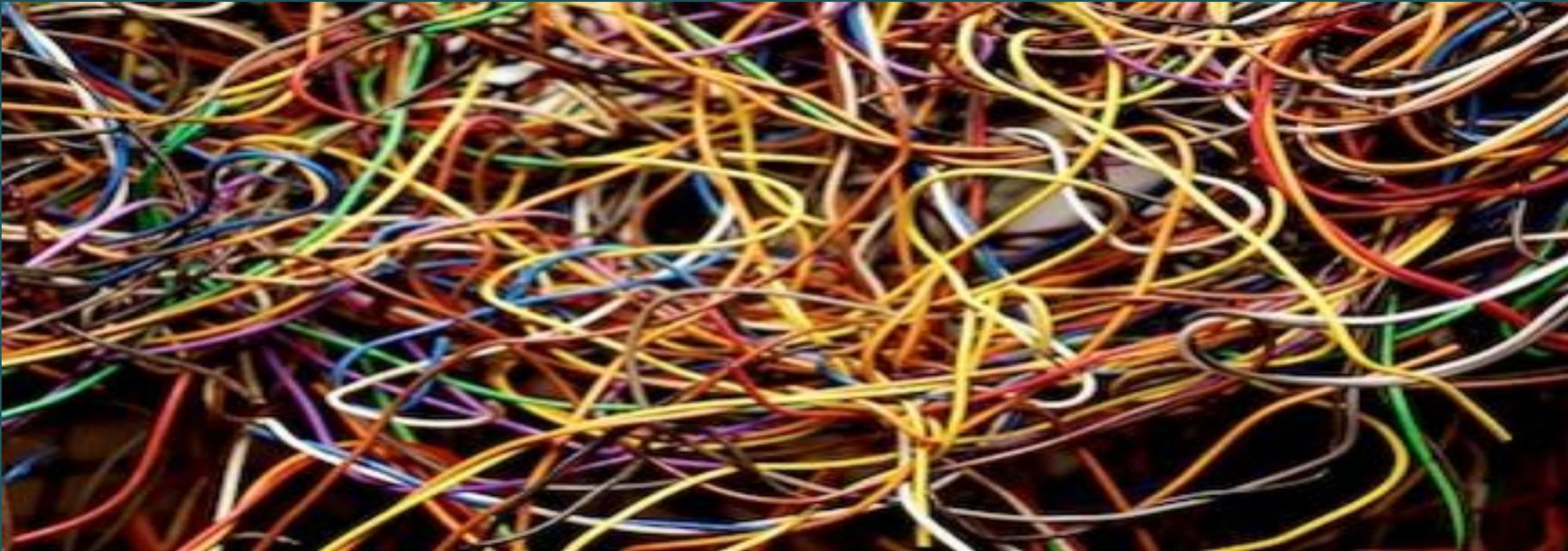


# Public Involvement in Curriculum Reform in Upper Secondary Education



JAN VAN DEN AKKER

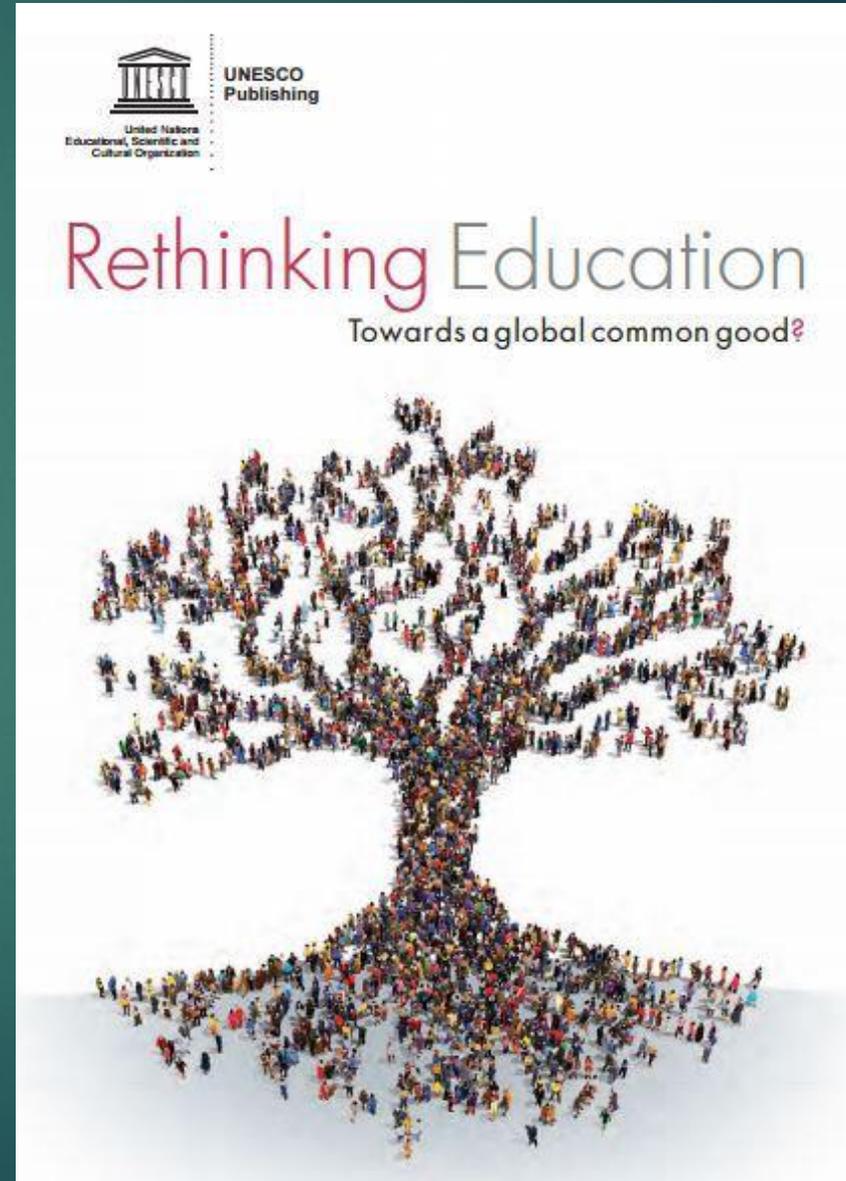
DUBLIN, 20 FEBRUARY, 2018

# Outline

- ▶ Recent/ongoing process of curriculum renewal in the Netherlands, with special attention to engaging wider public in debate
- ▶ Focus on specific position of upper secondary education in curriculum change
- ▶ Tentative lessons learned

Global  
curriculum  
discourse  
alive and kicking

*Quality of Education*  
prominent in  
*Sustainable*  
*Development*  
*Goals*



# Prototype of a National Curriculum Framework



# Also:

- ▶ cf. *The Future of Education and Skills 2030* (OECD)
- ▶ Lots of mutual trend watching between nations
- ▶ Careful with transfer of experiences and examples

# The Dutch curriculum landscape





SPECIAL EDITION VAN LRPLN

2015 - 1

# CRRCLM

MAGAZINE OVER ONDERWIJS & CURRICULUMONTWIKKELING

#ONDERWIJS2032

KOERSEN NAAR DE TOEKOMST

AAN DE SLAG MET 21E EEUWSE VAARDIGHEDEN

DE RUST IS TE DANKEN AAN DE SFEER IN HET GEBOUW

RICHTING GEVEN AAN HET CURRICULUMGESPREK

State Secretary  
of Education,  
Sander Dekker (2015):

“We need clarity”

Sander Dekker

‘We hebben helderheid nodig’

# Need for a curriculum debate

- ▶ More attention to the curriculum as a key factor in improving quality, especially relevance, of teaching and learning:
  - ▶ Assessment-driven approaches are increasingly challenged
  - ▶ Call for less *ad hoc* policy and fragmentation
- ▶ Need for a societal vision on education to offer inspiration and sense of direction for all participants in education
- ▶ **Education2032** (<http://onsonderwijs2032.nl/advies/>)
  - ▶ Including English version



# Historical of decentral curriculum policy

- ▶ For over 400 years: Restraints in regulation regarding curriculum issues
- ▶ School autonomy (“Freedom of education”) formally dates back to a constitution legislated in 1848



# Curriculum challenges

- ▶ No coherent curriculum for 4-18
- ▶ Outdated, overloaded, fragmented
- ▶ Too vague (4-15) or too detailed (15-18)
- ▶ Unclear about relation between:
  - ▶ Obligated
  - ▶ Optional
  - ▶ Possible
- ▶ ***No joint overall vision, rationale, sense of direction***

# Platform Onderwijs2032

onsonderwijs2032



# In Search of a Vision

- ▶ In 2015: national brainstorm, debate
- ▶ Broad and interactive consultation about draft vision document
- ▶ January 2016: final proposal
- ▶ Policy intention for 2016-2017: reformulation of curriculum frameworks for primary and secondary education (by national design team)
- ▶ Plus: stimulation of curriculum discourse and initiatives by schools and teachers

# About the trajectory of the debate

- ▶ Actual start in late 2014 (after two years of preparatory/exploratory activities and efforts to mobilize stakeholder organizations)
- ▶ November 2014: start of national brainstorm by Secretary of Education
- ▶ February 2015: 'Platform' (advisory committee) established
- ▶ October 2015: mainlines of draft report ➤ consultation
- ▶ January 2016: publication of final report: *Ons onderwijs2032 – Advisory Report*.
- ▶ Rest of 2016: seeking feedback and support

# About the consultation process

- ▶ The Platform had to **stimulate and monitor** dialogue and debate, and try to distill a vision
- ▶ Intensive use of **internet** (through a dedicate, interactive website) and social media
- ▶ An **interim report** with main preliminary conclusions and recommendations was published in October 2015 for a **consultative round of feedback**. The **final report** was published in January 2016
- ▶ Also various **international activities**:
  - ▶ some background papers on curriculum renewal were delivered by the OECD
  - ▶ various short **study visits** (by small, heterogeneously composed delegations) were organized to other countries (e.g. Scotland, Estonia, Finland, Norway, Singapore, British Columbia) to seek inspiration.

# Participation (numbers) in debate

- ▶ About 500 papers, reports, manifestos and the like
- ▶ About 200 meetings
- ▶ About 19000 online contributions (to website, through tweets, via Facebook)
- ▶ 59 brainstorm sessions with over 1000 pupils
- ▶ About 45000 visitors to website

# Limitations in debate

- ▶ Contributions came from all intended audiences, although participation from practitioners were more limited than hoped for.
- ▶ The Platform itself did not structure and organize many meetings; instead it aimed at building on bottom-up initiatives of others.
- ▶ Too many short 'soundbite' statements, often promoting very specific issues, without depth (or nuance)
- ▶ Not enough focus on substance (too many side steps)
- ▶ Little interaction; no structured feedback
- ▶ Quality/productivity debate/discussion??

# Major conclusion of Platform: seeking for renewed balance

- ▶ Learning for further studies and work (qualification): *less is more*
- ▶ Preparing for participation in society (socialization): *more attention*
- ▶ Personal development: *more emphasis*

# Core components

- ▶ Mother tongue
- ▶ English
- ▶ Mathematics
- ▶ Broad knowledge areas
  - ▶ Men and Society
  - ▶ Nature and Technology
  - ▶ Language and Culture
- ▶ Digital Literacy
- ▶ Citizenship
- ▶ Cross-curricular skills (cf 21st Century Skills)

# Other wishes for future-oriented curriculum

- ▶ More **coherence** (horizontal and vertical)
- ▶ **Feasibility** (within school time)
- ▶ Space for **diversity** (for choices of schools, teachers, parents, students)
- ▶ **No detailed, prescriptive 'national curriculum'** with accountability at every corner
- ▶ Also two more process-oriented arguments:
  - ▶ Strengthening **curricular awareness** and active participation by teachers and school leaders in school practices.
  - ▶ Moreover: exploring new approaches to **periodical curriculum revision**, with broad participation by society and school practice (like Finland).

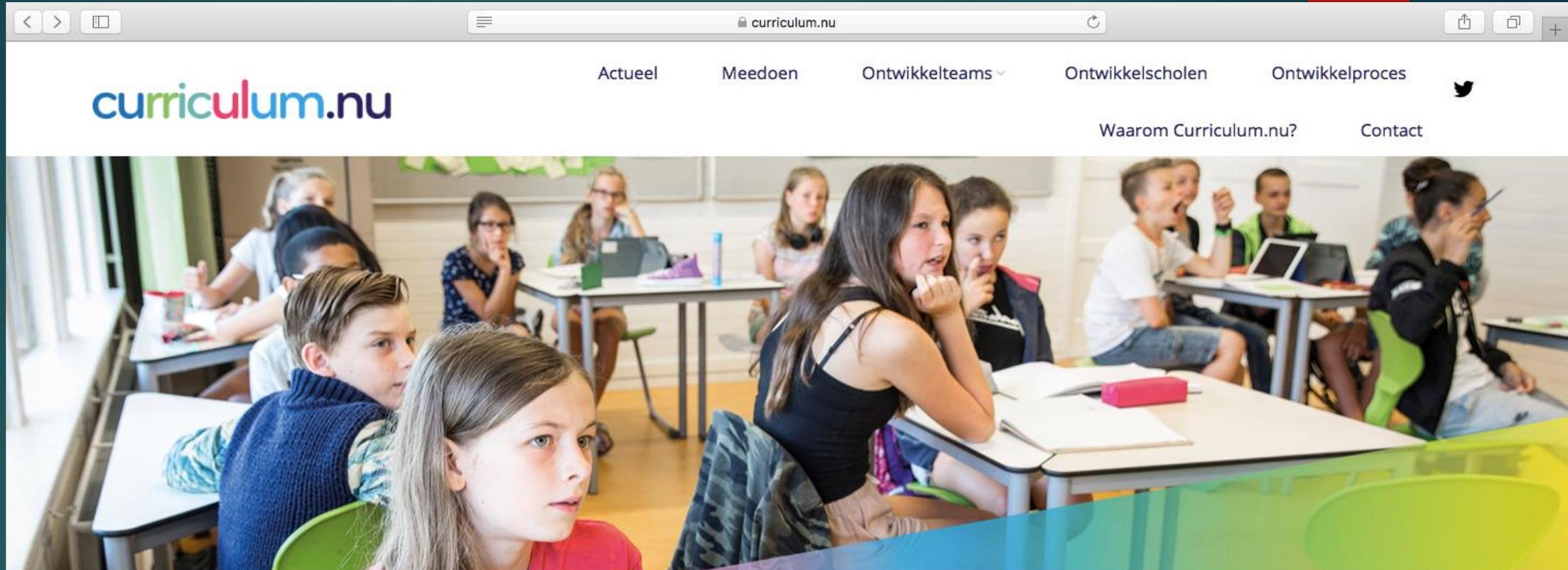
# However:

- ▶ Process interrupted/delayed in Spring 2016
- ▶ Part of teachers' organization strongly objected against:
  - ▶ perceived lack of real consultation and thorough discussion
  - ▶ perceived risks for traditional subjects (notably in upper secondary)
- ▶ New rounds of consultations with teachers
- ▶ Unclear outcomes and uncertain political prospects (elections)
- ▶ Confusion and watering down
- ▶ Momentum?

# Follow-up process

- ▶ Several political stagnations with parliament and with different interest groups of teachers.
- ▶ April 2017: **parliamentary debate** about proposals:
  - ▶ no broad clusters of subjects
  - ▶ no curriculum development for personal development or for cross-curricular skills
  - ▶ even more emphasis to put teachers in the front seat of development work.
- ▶ Onderwijs 2032 ➤ **Curriculum.nu**
- ▶ September 2017: invitations to participate in development teams for curricular 'building blocks'.
- ▶ 2018-2019: **(re)design by nine development teams** for different areas.
- ▶ 2019: discussing the resulting 'building blocks' with **parliament**, leading to decisions about follow-up actions.
- ▶ 2020-2021: updating of curriculum framework
- ▶ ??? Implementation

# INVITATION TO TEACHERS

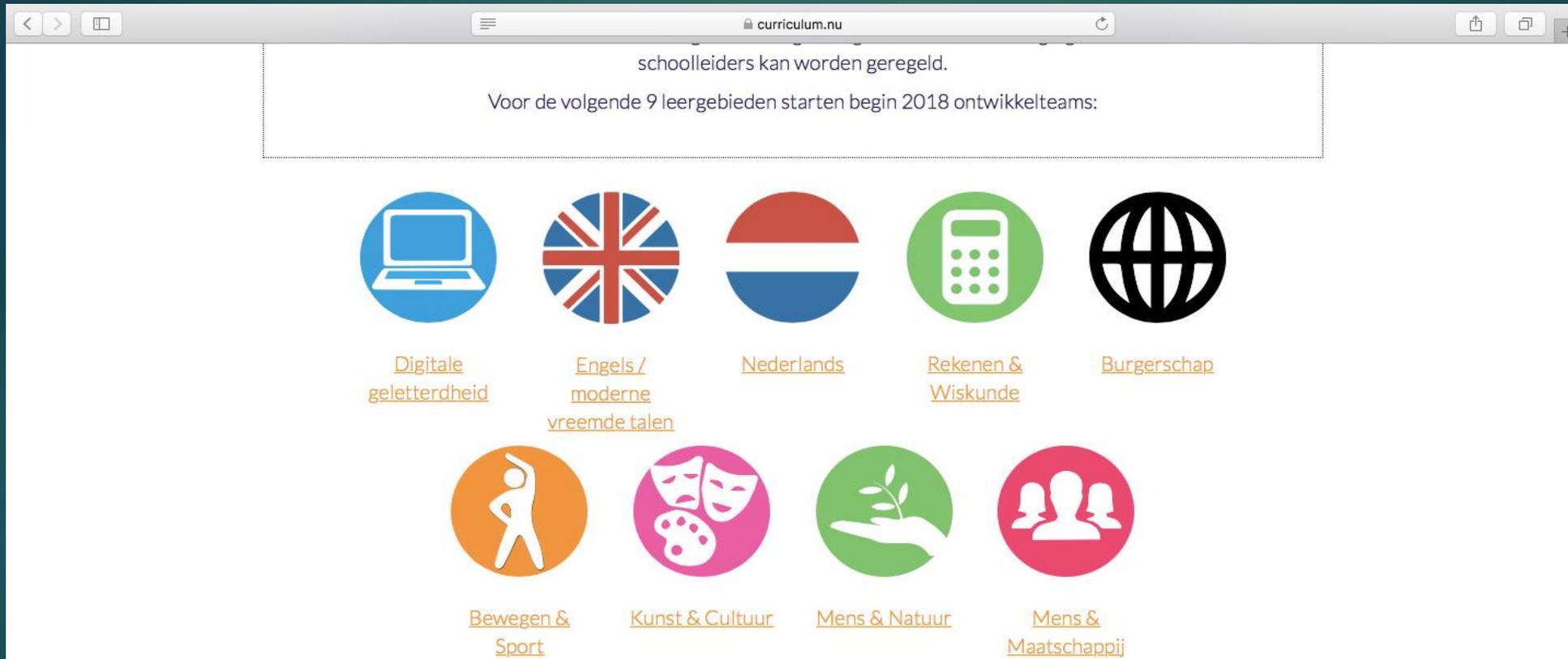


## Werk mee aan het onderwijs van morgen

Dit jaar buigen 125 leraren, 18 schoolleiders en ruim 80 scholen zich over de vraag wat leerlingen in het primair en voortgezet onderwijs moeten kennen en kunnen. Voor negen leergebieden. Met de opbrengst van dit ontwikkelproces zullen kerndoelen en eindtermen worden geactualiseerd. Vrijdag 15 december kwamen de negen ontwikkelteams voor het eerst bij elkaar om kennis te maken. Lees [hier](#) meer over de ontwikkelteams. De onwikkelscholen worden medio februari bekend gemaakt.

Op de ontwikkelteampagina's (klik op de icoontjes onderaan deze pagina) kun je alvast kennismaken met de leden van de ontwikkelteams. Ook kan je hier komend jaar lezen over de ervaringen en opbrengsten van de ontwikkelteams. Wil je meedenken en reflecteren op de tussenresultaten van de ontwikkelteams? Houd dan onze website in de gaten of meld je

# Nine development teams



schoolleiders kan worden geregeld.  
Voor de volgende 9 leergebieden starten begin 2018 ontwikkelteams:

-  [Digitale geletterdheid](#)
-  [Engels / moderne vreemde talen](#)
-  [Nederlands](#)
-  [Rekenen & Wiskunde](#)
-  [Burgerschap](#)
-  [Bewegen & Sport](#)
-  [Kunst & Cultuur](#)
-  [Mens & Natuur](#)
-  [Mens & Maatschappij](#)



# Transition from Onderwijs 2032 to Curriculum.nu is problematic

- ▶ No political agreement (little on substance, much about process)
- ▶ No overarching vision (➤ how to justify later choices?)
- ▶ Lots of struggle about organisation (who is calling the shots?)
- ▶ '*Teachers in the lead*' (how realistic for national frameworks?)
- ▶ Intended outcomes (building blocks?) and continuation are still vague

# Special position of upper secondary education

- ▶ General (academic) vs Vocational direction (50/50)
- ▶ Contested sector in past reform efforts (about 20 years ago)
- ▶ Ambiguity whether to include in current curriculum renewal
- ▶ Traditionally strong dominance of final (central) exams
  - 'exam program' = 'curriculum'
- ▶ Subject specific approaches of curriculum design
- ▶ Clustering in four 'profiles, but doubts about relevance
- ▶ Ambiguous attitude of higher education
- ▶ Parental sentiments ('nostalgic' curriculum)

# Familiar warning

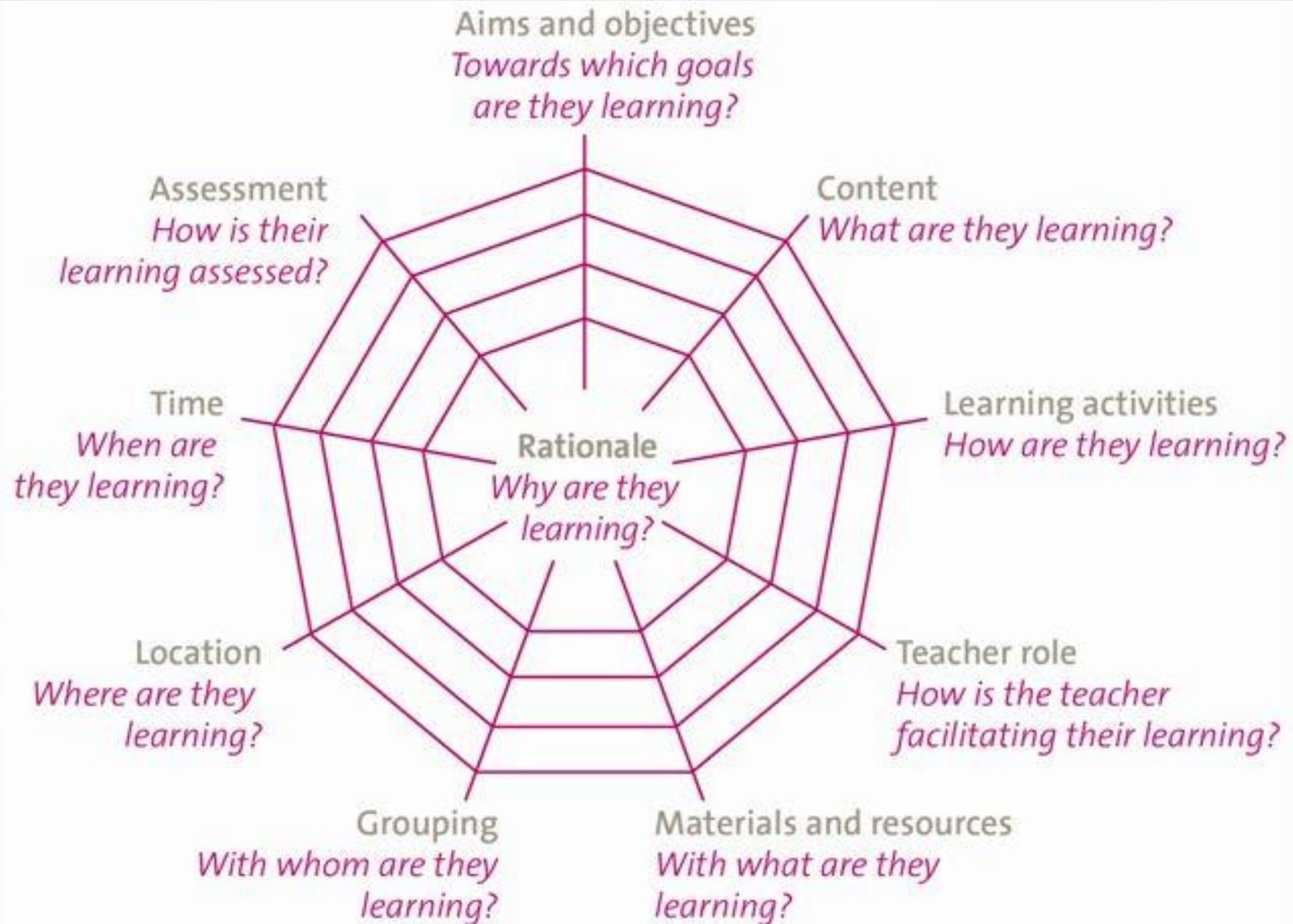
***“Change in education is easy to propose,  
hard to (agree upon and design/develop  
and) implement, and extraordinarily  
difficult to sustain”***

Hargreaves, A. & Fink, D. (2006). Sustainable leadership.  
San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

And curriculum change is the hardest of all...



# CURRICULAR SPIDERS' WEB (multiple components)



# Every chain as strong as weakest element

- ▶ All components eventually addressed when changing curriculum
- ▶ No hierarchy between many components, but rationale/vision (broad purposes of learning and teaching) as binding element
- ▶ Multiple entry points or priorities possible
- ▶ Let schools and teachers explore whole spiders' web: where are we and what do we want to address?

# Curriculum deliberation



# LESSONS LEARNED

- ▶ Start with careful problem & context analysis, with involvement of all stakeholders, stimulating commitment later on during debates and decision making.
- ▶ Investing in broad consensus, ownership and support
- ▶ Clarity and simplicity of mission
- ▶ Involving and supporting teachers in elaborating frameworks
- ▶ Strive after combination of participatory approaches and utilization of specific curriculum expertise on substance and design
- ▶ Capacity building of many actors (e.g. textbooks publishers, inspectorate, teacher education)

# Lessons (continued)

- ▶ Combining top-down, bottom-up, plus from the middle
- ▶ Long term (continuous, evolutionary) process
- ▶ Implementation philosophy: not high fidelity, but mutual adaptation, enactment, and encouragement
- ▶ Avoid hyper-active management and control; trust and confidence in schools & teachers
- ▶ Let assessment follow curriculum
- ▶ Continuous monitoring, evaluation, research
- ▶ Predictability, standardization and continuity of monitoring and (re)design/renewal of curriculum

# Overall reflections

- ▶ Coherent and integral (re)design of national curriculum frameworks(s) is, besides a demanding and substantive technical-professional task, even more complex and challenging because of the strong **socio-political nature** of the enterprise
- ▶ Don't forget: The real and ultimate challenge for curriculum renewal is, of course, that **students** get eventually engaged in (more) relevant and (more) effective learning experiences
- ▶ It is a long way from changing curriculum frameworks (essentially documents) into such living, meaningful practices in a wide variety of school contexts...
- ▶ *Let Larry be wrong, for once!*

# Larry Cuban (during many years) about educational reform

*Like storms on the ocean:*

*'The surface is agitated and turbulent, while the ocean floor is calm and serene (if a bit murky). Policy churns dramatically, creating the appearance of major changes...while deep below the surface, life goes on largely uninterrupted'.*

The Irish will do better!



*Go raibh maith agat go mór!*

▶ YOUR QUESTIONS?

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