

# Teachers as curriculum-makers: the case of citizenship education in Dutch schools

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Due to socio-political issues in Dutch society, citizenship education (CE) became obligatory by law in the Netherlands in 2006. Schools were to decide on their local CE curriculum. This contribution intends to open up the black box of school-based curriculum-making efforts for CE. It reports on a four-year study in four schools for secondary education. In each school, teachers designed (parts of) their CE curriculum with guidance during weekly coaching sessions. The central question is, what are the professional experiences and results of teachers who are involved in guided school-based CE curriculum-making? The qualitative data set comprised of interview and focus group data as well as artefacts such as CE-activities designed by teachers. Findings show teachers' preference for broad and integrated approaches to CE, and that teachers needed guidance not only to improve their CE-knowledge and design abilities, but also to increase their socio-political skills for school-wide implementation. These results are discussed in view of the current tendency in the Netherlands to define CE in a more centralised and content-specific manner and in doing so limiting the space for teachers as curriculum-makers.

**Keywords:** teachers' curriculum-making; school-based curriculum development; curriculum policy; citizenship education; secondary school teachers

## Introduction

In order to increase our understanding of what it takes for teachers to be engaged in citizenship education (CE) curriculum-making in their secondary schools, this study examines the case of the Netherlands. In 2006, CE became legally obligatory in primary and secondary education. This development is related to socio-cultural issues in Dutch society such as decreasing social solidarity, growing individualism, mounting tensions between ethnic-cultural groups and increasing numbers of populist and anti-establishment political parties. The focus of CE was on socio-cultural integration, democracy and active participation in school, community and political life. The introduction of CE for all age groups was meant as an addition to and specification of the existing attention paid to social and societal competences in school culture, in school subjects in general and in social studies more specifically.

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Curriculum policy regarding the introduction of CE reflected a high degree of freedom in schools' and teachers' curriculum design, meaning that the government refrained from precise prescription of the place of CE in the school curriculum, and was reserved in the prescription of the goals, content, pedagogical approaches and assessment modes regarding CE. This policy is in keeping with the long-standing statutory Dutch tradition of 'freedom of education' regarding religious and moral goals and pedagogical approaches. Instead of prescription, the policy focus has been on trusting the professional freedom and capacities of schools and teachers to engage in curriculum renewal on moral and religious aims of education (Hopkins, 2005; Nieveen & Kuiper, 2012; Onderwijsraad, 2012). The freedom granted to schools for the development of CE can be viewed as a policy of tolerance for diversity in ways of upbringing children in Dutch society and consequently different ways of addressing socio-political tensions. At the same time, this CE policy can be seen as passing on the responsibility of addressing socio-political issues in education.

Matching the rather reserved curriculum policy, the only guiding principles given were that schools must formulate a CE vision that covers the official aims, and they must attend to the legal boundaries in the constitution, such as no discrimination and freedom of expression and religion. The introduction of CE was not accompanied by any professional development activities for school leaders, teachers and teacher educators. For schools and teachers, a website was set up containing practical insights and recommendations concerning CE-related aims, activities and pedagogical approaches and offering a supply of exemplary teaching and learning materials and assistance for the design of school-based examinations. All support on the website is organised along three generic CE learning strands: democracy, participation and identity (Bron *et al.*, 2009). In order to help teachers visualise pupils' learning outcomes, an assessment instrument limited to CE-related social tasks in the life of adolescents was developed with government support (Ledoux *et al.*, 2011).

Since 2006, the inspectorate has monitored the implementation of CE annually. In its specific study of CE in 2016 (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2016), the inspectorate acknowledged schools' efforts to offer mainly extra-curricular CE activities. However, it has also reported that schools were not fully succeeding in developing strong teaching and learning practices for CE. The inspectorate found neglect of the systematic integration of CE in the curriculum, a lack of consistency in the aims and pedagogical approaches and a failure to focus on the learning outcomes. According to the same report, CE had been marginalised in some schools. To improve this situation, the inspectorate's suggestions tend towards (a) defining CE in a more integrative and straightforward way and (b) exemplifying and supporting CE by the provision of ready-made teaching and learning materials. The first suggestion in particular implies a dilution of expectations with regard to site-specific, varied and meaningful CE curriculum development. This would mean a swing of the pendulum from a deregulated CE policy that encourages schools to take the lead to a more regulated policy.

Next to the inspectorate, other stakeholders mingled in the debate. For instance, in its 2012 advice, the Education Council suggested limiting CE to a core with a

focus on knowledge about the democratic constitutional state. In accordance with the Dutch tradition of freedom of education, in addition to the core, the Dutch Education Council recommended the provision of space and support for school-specific efforts, especially regarding ‘the development of and the reflection on one’s ideals, norms, values and position in society’ (Onderwijsraad, 2012, p. 14). For the latter recommendation, the council acknowledged that design and implementation support for teachers should be reinforced. The academic contributions to the debate centred on the goals and content of CE. For instance, Peschar *et al.* (2010) have published a non-binding general knowledge base. Biesta (2009), Veugelers (2007) and De Winter (2004) have advocated for a critical democratic approach, and Leeman and Wardekker (2012) have emphasised a culturally inclusive perspective regarding immigration issues. The debate on CE shows different views on aims and content and illuminates the reality that suggestions differ and are sometimes even contradictory regarding the curriculum-making process (school-based and/or more top-down) and the required support (textbooks, examinations and/or professional development of teachers).

The pressure for the Dutch government to take action grew when the results of the ICCS 2016 study showed that, in comparison to their European peers, Dutch students in secondary education have less knowledge of democracy and are less inclined to grant equal rights to men and women and to migrants (Schulz *et al.*, 2018). The ICCS 2016 study also gave insight into the limited expertise of Dutch teachers, who recognised only three out of the eleven CE learning objectives. They focus on knowing basic facts and understanding voting principles and pay little attention to key values and attitudes and participation.

This study intends to open up the black box of teachers’ school-based CE curriculum-making efforts in the Dutch context. The central question is, *What are the professional experiences and resulting CE activities of teachers who are involved in guided school-based CE curriculum-making?* This article first outlines the theoretical framework regarding teachers’ CE curriculum development expertise followed by the design of the study and its main findings and conclusions. The article ends by discussing important issues concerning school-based CE curriculum development by teachers and the implications for future CE policy and teachers’ professional support.

### **Theoretical framework: perspectives on curriculum development expertise**

For more than a decade now, Dutch schools and teachers have had the responsibility of developing their local school-based CE curriculum. Here, curriculum development refers to the intentional process directed at the (re)design and implementation of plans/activities for teaching and learning (Kuiper *et al.*, 2003). Curriculum development processes can be characterised from various analytical angles. In this study, we apply three perspectives introduced by Goodlad *et al.* (1979): the substantive, the professional design and the socio-political perspectives. These three perspectives reveal different kinds of expertise that teachers require when engaging in curriculum-making. This section introduces the three perspectives and their accompanying expertise domains. The three perspectives and the related expertise domains are used as analytical lenses in this study.

### *Substantive perspective*

The substantive perspective highlights the substance or essence of the curriculum choices such as their goals, content and pedagogical approaches. In the context of designing and implementing a broad and meaningful local CE curriculum, teachers need to make several substantive decisions. To this end, they need basic knowledge about general political guidelines for CE, and they must be familiar with possible goals, content and pedagogical approaches. In addition, they need insight into the socio-political issues in Dutch society and in the lives of their students, as well as into their colleagues' views on CE. They also require an overview of school-specific needs, experiences and wishes that can be found in school policy documents, for example.

For the actual design of CE learning activities, teachers need to know and consider the differences in goals, content and pedagogical approaches. Consequently, they must be able to translate this knowledge into local designs.

In the scientific literature, the goal orientations regarding 'a good citizen' vary from adaptive, participative, democratic to social justice-oriented citizenship (Haste, 2004; Veugelers, 2007; Johnson & Morris, 2010; Carretero *et al.*, 2016). Consistency between the orientations, content and pedagogical approaches to CE is necessary. For example, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) have demonstrated that civic participation and the experience of a democratic school culture build on participative citizenship development, whereas the development of critical, social justice-oriented citizenship is highly influenced by critical dialogic reading exercises.

Moreover, teachers need to have a longitudinal overview of the objectives and accompanying content and core experiences of CE that the school offers over the consecutive school years. They also need an understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of presenting CE as an extracurricular activity, as a separate subject or in a whole-school approach, meaning that CE is integrated in subjects, pedagogical approaches and the social and cultural life at schools. According to Solomon *et al.* (2001), such a whole-school approach would be the most effective.

Eventually, Haste (2004), Kelchtermans (2009) and Sachs (2001) emphasised the moral and political professional identity development of teachers themselves in supporting the citizenship identity development of their students.

### *Professional design perspective*

Studying curriculum development efforts from a professional design perspective stresses all the processes needed to analyse, discuss, design, develop, evaluate, improve and implement the CE curriculum.

Teachers who engage in local curriculum development need to take care of curriculum relevance and consistency by aligning the components, such as goals, teacher and student activities and assessment. They need to connect new curricular elaborations with the school population and existing school practices and culture. All of these activities must occur while working on a common direction for CE within the school (cf. Clandinin & Connell, 1992; Van den Akker, 2003; Marsh, 2010). Moreover, from a professional design point of view, inquisitive and

critical-reflective research attitudes and skills are needed, including making time and opportunities to discuss the new design; test the design; discover its relevance, consistency, practicality and effectiveness; and share these experiences and findings with colleagues (Kessels & Plomp, 1999; Gustafson & Branch, 2002; Priestley & Biesta, 2013; Nieveen & Folmer, 2013; Huizinga *et al.*, 2014; Sinnema, 2015; Wermke *et al.*, 2018).

Teachers also need intrapersonal competences including the courage to ask critical questions about the hidden curriculum and the school culture in relation to the aims of the CE curriculum development that are at stake (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Leeman, 2013). These competences also include being self-motivated to contribute to the design of the CE curriculum, able to reflect in and on action, and interested in evaluating the positive and negative results of the design in practice.

### *Socio-political perspective*

The socio-political perspective focuses on all political processes and social interactions that influence the curriculum-making processes within schools.

Teachers who are involved in curriculum development efforts in their schools need to bring related (e.g. micro-political) competences to the table. This perspective understands schools as spaces for the design of meaningful CE and refers to a process of normative professional identity development, including being able to recognise differences in values and political choices, advocate for and reflect on desirable developments and strive for a common and democratic engagement with CE (Schultz, 2003; Van Ewijk & Kunneman, 2013). This democratic engagement includes the will and ability to strive for a democratic school culture and to participate in its development, such as through a process of democratic deliberation on the aims of CE. From a socio-political point of view, teachers also need interpersonal competences. These competences include the dispositions and skills to contribute to good relations with colleagues and school leaders and to involve them in the design and decision-making activities related to the school's general educational aims (Schenke, 2015; Jonker *et al.*, 2016).

### **Research design**

To answer the central question, *What are the professional experiences and resulting CE activities of teachers who are involved in guided school-based CE curriculum-making?* two sub-questions were formulated:

1. What guidance did the teachers receive from the facilitators, and what are the resulting CE activities?
2. How did the teachers experience their professional growth regarding local CE curriculum-making?

To answer these questions, data were collected through a research project concerning the professional development of teachers for the design of CE in secondary education. This practice-based research project was one of the sub-projects in a

wider project on school-based CE development. The other sub-projects focused on the learning results of the students and on the professional growth of the school leaders (the design of the wider project was published in Geijsel *et al.* [2009] and the integral results in Geijsel *et al.* [2014]). The present sub-project involved four teacher teams in four secondary education schools, three facilitators and two researchers. In consultation with their school leaders, each teacher team worked on a school-specific vision of CE, the design of CE activities and the dissemination and implementation. The guidance of the teachers consisted of weekly coaching sessions at each school by three facilitators with expertise in research and teacher education. The facilitators took a supportive stance towards the teachers' requests. Throughout the subsequent years, the research findings were used to improve the guidance and gain insights into what it takes for teachers to be involved in local CE curriculum-making. The following sections elaborate on the selection of schools and teachers for the project and the data collection and data analysis procedures.

### *Selection of schools and teachers*

The secondary schools were selected based on the following criteria: (a) school leaders were interested in the development of CE and were able to give evidence of their school's recent activities in this respect, (b) school leaders were interested in teacher development regarding the design of CE, (c) school leaders were accepting of the principles of voluntary participation of experienced teachers with some basic knowledge of CE, (d) school leaders and teachers were willing to collaboratively develop a school vision for CE and (e) school leaders were willing to guarantee the time necessary for the guidance and curriculum-designing work of the participating teachers for four years (the project offered payment for four hours per week for each teacher).

During the school and teacher selection process, the criterion of diversity was used. The four schools that were selected have the following features: Schools B and C provide pre-vocational education (vmbo) and Schools A and D offer senior general secondary education (havo) and pre-university education (vwo). School D also offers pre-vocational education. School C participated in 'the academic school', a nation-wide project with a focus on research by teachers. In each school, four teachers representing different subjects were selected to participate. The teachers were invited by their school leaders. Along the way, a few changes were made in the teams of teachers due to maternity leave, prolonged illness or job change. In total, 22 teachers participated, and of those, 17 teachers participated multi-annually and worked on a CE curriculum product. The data of this group of 17 teachers were included in the study. The main reasons teachers participated were their interest in the professional design of their CE curriculum and in participating in school development activities regarding CE. Except for three teachers, they all had long-standing teaching experience. The teachers represent the following subjects: mother tongue, English as a foreign language, history, social sciences, music, religious education, natural sciences and geography.



### Data collection

All data in this study are qualitative in nature. Data regarding the guidance consist of the written guidance programme, field notes made by two researchers during observations of the guidance and the monthly meetings with the facilitators, and information from the interviews (subquestion 1). Data on the curriculum designs consist of the teachers' written CE activities and of data from the semi-structured interviews with the teachers (subquestion 1). Data on the professional growth of the teachers consist of the data from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews with the teachers conducted by the two researchers (subquestion 2). Table 1 provides an overview of the data.

*Guidance programme.* The document on the guidance programme describes the goals of school-based CE development, possible support materials and the frequency and type of guidance.

*Designs.* During the four-year project, the teachers designed CE activities for their schools. All of the teachers provided a description of these CE activities in a pre-structured format including the goals, content and pedagogical approaches of these activities; the subjects involved; and the activities' place in the school's curriculum. They also provided information about the evaluation rounds that were performed and the way their colleagues were involved in the process.

*Field notes.* During the trajectory, the two researchers (one of whom was the first author) made observational notes during several coaching sessions at the schools and discussed the teachers' growth and the guidance in monthly meetings with the facilitators. The two researchers reported on these meetings and sessions using field notes. These fieldnotes were member-checked.

*Semi-structured interviews with teachers.* At the end of the first three school years, all 17 teachers who participated long-term were individually interviewed about their

Table 1. Data collection strategies for both research questions

Data collection strategies	RQ1 Guidance and designs	RQ2 Professional growth
Artefact analysis	X guidance programme	X written CE-activities
Semi-structured interviews with teachers (three times, end of school year)	X	X
Focus group interviews with teachers (end of fourth year)	X	X
Field notes (observational notes and notes monthly meetings)	X	

professional experiences and their professional growth concerning CE curriculum design within their schools. Every year, the semi-structured interviews contained an evaluative question about the guidance as well as the same set of open-ended questions concerning teachers' expertise on CE, their design and research experiences, and their reflections on the school's development of CE. The interviews were conducted by the researchers (one of whom was the first author). These interviews were transcribed verbatim and were sent to the interviewees for member checking. The relevant parts of the member-checked versions were used during this study (Merriam, 1988).

*Focus group interviews with teachers.* The two researchers (one of whom was the first author) held focus group interviews with all four teachers from each school at the end of the fourth year. The interview guidelines contained questions regarding the evaluation of the guidance, the teachers' perspectives on school-based CE development, and the professional growth of the teachers as curriculum-makers for CE. The member-checked summaries of this interviews were used during this study.

### *Data analysis*

In order to answer the questions that are central to this study, the dataset was studied by a team consisting of three members of the research project (one researcher [first author] and two facilitators [third and fourth authors]) and a researcher with specific curriculum expertise (the second author) who was not involved in the original research project.

With respect to the first subquestion about the guidance, a summary of the written programme was made and compared with the field notes and the experiences mentioned by the teachers during the interviews. The data were sorted along the three perspectives. A quick analysis was made by the first author to provide a validated description of the guidance as designed, conducted and experienced.

With respect to the first subquestion about the designs, the third and fourth authors analysed the written CE activities using the relevant aspects from the three perspectives (substantive, professional design and socio-political). The relevant parts of the interviews were used as background data for correct interpretation.

With respect to the second subquestion about the teachers' professional growth, all of the interview data were put in order per stage in the project and coded with a deductive and inductive approach using a combination of a priori and open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The three perspectives (substantive, professional design and socio-political) were used as a set of lenses during data ordering and analysis. All data were carefully read and segmented into meaningful units. Initially, all segments were coded with the three perspectives. Each segment was then deductively labelled with specific professional needs within each perspective as introduced in the theoretical framework. In reading and rereading, some labels were added inductively, leading to additional labels like 'school-cultural perspective on CE' regarding the substantive perspective.



Finally, all coded text segments were also categorised into two categories: one regarding growth in individual expertise and one regarding growth in school-based development expertise. Moreover, the interview data were also analysed vertically to follow the teachers' growth over time.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, data triangulation (artefacts, interviews, field notes and diversity in four schools and 17 teachers) and researchers' triangulation (three authors who participated in the project and an external researcher) were applied. The external researcher—a curriculum expert—was part of the team in order to incorporate specific curriculum expertise and provide an outsider's view. All four members of the team participated in triangulation. Differences in coding and labelling only concerned minor issues, and after discussion and clarification, consensus was reached for all codes.

## Findings

### *Curriculum-making guidance and resulting CE activities*

*Guidance programme.* The project consisted of a four-year guidance programme that aimed at school-specific CE curriculum-making through teachers' inquiry-based designs. Facilitators supported a small group of teachers in each school. No formal training was provided. This flexibility was based on the idea that a 'one-model-fits-all approach' would neither take the specific context into account nor meet the specific needs of the teachers. The programme as designed was consistent with the programme as conducted and experienced and consisted of three phases:

- Year 1: Becoming informed about CE and performing a school-specific context analysis leading to a CE school portrait;
- Years 2 and 3: Developing both a school vision of CE in collaboration with school leaders and a cyclical design of CE lessons in collaboration with colleagues;
- Year 4: Disseminating CE activities within the schools.

*Substantive guidance.* The project took a broad concept of CE as a starting point. The teacher teams were to choose among the different substantive possibilities. The programme supported the teachers with respect to the substantive perspective through an on-demand, just-in-time provision of reading materials (books, websites) providing a broad diversity of CE concepts, policy guidelines and support materials. In this way, the facilitators assisted the teachers in gaining an overview of state-of-the-art CE knowledge.

*Professional design guidance.* The teachers were invited to use an iterative approach during the development of the CE activities for their respective schools and to share the resulting curricular products with their colleagues. As a first step in the first year, the facilitators supported the teachers in analysing their school with the aim of discovering the following in an inquisitive way through document analysis and interviews with students and teachers: (a) relevant characteristics of the

school (e.g. commonalities and differences in the student population, the existence of a democratic culture and institutions, the relevance of the curriculum concerning socio-political issues in society and the lives of the students), (b) the nature of the teachers and students and (c) what the CE curriculum looked like and what would be desirable for their school. This analysis stage led to a school portrait. As a next step, the facilitators guided the teachers' reflections concerning the preferable aims of and approaches to CE for their schools and the embeddedness of CE in the school curriculum. They stimulated the teachers to share the results of their context analysis and their reflections for the local CE developments with their colleagues and school leaders. Based on these discussions, they made a decision about how to proceed with the design of local CE activities. Next, informed by the findings of the analysis stage, the facilitators also supported the teachers individually and/or as a team in designing and evaluating meaningful CE curriculum activities.

*Socio-political guidance.* An important finding is that it was initially unforeseen that the facilitators should also assist the teachers in safeguarding their time for analysis, curriculum development and dissemination. Moreover, at the beginning it was also unanticipated that the facilitators needed to facilitate by providing micro-political strategies for teachers' collaboration with their school leadership and colleagues in developing CE. During the later stages of the project, these types of support were added to the guidance programme.

In sum, guidance regarding the substantive and professional design expertise was prepared for from the start, whereas support to improve the teachers' socio-political expertise had to be added when the study was already underway.

*Resulting CE activities designed by the teachers.* The teachers at the four schools designed 17 CE activities, lessons and school-wide projects during the four-year period. Table 2 provides an overview of these activities.

*Substantive perspective.* Teachers at Schools A, B and D opted to integrate CE into subjects and overarching projects. Teachers at School C aimed to incorporate CE into a whole-school interdisciplinary pedagogical approach. CE was not designed as a separate subject or as a solely extra-curricular activity at any of the schools. Further analysis of the CE activities from a substantive point of view showed that teachers used an integrative and broad CE vision. Five whole-school activities and 12 subject-based activities were developed. An array of goals, themes and pedagogical approaches were covered and integrated into a range of school subjects such as social studies (4), geography (1), physics (2), music (1), English (1), history (1), religious education, (2) and mentor lessons (1). The three themes of democracy, participation and civic identity (to be found in the national support materials provided) are present in the designs. The subject-based designs in history, English, social studies and religious studies are strongly related to the content and goals of those subjects. Other subject-based designs (in music, geography and physics) focus on a pedagogical approach regarding participation and identity development. The participative citizen

Table 2. Overview of CE-designs

	Title CE activities	Place in the curriculum	CE aims	Evaluation rounds
Whole-school approach (n = 5)	School newspaper	School culture	Bonding	EE
	Own choices	Interdisciplinary pedagogical approach	Participation	E
	Day on cultural diversity	Extra-curricular	Identity development	EE
	Charity Day	Extra-curricular	Knowledge Empathy	-
	Talent for the future	Extra-curricular	Knowledge Empathy	-
Subject-based (n = 12)	Parliamentary democracy	History	Identity development	-
			Knowledge Political literacy	-
			Democracy	-
	Participation in decision-making	Geography and physics	Participation	E
	TED presentations	Physics	Participation Identity development	-
	Class conversations	Mentor class	Dialogue	E
	Reflective questions	Religious education	Identity development	E
	Individual theme choices	Religious education	Reflection	E
	Citizenship and newspapers	English	Participation	EE
	Music as a tool	Music	Knowledge	EE
Media literacy	Social studies	Cooperation Participation	-	
Being a citizen	Social studies	Participation Democracy	E	
Societal issues	Social studies	Reflection Identity development	-	
Debating	Social studies	Knowledge Societal issues	-	
		Debating skills	-	

Note: E = Evaluation of the materials in the classroom setting; EE = two evaluation rounds in the classroom setting in two subsequent years

approach was predominantly included, whereas the adaptive and critical-democratic citizen approaches are less present in the CE activities.

*Professional design perspective.* It is important to note that the designs cover one lesson, a small range of lessons or a pedagogical approach such as the participation of students in defining the theme of a lesson. The school-wide projects consist of an extra-curricular activity or a set of general principles for an interdisciplinary theme or a common pedagogical approach to, for instance, classroom dialogues on a sensitive societal theme. Overall, it is interesting to note that the learning objectives were not described in sufficient detail to become supportive in the evaluation process. The objectives appeared to be formulated as objectives to be accomplished by the teachers rather than the learners. Furthermore, specific concepts included in the objectives, such as participation, dialogue and debate, were used as both an activity and an end in themselves. Moreover, the curriculum materials have not yet been fully completed. Due to a lack of time and/or experience, eight designs have not been pilot-tested, five have been evaluated once, and only four designs have undergone two evaluation rounds and been revised accordingly.

*Socio-political perspective.* It is noteworthy that the subject-based design work remained an isolated endeavour for most teachers. Only one design ('Citizenship and newspapers') was pilot-tested by a colleague teacher from outside of the project. However, all five CE activities that took a school-wide approach were developed by more than one teacher—all of whom were participating in the small project group—and were distributed among colleagues.

In sum, the teachers in all four schools managed to design CE activities. They used an integrative and broad vision of CE. They predominantly used the participative citizenship approach. All of the CE activities had some flaws in terms of design quality. Only in a few instances the CE activities were evaluated in a systematic way and/or pilot-tested by colleagues. Only the designs with a school-wide approach were spread among colleagues who were not involved in the project.

#### *Teachers' experiences regarding their professional growth*

The findings regarding professional growth are presented according to the three perspectives. Within the substantive and professional design perspectives, the findings are displayed within the categories of personal expertise and school-based expertise.

#### *Growth from a substantive perspective.*

*Individual substantive expertise.* The project began with teachers of different subjects who were interested in CE. Throughout the four-year trajectory, all of the involved teachers' knowledge about CE developed. It is worth noting that although the teachers began with different ideas about what CE entails such as respectful manners, knowledge of politics and the idea that CE encompasses everything in school life, by the third year, all of the teachers reported that they had gained essential knowledge

about CE and were working with an integrative and substantiated concept of CE that encompasses democracy, participation and social identity development:

- Democracy: ‘I was concerned about democracy at my school and worked on that by improving the climate of trust in the learners’ council’ (Teacher 4).
- Participation: ‘I became more aware that student participation was low in my lessons. Now, learners’ participation is more natural and better linked to our CE vision’ (Teacher 2).
- Social identity development: ‘I pay more attention to social issues and tackle these right away. For instance, when I sensed that the class did not show tolerance regarding an immigrant student, I immediately discussed this with my class in the context of social identity development. Prior to the project, I would have let it go’ (Teacher 13).

All of the teachers provided instances of their personal professional development. They indicated that they changed as teachers because of the information, discussions, reflections and experiments. For example, Teacher (10) expected to gain insights into CE as a topic in teaching. He began with an elaborate view of the importance of respectful manners. In the second year, he systematically experimented with the active participation of students in his classes. In the third year, he became quite keen on moments in his lessons where he could include CE. He mentioned a change in his personal professional identity:

*‘CE is increasingly becoming a part of me ... I, as a teacher, should bring CE to the floor ... I try to pay more attention to democracy, participation and social identity development ... This is based on the awareness that students tend to become more motivated when participating actively in lessons and that students are unaware of their identity development. They should develop answers to questions such as “What made me?” and “Who would I have been if I had been born and raised in another family?” ... It is my wish that they will accept and respect one another more easily. That is a large part of what CE is all about. I discuss disrespectful behaviour and focus on respectful manners ... I do this now with underlying ideas and because I see the value of it’.*

*School-based substantive expertise.* Most teachers developed towards opting for a cultural perspective on CE, which implies a whole-school approach that affects the pedagogical approach, the relations between teachers and pupils, and the relevance of the curriculum for the pupils’ personal civic development. Teacher (7) describes this as follows:

*‘I am increasingly convinced that CE is in all aspects of education, at the heart of the organisation, and should be part of every subject and in all years ... Working well together as a team of teachers is of the utmost importance. It is an important cultural example for the pupils’.*

The preference for a cultural perspective was fed by the project’s suggestion to disseminate the teaching of CE to colleagues. It was also influenced by the choices of democracy, student participation, and identity development, which fit well in an overarching approach to teaching that can be used by all colleagues.

At the beginning of the project, the teachers did not consider a longitudinal and school-wide vision of CE to be a prerequisite for substantial and consistent CE

curriculum development. Based on the context analysis, in the first year they discovered that CE in their schools consisted of loosely coupled activities without a common basis and a clear learning strand. All of the teachers reported that because of the interviews with pupils and colleagues, their awareness grew regarding the idea that CE should be meaningful by having a strong link to the daily life of the pupils inside and outside of school. At School C, this was operationalised by the obligation of all teachers to visit students' homes and use these visits in the elaboration of CE.

By the third year, the teachers reported that they had developed a predominantly school-cultural perspective on CE and on suitable pedagogical approaches for their own school. They mentioned the integration of CE into their regular lessons by, for instance, using the topic at hand and including collaborative and participative activities. They reported that they paid attention to democracy, for instance, by providing opportunities to experience the complexities of discussing controversial societal topics. Concerning participation, they indicated that they regularly invited the pupils to co-decide on the pedagogical approach and possible substance of a lesson.

The teachers reported that they gained insights into different views on school-specific CE design based on both the weekly guided reflections in the small collegial groups and the annual exchange meetings with the other participating schools.

In sum, all of the teachers developed their knowledge about CE in general and their understanding of the importance of a longitudinal and school-wide vision of CE as a prerequisite for CE curriculum development. The teacher predominantly developed an integrative and school-cultural perspective on CE.

#### *Growth from a professional design perspective.*

*Individual professional design expertise.* At the beginning of the project, most of the teachers reported not having any design or research skills. These had not been part of their professional education thus far. The teachers at School C mentioned having some basic experience because of their school's participation in a national research project on action research by teachers.

All of the teachers needed assistance in generating ideas, considering the consistency of all curricular components, and actually analysing, designing, evaluating and redesigning CE activities. The majority of the teachers did not complete the entire design process. Some did not evaluate the first design in a systematic way, because they saw the shortcomings while teaching, felt a lack of time and experience or could not find any colleagues who were willing to test the CE activities in a similar class. Most teachers did not revise the materials for a second evaluation round. Teacher 6 stated, 'I am not content with the lessons that I designed, and so I did not use the lessons again'. The teachers also mentioned organisational issues such as changes in the class schedule or in agreements with colleagues to test specific subject matter.

At the end of the third project year, all of the teachers were positive about their acquisition of inquisitive design attitudes and skills. They mentioned several aspects of an inquisitive attitude, saying, 'It brought more structure into my work ... after the project I'll continue this way of working' (Teacher 2) and 'I started to see education as something that is constantly in development. It is possible to make a mistake and try again' (Teacher 9). However, all of the teachers experienced tensions and



mentioned doubts about their working and organisational conditions for performing inquiry-based design activities on a larger scale. The following views were typically mentioned and supported in all focus groups: ‘Research is too complex and time consuming for teachers’ (Teacher 4), and ‘At schools, conditions such as time and rest to perform design-research activities are not present’ (Teacher 13).

*School-based professional design expertise.* Most teachers were surprised by the initial assignment to perform a context analysis. Over the project period, however, they began to value having carried out this analysis instead of starting to design right away. Interviewing the students about participation, social life and democracy at school provided them with relevant aims for CE that they had not previously recognised. Teacher 16 stated, ‘I became aware of my tasks in helping my students to grow towards the society and realised that this is not part of our current CE curriculum’.

The findings of the analysis legitimised the basis for curriculum decision-making for CE at the schools.

- At School A, teachers found a lack of student participation and a shortage of personal attention paid to their learners.
- At School B, teachers became aware of the lack of possibilities for students to take responsibility for their learning. Teacher 6 said, ‘The school should be a practice area for learners who need to develop democratic identity’.
- At Schools C and D, the ethnic-cultural diversity among the students became apparent, as did the lack of knowledge concerning the students’ living contexts. Teacher 15 indicated, ‘The learners say, “The teachers do not actually see us. They do not see who we are.” That is why we chose for an integrative view on CE that links subject matter with socio-political issues and in which we support learners with dialogical learner activities to develop their citizenship-identity’.

In sum, most of the teachers began as novices in professional design. They were enthusiastic about the school-specific approach to analysis and design. They became convinced of the importance of a systematic design approach, although they were somewhat disappointed with regard to the effort it takes to perform systematic inquiry-based and cyclical work and to convince colleagues to become involved in the process.

*Growth from a socio-political perspective.* In the beginning, the teachers were unaware of the importance of socio-political expertise for school-based curriculum design. During the project, the majority of the teachers became insecure and aware of an insufficiency in their micro-political competences and related interpersonal dispositions and skills. They felt this shortage not only during the context analysis but also when they needed to involve other colleagues. They acknowledged that the project placed them in a new position within the school, and they perceived this as new and challenging.

The teachers experienced the CE design work as a process of exploring possibilities and developing support and trust within a difficult environment characterised by an organisation culture that prioritises individual and not collaborative teaching.

They struggled with the tension of subject-specific CE design and school-wide commitment. They experienced the dilemma of either designing lessons for one's own teaching setting (which is easier to do but more difficult to transfer) or designing more generic activities (which require the input of a broader group of teachers). Those who chose the latter complained that colleagues' participation was not facilitated. Teacher 10 stated, 'As a participant in the project I'm in a luxurious position. I have time to experiment with CE. My colleagues keep running through the corridors to deliver their lessons'.

The teachers learnt that the stance of the school leadership was crucial. In School C, teachers chose to design subject-overarching CE activities from the outset with the active support of the school leadership. In the other schools, where this strong support was lacking, teachers worked on an individual basis or in pairs. Here they used (in)formal meetings and professional capacity-building moments to inform their colleagues. Although their colleagues were interested, the school cultures were not very supportive of the further spread of CE. The teachers also became aware of their school's strong policy focus on learning outcomes, which hampered and discouraged their colleagues from paying serious attention to the development of CE.

In the course of the project, the teachers began to talk about their curriculum-making experiences in socio-political and organisational terms. Most of the teachers had to deal with unexpected organisational challenges during the design work, such as changes in their class schedule that made it impossible to conduct a second round of evaluation.

Moreover, according to some teachers, the set topics for the central examination at the end of upper secondary education made a strong mark of inflexibility on their local design process, limiting the scope of the CE they could develop. The aim of spreading the renewal made great demands on their interpersonal skills regarding convincing and motivating colleagues.

In sum, all of the teachers reported that their insights into the complexities of their school's development of CE had grown, they had begun to learn how to deal with differences in vision, and they had gathered some initial insights into the difficult position of school leadership.

Overall, the teachers experienced personal growth in their substantive and professional design expertise. They also became increasingly aware that socio-political expertise is crucial in these local curriculum-making trajectories and that school organisation development (including a collaborative culture and supportive school leadership) supports substantial and meaningful local CE curriculum-making.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

### *Conclusions*

In 2006, CE became legally obligatory in primary and secondary education in the Netherlands, primarily because of socio-political issues. Against the background of a longstanding statutory tradition of freedom of education, school-based curriculum development in the Netherlands has been perceived as a strategic approach to

focusing on the social and moral personal development of youth. In order to understand the professional experiences of teachers engaged in such local CE curriculum-making efforts, data from a four-year school-based curriculum development project were analysed.

The findings led to the overall conclusion that the teachers experienced the site-specific CE curriculum-making process as rewarding but challenging. At the beginning of the four-year project, the teachers perceived themselves as novices in school-based CE curriculum-making. In general, at the beginning they reported that they had some understanding of the substantive perspective regarding CE and that they had only limited expertise regarding the other two perspectives. Personal guidance during the four-year project appeared to be crucial for developing teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes regarding all three perspectives introduced in this study.

The threefold distinction in curriculum perspectives proved to be supportive in illuminating the different kinds of expertise needed when performing school-based curriculum development activities. In particular, the inclusion of the socio-political perspective provided additional insights into the complexities the teachers encountered.

From a substantive perspective, the results indicate the teachers' preference for meaningful, school-specific, broad and integrated approaches to CE. They were inspired and found support in the three themes of democracy, participation and identity development that were provided in the national support materials. These themes made it possible for the teachers to see the school as a participative and democratic cultural environment in which learners are supported in their social and societal identity development. They valued the context analysis at the beginning of the project, which provided a common basis for the design of CE lessons and activities. The teachers reported that because of the interviews with the pupils and their colleagues, their awareness grew regarding the idea that CE should be meaningful in having a strong link to the daily life of the youngsters inside and outside of school and to the school-cultural characteristics.

From a professional design perspective, the results indicate a lack of teacher knowledge and experience regarding systematic cyclical design and the creation of CE activities suitable to share with colleagues. The guided preliminary analysis of the school cultural context, the citizenship identities of the students and the personal professional identities of the colleagues proved to be important. The preference of a school-cultural approach to CE complicated the professional design work. In the teachers' experience, broad goals evoke a need for additional design processes that are more relational and socio-political in nature (cf. Kessels & Plomp, 1999). The teachers needed assistance in taking such an approach.

During the process of curriculum-making, the teachers discovered the socio-political nature of CE design and integration into the subjects. The teachers encountered socio-political tensions with regard to work conditions and school culture and structures, which subsequently impacted the quality of the collaborative process and the kind of CE activities they could develop. They mentioned a general lack of formal say and control regarding the school curriculum, the hierarchical school organisation and the indifference of colleagues (cf. Nieveen *et al.*, 2011;

Priestley *et al.*, 2015; Leeman *et al.*, 2017; Priestley & Philippou, 2018). All of the teachers required socio-political guidance to address these issues.

From a school-based design perspective it is interesting to note that the teachers (although lacking sufficient substantive knowledge and insights, and considerable professional design- and micro-political skills) were able to design and pilot an integrated approach to CE in their schools, focusing on a culture of participation of learners in decision-making in lessons and in cross-curricular activities. The teachers started to design meaningful education to support pupils' social and societal development which is narrowly related to citizenship identity development. It is interesting that the design-research approach, and especially the context analysis, put the teachers on this track.

This project shows the potential of a school-based approach for CE that provides professional space for teachers thereby giving learners the chance to build meaningful experiences with participation and citizenship identity development. The teachers took first steps in a school-wide approach of CE that is integral and experience-based. In this integral and experience-based nature, an important contribution of school-based curriculum development for CE is hidden. As such, it affords opportunities for more than knowledge and skills concerning citizenship and democracy. In sum, for the teachers in this study to be engaged in CE curriculum-making has been challenging but with the help of the available support it has been valuable and has led to meaningful results.

### *Recommendations*

CE relates to sensitive socio-political issues that transcend the power of education. Over the years, the debate on democracy, social justice, diversity and commonality has intensified in the Netherlands and the EU. The results of the 2016 ICCS study impacted Dutch education policy. This led to sharpening the law on CE with a common knowledge and skills base that focuses on the promotion of social cohesion and on the basic values of the democratic constitutional state. It includes the requirement to work on these with more detailed learning objectives in a consistent school culture that respects democracy. The revision of the law on CE is expected to be introduced in 2020. Although schools and teachers might welcome some focus and clear expectations regarding CE, this policy direction will not encourage schools and teachers to work towards local, participative and critical democratic approaches that are at the heart of socio-political engagement.

The new policy directions do not pay focused attention to CE-related ethnic-cultural tensions and socio-economic divisions in Dutch society and the wider global context. Moreover, the new directions lack incentives for teachers and schools to relate their CE teaching practice to a broad range of substantive citizen approaches to CE, including the critical-democratic citizen approach. Limiting the scope of CE in terms of substance and space for school-specific choices comes with the risk of a policy-practice divide and of paying the ideological price of losing teachers' professional autonomy and their opportunities to develop meaningful CE curricula (cf. Wubbels & Van Tartwijk, 2018). These new directions can have

as a consequence that, steadily, the liberal foundation of the education policy contained in the principle of 'freedom of education' (cf. Exalto, 2018) gets lost in the mire.

This study provides a better understanding of the possible power of teachers as curriculum-makers for CE that is meaningful for the development of (a range of possible) citizenship identities of young people. The teachers in this study strongly focused on the education of students through integrative experiential learning, participation in democratic practices and reflective citizenship identity development activities. 'CE is increasingly becoming a part of me', this remark of one of the teachers illustrates the importance of the professional identity development of teachers themselves to realise meaningful CE in their schools. For this to occur, professional development in all three curriculum perspectives proved to be important during the project. To support teachers as curriculum-makers extensive and continuous professional development in these three perspectives needs to be at hand. However, the new policy directions do not anticipate on professional development of teachers regarding CE. Moreover, support to school organisation development needs to be in place, in order to harness and support the professional power of teachers as curriculum makers for CE and in doing so to secure the professional use of the relative autonomy of schools and teachers with regard to CE. Teachers' professional development implies that initial teacher education programs should include societal issues and related CE basics for all teachers. From there, in-service teachers should have opportunities to become expert CE teachers by enrolling in dedicated CE master's programmes that cover the substantive, professional design and social-political perspectives of CE development in schools. Given the political complexities of CE and the growing global influences on national curricula, this could include political literacy, enabling teachers to 'read' both their micro-political environment and the macro-political situation. In initial as well as in-service teacher education, specific attention could be given to teacher identity development to connect intellectual engagement with the purposes of CE education to the work of teachers and to school culture and structure (Priestley *et al.*, 2015; Onderwijsraad, 2016; Wahlström, 2018). School-based curriculum design for CE presupposes political sensitivity, professional competences and agency on the teachers' part regarding meaningful CE aims and approaches. It is crucial that guidance be in place for teachers to discover and experience what CE can mean for young people's societal development and to share this with colleagues.

With respect to school organisation development, the school could become a democratic and powerful curriculum design environment (cf. Handelzalts *et al.*, 2018). This means that schools have a *culture* that addresses relevant design activities, values collaboration and accountability in a meaningful way, and has distributed leadership in place. Moreover, *structures* within a school support the collaborative work of teacher design teams with scheduled time and opportunities to study substantive CE issues, create a local context analysis, and design together in a workplace suitable for joint work.

### Conflict of interest

We acknowledge any financial interest or benefit that has arisen from direct applications of our research.

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### Geolocation information

Our papers' study area covers 4 secondary schools in the west, north, east, and south of the Netherlands and the national curriculum policy in the Netherlands.

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