellent pupil coaching, the quality of the educational process is not scoring high enough on other aspects, however.

Considering the quality of basic secondary education, the inspectorate concludes that, although it has been implemented as a system, its content and didactics are insufficiently apparent. Schools are still encountering a lot of difficulties interpreting their new tasks. The differences among schools are great.

‘Werk aan de basis’ emphasises the need and the scope for further development. School development should imply that schools develop into cohesive organisations, in which policy plays an important part. The development should also be aimed at quality improvement of the primary processes. Consultation among teachers remains largely limited to the practical aspects of the subject section. According to the inspectorate, the relationship between quality of educational policy and the quality of the teaching process within a school is too weak.

In general, the transition of pupils from primary school to secondary education is quite smooth. Schools take sufficient organisational measures to assure this. The formal legal aspects are usually quite well organised, as are information exchange and mentor supervision. However, the actual attunement is clearly inadequate - the contents and methods of primary and secondary education are just too far removed.

The core objectives as a guideline for basic secondary education

The core objectives are included in the inspectorate’s evaluation report. An answer is given to the question whether the core objectives for basic secondary education meet the expectations. It is important, in this, to distinguish between a number of functions that core objectives may have.

In 1998, Letschert published a study into the core objectives of primary education in the Netherlands. In section 6.1.7 of this study, he distinguishes five functions:

- Criterion or calibration function;
- Attunement function;
- Image function;
- Emancipatory function;
- Self-referential function.

In its study, the inspectorate particularly focussed on the first two functions of core objectives, the criterion or calibration function and the attunement function. Are the formulated core objectives leading to an adequate and high-quality educational programme concerning these functions? As regards this question, the inspectorate uses the phrase ‘characteristics of good education’.

In practice, there isn’t a single school that meets all core objectives for all subjects. Therefore, no school meets the legal requirements. They do, however, meet most core objectives at least. In an average school, pupils are faced with almost nine out of ten of the assessment targets; mostly focussed on subject material that was taught before 1993 as well. Almost two thirds of the core objectives are sufficiently met.

In a great number of subjects, the core objectives are leading to an overloaded programme. The inspectorate observes that the core objectives are rather abstract and detailed to such an extent that adequate implementation is demanding more time than is available. At school level (adding the subjects), the existence of an overload is obvious, considering the fact that not a single school in the survey was able to meet all of the core objectives. Also, the fact that schools have devoted more time to the basic curriculum than had been recommended, indicates that overloadedness exists.

The inspectorate’s study provides insight into the way teachers plan their job according to the core objectives. Teachers particularly focus on the core objectives in order to choose a method, rather than to familiarise themselves with the core objectives and the objectives concerning skills. As a result, although they make a conscious choice for a method that fulfils the core objectives and those concerning skills, teachers rarely or never deviate from the book’s established lines. They do skip parts, however. But they fail to look for extra subject or teaching material or make any independent planning. Pretty soon, the teachers lose sight of the core objectives; the book is their guideline. It seems that the work pressure teachers are under is affecting them. The inspectorate feels that teachers often teach according to a routine and no longer actually prepare their lessons. The teaching field of the lower school of secondary education and the political field adopt this conclusion by the inspectorate and agree that the development of the lower school is particularly steered by the availability of new, flexible and differentiated educational tools, which enable schools to make their own choices in combining subject material at different levels. That is why the government promotes the collaboration between publishers and the educational field for the development of flexible educational tools for the lower school of secondary education. This has led to a number of projects in which teachers and publishers collaborate.

In its report, the inspectorate observes that the choices teachers make in using a method largely depend upon the amount of time they estimate to need for certain parts of it. Furthermore, it has turned out that better justice is done to familiar core objectives than to new ones. According to the inspectorate, this is not only the result of the fact that new objectives are harder to realise (although this would probably be the case for skill-oriented objectives), but also with the observation that teachers tend to choose for familiar teaching content. Basic secondary education as an innovation has not become a conscious part of their awareness; the familiar assessment targets still form their fixed markers. One of the reasons would be that, especially in the initial stages, there was insufficient basis for the implementation of the basic secondary curriculum. Prick (2006, p. 38) sees this as one of the major flaws of the basic secondary curriculum: it had been implemented without consulting the teachers; everybody had been in favour, except for the teachers themselves.

Success rates

What is the effect of core objectives and the curriculum on education and the learning performances of pupils? The inspectorate judged harshly. According to the inspectorate, the teaching process in basic secondary education does not meet the standards of good teaching. Pedagogically speaking, most lessons are adequate; class management and the 'new tasks' introduced upon the implementation of basic secondary education, lag behind.

Concerning the pupils' performances, it was observed that they are on or above the minimum level for two out of three domains. There are great differences between subjects. Their language performance is good. The required minimum level for the exact subjects and social studies, combined, is reached only just. And the pupils' performance levels for mathematics, technology and economics are below par. Their artistic performances are inadequate; art education poses a problem. The inspectorate concludes that the extent to which pupils meet the core objectives represents no more than a mere pass. Especially those following the higher levels of secondary education (havo/vwo) fail to achieve the level indicated for their type of schooling.

42 The conclusion the inspection draws is that it is difficult to find a univocal connection between pupil performance and the school policy or the quality of the educational process. There seems to be a relationship with the educational programme; in the average school, a pupil is offered six out of ten of the core objectives to an adequate extent. At subject level, however, the relationship between programme and performance is missing. For the subject of Dutch language, for example, few core objectives are offered to an adequate extent,

while the performances are good. Reality is complex; many factors affect the pupils' performances.

In conclusion, the inspectorate observes that basic secondary education, considering the legal objectives, has undergone considerable developments in the years 1993 - 1998. However, many important parts of basic secondary education can be substantially improved. And while doing so, interventions should focus on the three actors affecting the quality of education: teachers, school principals and the authorities.

Concerning the core objectives, the inspectorate recommends the following:

- Distinguish between compulsory core objectives that apply to all pupils, and objectives that may be included in the basic secondary curriculum in accordance with the school's own views. Starting point should be a common basic curriculum covering two years for all pupils, while allowing free movement of pupils among the different courses.
- Develop core objectives for clusters of related subjects in order to enable schools to present a programme in the form of subject clusters or learning areas next to a programme that includes the core objectives.
- Ensure preservation of educational/didactical components that will enhance the cohesion with innovation of continued secondary educational programmes.
- Ensure preservation (vmbo) or reinforcement (havo/vwo) of the cohesion concerning content with the examination programmes (does not apply to all subjects). During the implementation, it may turn out to be necessary to include core objectives that are not compulsory for basic secondary education in certain courses in the examination programmes (for example for a subject such as Dutch language).
- Pay attention to subject-specific recommendations for the adjustment of core objectives, as laid down in subject reports.

A new advice request submitted with the Advisory Council for Education

The State Secretary requests the Advisory Council for Education to include the following developments in its long-term advice:

- The educational contents for secondary education (as well as primary education) have been expanded. New requirements, wishes and expectations are formulated on an ongoing basis, causing the programme to become fragmented and overloaded, while limiting the actual amount of free space in schools. For example, the Advisory Council may consider the desirability of a so-called 'learning area approach'.

- In addition to attention for equal opportunities for pupils with different social and cultural backgrounds (proportional participation in educational facilities), more attention for individual performances.
- Question is, exactly what knowledge and skills should pupils have after a period of secondary education; this question both relates to the existing curriculum and any educational standards, and to new social and technological developments.
- A current development involves the social task of the school, which is increasingly extended, as is demonstrated by a new rapprochement between schools and out-of-school facilities.
- Question is what should be the optimum (weekly) educational time for pupils during their first three years of secondary education. With regard to this question, the observations by the inspectorate concerning educational time during basic secondary education and the need for more autonomy in school development should also be taken into account.

In its response to this advice request, the Council states that the core objectives have become increasingly extensive as a result of the general skills, as well as the addition of a great number of educations and facets. According to the Council, the method makers' starting points are based upon maximum interpretation of the core objectives. Teachers are inclined to follow a method rather strictly, reinforcing this overloadedness. Because of the overloadedness of the whole of core objectives, and influenced by the (old) examination programmes, schools tend to make their own choices, which often negatively affect the new (timeconsuming) parts that are aimed at the application of skills.

Second advice of the Advisory Council for Education: 'De basisvorming: aanpassing en toekomstbeeld' (The basic curriculum: adjustments and vision of the future)

In a subsequent advice, the Council dilated upon the actual educational programme of basic secondary education. The advice includes an approach to face the observed overloadedness and fragmentation of the basic curricular programme, as well as a stimulus to update the programme. The council gives proposals both from short-term and from long-term perspectives.

From a short-term perspective, the Council strives to obtain a solution for the bottlenecks that became tersely apparent from the inspectorate's evaluation. The Council proposes the following composition of the core curriculum:

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- A cluster of basic subjects, comprising Dutch, English, and Maths.
 - A cluster comprising the Science subjects (physics, chemistry, biology and technology).
 - A cluster of social-cultural studies comprising history/politics and geography, as well as the art subjects.
 - Physical education.

In addition, ICT knowledge and skills should form a part of the core curriculum. The differential curriculum may include the following subjects:

- German, French, and Frisian;
- Care and economics;
- Religion and ideological education;
- Classical languages;
- New, modern foreign languages, such as Arabic and Turkish;
- Learning activities oriented at study or profession.

Where the long-term perspective is concerned, the Council feels that the social and technological developments call for a more fundamental revision of the programme. Question should be, what knowledge and skills should pupils have at the end of secondary education in order to adequately participate in further studies, future employment, and a range of other social activities. This question goes beyond basic secondary education and not only concerns the content of the curriculum, but also the organisation and didactics of the whole of basic education. The proposal touches on the central objectives, as they were formulated for basic secondary education, particularly concerning the raising of educational level, modernisation of education, and reinforcement of the vbo, the lower vocational school.

According to the Council, this fundamental way of thinking should also include the consideration whether core competences might provide a better classification method for basic secondary education than subjects and/or core objectives.

Slowly but surely, we are observing more of a bottom-up than a top-down approach for the formulation and implementation of core objectives. Teachers are increasingly involved in the realisation of core objectives, especially during the development of the third generation of these. Generally speaking, teachers are fairly pleased with the existing domains and the core objectives described in these. The core objectives cover the subject and are described in such a way as to avoid wrong interpretations. Nobody is contradicting the importance of core objectives. In terms of quality assurance, they serve a good cause. And besides, they provide a guideline for authors and designers of methods.

7. Policy philosophy, steering mechanism, innovation policy

Policy philosophy and the steering principles used by the government have a strong influence on the way in which core objectives are created. The policy strategies the government followed during the past decades have undergone quite a few changes. With regard to the second half of the twentieth century, Lagerweij (1994) makes the following distinction:

- Nineteen sixties: distributive or allocational educational policy. The government administers the funds and distributes these among the school boards. Characteristic for this policy is the fact that the state allows considerable freedom in order to promote the multiformity of society. The nature of this policy is decentralised.
- Nineteen seventies and eighties: constructive policy. The government is getting more involved in content-related matters. Conditions are created for the educational system, in order to meet its legal objectives. The government determines the educational programmes and adjusts these where necessary. It is wielding an innovative policy. The nature of this constructive policy is centralistic.
- Nineteen nineties: transformative policy. Keyword is de-regulation. The rules drawn up by the government under the constructive policy were so numerous and complex that they hindered the schools' freedom of movement. When it started wielding a more transformative policy, the government decided to take a step down and leave more to the schools themselves. The core of transformative policy is to ensure that people are aware of the context they live and work in and that their individual abilities and responsibilities are addressed in order to change this context. The nature of this policy is decentralistic.

The policy philosophy is reflected in the way the welfare state is organised. Based on Esping-Andersen, the SCP (Social and Cultural Planning Bureau) distinguishes three types of welfare states: a social democratic one, a corporatistic one, and a liberal one. The Scandinavian welfare states belong to the social-democratic type: a strong system of redistribution of social services on a high level. Germany and Austria are classified as a corporatistic welfare state. It demonstrates a strong link between welfare provisions and membership of occupational groups. The United Kingdom is considered a liberal welfare state, with strong emphasis on market processes.

The Netherlands is seen as a hybrid welfare state, with elements of the three types listed above. Considering the growing emphasis on increasing the autonomy and the influence of market processes, the system is shifting more and more towards the liberal type (SCP, 2002, p. 25).

The characteristics of a hybrid welfare state are reflected in the decision-making process, in 2006, concerning core objectives. More emphasis is placed on input from the - decentralised - field. Less leeway is given to central knowledge centres and lobbies by interest groups.

The policy developments during the last decades of the twentieth century show a shifting by the government between centralism and decentralism. In a congress book on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of SLO, Kuiper et al (2005) speak of a 'pendulum' to illustrate the movement between two poles: centralism and decentralism. This trend is not a specific Dutch one. Other countries show a similar movement, although the pendulum does not move to the same pole at the same moment. Some countries can be placed on a continuum between the two extremes. The Netherlands is currently seen as a country with strong decentralistic tendencies. The developments concerning the canonisation of certain types of educational content and those concerning the setting up of a frame of reference for language and maths/arithmetic for the whole educational column, from primary education right up to the inflow into higher education, point to the reaching of a turning point towards stronger steering by the government, concerning content.

Educational systems in western oriented European countries show other characteristics as well.

The Netherlands, Germany and Austria have categorial educational systems, with a transition around the age of ten or twelve and a subsequent choice of school types. Integration is pursued during the first one to three years of secondary education.

France, Greece, Italy and the United Kingdom belong to the second group, where a transition is made around the age of eleven, but where the first phase of secondary education still has an integrated character. In a third group of countries, the switchover is not made until the age of 15/16: Scandinavia (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland) and Portugal. In these countries, equal opportunities and a maximum level of education for all pupils are striven for.

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The introduction of a three-year basic secondary education, with corresponding core objectives based upon equal opportunities and the

postponement of study choice moments was inspired by the Scandinavian models. The continued existence of the categorial educational system (with overlapping constructions) was part of the reason that a wide and general, integral basic secondary education as it was originally envisaged, never really made it. Because of the strong opposition offered by the schools, the Task Force Basic Secondary Education provided them with the opportunity to influence the core objectives.

Development processes, such as the design of core objectives, take place under the influence of policy views that are prevalent at the time. At the moment, the Netherlands operates under policy views that are called 'good governance' (Dutch Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science, 2005).

The contours of this policy philosophy appear in ministerial policy documents from 1999 and 2000. In these, an image is created of strong institutions, a government that is keeping its distance, a focus on quality, and room for variety in the field. This philosophy affects all individual policy parts. The core of this vision is to provide more freedom for those actually working in the field and to greatly simplify the supervisory and social accountability functions (vertical and horizontal accountability). This is in line with the advice by the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR), called *Bewijzen van goede dienstverlening* (2004) ('Proof of Good Service'). The administrative philosophy is based on a combination of government regulation, self regulation, and, where necessary, market regulation.

In the memorandum *Grenzeloos leren* (Learning without bounds) (2001), by the Ministry of Education, the steering concept for educational policy is presented by means of four concepts. These concepts are Direction, Autonomy, Results, and Accountability. In other words, the direction and the results to be aimed for are provided by the policy makers, while educational institutions are given free reign to achieve these results in any way they choose and are accountable for these results and the means with which these are achieved. In the policy memorandum 'governance in education' (June 2005) and the progress memorandum 'good governance in education' (June 2006), the Minister of Education elaborates on these administrative principles in education and their corresponding responsibilities for all parties involved, such as the department, school boards, teachers, pupils and parents, and the local authorities.

Core points include that the administrative relationships should provide room for inspiration and commitment concerning content and that the department should provide institutions with sufficient leeway to fulfil their social task instead of keeping up a formal and uniform monitoring system that is based on distrust. The downside of this leeway is that institutions have to create their own vertical and horizontal responsibility framework and have to provide information in such a way that the minister is able to give public account for the system's functioning. This public account concerns requirements such as the quality of education, the connection between pupils' talents and their educational results, the matching of educational yield and social demand, the accessibility, and the adequate funding of the educational system. Concerning the division of roles, the school board is the party that should enable the school's professionals to perform their jobs and deliver quality, and to give account for the policy pursued. The government, by way of legal frameworks, takes its responsibility for the funding. Quality requirements and supervision are a logical part of this. Teachers and institutions are expected to consider the political and social priorities and take steps accordingly. If this is not done in an adequate way, the cabinet may prioritise by means of political targets. Such prioritisation may also affect administrative agreements with branch or board organisations. Positive results from this division of roles are that administration and supervision are strictly separated and that the commitment shown by pupils, parents and social environment are guaranteed. A balance should be struck between internal supervision, horizontal accountability, and government supervision. Introduction of a lump sum and the simplification and removal of rules and regulations are offset against the specification of quality and yield standards, both to facilitate supervision and horizontal and vertical accountability, and to promote the availability of transparent, comparative data concerning teaching performance, i.e. benchmarks.

Innovation

50 The decentralised steering principle gives more leeway to local parties and stimulates the development of autonomous, professional institutions. The principle also includes the opportunity for schools to create their own innovations. The history of basic secondary education showed that large-scale reform operations initiated by the government do not automatically lead to success. In response to this, schools have been given more autonomy for their own developments. At the same time, the government does expect inclusion of the reforms it deems necessary, as well as school innovations to meet new

social changes and requirements. In other words, the ministry firmly addresses the schools' own capabilities to implement changes themselves. Question is whether schools are able to bring about the desired changes under their own steam. The same is true for decentralised curriculum development. From literature research, the involvement of teachers in schools' innovations is barely perceptible. However, this may be the result of a flaw in the research methods (Van der Bolt, ea. 2005). The difficulty in accomplishing change in schools also becomes apparent from the integral report of an innovation project the SLO has been involved in, concerning schools that had not opted for a radical innovation (such as Slash/21 or UNIC), but chose to gradually renovate an existing situation. Like a kind of knowledge community, the Bonhoeffer College, the SLO, and the University of Twente collaborated in this project. (Hooghoff, Leverink, Lucardie, 2005).

As commissioned by the Ministry, the SCO-Kohnstamm Institute recently carried out an investigation to find out whether schools possess sufficient innovation capacity to implement the changes necessary for basic secondary education. They studied five schools that participated in the networking project for lower school development for secondary education school managers (Dutch: Netwerkproject Onderbouwontwikkeling van Schoolmanagers VO). This projects intends to provide support for school managers during the implementation of the educational changes. The five schools turned out differ considerably in aspects of innovational content. In some schools, a total conversion seemed to be taking place, while others kept the changes to a minimum. It was noted, however, that none of the schools formulated concrete goals: 'Stimulation of independent learning, using activating didactics, or even school development are rather abstract objectives.' If plans are not made more concrete, chances are that teachers will start interpreting the envisaged innovation in different ways. From the study, it became apparent that the initiative for change comes from the management. Project leaders endeavour to involve teachers with the initiative; they indicate a preference for a bottom-up approach. However, the researchers are observing a contradiction in what project leaders are saying and what they do. Even the project leaders themselves are struggling with this. They go to great lengths to involve teachers across the school with the innovations, for example by setting up information and study meetings and by forming temporary project groups. However, with little effect. Teachers are using such meetings to voice their doubts about the content and the approach of the innovations and to moan about the limited influence they

have on the process. Because of this critical attitude of the teachers, schools tend to implement the desired changes in experimental form first. The study demonstrates that the subsequent broadening is greatly obstructed by this. The researchers conclude that none of the five schools are showing any school-wide changes in educational practice. Although there are some good examples of positive changes, these mainly concern individual efforts by innovation-minded teachers.

Obviously, schools are in need of more instruments in order to implement changes. In fact, one could say that schools are insufficiently equipped for change. Time and tools are needed for changes and improvements. However, the school as a work place is insufficiently equipped to achieve this.

8. Development and implementation of core objectives

8.1 Primary education

The procedure of development, validation and legislation of core objectives in Dutch primary education - until the introduction of the second generation in 1998 - was analysed elaborately in the dissertation 'Wieden in een geheime tuin' (Weeding a secret garden), (Letschert, 1998). This research involves the development, strategies and purpose of the common content of primary education in the Netherlands. Since 1985, Kindergarten and primary schools have been integrated in the Netherlands into a new type of primary or basic education, known as the 'basisschool'. Primary education covers a period of eight years for children from four to twelve years old. Once they reach the age of four, children have the opportunity to attend school, but schooling does not become compulsory until they reach the age of five. In the primary education act (WBO) the subjects they will study are prescribed. As far as content is concerned, the primary education act, only sets out guidelines. The structure is given, but the details are left open. In 1985, nothing more was prescribed with regard to content than the notion that attention should be given to the following eight educational content areas:

- a. Sensory and physical exercise;
- b. Dutch language;
- c. Arithmetic and mathematics;
- d. English language;
- e. Several fields of knowledge or knowledge domains;
- f. Art subjects;
- g. Social skills and road safety;
- h. Promotion of healthy behaviour.

This canon is slightly elaborated in the primary education act. The various fields of knowledge include geography, history, science, social studies (including civics) and religious and ideological movements. The art subjects include: the promotion of language usage, arts and crafts, drama, music and dance.

Neither the factual content nor the time to be spent on these areas of study was mentioned in the primary education act. The reservation of the government to pronounce in regulations about the content of education is based on article 23 of the Constitution. In this article, published in 1917 after a long and difficult debate

in society and parliament, an assurance was given with regard to the freedom of private and denominational education.

In 1993 core objectives for primary education came into effect. Core objectives are descriptions of knowledge, insights and skills that should be offered to all pupils in Dutch primary education. The core objectives have been set by an order in council. The primary education act records that schools should attempt to realise the intentions of the core objectives with all pupils. This means that core objectives in the Netherlands are, in fact, attainment targets.

After much reservation, the central government took steps based on the advice in an influential report by the Scientific Council on Government Policy (WRR, 1986), which led to the increase of control on the content of primary education. The minister of education commissioned the National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) to start with the development of proposals for attainment targets. SLO was asked to do so in collaboration with the National Institute for Educational Measurement (Cito). The assignment was accepted with reservation because of the hesitancy felt about the general acceptance of the idea and about the strategic approach. A key question was whether such a 'top-down' model was acceptable for the process of innovation of education. The decisive argument for SLO to carry out the assignment was the reasoning that by so doing the parliament could discuss principle issues, such as the legitimacy of the enactment, the selection and precedence of content, and the desired design.

The design of attainment targets was based on directives from the Ministry of Education, worked out by SLO in detailed instructions for authors. A weighty issue in the discussions concerned the definition of attainment targets. They were intended to be focused on the teaching of knowledge, insights and skills and certainly not on attitudes. This was frequently questioned in the debates.

54 The proposals for attainment targets were very detailed (464 targets). They had been distributed on a large scale but they were never formalised. The general impression was that they were too detailed and in that sense too big a step from a long period in which the government had insisted on a rather liberal position regarding the content of education to a more prescribing situation. A new cabinet installed a committee (1990) to generalise the previous proposals. Also the name was changed and the attainment targets came to be known as core objectives. Nevertheless, the intention of prescribing content offered to pupils remained the same.

The first generation of core objectives was determined in 1993. There were only 122, a remarkable reduction compared with the previous list of attainment targets. Initially they were to last for a period of five years, after which they could be revised. However, immediately after their introduction, they were heavily criticised. As a result of a large-scale evaluation of primary education in 1995, ten years into the period of the integrated primary school system, there appeared to be a serious discrepancy between the actual level of primary education and the ambitious level of the core objectives. Some new and temporary committees were established to advise the minister. One of these committees (CHKB, 1994) published an advice concerning suggestions about the relevance and feasibility of the core objectives and proposed a new set of 53 core objectives which should replace the former objectives. This advice was taken very seriously but the existing core objectives remained intact for the time being.

In 1995 the Secretary of State for Education, Culture and Science took the first steps to revise the first generation of core objectives. SLO was asked to carry out the revision process, together with Cito (the national assessment and examination council). The result of these activities was a report containing proposals for 92 core objectives clustered in a more homogeneous way than previously. The core objectives contained a set of objectives focused on the development of attitudes and the pedagogical assignment of primary education (SLO, 1997). The proposals have been accepted with modifications. Besides the positive responses there were outright negative reactions. The influential Dutch Education Council, for instance, advised against implementing the objectives. The general nature of the core objectives was a main point of their criticism. After some refinements based on the initial advice, the proposals were converted into an order of council and came into force in August 1998.

The time seemed right for a more precise articulation of the content of teaching in primary schools. This process was boosted by allocating to centres of expertise the development of outlines of content from core objectives to form and design objectives for specific periods in primary, in particular for Dutch language and mathematics.

Five topics

During the development of a common educational content for primary education in the Netherlands the debate concentrated on five topics:

- *Functionality*. Which functions should be decided by the determination of a common educational content designed as core objectives and which functions should have more, or less, priority than others?

- *Legitimacy.* Is the central government authorised and entitled, within the Constitution, to make demands relating to the content of education? On the one hand, the issue of freedom in education plays an important role. On the other, the argument is that quality and reliability of education are the responsibility of government.
- *Sources for and the selection of educational content.* What kind of content could be seen as common educational content for primary education? A central question is whether the content should be exclusively about knowledge, skills and insights, or whether it should also include the development of attitudes and connected values.
- *Design of core objectives.* Should the agreed educational content be defined as precisely as possible or should it be presented in a more general way? Was it advisable to follow the structure of the canon of the primary education act or should an alternative basis have been chosen? Should the objectives be considered as input or as desired outcomes?
- *Procedures to develop core objectives.* What kinds of procedures were most effective for the process of development, validation and legislation of the agreed educational content for primary education? Who should be actively involved in the process?

The third generation of core objections came into force in 2006. It is a set of 58 objectives, preceded by a preamble, which could be considered as a reduction of earlier cross-curricular objectives.

Implementation

Parallel with the development of core objectives, the idea was launched to develop instruments as a kind of help by using core objectives in daily practice of schools. The rather abstract core objectives should be accompanied by examples of how to use them. For instance using short descriptions, examples of lessons, learning lines, teaching materials, and tips. The instrument that accompanied the first generation of core objectives for primary education was called ‘Handreikingen bij de kerndoelen’, a set of 15 booklets for subject areas and a general booklet with an introduction, developed by SLO. The set was sent to all primary schools, institutes for teacher education, and educational support organisations.

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Schools received support in coping with the following generations of core objectives as well. Core objectives are worked out in learning lines and interim objectives. These guidelines and sub-objectives prove useful for textbook writers. They make continuous development visible and manageable. The terms of learning

lines and interim objectives originate from innovation projects, called TELL and TAL, both initiatives by the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of education in reading, writing and arithmetic. These activities were and are carried out by the Centre of Expertise in the Dutch Language in Nijmegen and the Freudenthal Institute in Utrecht. Interim objectives are meant to be a refinement to the core objectives. They are not obliged, however.

The Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development, SLO, also assists schools in their handling of the core objectives, for instance by analysing textbooks and other educational resources from educational publishers in order to find out to what extent they comply with the core objectives. SLO also develops interim objectives and learning lines (Dutch acronym: TULE), which contain examples of how to work with core objectives and gradually teach these in phases throughout eight years of primary education (Greven, 2001). SLO develops interim objectives and learning lines for all the new core objectives (<http://tule.slo.nl/>).

From 1993 the Dutch Inspectorate has followed the implementation of core objectives. In the Annual Report 1997 (Inspectie van het onderwijs, 1998), it was observed that, after an initial reluctance, core objectives were now gradually being adopted. In 1997, two-third of all primary schools had initiated changes based on demands by core objectives. 16% of the schools formulated proposals. Changes concentrate on Dutch language, mathematics and some of the so-called 'knowledge areas (civics, science). Most changes are related to the purchase of new textbooks. The turnaround speed of textbooks, however, is slow (ten years), hence the changes are taking their time (CEB, 1994).

8.2 Secondary education

8.2.1 The determination process of the core objectives for basic secondary education 2006

After the report by the inspectorate, in 1999, about the evaluation of basic secondary education, a number of recommendations and policy reactions occurred in rapid succession. In 2000, the Dutch Advisory Council for Education published the advice *Agenda voor een herijking van de basisvorming* ('Agenda for recalibration of basic secondary education'). In this advice, the Advisory Council points once more to the problems in basic secondary education, while focussing particularly on the objectives of basic secondary education. In the policy reaction *Ruimte voor*

kwaliteit ('Room for quality', Dutch Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science, 2001), the Advisory Council's advice was discussed. Based on a number of factors, including this advice, the Ministry submits a new request for advice. In 2001, the Advisory Council hands in a second advice, called *De basisvorming: aanpassing en toekomstbeeld* ('Basic secondary education: adjustments and vision of the future').

This advice is characterised by its breach with the past. It is suggested to design the implementation process in an interactive way. The core points of the revision concern:

1. a general raising of the educational level in junior schools;
2. modernisation of education;
3. harmonisation;
4. postponement of the moment for educational and professional career choices.

In 2002, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science, commissions the Task Force Reformation Basic Secondary Education to revise the core objectives. The Ministry presents the Task Force with a rather extensive assignment, because, in addition to the reformulation of core objectives and the solving of a number of specific bottlenecks, attention is also to be given to implementation and a solid basis. The products should explicitly be based upon practical experiences of schools and should gain broad public support. School development is to be stimulated. Therefore, the dialogue with the field played an important part during this process, which was conducted publicly in all aspects.

From the very start, the Task Force based its efforts upon pupil-oriented dynamics, variety, and a stimulus for coherence between subjects. The most important characteristics for the lower school of secondary education are:

- the pupil learns in an active and increasingly independent way;
- the pupil learns in collaboration with others;
- the pupil learns in cohesion;
- the pupil researches;
- the pupil learns in a challenging, safe and healthy learning environment;
- the pupil learns in a continuous learning line.

58 Finally, the Task Group arrived at 58 core objectives, covering the following areas:

- Dutch;
- English;
- Mathematics;
- Man and nature;

- Man and society;
- Art and culture;
- Physical education and sports.

The Task Force's interactive approach can safely be called a breach with the past in policy development in the Netherlands. Many meetings were held, which are extensively accounted for by the Task Force in the appendices of *Beweging in de onderbouw* ('Movements in the lower school') (2004), not just in summarised form, but also by means of a report with comments by an external consultancy. The Task Force's procedure distinguishes itself in different phases, the first of which concern planning, which soon give way to a large-scale interaction with the field. These concern regional meetings with the VVO, platform meetings, 24-hour sessions, transitional meetings, large-scale conferences, and overspill meetings.

- At first, particularly school principals and managers were approached. Later on, teachers were involved on a wider scale as well. This is illustrated by the experiment educational tools for the lower school of secondary education. Teachers are not only gaining more influence on the core objectives to be formulated, but also on the way these are converted into educational tools. Presupposing that teachers are particularly method followers, eight projects have been defined with the purpose of developing educational tools.

In the projects, publishers and schools collaborated in various ways:

- teachers write the material; publishers supervise and edit;
- publishers and/or schools provide existing material; teachers rearrange and add to it;
- authors employed by publishers develop (or have developed); teachers field-test the material.

From the project reports, it has become apparent that not all teachers are, or will become, professional developers. Things often fail on division of tasks, work culture, discipline, or work-load. On the other hand, publishers sometimes adopt too laid-back an attitude.

8.2.2 Stakeholders

Actors in the discussion around core objectives

The process during which the core objectives for basic secondary education are developed demonstrates that many official bodies, persons and authorities are putting their oar in. It isn't always clear how important one party's role is compared

to another's. In order to value - to some extent - the role of all parties involved, it is important to start by classifying the different target groups.

In his study, Letschert distinguishes the following target groups:

- Education: boards, school management, teachers;
- Intermediaries: method writers, instructors, school counsellors, curriculum developers, examination developers, the inspectorate;
- Parents;
- Society as a whole, in this case represented by the government.

In general, it can be stated that the decentralistic steering principle employed by the Dutch government entails that the teaching field (boards, school management and teachers) is holding most of the trump cards. This is also true for the core objectives. The intermediaries (e.g. SLO, CITO, inspectorate) are generally pushed back to a position on the sidelines.

In Letschert's research, six groups of respondents (policy makers, policy advisers, policy influencers, policy supporters, policy executives, policy supervisors) were asked about their opinions concerning the core objectives. Their opinion was asked about a number of matters, including the primary target group of the core objectives.

Some respondents indicated that, according to them, the core objectives are primarily intended for teachers, because the objectives give them a clear insight into the teaching task expected from them. Others consider core objectives to be the guiding criteria for intermediaries. Even parents are named as a target group. Looking at the core objectives, parents gain an idea of the way in which schools construe the responsibilities delegated by them. Their attention is also drawn to the importance of core objectives for preceding and subsequent education, as well as extra schooling.

The role of parents and teachers in the process of core objective determination for basic secondary education seems limited. Particularly school leaders and teachers from subject groups are heard.

Taking a closer look at the actors

- **The Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science (and specific persons within the ministry)**

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The Ministry of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science commissions the drawing up of core objectives. By deciding upon a commission chairman, composing the commission, and laying down its working methods, the ministry is able to influence the outcome of the core objectives. Furthermore, the ministry plays a part

in protecting education. This role is not always recognised by outsiders. However, a continuous flow of parties and subjects is fighting for a position on the school agenda, for example: road safety, health education, media education, energy, water, volunteer work, political participation for youngsters, etc. The Ministry excludes many of these subjects from the school agenda, or finds ways to allow schools to decide for themselves whether they are included in the curriculum, e.g. in the differential part, or the Broad School.

- **The inspectorate**

The inspectorate played an important part in the new core objectives for basic secondary education. Particularly in the way the inspectorate supervises and reports on the quality of education. Accountability is of vital importance and politics and education are well aware of this fact. The critical report in 1999 by the inspectorate concerning basic secondary education formed the basis for an innovation report and a number of developments.

The inspectorate increasingly goes by the results of school-based evaluation. However, the schools' self-evaluating ability has to be developed further in order to be able to use it as a solid accountability basis.

- **The Advisory Council for Education**

In 2000 and 2002, the Dutch Advisory Council for Education provided clear directives, which presented a breach with the past. Also, during the Task Force process, there has been much - informal - consultation with the Advisory Council. In 2005, the Advisory Council concludes its involvement with a written advice about the minister's legislative proposals for the lower school in secondary education. The Council emphasises the necessity to give schools sufficient leeway to follow their own course, but feels that this should not limit the educational time. The minister follows up on this advice by the Advisory Council for Education.

Recapitulating, it can be stated that the Dutch Advisory Council for Education played a very important part during the whole process.

- **SLO**

The main responsibility of the SLO is considered to be the development of core objectives. With regard to the third generation of core objectives, especially concerning secondary education, the SLO was more or less sidelined. It was particularly the educational field that called the shots. SLO was only called in for parts of the advisory process.

- **Trade unions**

For the third generation of core objectives, the trade unions had much less influence on the development of core objectives than was the case before. In its assignment description for the Task Force, the Ministry of Education had clearly indicated that a number of organisations were to be involved in the commission. In addition, other (interest) groups had also sought contact with the Task Force Basic Secondary Education.

- **Central organisations**

Established school cooperatives were also approached, but the emphasis remained with the practical teaching field of schools and teachers.

- **The media**

The media play a role in the developments of education and, hence, the development of core objectives. Striking detail, for example, is the contribution by Leenheer (2006), who portrayed this role by the media in educational reform.

- **Politics**

Much less than before did politics affect the development and selection process of the core objectives. Earlier, we pointed out that Prick (2006) remarked upon the way basic secondary education was developing into a rich patchwork quilt of amendments.

However, the role of politics remained limited during the development of the latest set of core objectives.

- **Teachers and school leaders**

Much more than before did teachers and school leaders play a role in the determination of core objectives. Not only were school leaders given a place within the Task Force, many school leaders and teachers were also involved in the Task Force's working method.

- **Publishers**

During the whole discussion around core objectives, publishers played a silent, but very influential part. Especially during the first period of basic secondary education (1993-1998), like the teachers who used the core objectives as a guideline for their lessons, publishers used them as a guideline for method development. This is particularly caused by the interpretation of the core objectives: the methods promised that the methods would cover the core objectives.

- **CITO**

The tests developed by the Dutch Central Institute for Test Development, CITO, influenced the development of core objectives only in a very limited way. However, the CITO hadn't been sitting idle. The PPO tests and proposals for educational standards play a part in the considerations. In addition, the CITO tests play a steering part at school level.

In conclusion, we can state that there are four main actors driving the process. The Advisory Council for Education, by proposing the working methods, the Ministry of Education, who accepted the Council's advice, the Task Force Reformation Basic Secondary Education (who directed the authoring process), and a group of dedicated school leaders and teachers who participated in the Task Force's meetings. This is quite another group of actors than the usual one for the drawing up of core objectives. In the old situation, more was left to experts, interest groups, and representative union branches.

In school development and educational reform, core objectives often represent a symbolic function at the system's macro level. We refer to the research by Ogawa et al (2003). Especially concerning secondary education and the third generation of core objectives, it was endeavoured in the Netherlands to involve the educational field more intensively than had been the case in earlier developments. Next to the benefits of such involvement, this method also has disadvantages. Although teachers may be quite pleased with the fact that they are 'heard', the one who writes the method will actually turn out to be the one in charge. Sometimes, remarks are included, but they may also be regarded as a mild form of participation, where remarks by participants are largely ignored or used only to simplify own points of view or the introduction of compromises.

Because in the Netherlands, the developments of core objectives took place in close proximity of schools, and prevailing educational practice and its teaching tools were firmly taken into account, the core objectives are confirming rather than reforming. This may imply that the improvements in education the Netherlands should be focussing on, for example in view of the developing knowledge economy, are insufficiently done justice. It is not inconceivable that the chosen development model in the Netherlands lacks ambition and orientation upon the future. In other countries, a more explicit expert model is chosen for the development of core objectives or standards. For example, in Germany (IQB, 2006).

During the development of the core objectives in 1993 and 1998, the SLO, as national curriculum institute, played a central role, both for primary and for secondary education. Different interests, new insights, and wish lists by branch organisations were offset against each other. In this, the SLO played both the expert role and the part of the director. The decisionmaking process took place in an intensive interaction with the Dutch Ministry of Education. The SLO also played an important part in the translation of core objectives into learning lines and educational programmes - a role that matched its official task. In later developments, for example when the Task Force Reformation Basic Secondary Education, explicitly commissioned with the development of core objectives, was set up, the expertise is sought outside of the national expertise institution once again. The Task Force expressly involves the educational field as the most important actor. The whole central field of interest organisations (including branch organisations) is kept at bay. The SLO is involved, for example to give advice on parts, or to come up with detailed examples, but only in a limited way. Only when the core objectives are to be specified in detail, in the form of tools for schools and teachers (the TULE project of intermediate objectives and learning lines) is the SLO returned its role of expert.

The SLO, as expert institution, remains explicitly involved in the development of the latest generation of core objectives for primary education. This was particularly thanks to a threatening deadlock, earlier, as a result of the many poorly attuned recommendations, collected by a temporary commission appointed for the proposal of new core objectives. Changes in policy climate, especially concerning the increasing autonomy for schools in the context of governance, also played a part in this. Today, the SLO once again occupies a more prominent position in the Netherlands as a national expertise institution for processes of curriculum policy and development, both at macro and at system level.

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Appendix

Core objectives primary education

Preamble

Primary education aims to broadly educate children. The education addresses their emotional and intellectual development, the development of their creativity, and their acquisition of social, cultural and physical skills. The core objectives help put all this into practice. The whole of cohesive, and therefore consecutively numbered, core objectives represents the contents of primary education. The core objectives in this list are divided into chapters for Dutch language, English language, Frisian language, mathematics and arithmetic, exploratory social studies, art education and physical education. Core objectives provide guidelines. They indicate the goals each school should at least strive for. Three comments need to be given here, however.

First of all, the objectives describe the desired results of a learning process, not the way in which these are to be achieved. The core objectives do not prescribe any didactics. Considering the nature of primary education, teachers should address and stimulate the children's natural curiosity and their need for development and communication. By offering a structured and interactive educational programme, different forms of exploratory education, and interesting themes and activities, children are stimulated in their development.

Secondly, content and objectives should be closely linked, be connected to everyday life, and presented in coherence with each other. In concrete education, objectives from different chapters are applicable simultaneously. For example, language is important in all subjects; culture does not only apply to the artistic domain; and information technology applies to all areas.

Thirdly, attention should be given to objectives that are important for all learning areas: a good working attitude, use of learning strategies, reflection on one's own actions and learning, expression of one's own thoughts and feelings, respectful listening to and criticising of others' opinions, acquisition and processing of information, development of self-confidence, respectful and responsible dealing with each other, and care and appreciation for the living environment.

DUTCH LANGUAGE

Characteristics

Language education is important because the role of language during the acquisition of content and skills in all learning areas - and the transfer among these - is obvious. Education in Dutch as a second language further reinforced this realisation over the past few years. Language education, therefore, is important for the learning successes of children and for the position they will eventually occupy in society.

In addition, language has a social function. Children need to develop their linguistic skills, because they need them now and in the future. This means that education should include communicative situations: lifelike and fascinating readers, discussions about subjects that are interesting to children, and real correspondence with children in other schools.

Language acquisition and education occur in a circular way: content is similar, while complexity and command increases. In other words, Dutch language education aims to turn children into increasingly competent language users in their command of this language, both inside and outside of the school. These competences can be typified in four key words:

- copy: copy an action as precisely as possible (for example by copying text from the blackboard);
- describe: apply a skill (e.g. report, give information, or ask questions) in their own way and in their own words;
- structure: give structure in their own ways;
- assess: reflect about possibilities, evaluate.

These key words are not easily formulated and included in core objectives, because they often refer to a combination of competences. Written linguistic skills take up an important position. 'Literacy' presumes more than just the technique of reading and writing. It also implies insight into its social function and a positive attitude. This development is started before the child attends primary school, when the child is read to or when stories are exchanged in the family environment, and is continued in school. And although the development of written language skills is focussed on, the development of oral language skills remains important as well.

74 Expansion of the child's vocabulary, attention to language and thinking, application of listening strategies, reading aloud and telling - these are activities that further develop the oral language skills, while also forming preconditions for the written domain.

Linguistics and language use present children with tools to talk and think about language. Traditionally, these mainly concerned grammar and sometimes the consideration of interesting language phenomena. Today, they particularly concern the child's insight into his own strategies of language use and those of others, so that he learns to use them in an increasingly conscious and purposeful manner. In addition to language as a system, reflection on one's own language use is important. Linguistics should not form a separate subject, but should be integrated in (parts of) other domains.

Education in Dutch as a second language is often different in nature from education in Dutch as a primary language: the starting situation of the pupils is different, the didactics differ, the educational programme is sometimes phased differently, and there is more emphasis on the expansion of vocabulary. However, the same objectives and the same educational programme apply to all pupils. Many native-speaking children who grow up in disadvantaged situations will benefit from the didactic insights gained from teaching ethnic pupils. One of these insights is that language plays a crucial role during the acquisition of knowledge and skills in the 'other subjects'.

Core objectives

Oral education

- 1 The pupils learn to acquire information from spoken language. At the same time, they learn to reproduce this information - orally or in writing - in a structured way.
- 2 The pupils learn to express themselves in a meaningful and engaging manner when giving or requesting information, reporting, giving explanations, instructing, and participating in discussions.
- 3 The pupils learn to assess information in discussions and in conversations that are informative or opinion forming in nature and learn to respond with arguments.

Written education

- 4 The pupils learn to retrieve information from informative and instructive texts, including diagrams, tables and digital sources.
- 5 The pupils learn to write meaningful and attractive texts with different functions, including: informative, instructive, convincing, or enjoyable.
- 6 The pupils learn to structure information and opinions when reading educational, study-oriented, and other instructive texts, as well as systematically structured sources, including digital ones.

- 7 The pupils learn to compare and assess information and opinions in different textual forms.
- 8 The pupils learn to structure information and opinions when writing a letter, a report, a form, or a paper. While doing so, they pay attention to syntax, correct spelling, writing legibly, type page, as well as, in some cases, images and colour.
- 9 The pupils derive pleasure from reading and writing of stories, poems and informative texts intended for them.

Linguistics, including strategies

- 10 The pupils learn to recognise, express, use, and assess strategies in the objectives for 'oral language education' and 'written language education'.
- 11 The pupils learn a number of linguistic principles and rules. Within a sentence, they are able to distinguish between subject, verbal predicate, and parts of a predicate.
The pupils know the rules for spelling of verbs, the rules for spelling of other words besides verbs, and the rules for the use of punctuation marks.
- 12 The pupils acquire an adequate vocabulary and strategies for the understanding of words as yet unknown to them. 'Vocabulary' includes terms that allow pupils to think and talk about language.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Characteristics

As a result of the increasing internationalisation, a growing mobility, and the ever-expanding possibilities in communication using the new media, command of the English language is increasingly important to everybody. The position of English in primary education is based upon European policy and the principle that a reasonable command of that language is achieved when English education is commenced at an early age. The purpose of English language lessons is to lay a foundation for communication with native English speakers and others who speak English outside of the school. This initial impetus is further developed during the period of basic secondary education. In primary school, education in the English language is linked to the content of other subjects wherever possible. For example to the content of personal and world orientation. This concerns simple, everyday subjects, such as: 'how do you live', 'spare time and hobbies', 'your body', and 'the weather'.

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In primary school, English language education particularly concerns oral communication and the reading of simple text forms. Writing is limited to an introduction to the spelling of a number of common English words. In addition, children learn to look up the meanings and spelling of words using a dictionary.

Core objectives

- 13 The pupils learn to acquire information from simple spoken and written English texts.
- 14 The pupils learn to ask and give information in English about simple subjects while developing a confident attitude in expressing themselves in that language.
- 15 The pupils learn the spelling of a number of simple words about everyday subjects.
- 16 The pupils learn to look up the meanings and spelling of English words using a dictionary.

FRISIAN LANGUAGE

Characteristics

Primary schools in the province of Friesland are obliged to include education in the Frisian language in their educational programme. This is based on Article 4 of the Primary Education Act: 'In schools in the province of Friesland, education is also given in the Frisian language, unless the Provincial Executive has granted exemption from this obligation after a request by the competent authorities'. Education in the Frisian language, like education in the Dutch language, has a social function. This social function corresponds to the function of education in the Dutch language: the role of language during the acquisition of content and skills in all learning areas and the transfer between language and 'other subjects'. Therefore, in schools where Frisian is taught, this education is connected to the education in Dutch. There is a transfer between them, for example: expansion of the vocabulary, listening and reading strategies, linguistics.

In addition to the social function, education in the Frisian language has a cultural function as well. Children familiarise themselves with learning to express themselves in the language that is used in the province, the region, the town, the neighbourhood, and the family, in formal and informal situations. While doing so, they participate in the culture of their own region, insofar it coincides with the use of the Frisian language.

In the educational programme, oral linguistic skills take up an important position. These concern subjects that are familiar to the children and relatively simple competences such as describing and structuring. Some reading skills are also pursued. These concern texts that are interesting to the children, whereby reading enjoyment is more important than practice of their understanding of the texts. Like education in the Dutch language, the acquisition of listening, reading and vocabulary strategies are important. In part, these are transferable from (or to) education in the Dutch language. Apart from this coherence in strategies,

linguistics in the broad sense of the term is a domain that forms a rich source of planned and incidental lessons, e.g. the position of the Frisian language in the Netherlands as a whole and in the province of Friesland in particular, and the differences and similarities between the Frisian and Dutch languages in usage, form, vocabulary, etc.

Core objectives

Oral language education

- 17 The pupils develop a positive attitude towards the use of Frisian by themselves and others.
- 18 The pupils learn to acquire information from the spoken Frisian language. These concern texts that give information, enjoyment, opinions or instructions about subjects familiar to them.
- 19 The pupils learn to express themselves in a meaningful and engaging manner in situations from their everyday life, in which they request or give information about a subject with which they are familiar.

Written language education

- 20 The pupils learn to acquire information from popular Frisian texts, such as articles from youth headings, songs, stories, etc.
- 21 The pupils learn to write simple texts in Frisian about everyday subjects, with the purpose of communicating with others about those subjects.

Linguistics, including strategies

- 22 The pupils acquire a vocabulary of frequently used Frisian words and strategies for the understanding of words as yet unknown to them.

MATHS/ARITHMETIC

Characteristics

In the course of primary education, the children will gradually acquire - in the context of situations that are meaningful to them - familiarity with numbers, measurements, forms, structures, and the relationships and calculations that apply to these. They will learn to use 'mathematical language' and gain 'mathematical literacy' and skills in calculus. This mathematical language concerns arithmetical, mathematical and geo-metrical terms, formal and informal notations, schematic rep-resentations, tables and graphs, and exercises for the calculator. 'Mathematical literacy' and skills in calculus particularly applies to coherent insight in numbers, insight in measurements and three-dimensional insight, a repertoire of ready

knowledge, important reference numbers and measurements, characteristic examples and applications, and practice in arithmetic, measurements and geometry. Geometry concerns three-dimensional orientation, the description of phenomena in reality, and the ability to reason on the basis of images in two and three dimensions. The subjects according to which children develop their 'mathematical literacy' have different origins: everyday life, other development areas, and mathematics itself. When selecting and offering the subjects, the children's levels of knowledge and ability are kept in mind, as well as their other areas of development, their interests, and topicalities, so that children will feel challenged to carry out mathematical activity and be able to do maths at their own level, with satisfaction and pleasure, both independently and as a part of a group. In short, that they are able to ask mathematical questions and formulate and solve mathematical problems. During the arithmetic or maths lesson, the children learn to solve a problem in a mathematical way and explain to others the solution in mathematical language. They learn to give and receive mathematical criticism with respect for another person's point of view. Explanations, formulations and notations, as well as the giving and receiving of criticism, are all part of a specifically mathematical method that will teach children to organise and motivate ways of thinking and to avoid mistakes, independently as well as together with others.

Core objectives

Mathematical insight and operation

- 23 The pupils learn to use mathematical language.
- 24 The pupils learn to solve practical and formal arithmetical and mathematical problems and clearly represent argumentation.
- 25 The pupils learn to motivate approaches for solving arithmetical/mathematical problems and learn to assess solutions.

Numbers and calculations

- 26 The pupils learn to understand the general structure and interrelationship of quantities, whole numbers, decimal numbers, percentages, and proportions, and to use these to do arithmetic in practical situations.
- 27 The pupils learn to quickly carry out the basic calculations in their heads using whole numbers, at least to 100, whereby adding and subtracting up to 20 and the multiplication tables are known by heart.
- 28 The pupils learn to count and calculate by estimation.
- 29 The pupils learn clever ways to add, subtract, multiply and divide.

- 30 The pupils learn to add, subtract, multiply and divide on paper, according to more or less contracted standard procedures.
- 31 The pupils learn to use the calculator with insight.

Measuring and geometry

- 32 The pupils learn to solve simple geometrical problems.
- 33 The pupils learn to measure and calculate using units and measurements, such as time, money, length, circumference, surface area, volume, weight, speed, and temperature.

PERSONAL AND WORLD ORIENTATION

Characteristics

In this learning area, pupils orientate on themselves, on how people relate to each other, how they solve problems, and how they give meaning to their existence. Pupils orientate on their natural environment and the phenomena occurring in it. Pupils also orientate on the world around them - nearby and faraway; then and now - and while doing so make use of cultural heritage. Children are naturally curious. They are always on the lookout to learn about themselves and explore the world. This development need is a starting point for this learning area. At the same time, society, in which the children are growing up, is making its demands. Children are fulfilling, and will fulfil, tasks and roles, for which education is preparing them. These concern the role of consumer, the role of traffic participant, and the role of citizen in a democratic constitutional state. Knowledge about and insight in important values and standards, and knowing how to act accordingly, are pre-conditions for coexistence. Respect and tolerance are forms of these.

When learning about the ways in which people organise their environment, economic, political, cultural, technological, and social aspects play an important part. These concern matters that are of importance to the giving of meaning to existence, to sustainable development, to (food) safety and health, and to technological achievements.

Orientation on nature includes ourselves, animals, plants, and natural phenomena. Orientation on the world includes the creation of a world view in terms of space and time. Area by area and using map skills, pupils develop a geographic world view.

- 80 They develop a historic world view. This means they have knowledge of historic events in parts of the world and of chronology. Pupils learn to continually update their world view (about themselves and the world) by means of current topics. Wherever possible, educational content about people, nature and the world are

presented in coherence. This promotes the pupils' understanding and contributes to a reduction of the overloadedness of the educational programme. Contents from other learning areas are applied to 'personal and world orientation'. For example the reading and writing of texts (reading comprehension), the measuring and processing of information in tables, timelines, graphs, etc. (maths/arithmetic), and the use of images and expressive material (art education). After all, education is particularly aimed at giving pupils insight into meaning and coherence.

Core objectives

Social studies

- 34 The pupils learn to care for their own physical and psycho-logical health and that of others.
- 35 The pupils learn to behave in a self-sufficient manner - socially, in traffic situations, and as a consumer.
- 36 The pupils learn about the essentials of Dutch and European politics and citizen's duties.
- 37 The pupils learn to behave from a sense of respect for generally accepted standards and values
- 38 The pupils learn essentials of religious movements that play an important part in the Dutch pluralistic society, and they learn to respect people's differences of opinion.
- 39 The pupils learn to handle the environment with care.

Nature and technology

- 40 The pupils learn to distinguish and name many common plants and animals in their own environment and the way they function.
- 41 The pupils learn about the makeup of plants, animals and humans and about the form and function of their parts.
- 42 The pupils learn to research materials and physical phenomena, including light, sound, electricity, power, magnetism, and temperature.
- 43 The pupils learn to describe the weather and climates in terms of temperature, precipitation, and wind.
- 44 Concerning products from their own environment, the pupils learn to find connections between form, material use, and the way things work.
- 45 The pupils learn to design, realise and evaluate solutions for technical problems.
- 46 The pupils learn that the position of the earth in relation to the sun causes the differences between seasons and night and day.

Space

- 47 The pupils learn to compare the spatial organisation of their own environment with other environments in the Netherlands and abroad, from the perspectives of landscape, living, working, government, traffic, recreation, welfare, culture, and religion. Attention is at least given to two member states of the European Union and two countries that became a member in 2004, to the United States, and to a country in Asia, one in Africa, and one in South-America.
- 48 Children learn about the measures that are taken/ have been taken in the Netherlands in order to enable living in areas threatened by water.
- 49 The pupils learn about global spatial spread of population densities and religions, about climates, energy sources and natural landscapes such as volcanoes, deserts, tropical rain-forests, high mountain ranges, and rivers.
- 50 The pupils learn to handle maps and atlas, command the basic topography of the Netherlands, Europe and the rest of the world, and develop an up-to-date geographic view of the world.

Time

- 51 The pupils learn to use simple historic sources and learn to handle time indications and arrangements.
- 52 The pupils learn about the characteristic aspects of the following eras: hunters and farmers; Greeks and Romans; monks and knights; cities and states; explorers and reformers; kings and regents; revolutions and periwigs; commoners and steam engines; the World Wars and the Holocaust; television and the computer.
- 53 The pupils learn about important historic persons and events from Dutch history and are able to connect these with examples from world history.

ART EDUCATION

Characteristics

Art education helps children become acquainted with the artistic and cultural aspects of their world. This domain is especially concerned with those aspects of cultural heritage that people have used during the course of time to give form and meaning to their existence.

- 82 Another thing art education is concerned with is the acquisition of some knowledge of the present-day artistic and cultural diversity. This takes place both in school and via regular interaction with the outside world. Through art education, children learn to open their minds: they observe paintings and sculptures, they listen to music, they enjoy language and movement. Art education also encourages

them to appreciate cultural and artistic works of expression in the world around them. Furthermore, they learn to express themselves, using the means linked to the artistic domain: They learn to investigate the expressive possibilities of various materials by means of aspects such as colour, form, space, texture and composition; they make drawings and three-dimensional works; they learn songs and use rhythmic instruments to support their singing; they play and move.

Wherever possible, subjects are used that are linked to those in other learning areas. This way, education becomes more cohesive and therefore more meaningful for pupils. But above all, the authentic contribution made by art education is to stimulate children in their development.

Core objectives

- 54 The pupils learn to use images, language, music, games and movement to express their feelings and experiences and to communicate with.
- 55 The pupils learn to reflect upon their own work and the work of others.
- 56 The pupils acquire knowledge about and learn to appreciate aspects of cultural heritage.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Characteristics

Children love to move and move around a lot. Just watch how toddlers behave in the playground during playtime. An important goal of this learning area is to maintain this active life-style. To achieve this, children learn to participate in a wide range of exercise activities during physical education lessons, in order to build up a broad 'movement repertoire'.

This repertoire includes motor aspects as well as social skills.

During attractive exercise situations, pupils learn about the principal aspects of the most important forms of exercise and sports. These include movements such as balancing, jumping, climbing, swinging, tumbling, running, and moving to music. Also included are sports and games, such as playing tag, goal games, throwing games, juggling, and romping games. From this programme, children will also be able to find their way in the out-of-school exercising and sports culture and the more seasonal activities.

Most exercise and sports activities are participated in as a group, which makes it necessary to learn about the rules that apply, how to abide by them, and who plays which part. In addition, it is necessary to learn to help each other, watch over each other's safety, respect each other's possibilities, and explore one's own possibilities. Exercising is and should be fun. Fun is essential in order to continue to participate in exercising activities.

Core objectives

- 57 The pupils learn to participate in a responsible way in the surrounding exercise culture and learn to experience and perform the main principles of the most important sports and exercise forms.
- 58 In collaboration with others, the pupils learn to participate in exercise activities in a respectful way, agree on regulations thereof, evaluate their own exercise possibilities and take these into account when participating in activities.

8.3 Core objectives secondary education

Core objectives for the lower school in secondary education

Dutch

The first ten core objectives are particularly aimed at the communicative function of the Dutch language and assign an important role to strategic skills. In addition, attention is given to cultural and literary aspects (core objectives 2 and 8).

Core objectives

- 1 The pupil learns to express himself comprehensibly, both orally and in writing.
- 2 The pupil learns to adhere to conventions (spelling, grammar, use of words) and learns to appreciate the significance of these conventions.
- 3 The pupil learns to use strategies to expand his vocabulary.
- 4 The pupil learns to use strategies to acquire information from spoken and written texts.
- 5 The pupil learns to find, arrange and assess information in written and digital sources, for himself and others.
- 6 The pupil learns to participate in meetings, planning and group discussions.
- 7 The pupil learns to give oral presentations.
- 8 The pupil learns to read stories, poems and informative texts that are close to his sphere of interest and that help expand his perception of the environment.
- 9 The pupil learns to structurally prepare and participate in language activities, such as speaking, listening, writing and reading.
- 10 The pupil learns to reflect upon the way he carries out his language activities and, based upon these and the reactions by others, learns to draw conclusions in order to carry out new language activities.

English

The eight core objectives for the subject of English language are also particularly aimed at the communicative function. The emphasis lies on English as a world language. Especially the core objectives 11, 14, 15, 16 and 17 tie in with the European Framework of Reference [Council of Europe (1998), *Modern languages; Learning, teaching, assessment. A Common European Framework of Reference* (pp. 131-135) Strass-bourg: Council of Europe]. Depending on the pupil population, the school can orientate itself on the result descriptions of the cells in A1, A2 and B1 in the Framework of Reference.

No core objectives have been formulated for other modern foreign languages - in particular the German language and the French language - which, next to the English language, are compulsory for the learning paths on the basis of the new Articles 21 and 22 of the Inrichtingsbesluit WVO (the Dutch Secondary Education Organisation of Teaching Decree). However, schools may use the core objectives for English as a guideline for education in other modern foreign languages, by substituting the word 'English', wherever it occurs, for the name of the other modern foreign language concerned.

Core objectives

- 11 The pupil learns to increasingly familiarise himself with the sound of the English language by listening frequently to spoken and sung texts.
- 12 The pupil learns to use strategies to expand his English vocabulary.
- 13 The pupil learns to use strategies to acquire information from spoken and written English texts.
- 14 The pupil learns to find, arrange and assess information in written and digital sources in English, for himself and others.
- 15 The pupil learns to give others an impression of his every-day life in colloquial speech.
- 16 The pupil learns to conduct standard conversations in order to purchase something, seek information, or ask for help.
- 17 The pupil learns to maintain informal contacts in English by email, letter and chat.
- 18 The pupil learns about the role of English in different types of international contacts.

Mathematics and arithmetic

There are nine core objectives pertaining to mathematics and arithmetic. To some extent, schools are at liberty to develop these according to their different

ideologies and learning styles. These core objectives primarily concern the application of (elementary) arithmetic skills and maths both within and outside of the educational programme, both in the lower school and the senior years of secondary education (including the third year of havo and vwo). Systematic attention in the educational programme for (elementary) arithmetic skills is of importance to realise continuing learning lines from primary education, via secondary education, to intermediate vocational education and higher education.

Core objectives

- 19 The pupil learns to use appropriate mathematical language to structure his own thoughts and to explain the matter to others, and learns to understand the mathematical language of others. Core objectives for the lower school in secondary education
- 20 Independently as well as together with others, the pupil learns to recognise maths in practical situations and use it to solve problems.
- 21 The pupil learns to set up mathematical argumentation and distinguish it from opinions and allegations, and learns to give and receive criticism while respecting other people's ways of thinking.
- 22 The pupil learns to understand the structure and coherence of positive and negative numbers, decimal numbers, fractions, percentages and proportions, and learns to use these in meaningful and practical situations.
- 23 The pupil learns to calculate exactly and by estimation and reason on the basis of insight, accurately, in the correct order of magnitude, and using margins that are appropriate to the particular situation.
- 24 The pupil learns to measure, learns to understand the structure and coherence of the metric system, and learns to calculate using measures and quantities that are common in relevant applications.
- 25 The pupil learns to use informal notations, schematic images, tables, diagrams, and formulas in order to get a grip on the relationships between quantities and variables.
- 26 The pupil learns to work with forms and structures in two as well as three dimensions, learns to create images of these and interpret them, and learns to calculate and reason using their characteristics and measurements.
- 27 The pupil learns to systematically describe, structure and visualise data, and learns to critically assess data, representations and conclusions.

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Man and nature

The next eight core objectives cover a large area regarding content, concerning physical, technological and care-related subjects. These core objectives describe in

global terms what is concerned: an investigative attitude towards nature, recognising relationships and interactions, linking of theories and models to practical work and observation, promoting sustainability. The core objectives start with the asking of questions (28, 31) and continue via the approach of key concepts (29, 30) to those in which more specific subjects and skills are addressed (32 t/m 35).

Core objectives

28. The pupil learns to turn questions about physical, techno-logical and care-related subjects into research questions, carry out research about such subjects, and give a presentation of the results.
29. The pupil learns to acquire knowledge about and insight into key concepts in living and non-living nature, and learns to relate these key concepts to situations from everyday life.
30. The pupil learns that humans, animals and plants are interrelated with each other and their environment, and that technological and physical applications may influence both positively and negatively the sustainable quality of the environment.
31. In various ways, for example by carrying out practical work, the pupil learns to acquire knowledge about and insight into processes in living and non-living nature and their relationships with the environment.
32. The pupil learns to work with theories and models by carrying out research into physical and chemical phenomena, such as electricity, sound, light, movement, energy and matter.
33. By carrying out research, the pupil learns to acquire knowledge about technical products and systems that are relevant to him, and learns to assess this knowledge, and design and make a technical product in a structured manner.
34. The pupil learns to understand the essentials about build and function of the human body, link these to the promotion of physical and emotional health, and learns to take his own responsibility in this.
35. The pupil learns about care and learns to care for himself, for others and for his environment, and learns how to positively influence his own safety and that of others in different living situations (living, learning, working, going out, traffic).

Man and society

In the twelve core objectives for the part Man and society, a somewhat similar structure to the core objectives for Man and nature is observed: asking questions and doing research (36, 39), placing phenomena in time and space (37, 38), using sources (40, 41, 42), and the organisation of themes concerning content (42 - 47) from nearby and small-scale to faraway and large-scale. Different core objectives

concretise the schools' obligation to teach good citizenship. These especially concern the core objectives 43 and 44, while other core objectives, including 6, 35, 36 and 56, also touch on the subject.

Core objectives

36 The pupil learns to ask meaningful questions about social issues and phenomena, take a substantiated point of view concerning these, defend it, and deal with criticism in a respectful way.

37 The pupil learns to use a framework of ten periods to correctly place events, developments, and persons. The pupil learns about the characteristic aspects of the following eras:

- era of hunters and farmers (prehistory up to 3000 BC);
- era of the Greeks and Romans (3000 BC - 500 AD);
- era of monks and knights (500 - 1000 AD);
- era of cities and states (1000 - 1500 AD);
- era of explorers and reformers (1500 - 1600 AD);
- era of kings and regents (1600 - 1700 AD);
- era of revolutions and periwigs (1700 - 1800 AD);
- era of commoners and steam engines (1800 - 1900 AD);
- era of the World Wars (1900 - 1950 AD); and
- the television and computer age (1950 AD - today).

The pupil will at least learn to connect events and developments in the twentieth century (including the World Wars and the Holocaust) and present-day developments.

38 The pupil learns to use an up-to-date view of his own environment, the Netherlands, Europe, and the world, in order to correctly place phenomena and developments in their environment.

39. The pupil learns to carry out a simple research into a current social phenomenon and give a presentation of the results of it.

40 The pupil learns to use historic sources to form a picture of an era or find answers to questions and learns to include his own cultural-historic environment in this as well.

41 The pupil learns to use the atlas as a source of information, learns to read and analyse maps in order to orient himself, to form an image of an area, or to find answers to questions.

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42 From his own experience and in his own environment, the pupil learns to recognise effects caused by choices made in the area of work and care, living and recreation, consuming and budgeting, traffic and the environment.

- 43 The pupil learns about agreements, differences and changes in culture and religion in the Netherlands, learns to connect his or her own, as well as someone else's lifestyle with these, and learns that respect for each other's views and lifestyles will enhance society.
- 44 The pupil learns the essentials of the way the Dutch political system operates as a democracy, and learns how people may be involved in political processes in different ways.
- 45 The pupil learns to understand the meaning of European collaboration and the European Union to him or herself, to the Netherlands, and to the world.
- 46 The pupil learns about the distribution of wealth and poverty in the world, to recognise its implication on the population and the environment, and to connect these to (his own) life in the Netherlands.
- 47 The pupil learns to place current tensions and conflicts in the world against their backgrounds and, while doing so, learns to recognise their effects upon individuals and society (nationally, internationally and on a European scale), the tremendous interdependence that exists in the world, the importance of human rights, and the significance of international collaboration.

Art and culture

The five core objectives for the part of art and culture emphasise the similarities among the different artistic disciplines. The purpose is to broadly orientate on art and culture. These core objectives also indicate a variation in activities: making and presenting own work, experiencing and placing the work of others, reporting activities, and reflecting own and other people's work.

Core objectives

- 48 By using elementary skills, the pupil learns to research and apply the power of expression of different artistic disciplines, in order to express his own feelings, record experiences, shape his imagination, and realise communication.
- 49 The pupil learns to present his own artistic work, individually or as a part of a group, to third parties.
- 50 On the basis of some background knowledge, the pupil learns to look at the visual arts, listen to music, and watch and listen to theatre, dance and film performances.
- 51 Using visual and auditive means, the pupil learns to report about his participation in artistic activities, as a spectator or participant.
- 52 The pupil learn to reflect upon his own work and the work of others, including artists, orally or in writing.

Physical education and sports

The six core objectives for the part physical education and sports concern a broad orientation on different types of exercise activities and the exploration and expansion of the pupils' own possibilities (53 - 55). Because sports and exercise require definite collaborative skills, separate core objectives have been included for these (56 and 57). The final core objective (58) emphasises the explicit relationship with health and wellbeing. Physical education, particularly the part comprising practical exercise activities, takes place around the school year and to such extent that the qualitative and variational requirements concerning content, as laid down in these core objectives, are met.

Core objectives

- 53 In view of out-of-school participation, the pupil learns to familiarise himself in a practical way with many different exercise activities in a varied range of areas, including games, gymnastics, athletics, dancing to music, defence sports, and current developments in exercise culture, and to explore his own possibilities in these.
- 54 Through challenging exercise situations, the pupil learns to expand his movement repertoire.
- 55 The pupil learns to apply the main principles of the exercise activities on his own level.
- 56 During exercise activities, the pupil learns to be sportive, take the possibilities and preferences of others into consideration, and have respect for and care for each other.
- 57 The pupil learns to fulfil simple regulating tasks that enable individual and collaborational practice of exercise activities.
- 58 By participating in practical exercise activities, the pupil learns to acquaint himself with and experience the value of exercise for health and wellbeing.

Frisian language and culture

Fryslân is a bilingual province, in which both the Dutch language and the Frisian language take up an important position. Many pupils in Fryslân speak Frisian; most pupils, according to themselves, understand the Frisian language reasonably to quite well. They experience the bilingual culture of their province on a daily basis.

- 90 Pupils are aware of the bilingual nature of their living environment and also learn about the differences and similarities with situations in the Netherlands and abroad. The language is not a separate phenomenon, but - especially in Fryslân - is directly linked to the culture and history of the province. Pupils gain more insight into the specific characteristics of the Frisian language and culture and its

background, so that they become better participants of the Frisian culture. Based on Article 11e of the Dutch Secondary Education Organisation of Teaching Decree (WVO), core objectives have been formulated for the Frisian language and culture, which, in the province of Fryslân, have the same status as the general core objectives based on Article 11a of the WVO. These distinguish core objectives that are compulsory for all pupils (1 - 3) and core objectives that have been set up differently for pupils who speak Frisian as a second language (4a - 6a) and those who are native speakers of Frisian (4b - 6b).

Participant in a bilingual culture

Core objectives

- 1 The pupil learns to recognise the significance of the bilingual Frisian culture for everyday life and learns to compare it to situations in the rest of the Netherlands and abroad.
- 2 From examples, the pupil learns to understand the specific characteristics of the Frisian culture and link these to their historical backgrounds.
- 3 From examples, the pupil learns to recognise the importance of Frisian cultural expressions (texts, music, drama, film, TV, and radio) and to put the meaning he gives to them into words.

For pupils with Frisian as a second language

Core objectives

- 4a By means of contexts that are meaningful to him, the pupil learns to build up a Frisian vocabulary by applying different strategies.
- 5a On the basis of questions about subjects that are within his sphere of interest, the pupil learns to find and organise information from written and digital Frisian sources.
- 6a The pupil learns to conduct informal conversations in Frisian with peers about subjects from everyday life.

For pupils who are native speakers of the Frisian language

Core objectives

- 4b The pupil learns to express himself comprehensibly, both orally and in writing, and observe conventions that apply to the Frisian language (spelling, grammar, use of words).

- 5b The pupil learns to discover the importance of communication according to current Frisian language rules in formal situations (meetings, planning, discussions).
- 6b The pupil learns to choose and read Frisian stories, poems and informative texts that are close to his sphere of interest and that help expand his perception of the environment.

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