Core affairs

Flanders, Belgium

Case studies basic education in Europe

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

slo

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Colophon

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 our tasks, we take into account the developments in society in general, both nationally and internationally, and in education in particular. SLO operates in virtually all sectors of education, including primary education, secondary education, special education, vocational education and teacher education, and covers all subject areas. Our 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 our constitutional task, the national Institute for Curriculum Development in the Netherlands (SLO) carries out a comparative research project regarding the motives, functions, resources, 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)centralized context in some European countries.

Curriculum and curriculum development are not just issues that concern schools and teachers; both have a broad impact on, importance for 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 society in general. The concept 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

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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.

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 the ways 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, these are rather global, sometimes 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)centralized policy context. More specifically, 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 realized 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 at 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 whichlearning 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 in-depth, 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 sharper understanding of why things happened as they did, and what might become 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. 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 in Flanders in basic education. Three perspectives (Goodlad, 1994) are central in the research:

• *Substantive:* focusing on the classical curriculum question about the knowledge that is 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 Flemish core curriculum for basic education?

Research topics:
• *sources of 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 has been carried out by:

Christine De Coninck: adviser in the Division Curriculum of the Ministry of Education Flemish Community.

Division Curriculum is the new name for the Department of Educational Development, the research department within the Flemish Department of Education, which ensures the development of attainment levels and development objectives.

This case study was realised under the supervision of prof. Dr. Roger Standaert, founder and director of the Flemish Department of Educational Development and the Curriculum entity.

The study is based on documentation from the library and archives of the Division Curriculum. In addition, the author was able to profit from her long-standing practice in developing the Flanders core curriculum. This helped to reduce the distance to the wide variety of resources, discussion texts, working documents, and legal texts to a minimum, resulting in their exhaustive use.

The help of researchers Els Ver Eecke and Bart Maes, and advisers Chris Van Woensel and Marleen Wouters in the Division Curriculum proved to be highly inspiring.

The case study was carried out during the autumn of 2007.

4.   Context; country; features

Flanders roughly covers the northern half of Belgium. Belgium is one of the historic European monarchies. Since 1830, Belgium has been a constitutional monarchy. After a number of state reforms, the country became a federation of different communities and provinces, each governed by its own parliament and government. Belgium is a trilingual country in which Dutch, French and German are spoken. (*see table 1*)

In Flanders, six million people inhabit an area of 13,500 square metres. Flanders is more densely populated than the Walloon provinces of Belgium. Brussels, the capital area, is bilingual: Dutch and French. The capital of Belgium is sometimes called the capital of Europe. Within the city limits, we find the headquarters of the European Union, the NATO, and over 900 international government and non-government organisations.

Most Belgians have been baptised as Roman Catholics, although there are sizeable numbers of free-thinkers and Muslims. In addition, there are minorities of Protestants, Jews, members of the Orthodox Church, Anglicans and Buddhists - each group representing a percentage less than 1%. The Islam arrived in our country by way of large migration streams from Morocco and Turkey. By opening up its borders and the increase of the European Union, Belgium has become a pluralistic country. This is especially manifest in the major cities.

Flanders is an internationally oriented high-technology centre, featuring such industries as micro electronics, chip development, media technology, biotechnology, product design, and gen engineering. The Flemish economic network is greatly reinforced by a web of many small and medium-sized organisations, often operating as supply companies. Flanders also boasts a great number of multinationals. Almost 70% of production is intended for export purposes.

4.1   Education as community mater

Upon the foundation of the Belgian state in 1830, the Constitution laid down the structures of a centralised state, based on a uniform law and government for the whole nation. The Constitution holds the principle of separation of the three branches of government: the legislative, the executive and the judiciary. Provinces and municipalities were given great autonomy; however, their decisions are

Table 1

System of government	Part of constitutional monarchy	
National language	Dutch	
Population	6.043.161	
Capital city	Brussels	
Seat of government	Brussels	
Number of municipalities	308	
Number of provinces	5	
Population density	447	
Total area	13.522 km²	
Population by age (2006)	0 - 19	16,5%
	20 - 64	66,1%
	65 and older	17,4%
Religion (2006)	Catholic	83%
	Humanist	10%
	Muslim	3%
	Other religions each	-1%
Educational attainment (15 - 64) (2006)	Primary only	%
	Junior general secondary	37,5%
	Senior general secondary	34,7%
	Higher professional	16,7%
	University	11,7%
	Senior general secondary	34,7%
	Senior general secondary	34,7%
Gross domestic product (GDP)	28,504.0	
Expenture	17.908 billion euro, 43% to education	
Working population in services	70,4%	
Working population in industry	28,31%	
Working population in argiculture	1,27%	
Unemployment rate	6,11%	

Source   www.flanders.be
www.ond.vlaanderen.be

controlled by the regional and national legislative and executive branches.
During the second half of the nineteenth century, a linguistic conflict arose to have the Dutch language recognised as an official language next to French, which had been, up until then, the only official language of Belgium. In the nineteen sixties, this linguistic conflict resulted in a series of state reforms and amendments to the constitution. Finally, after a great number of steps, a federal state arose, which was comprised of provinces and communities.
In 1962, the language boundary became territorially definitive, and in 1963, the language law was amended.
In 1968, the ministerial portfolio of National Education was split up and both a Dutch-speaking and French-speaking Minister of Education were instated. However, the educational law remained the same.
In 1970, Belgium was divided up into 3 cultural communities, 3 provinces, and 4 language regions:
• the Dutch: Flanders, with the provinces of Antwerp, Limburg, Flemish Brabant, East-Flanders and West-Flanders;
• the French: the Walloon provinces of Hainaut, Liège, Luxembourg, Namur, and Walloon Brabant;
• the German, with the 9 municipalities of the East Cantons;
• the bilingual territory of the Brussels capital, with the 19 Brussels municipalities.

As from 1989, the Flemish community is responsible for all educational matter and the administration of education in its language region. In 1989, the constitution transferred all responsibilities for the educational system to the Flemish, Walloon and German-speaking communities, with the exception of:
• the constitutionalisation of the beginning and the end of compulsory education;
• the minimum attainment levels for the granting of a certificate;
• the pension system.

The first two exceptions were made to secure a minimum of coherence among educational systems within the Communities. The third exception, concerning the pension scheme, forms a part of the national social security system, which is financed on a national basis, based upon solidarity among Communities and Provinces.
As a result of all of these changes, the responsibility for educational matter now lies with the Flemish Community to ensure the quality of education in its language region. From this point onward, this case study will deal with education in Flanders.

The Belgian constitution guarantees freedom of education. This includes the

freedom for everybody to design their own education system under a regimen of pedagogical freedom. In the School Pact Act of 1959, the freedom concept of the constitution was concretised in such a way that school boards not being a part of the government can be subsidised on the condition that they respect a certain minimum curriculum and minimum schedule of lessons. This Act was amended on a regular basis. Today, a school board is allowed to draw up its own schedules, as well as its own curricula, as long as these contain attainment levels and are approved by the minister. In order to guarantee minimum study levels, this approval remains the minister's prerogative.

In addition, each school board is allowed to choose its own pedagogical methods. In actual practice, this means that school boards enjoy a lot of freedom: in addition to curricula, they also decide upon group forms, examinations, certifications, as well as recruitment and dismissal of teachers.

Freedom of education also means freedom of school choice. In the regional decree concerning equal opportunities in education, of 2002, the GOK decree, the schools' obligation to register was concretised. Schools are only allowed to refuse pupils if the parents are unwilling to observe the school regulations, if it can be demonstrated from objective facts that the school has no vacancies, or if the school can demonstrate its lack of financial means to admit pupils with a handicap. In 2005, the GOK decree was amended to include the right of preference of brothers and sisters and percentages of pupils who meet the criteria of disadvantage risks.

Especially after the School Pact Act was drawn up, the free schools started to set up an organisational network next to the then state schools. At the same time, municipalities and provinces also got organised so that, eventually, networks for the three types of school statute emerged: the official state schools, now called community schools; the officially subsidised provincial, town and municipality schools; and the free subsidised schools. These particularly concern schools for Roman Catholic education, as well as alternative schools with their own particular profiles. Examples are method schools based on the views of Freinet, Montessori or Steiner, who apply specific pedagogical methods. Some of these joined forces in a discussion platform.

At the moment, Belgium has four educational umbrellas. The community schools are organised by order of the Flemish Community and have to meet special requirements in terms of neutrality, now actively called pluralism. These are governed by the Council for Community Education (RAGO). During the school year 2006-2007, the community schools accommodated 15% of all primary and

secondary school pupils. The umbrella of free subsidised education accommodated 68% of all pupils. The other two umbrellas, the Educational Secretariat of Towns and Municipalities (OVSG) and the Flanders Provincial Education (POV) together accommodated 16.5% of the pupils.

As a result of the ties with political parties, the different umbrella organisations over the years built up a great power, allowing the phenomenon of denominationalism, which was present in other social domains as well, to spread to the educational system. In more than one aspect, this denominationalism was also anchored in the law, for example in the statute of teachers, the consultative competence with the minister, the representation in various bodies, and the management of the schools advisory service. On the other hand, there is a fundamental difference between community schools and those belonging to the other umbrella organisations. Community education has only a single school board, while the other organisations consist of a collection of school boards, each of which independent from the next. Guidelines from the umbrella organisations, other than community education, may or may not be observed by the local school boards. In fact, the umbrella organisations form an intermediate level in the policy formulation between the Department of Education and the schools themselves.

4.2   Compulsory education

In 1914, education became compulsory for children from 6 to 12 years of age. When this law came into force, it was assumed that this compulsory education would gradually be extended to the age of 14. Despite a number of attempts in the meantime, compulsory education up to the age of 14 remained in force until 1983. In 1983, in a single step, compulsory education was raised to the age of 18. In effect, compulsory education covers a stretch of twelve years' time, starting from the moment the child turns six years of age right up to the moment the pupil turns eighteen. The pupil is not obliged to finish the school year in which he turns eighteen; he may leave the school from his eighteenth birthday. Compulsory education is full-time until the age of 15 or 16, after which a form of part-time education suffices. Children who are unable to be in school, for reasons of a severe handicap, may be exempted from education.

Belgium observes compulsory education, rather than the obligation to go to school. It is possible to have home or private tutoring. However, home tutoring cannot be concluded with a recognised certificate. To achieve this, it is required to take an exam by the examining board of the Flemish Community. In order to obtain a

certificate for primary education, children receiving home tutoring should take a test in a designated school, which is authorised to conduct such tests.

4.3 Quality assurance

In addition to provisions for educational structure, as determined by decree, the names given to the various subjects, and the laws concerning numerous preconditions of quality, there are two important mechanisms concerning quality assurance in Flanders education. These concern the system of the inspectorate and the mechanism of attainment levels. Contrary to most educational systems, Flanders neither operates central examinations, nor does it centrally impose curricula. Compared to the systems abroad, the Flanders educational system features a lot of freedom, which is tempered only relatively lightly by the two systems of quality assurance.

4.3.1 The Education Inspectorate

To ensure the quality of the education given, there is an inspectorate body for primary, secondary and adult education. This body is also authorised to inspect the Centres for Pupil Coaching. The core tasks of the inspectorate have in 1991 been laid down in a decree. In this decree, it is stipulated that, from that moment forward, the inspectorate will focus on the school rather than on each individual teacher. From that moment, a team of inspectors audits a school once every six years. To achieve this, the inspectorate makes use of a series of indicators by which to assess the schools. These indicators were rubricated according to the CIPO model (Context-Input-Proces-Output). Naturally, the main activity assessed during these audits comprises the observation of lessons. However, these observations are not used to judge the teachers, but to obtain a global impression of the quality of the school. At the same time, the inspectorate forms an opinion about whether the attainment levels are achieved and the approved curricula are realised. The reportings about each school are freely accessible and can be consulted on the Internet. Each year, the inspectorate also publishes a global report about the state of education.

4.3.2 Attainment Levels

The 1991 decree, mentioned above, also contained the system of attainment levels. Attainment levels are minimum levels concerning knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes, which the educational authorities consider necessary and attainable for a certain pupil population.

One of the purposes for the establishment of the Department of Educational Development was the setting up of attainment levels. This department develops a draft, which is presented to the Flemish Advisory Council for Education for advice. The Flemish government converts the attainment levels into a Decision, which is passed by the Flemish Parliament and turned into a Decree. During the development stages, it turned out that, in addition to the attainment levels, there was a need for a concept of 'development objectives'. These are attainment levels that need not be achieved, but should be striven for. The difference between attainment levels and development objectives is that attainment levels require a compulsory result, while development objectives call for a compulsory effort. For pre-school education and the B group within the first stage of secondary education, development objectives or attainment levels 'to be striven for' have been developed. For special education, these are even less defined. The heterogeneity of the pupils in these types of education is so diverse that even compulsory attainment levels 'to be striven for' are unattainable. That is why development objectives for special education have been given the form of an ideal-typical list of attainment levels. These correspond to the attainment levels in regular education as far as possible; however, the school is able to choose the development objectives that are best suited to the aptitudes of the pupil concerned. Development objectives for special education therefore comprise attainment levels 'to be selected'. Still, the term development objectives is used for these.

Primary education also features attainment levels that cover different learning areas, like the trans-subject attainment levels in secondary education. From the second stage of secondary education, subject packages are presented, which result in a distinction between attainment levels and specific attainment levels. The latter concern the part of the curriculum that is not communal, but the part of a specific subject package (e.g. humane studies, electricity, office duties, welding). The schools should have a curriculum in which attainment levels are comprised and can be concretised. These curricula must be approved by the minister, after advice by the Education Inspectorate. Often, the umbrellas design the curricula for the schools under their umbrella. Where umbrellas for subsidised education are concerned, the curricula form a proposal; in the case of community education, the curriculum is compulsory for all schools under that umbrella.

4.3.3 Support

To support schools, Flanders provides pedagogical guidance, by means of Centres for Pupil Coaching, as well as a budget for refresher courses. A special place is reserved for the Flemish Advisory Council for Education, which, in essence, is an advisory body, but one that is very closely involved in support and support bodies.

Like the Education Inspectorate and the Department of Educational Development, *Pedagogical Guidance* is provided for in the afore-mentioned decree of 1991. Pedagogical counsellors are appointed to the umbrella organisations and are, therefore, in essence a part of these umbrellas while providing supply-driven guidance. The decree giver clearly separated the guidance function from the inspection function.

Refresher courses were reformed by a decree on the teacher training courses of 1996. As a result, the refresher courses for the umbrellas became demand-driven, rather than supply-driven. Whereas previously the means for refresher courses were intended for the umbrellas, now these were made available to local schools in order to buy in refresher courses in the market where needed. Only a relatively small part of the means still goes to the umbrellas. The major part is intended for the schools.

Since September 2000, the *Centres for Pupil Coaching (CLB)* have become the successors to the formerly psycho-medical social centres (PMS-centres) and the services supplying medical school supervision (MST), resorting under the Department of Welfare. The CLB have multi-disciplinary teams comprising psychologists, educationalists, social workers, nurses and physicians. The 1998 decree describes the CLB's guidance tasks as follows, divided into four sections:
• coaching of schooling and study;
• (school) careers guidance;
• preventive health care;
• the psychic and social functioning of pupils.
CLB, therefore, are particularly focussed on pupil guidance and give priority to pupils with special needs. In addition, they are very active in giving (school) careers guidance to pupils. And, more and more, they support teachers in providing second-line medical care. The CLB are still largely organised by denomination. This creates an area of tension with the objective orientation towards the school best suited to the pupil's needs, independent from the school's particular denomination.

The Flemish Advisory Council for Education (VLOR) was set up by a decree in 1990 as one of the first decrees of the Flemish autonomous educational policy. With the participation decree of 2004, the role and methods of the advisory council were thoroughly revised. The VLOR now has an advisory and consultation function regarding the Flemish educational policy. The Advisory Council for Education now has to be consulted by the government, each time a decree is drawn up. If any advice is rejected, the Flemish government has to motivate this action. In addition, the advisory council is able to make recommendations on their own initiative. The Flemish Advisory Council for Education, VLOR, represents all sections of umbrellas, teachers' syndicates, school-board representatives, parents, and pupil umbrellas. Public services and members of the inspectorate do not participate in the advisory council. However, the VLOR is enabled to invite experts who are not a member of the organisation. The advisory council is supervised by a general secretary. This person organises the collaboration with district councils, which are composed per educational level and which are coordinated by a general council.

4.4 Primary Education

The Primary Education Decree of 1997 integrates the rules and regulations of regular as well as special pre-school and primary-school education. The educational objective is to minimise the partitions between pre-school and primary-school education. Moreover, an improved integration between regular and special schools is envisaged. A number of features are therefore shared between pre-school, primary-school and special primary-school education.
The term 'primary education' includes the pre-school stage as well as the primary-school stage.
Primary education is attended by 649,202 pupils in 2499 schools; of which 28,701 pupils attend 190 schools for special education. During the school year 2007-2008, there are 2057 schools in Flanders offering both pre-school and primary-school education. In addition, 273 schools offer only primary education, while 169 schools only accommodate pre-school children.

Since 2003, primary education has a new structure, resembling the comprehensive school. This form of cooperation between schools contributes to a more efficient management of means and a broadening of the basis for each separate school. Such a comprehensive school should number at least 700 pupils. Schools collaborating in a comprehensive form will receive extra means. Comprehensive schools can be formed per network, or across several networks. This increase

in scale should increase the decision-making ability and efficiency of primary education. The division of tasks, the exchange of expertise, joint refresher courses and a common administration are matters that are supported.

Primary education is presented in regular and special schools. Special schools offer education to children who are in need of temporary or permanent specific help. This may be the result of a physical, sensory or mental handicap, serious behavioural or emotional problems, or serious learning disabilities. There are eight types of special primary education, geared towards the special educational needs of a certain group of children.
Children with an indication for special education may attend a regular school to receive an integrated form of education (GON). Integrated primary education is a form of collaboration between regular and special primary education. This type of education is intended to give children with a handicap or a learning or educational problem the opportunity to attend lessons or activities in a school for regular education, on the condition that support from special education is given. This may be done on a temporary or permanent basis, and may concern some or all of the lessons.

Children may attend pre-school education from the age of 2.5 up to the age of 6. Normally, primary-school education starts in September of the year in which the child turns 6. From that moment, the child is obliged to go to school. Compulsory education covers twelve years. After an advice by the council of teachers and the Centre for Pupil Coaching (CLB), parents may decide to have their child attend the first year of primary education from the age of five, or spend their first year of compulsory education in a pre-school class. It is possible for a child to spend eight years in a primary school. Thanks to this arrangement, a child who is a late starter in the educational system is given the opportunity to remain in the primary school until the end of the school year in which he or she reaches the age of 15.

The school board is free to organise the school's own educational system. There is no laid-down way to organise classes, subjects, or stages. Most schools, however, stick to the six-year division. Usually, a single teacher will teach all subjects in a particular year. For some learning areas, such as musical education, physical education, and religious education, special teachers may be hired. The number of pupils per class is determined by the school board.
The number of teachers in primary schools depends on the lesson package. The lesson package comprises the total number of lesson periods the school receives finances for or is subsidised for by the government. This package comprises the

number of lessons based upon the number of pupils on a certain counting date. In addition to the lesson package, schools with regular pre-school education receive a period package for child care workers. These workers support the pre-school teachers and optimise the way young children are cared for.
Finally, the government grants each school a points envelope for policy and supporting staff. This points envelope is intended for the care policy, the coordination of ICT policy, and an extension of administrative staffing.

Since September 2002, schools receive extra staffing for ICT coordinators, similar to schools for secondary education and centres for adult education. The idea is for different schools to combine their means for ICT coordination in such a way as to be able to recruit a full-time coordinator for every 2,200 pupils or students. However, this is not compulsory, the hours may also be utilised by way of part-time positions.

From the school year 2003-2004, all primary schools also receive a number of extra hours for care coordination, calculated for the number of pupils. This way, all schools should gain extra skills in broader care services. To achieve this, the care coordinator is given a coordinating task, in order to support colleagues, design customised programmes for certain pupils, design ad-hoc solutions for specific groups, and, naturally, to provide personal remedial care for special-needs pupils. The schools are free to decide whom to recruit for this position. Based on the credentials of the care coordinator, this will cost a number of points from the finances granted for care coordination. A large primary school or comprehensive school should be able to hire a full-time coordinator this way.

Important for dealing with underprivileged children is the 2002 Equal Opportunities Decree (GOK). This decree intends to remove the differential approach of broader care services (for special-needs pupils) on the one hand and the educational priority policy (aimed at ethnic pupils) on the other. These two tracks of providing guidance to underprivileged pupils were initiated in 1993. Schools received extra hours if they accommodated such pupils. Since 2002, schools are given extra hours if they attract a minimum of 10% pupils who belong to an underprivileged target group. A pupil from a target group is indicated on the basis of social-economic and language indicators.

Upon registration, primary schools should present parents with their school regulations in which the daily routines, including any special costs that will be charged, are included. These regulations have to be drawn up in a participative

manner, in line with the participation decree that was approved in 2004.

In order to further explain their educational project, primary schools are also obliged to develop a curriculum according to a number of legally dictated sections.

At the conclusion of the primary school, a certificate of primary education is awarded. The number of pupils not being awarded with this certificate varies greatly and depends upon the particular school culture.

4.5 Secondary Education

Secondary education is intended for youngsters in the age group between 12 and 18 years of age. Secondary education is divided up into three stages: the first stage, for pupils from 12 - 14 years of age; the second stage for pupils from 14 - 16 years of age; and the third stage for pupils from 16 - 18 years of age.
Full-time secondary education is attended by 457,527 pupils in 1039 schools. Part-time secondary education is attended by 6,577 pupils in 48 schools.
Full-time secondary education has been organised according to a uniform structure since 1989. The unified structure comprises stages, educational types, and subject packages. The final study choice is postponed until the second stage, so that pupils are given the opportunity to learn about a wide diversity of subjects first.

During the first stage, the majority of lessons is covered by basic secondary education.
From the second stage onward, we distinguish four different educational types. Within one of these educational types, the pupil chooses for a certain subject package. General secondary education (aso) emphasises a broader general education, which will form the basis for higher education. Technical secondary education (tso) concentrates more on general and technical theoretical subjects. Artistic secondary education (kso) links a broad, general education to active artistic practice. Following tso or kso, the youngster is able to carry out a profession or switch to higher education. Vocational secondary education (bso) is a practically oriented form of education in which the youngster will learn a specific vocation, in addition to general educational subjects.
A pupil will receive a secondary school certificate after successfully completing six years of aso, tso, or kso, or seven years of bso. A secondary school certificate will give the youngster access to higher education.
Secondary education is organised per school year. After each year, the council of

teachers who monitor the educational progress of a class will deliver one of the three existing certificates. Certificate A will give access to the next school year. Certificate B will allow access, but only to a limited number of study packages. Certificate C means that the pupil has to repeat the year. After school year B and after the fifth year of aso and bso, B certificates are no longer given out.
The minimum teaching schedule in secondary education covers 28 periods of 50 minutes. The government, however, will subsidise for 32 periods, and for the tso, kso and bso even 34 or 36 periods. This is considered necessary in order to allow for sufficient practical experience. The subjects that have to be presented for each stage are laid down by law. The school board, however, is free to decide upon the number of periods spent on those subjects, resulting in different teaching schedules for different schools. In practice, the margins are limited because of the attainment levels that are set.

Also in secondary education, youngsters with a handicap, a learning or educational problem, who are impeded in their physical, psychological, social or intellectual development, are facilitated by special education. The ultimate goal is to optimally integrate the pupil into an educational or social environment by means of an individualised pedagogical and didactical course of learning. The educational types of special primary education are continued into secondary education, except for the fact that type 8 is not organised on a secondary level.
Special secondary education is organised in four educational structures according to the pupil's aptitudes and the chosen ultimate goal. We distinguish four educational structures (OV).
OV1 is the special secondary education towards social adjustment. The objective is to provide pupils with a social education in order to allow their integration into a protected living environment.
OV2 is the special secondary education towards social adjustment and ability to work. The objective is to provide pupils with a general and social education and a job training in order to allow their integration into a protected living and working environment.
OV3 is special secondary vocational education, and its objective is to provide pupils with a general, social and vocational education in order to prepare their integration into a normal living and working environment.
OV4 gives pupils the opportunity to follow an adapted programme that is equivalent to that of regular secondary education, with a full curriculum. These programmes are adapted for special secondary education in educational structure 4, adapted to the nature and the objectives of special education.

Via an integrated form of education (GON), youngsters with a handicap may also attend a regular school for secondary education. To realise this, they are given guidance by experts from special education.
From the age of 15 or 16, a pupil may switch to a part-time education system. In that case, youngsters may follow a training course in part-time vocational secondary education (DBSO). They may also start an apprenticeship with the VIZO-Syntra network or initiated by a recognised part-time training institution.

In order to valorise technical and vocational education, the Regional Technological Centres (RTC) were founded in 2001. These centres are regional forms of collaboration between education, trade & industry, and social-cultural organisations. Their objective is to join efforts in the setting up of technical and vocational schools. For example by sharing high-quality and expensive technical equipment, by attuning apprenticeship opportunities, and by organising refresher courses.

Especially in secondary education, there are classes for foreign newcomers, youngsters who do not speak any Dutch at all. These are called OKAN classes (Onthaalklas Anderstalige Nieuwkomers) or welcome classes for foreign-speaking newcomers. For one whole year, these youngsters are completely submerged in the Dutch language, in order to equip them to successfully follow a study after that year. In 2005, 38 secondary schools had welcome classes, which were attended by a total of 1695 students. One year proved insufficient for a number of students. That is why a study was started in 2007 to investigate the possibilities for a second year of OKAN.

First stage of secondary education
The first stage of secondary education comprises a first school year A for the vast majority of pupils and a school year B for pupils who are lagging behind to some extent in reading, writing and arithmetic. The second school year consists of a communal second year and a pre-vocational year (BVLJ).

The first stage does not differentiate any educational types. The idea behind this is to postpone the study choice until after the broad basic secondary education, covering two years, has been completed. During the first school year A, 27 periods are reserved for compulsory communal education with compulsory subjects for which attainment levels have been set. The remaining 5 periods are filled in at the school's own discretion. These may be used to anticipate a certain study choice, for example Latin, commerce, or technical subjects. During the first school year B,

also 27 periods are filled with basic subjects, with the emphasis on technological education and remedial language and arithmetic education. Here, also, are 5 periods free to be filled in.
During the second year, there are 24 periods of compulsory communal subjects with existing attainment levels. In addition, there are 'basic options' possible between 5 and 7 periods, of which some are focussed more on aso, while the majority is focussed more on tso and bso. Examples from the list of approximately 20 basic options include: Latin, science, commerce, mechanics/electricity, hotel/catering, building and woodwork. The remaining periods can be filled in at will. As far as content is concerned, there are no requirements as to the filling in of the basic options; neither are there any attainment levels set for these.
The pre-vocational year (BVLJ) is a choice for the bso. At the same time, it is ensured that the choice of vocations is not too narrow yet. To achieve this, pupils choose a broad vocational field covering 16 periods, or a combination of two vocational fields covering 8 periods each. Examples of wide vocational fields are: hotel, bakery, butcher's, agriculture, and horticulture. Examples of single vocational fields include: construction, electricity, decoration, metal, and textile. In all, there are over forty vocational fields to choose from.
Schools that opt for maximum communality, with ample opportunities for observation and orientation in order to enable optimum study choice after 14 years are commonly called comprehensive schools.

The primary school certificate allows general access to school year A. Without this certificate, exceptions may be made, provided that the Centre for Pupil Coaching, CLB, gives a favourable advice and on condition that the receiving school agrees. Pupils without a certificate go to school year B. Also, pupils from the age of 11 may switch from primary education to the school year B. This may prove to be a good alternative for pupils who experience difficulties keeping up in the fifth year of primary school. Rather than remain in primary school for another year, such a pupil will often benefit from the remedial approach of school year B. If he succeeds, he will be able to join school year A without any delay. A point of note: pupils are able to obtain their primary school certificate after the school year B or after the pre-vocational year. After the school year B, a pupil cannot gain access to the second communal year. He will either enter school year A, or switch over to the pre-vocational year.

Second stage of secondary education
In the second stage of secondary education, the pupil has the following options:
• the first and second school year of the second stage offer a choice of 4 educational types: aso, tso, kso, and bso;
• a third school year within the second stage of bso is organised in the form of a completion year.

Third stage of secondary education
In the third stage of secondary education, the pupil has the following options:
• the first and second school year of the second stage offer a choice of 4 educational types: aso, tso, kso, and bso;
• the third school year within the third stage of aso and tso is organised in the form of a preparatory year to higher education;
• the third school year within the third stage of tso, kso and bso is organised in the form of a specialisation year;
• the third school year within the third stage of bso is not organised in the form of a specialisation year, but gives the pupil a second chance to obtain the secondary school certificate;

Fourth stage of secondary education
Before 1995, there was the so-called Supplementary Secondary Vocational Education (ASBO), during which certain vocations were taught on an advanced level. These concerned nursing, dressmaking and the plastic arts. In 1995, higher education was rationalised and it was suggested to provide for a form of higher vocational education. After all, these students were over 18 years of age. Ultimately, it was decided to set up a fourth stage of BSO. These vocational studies take 2 or 3 years. Students are admitted after the sixth year of BSO or after passing an entrance test.
In the plans for a future qualification structure, it has once more been proposed to turn this fourth stage, together with higher adult education, into a form of higher vocational education.

However, for the purpose of this case study, we will limit ourselves to the curriculum of basic education during the first stage of secondary education.

5. State of the Art

This chapter describes the common core and what it looks like at the time of this case, and what the direction of their development is likely to be.

The 1991 decree marks the starting point for more autonomy being granted to schools. The decree regulates a core curriculum in terms of attainment levels for primary and secondary education, which are to be included in the school curriculum. Along with this curriculum, there are so-called Net curricula, which are developed and distributed by umbrella organisations, the so-called Nets. Net curricula are intended as support for schools in order to interpret the attainment levels and include these into their school curriculum. There are Net curricula for primary education and for all subjects in secondary education, all covering about 80 percent of the time available. The Net curricula are quite influential, in the sense that, to some extent, they have a centralising counter-effect on the pursuit of realising more curriculum autonomy.
Core objectives are considered to be the minimum objectives the educational authorities and the parliament consider necessary and feasible for a particular part of the pupil population. Attainment levels apply to a minimum set of knowledge, skills and attitudes for this part of the pupil population. Attainment levels with regard to knowledge and skills must be attained, while final objectives concerning attitudes are ones to be striven for. Attainment levels are established for the subjects of compulsory basic education. These subjects are compulsory for all pupils of the same form of education (general, technical, vocational or artistic secondary education) and stage. Attainment levels may be subject-bound or cross-curricular.

In addition to attainment levels, there are development objectives. These apply to pre-school education and the first stage of secondary education, and more especially to the school year B and the subsequent pre-vocational year. These development objectives must be striven for – although no strict results are required, they do call for a compulsory effort.
Special education also makes use of development objectives. However, the objectives for these pupils are selected on the basis of their aptitudes within the process of an operational plan.

5.1 Primary Education

The Department of Educational Development (DVO) formulated attainment levels, which have been anchored by the Flemish parliament. These attainment levels were made compulsory for all schools on 1 September 1998.

Pre-school education is provided with development objectives for the conclusion of the pre-school.
Development objectives have been determined for the following learning areas:
• Physical education: locomotive competencies, healthy and safe lifestyle, self perception, and social functioning.
• Musical education: image, music, drama, movement, media, and attitudes.
• Dutch: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and linguistics.
• World orientation: nature, technology, social studies, time and space
• Mathematical initiation: numbers, measurements, geometric initiation

Primary education is provided with attainment levels for the conclusion of primary school. These are grouped in the following learning areas:
• Physical education: locomotive competencies, healthy and safe lifestyle, self perception, and social functioning.
• Musical education: image, music, drama, movement, media, and attitudes.
• Dutch: listening, speaking, reading, writing, skills, strategies, and linguistics.
• French: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
• World orientation: nature, technology, social studies, time, space, and use of resources.
• Mathematics: numbers, measurements, geometry, strategies, problem-solving skills, and attitudes

Attainment levels covering different learning areas are laid down for:
• learning to learn
• social skills: forms of relationships, discussion conventions, and teamwork
• ICT

The attainment levels for ICT were added on 15 December 2006.

These attainment levels and development objectives can be consulted on the website of Division Curriculum: www.ond.vlaanderen.be/dvo., where they are also available in English.

5.2 Secondary Education

A 1991 decree states that the attainment levels for secondary education are laid down per form of education, per stage, and per cycle. When implementing a general education during the first stage, a problem is encountered as a result of the distinction between the inflow into the first school year A and that of the first school year B. For example, a number of pupils from the B stream will not be able to complete their basic secondary education by the end of the pre-vocational school year, while this is quite achievable for pupils from the second school year of the A stream. Moreover, the pupil profile of the B stream shows a very heterogeneous group.
That is why a differentiated approach for the A stream and the B stream was opted for. This way, an individual approach remains possible, allowing perspective on achieving the attainment levels and, if desired, a switch to the A stream. The level of difficulty of the curricula must match the pupils' aptitudes and should be increased only very gradually. The fact that, during the first school year B and the pre-vocational school year, the emphasis lies on the cohesion of subject material is demonstrated by the combination of a number of general subjects of basic secondary education in the Project General Subjects (PAV).

For basic secondary education, attainment levels and development objectives have been formulated. The attainment levels and development objectives have been formulated in such a concrete manner as to avoid misinterpretations. Still, they give schools sufficient freedom to realise other objectives as well, through their own educational projects and curricula. Organisations that believe that attainment levels and development objectives leave insufficient room for individual pedagogical and educational beliefs, or are irreconcilable with these, may submit a proposal of variance to the Flemish government.
The schools themselves determine in which way the attainment levels and development objectives are to be realised. Assessment of pupils is also left to the pedagogical freedom of schools. The final evaluation of pupils remains a decision of the council of teachers. There are no central tests or examinations.

For the first two years of secondary education, core objectives have been formulated for: geography, expressive arts, history, physical education, modern foreign languages: French and English, natural sciences, Dutch, technology education, and mathematics.
Cross-curricular core objectives have been formulated for: learning to learn, social skills, environmental education, education for citizenship, health education, and ICT.

The table below presents an overview of the subjects in the first stage of secondary education and their relation with learning areas in primary education.

First stage of secondary education		Primary education
Attainment levels A stream	**Development objectives B stream**	
Subject-linked	**Subject-linked**	**Linked to a learning area**
Geography	Social studies	World orientation
History		Domains of space and time
Artistic education	Artistic education	Musical education
Physical education	Physical education	Physical education
MVT (modern foreign languages): French and English	French	French
Natural sciences, physics, biology, research	Natural sciences, physics, biology, research	World orientation Domain of nature
Dutch	Dutch	Dutch
Technological education	Technological education	World orientation Domain of technology
Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
Trans-subject	**Trans-subject**	**Covering different learning areas**
Learning to learn	Learning to learn	Learning to learn
Social skills	Social skills	Social skills
Citizenship	Citizenship	World orientation Domain of society
Health education	Health education	World orientation Domain of society/ nature
Environmental education	Environmental education	World orientation Domain of nature
ICT	ICT	ICT

The attainment levels of the A stream and the development objectives of the B stream of the first stage of regular secondary education have been applied since 1 September 1997.
The attainment levels for ICT were added on 15 December 2006.
These attainment levels and development objectives can be consulted on the website www.ond.vlaanderen.be/dvo.

5.3 European developments

In the policy-making process of European countries, 'Europe' is an important player in the determination of educational content. In 2006, the following key competencies were approved as recommendations by the European parliament, after the Council of Ministers had also agreed:
• Skills in calculus and literacy as fundamental skills
• Basic competencies in mathematics, science and technology
• Foreign languages
• ICT skills
• Learning to learn
• Social skills
• Entrepreneurship
• General culture

Most of these key competencies are amply visible in the Flemish attainment levels, often in the form of trans-subject attainment levels. Some, however, are not written out as a separate section.
For example, the theme 'entrepreneurship' is not recognised as such. When the attainment levels are updated, this item will be given extra attention.

Culture is another item that is woven into the attainment levels of basic secondary education. In addition to musical education as a learning area in primary education, artistic education as a subject in the first stage, and the trans-subject attainment levels of musical-creative education in the second and third stages of secondary education, attainment levels concerning the broad meaning of cultural sciences is recognisable in many learning areas and subjects.
Recent studies into art and culture education in Flemish schools will be analysed by a committee and interpreted into policy proposals. Subsequently, a broad feedback group will indicate priorities.

When updating the key competency of foreign languages, the steering committee for language policy will pay extra attention to the knowledge of foreign languages in primary education and secondary vocational education.

5.4 Flemish policy document and letter for education

In his policy document for the period 2004 - 2009, minister Frank Vandenbroucke emphasised a number of aspects of the attainment levels. For example, he wondered whether the ideas and implementation of attainment levels mesh across the different layers. He also wonders whether a more competency-oriented description may lead to a whole of realisable and more concrete attainment levels. Furthermore, the cohesion among subjects should become more important by presenting minimum standards about which social consensus has been reached in a single package - more separately from the subjects in basic secondary education - to curriculum developers and school teams.
He also wants to evaluate trans-subject attainment levels in order to assess their achievability and social relevance.
Some of these questions could be interpreted in different ways.

In his policy letter for 2007 - 2008, therefore, the minister indicates his remarks and priorities in a clearer and more concrete fashion:

• Dutch
The attainment levels for Dutch and linguistics in primary education lack obligation. They concern mostly attitudes. Also, the list of terms and concepts is very limited. There are no agreements between Dutch and modern foreign languages.
During the coming working year, intensive efforts will be put towards the revision of attainment levels for the Dutch language, which will be presented to the Flemish Parliament in March of 2009. These will be drawn up according to the European Framework of Reference (ERK), which promotes a good balance between language structures and skills. The vertical attunement and coherence between Dutch and foreign languages will be monitored.

• Modern foreign languages
The current attainment levels for modern foreign languages show a few gaps. They are little operational, their level of command, according to the European Framework of Reference (ERK), is not clear, and the relationship between skills and

language structures is not clear. Moreover, they do not contain the component 'language and culture'.
In view of the compulsory subject of French in primary education, the attainment levels for French primary education and those for the first stage of secondary education should match more than they do, in order to facilitate the move from one educational layer to the next. According to the decree, two foreign languages are compulsory for all kso and tso pupils, and one for the bso pupils. That is why a revision of the attainment levels for foreign languages is being prepared as well. A proposal will be presented to the Flemish Parliament in March of 2009.

• Research and reference data for language, the sciences, and technology
In order to adjust the functions, interpretation and design of the attainment levels and development objectives, reference data are used. This way, I want to address the most urgent things first, rather than start up a long-winded and possibly little efficient process of refreshing the whole package.
As far as the subject-linked attainment levels are concerned, the development commissions for Dutch and foreign languages in primary education and the first stage of secondary education will set to work this school year. Subsequently, they will tackle foreign languages for the second and third stages.
In addition, the scientific subjects within primary education and the first stage of secondary education (world orientation, domain of nature) will be addressed. Finally, attention will be given to the attainment levels for technology, whereby the domain of technology within world orientation in primary education and technological education within the first stage of secondary education will be tackled first.

• Trans-subject attainment levels
The trans-subject attainment levels within the three stages of secondary education are updated as well. During the revision, an important point of attention will be the attunement between primary and secondary education.

For each of these points of attention, minister Vandenbroucke has commissioned the curriculum entity.

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

6.1 History

When the competences for education in Belgium were appointed to the communities in 1989, the then Minister of Education Daniel Coens commissioned the secretary-general Georges Monard to set up and supervise an advisory committee. The committee was to draw up a global vision and a draft for the promotion and control of educational quality. The commissions by the community inspectorate and the guidance services had to be clearly demarcated and their relationships clearly described.
The most important decisions by this Commission Monard were written out in two reports. Because all Nets are assigned pedagogical freedom, these Nets should bear responsibility for the setting up of their own project, attuned to their specificity. To help them achieve this, they are subsidised a counselling body.

The inspectorate is the government's monitoring instrument. It's main task is to determine the results that have been achieved for a certain pupil population. The objective of a visit by the inspectorate is to monitor the global functioning of a school in view of the achievement of attainment levels.
This advisory committee worked out the fundamentals for a decree.
The 'Decree concerning the Inspectorate, the Department of Educational Development, and pedagogical guidance services' was approved on 17 July 1991. This decree fit in with a broader vision on the quality of education. What was traditionally called the 'level of studies' was interpreted in further detail. In addition, the decree created a quality triangle, which included inspection, the development of attainment levels, and counselling. Pedagogical guidance became the full responsibility of the different Net organisations.
The interpretation of the attainment levels required expert preparations. That is why the Department of Educational Development was set up, under the command of Prof. Dr. R. Standaert. This service covered all networks and was to maintain close contact with the various components of society: socio-cultural associations, employers' and employees' organisations, and parents' associations. The most important tasks of this service include: the development of vision documents concerning attainment levels for education, the development of minimum

objectives, the coordination and quality control of scientific research concerning these, and the organisation of feedback concerning the implementation.
By means of a study performed by the Department of Educational Development and a thorough discussion in the General Board of the Flemish Advisory Council for Education (VLOR), in the presence of the then minister Luc Van den Bossche, a kind of charter was developed in 1993 containing principles and methods on which to base the formulation of attainment levels.

Since 1991, attainment levels and development objectives have gradually been edited in Flanders.
The attainment levels and development objectives, as designed by the Department of Educational Development, are advised by the Flemish Advisory Council for Education. Until a few years ago, this has always been a 'unanimous' advice. In other words, an advice adopted by a 75 percent majority was binding, because the Flemish government had to act in agreement with the advice. This way, the advisory council was able to intervene to a maximum in order to ensure the quality and quantity of the attainment levels. The attainment levels and development objectives are then approved and authorised by government and parliament.

The Nets draw up curricula that have to include the attainment levels, but they can contain a lot more besides. Curricula have to meet formal quality criteria, and must be presented to the inspectorate. The attainment levels guarantee a minimum quality, but leave very much room for differences in curricula.

In the decree of 22 February 1995, it was clarified that attainment levels and development objectives relate to the school, rather than the individual. The school itself determines who is awarded the certificate, by taking into consideration both the laid-down attainment levels and the own objectives. This is a unique feature of the Flanders system. A pupil's passing or failing is not based upon the attainment levels approved by the parliament. Although the attainment levels are to be included, the final decision remains with the school.

6.2 Principles

What should children and youngsters learn at school? Concerning the content of education, expressed as learning areas, subjects, objectives that cover different learning areas or different subjects, and key skills. Since attainment levels were established, parliament chose to determine upon, and monitor, a core curriculum.

This core curriculum contains all content distributed across the different educational types and the contents from pre-school education up to the end of compulsory education. The basic competencies of teacher training are also included.
Where the contents of education in the past were largely left to the school boards, the government should now also have sufficient know-how about the curriculum areas when setting out their policy concerning attainment levels. In addition, the developments within Europe, concerning foreign-language problems, the position of the sciences, culture, citizenship, and health stimulation, are themes that are of such significance that they deserve to be followed up.

The attainment levels and development objectives are formulated on the basis of a number of principles, which have been legitimised by the Flemish Advisory Council for Education. In other words, attainment levels and development objectives should:

• be consecutively built up;
• aim for harmonic education;
• operate subject-oriented as well as across different subjects;
• correlate horizontally;
• represent a broad education;
• be innovative.

6.2.1 Principle of the consecutive buildup

Consecutive buildup is the way in which consecutive educational layers are systematically engrafted onto the educational layer immediately preceding it. For example, the first stage of secondary education will follow from and capitalise on the attainment levels of primary education. The second stage of secondary education will capitalise on the attainment levels of the first stage, and the same is true for the third stage. Finally, the starting levels of higher education should be based upon the attainment levels of the third stage of secondary education. Although this principle is logical and simple, it is not always applied. As a result, teachers often find the pupils from the immediately preceding layer insufficiently prepared. By applying this principle, the own finality of the different educational layers is done justice to. And the psychological pressure on the teachers of the preceding layers is considerably reduced.
The continuity is also threatened because teachers are not familiar with the

attainment levels of each others' layers. The lack of consultation and knowledge about the layers preceding and following the own layer causes attunement problems.

6.2.2 Harmonic education

Attainment levels refer to knowledge, understanding, attitudes and skills. In other words, they concern a harmonic programme of cognitive, affective, and locomotive objectives. A person's character cannot be divided up into a cognitive, locomotive and affective part. Moreover, harmonic education implies the pursuit of both objective, monitored and measured objectives and other, more open and less measurable objectives. Also, competencies concern behavioural aspects in which knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes are applied in life-like situations, both on the shop floor and in social and personal life.

6.2.3 Relationship trans-subject and subject-oriented

Attainment levels may be categorised in subjects, in learning areas, and in themes. Including all intermediate positions. This way, a more general overview on reality is obtained. Attainment levels covering different learning areas and different subjects will stimulate schools to focus more on correlation and orientation on real-life situations.

6.2.4 Horizontal and vertical correlation

The different subject and learning areas that are presented within a certain educational layer should demonstrate sufficient correlation. Interrelationships and cross-references should be looked for. In addition, overlaps should be avoided. This way, horizontal correlation is obtained. Also, the vertical correlation should be monitored. The attainment levels of the different layers should be placed in a continuous line, whereby the pupils' transitions should be built in as seamlessly as possible. This is especially important for the pupils' ability to familiarise themselves. In the case of vertical correlation, gaps and overlaps are avoided. Education is placed in an overall framework.

6.2.5 Innovative principles

The implementation of attainment levels and development objectives also involved the legitimisation of a number of innovations and shifts in educational principles:
• from specialisation to a more general education;
• from pure knowledge to applied knowledge;
• from cognitive learning to a more harmonic education;
• from subject-oriented organisation to education in its entirety;
• from sequential buildup to exemplary teaching;
• from short-term learning to long-lasting learning.

6.3 Functions of attainment levels

Attainment levels of a centrally laid-down curriculum for a particular educational layer have different functions. A primary function is to make learning more transparent. When it becomes clear what pupils are learning at school, this will lead to a higher quality. As a result, attainment levels offer the following advantages:
• they will make education more accessible for the parents, lowering the threshold towards parent participation in school affairs;
• they facilitate a social discussion, because the options and preferences are clearly described. This way, attainment levels promote democratic education;
• they provide a recognisable basis for monitoring and control of educational quality;
• they provide clarity for teachers about the things that need to be focussed on. This will prevent information being asked too much or too little;
• they provide a basis for coaching and refresher courses;
• they enable the charting of transitions, attunement and overlap, as well as systems of modular education;
• they enable transition and attunement to adult education;
• they make investments in relevant and high-quality tests more profitable;
• they enable the provision of broad educational services by revealing situations in which remedial care is needed;
• they render the construction of curricula, tools and schoolbooks more efficient in a pedagogical and economical way;
• they create a rational basis for discussions about equivalency of certificates.

The important functions of attainment levels and development objectives are the criterion and attunement functions. Other functions of attainment levels include, image, emancipatory and guiding functions.

6.3.1 Criterion function

Attainment levels and development objectives describe the schools' social commitment towards a pupil population. For this population, they express a social minimum and therefore guaranteed aspiration level. The achievement of this aspiration level is evaluated by the government and the schools.
To enable this, the attainment levels and development objectives form an important criterion function. Attainment levels and development objectives are the criteria that guarantee a comparable minimum quality and aspiration level in all schools and for all pupils and enable the evaluation of this minimum quality and this aspiration level by the schools and the government.
Within a certain functionality and for a certain goal-orientedness, attainment levels fulfil the criterion function in other ways as well. For example when approving curricula, drawing up operational plans, recognising and financing or subsidising schools, developing evaluation tools used for the evaluation at system level, developing auditing frameworks for the inspectorate, sanctioning studies, and granting certificates to pupils.

6.3.2 Attunement function

Furthermore, by making the school's social commitment more explicit, attainment levels and development objectives guarantee a common base within the Flemish educational programme. In other words, attainment levels and development objectives also fulfil an attunement function. They contribute to the attunement within an educational layer at the end of a layer or stage as well as the attunement among consecutive educational layers.
Within this attunement function, horizontal and vertical correlation are important criteria for the development of curricula, operational plans, and educational tools. These curricular products make learning lines more concrete. School teams determine to a large extent the way in which horizontal and vertical correlation is realised. Therefore, attainment levels and development objectives are necessary elements - though not the only ones - for attunement. During the development of curricula, attainment levels and development objectives are the beacons that help

prevent excessive anticipation and overlap among consecutive layers and related subjects or learning areas within basic secondary education.

6.3.3 Image function

Development objectives and attainment levels help increase the transparency of education, for partners within and outside of the educational system. Not just parents and pupils, but others will also become familiar with what is learned in school. Education becomes a subject of discussion. This way, attainment levels contribute to the transparency within the educational system. Teachers and school teams gain reference points in order to assess their own views and daily practice. Moreover, attainment levels contribute to the transparency between education and society. Parents, the social playing field, and policy makers gain a perspective on socially important and necessary educational content. This way, a reference point is created for the discussion about citizenship, languages, ICT, technology, health stimulation, and sustainable development.
Using attainment levels, social expectations concerning education can be channelled in a democratic way, via a parliamentary procedure.

6.3.4 Emancipatory function

Because of attainment levels, pupils have to fulfil high expectations. From the perspective of equal opportunities, this means that all schools are committed to strive for these objectives together with all of their pupils, regardless of gender, descent, native tongue, or social-cultural capital. This way, attainment levels contribute to the guarantee of a high level of ambition for everybody. The guarantee of a broad education for everybody will lead to self-realisation, self-determination, and participation.

6.3.5 Guiding function

As a part of a quality assurance system, attainment levels will also fulfil a supporting and guiding function in related domains. Both for the government and for other actors, they represent a reference point that can be used in the pursuit of policies. They can support the policymaking process concerning free education. They can support local pursuit of policies, or the pursuit of policies in other policy

domains, such as culture, science, innovation, or the environment. They can support the development of educational tools and projects.

6.4 Features of attainment levels in primary education

The selection of attainment levels is guided by a number of basic principles, which have been discussed. The basic principles remain throughout education and are specified in more detail, or added to, according to the form of education or the educational layer.
The general objectives of pre-school and primary-school education are in line. These principles are: a broad education, active learning, broad care, and cohesion. These basic principles are always realised by means of intercultural and emancipatory education.

6.4.1 Broad education

Both in pre-school and primary-school education, the emphasis is put on broad education. This implies a wide basic education, whereby the child's personal development is focussed on. Moreover, the foundation is laid for further studies and the smooth functioning in society. Not only the intellectual development, but also skills, attitudes and values are important. Children should be given the chance to develop competencies in situations that are realistic to them. Children should learn from a world that is familiar to them. Different aspects of their development should be appealed to. This will also contribute to broad education. A harmonic development of the child's personality demands a balanced approach to all of his development areas.

6.4.2 Active learning

The development objectives of pre-school and the attainment levels of primary school ensure ample room for the children to learn in an active manner. For example by searching for solutions together with the teacher and fellow pupils, using skills, and gaining understanding. These concern basic competencies, i.e. the objectives formulated are real: they can be applied in the children's day-to-day lives. Aspects of active learning include: solving a problem together with a fellow pupil, organising one's own work, being given the chance to explain one's own

working method, learning about the working methods of others, asking for extra information, checking one's own solutions, and being given the chance to explore one's own aspects of active learning. Learning is an active and constructive process. In order to get this process going, children should dwell in a rich and challenging learning environment. Moreover, they should be given the chance to pick up their own learning process.

6.4.3 Broad care

The school's principal concern is to make sure each child learns the necessary basic skills. All children have a right to this minimum. Yet, the differences among children should be taken into consideration. After all, the personal development of each child is what needs to be focussed on. Parents expect the school to realise sufficiently broad care in order to provide their child with a solid basic education. The attainment levels formulate the rights of all children. Compensation and dispensation are aspects of broad care, just like more time and a specific programme, both preventive and remedial.

6.4.4 Cohesion

A fourth important feature is the cohesion among different learning areas. Children do not see reality as a series of separate items. That is why there are only 5 learning areas and 2 themes that cover different learning areas. This is called horizontal cohesion. In addition, there is vertical cohesion. This implies a continuous line in the learning process, from pre-school up to the end of compulsory education. Education that closely matches reality will demonstrate horizontal cohesion among the different learning areas and domains. A practical situation provides opportunities to work on attainment levels from different learning areas.

The Primary Education Decree of 1997 states that the school should create an educational and learning environment, based upon a pedagogic project, in which pupils are able to follow a continuous learning process. This environment is adjusted to the progress in pupils' development. Primary education is responsible for education to all pupils, and should provide continuous guidance to as many pupils as possible by means of permanent attention and broad care. That is why the obligation to organise education in school years is removed. The decree states that the traditional school-year system may be departed from.

6.5 Features of attainment levels in secondary education

The same basic principles guide the organisation of attainment levels for secondary education. And where the first stage of secondary education is concerned, the stimulation of study and vocational choice is added in principle. And by helping pupils to develop their self perception, by teaching them how to choose and coexist, the second and third stages of secondary education complete their education process.
Development objectives of the B stream are intended for youngsters from the first school year B who are expected to continue on to the vocational year. Attainment levels for the A stream are the minimum objectives for pupils from the first school year A and the second year.
This is in line with the objective to provide all pupils with a broad, balanced, general education during the first stage. This way, the youngsters are able to discover their own potential and make a well-founded study choice for the second stage, based on their personal aptitudes and interests. Attainment levels and development objectives are only formulated for the subjects of basic secondary education as laid down in the decree. Therefore, no attainment levels and development objectives have been laid down for the subjects from the basic options, the vocational fields, and the optional part. Similarly, no attainment levels and development objectives have been determined for education in a recognised religion or moral code.

In addition to subject-linked attainment levels and development objectives, there are the trans-subject ones. Trans-subject themes comprise objectives that may concern all subjects, or which cannot be included in a single subject. One could say that these concern objectives that might otherwise slip through the subjects net. By means of attainment levels and development objectives, society indicates its expectations of each school. The community inspectorate supervises this. The subject-linked attainment levels and development objectives have to be included in the curricula in a recognisable way. The trans-subject attainment levels and development objectives may be realised by several subjects or educational projects. The school must write down a vision, with which the teachers should be familiar, and about which all participants should be informed. Moreover, the school should be able to demonstrate its inclusion of these themes in their own planning.

7. Policy philosophy, steering mechanism, innovation policy

7.1 Freedom of education

The context in which quality control is situated in Flanders, is very different from the context in most other European countries. When putting inspection of contents on a scale, we distinguish seven levels. A maximum level of inspection indicates the government's laying down of curricula and methods to be used, and central tests in order to measure contents. The second highest level is where the government lays down curricula and external tests. A third level indicates the organisation of central tests and examinations. On a fourth level, minimum objectives are laid down as vague core objectives, which are linked to central tests. On a fifth level, curricula are laid down without central tests. Here, inspection is only carried out on the basis of curricula. On a sixth level, a core curriculum is determined upon and there are no external examinations. This is the situation in Flanders, with attainment levels without central tests. On the seventh level, schools are allowed to make up their own curricula, under a broad inspection, without central examinations. This was the situation in Flanders before attainment levels were introduced. In order to gain access to university education, a type of maturity test had to be done in the school.

In Flanders, a subtle and historically anchored balance has been reached between the government's tasks and the tasks of educational organisations. This has to do with the fact that education in Flanders is considered to be more than just training and teaching. It is believed that a school should, in its educational project, also teach values, attitudes and convictions. Often, these are aspects that cannot be measured, which is a reason not to have any external tests performed. Therefore, the freedom of educational organisation is quite extreme. It includes the hiring and firing of teachers, financial autonomy, the creation of curricula, the determination of teaching schedules, freedom of method and organisation, and freedom of evaluation and examination systems. On the other hand, the government puts schools under the obligation to ensure that attainment levels are achieved and development objectives are striven for.

The policy philosophy behind attainment levels is based on the fact that educational contents are best controlled by laying down a core curriculum all schools have to use. If this core curriculum is sufficiently concrete, it will render

external examinations redundant. By giving all youngsters the opportunity to follow the same basic education, with the same contents, the principle of equal opportunities is respected. This way, all youngsters are given the opportunity to smoothly move on to higher education or vocational schools.

To date, the concept of basic education in Flanders has only legally been included in the regulations for the secondary education system. Basic secondary education is described as 'those subjects that should be taught during a particular school year to each and every pupil, without exception'. An interpretation concerning content is added to indicate the contribution of this basic secondary education. The essence is to prepare pupils for critical and creative functioning in society and for the development of his personal life. This is quite another finality than the one used by education that prepares a pupil for a qualification.
From a social and personal point of view, the complete curriculum of primary education and the first stage of secondary education is regarded as basic education. From the second stage of secondary education, this changes. Here, pupils are given the opportunity to follow supplementary or vocational training, next to their basic education. Therefore, during the second and third stages of secondary education, basic education only forms a part of the curriculum.

The envisaged finality of basic education applies to both primary and secondary education. Naturally, the contribution of primary education to this finality will be interpreted differently from that of secondary education. The same is true for the contribution of special education as opposed to regular education. However, the ultimate goal is the same for each pupil.
Considering this finality, the content of basic education cannot be derived from a vocational profile or a study profile – frames of reference that indicate which competencies a pupil will need for his continued learning or vocational process. An important feature of basic education is that it concerns a socially established educational commitment. Its establishment must be guaranteed by procedures for development, advice and confirmation. For each of these stages, sufficiently broad public support and a democratic decision-making process are needed. This way, a social discussion can take place about the school's commitment.
Question is not what the minimum is, but what the aspirational level should be, for a certain group of children and youngsters. Not every pupil will be able to quite achieve this aspirational level, but each pupil, in every school, has the right to try. This is the essence of equal opportunities.
For Parliament, development objectives and attainment levels form the basis to make the social commitment of each school more explicit, in order to get as many

youngsters as possible to complete this basic education.

This conceptual interpretation of development objectives and attainment levels was written down in the so-called 'Theme Decree' for secondary education, as well as in the Primary Education Decree. With the Theme Decree of 2002, the government chose to include the quality standards regarding content and certain aspects of the development of attainment levels and development objectives in a single, adapted theme decree concerning quality standards in secondary education. Until that moment, the attainment levels and development objectives for secondary education were anchored in an earlier general act, which regulated the freedom of education.

7.2 The school as a focus on quality

The definition of attainment levels makes it clear that attainment levels are at the core of the school's commitment. Attainment levels should be achieved by as many pupils as possible. In order to assess whether the school lives up to this commitment, the school context and the features of the school population are taken into consideration. This way, the pressure is taken off the shoulders of individual pupils, and it becomes clear that attainment levels will not stand in the way of customisation.
It is assumed that the quality and the progress of quality are anchored in the local context. The school is viewed as a system in which different factors capitalise on each other in order to achieve a uniqueness. Schools differ in context, input, output, and learning and teaching processes. Each school has its own quality. That is why it is difficult to compare one school to the next.
The quality of Flemish schools is reported on the basis of a series of indicators concerning the context, the inflow of pupils, the nature of teachers, the organisational forms, the boards, the methods, and the output. Each of these factors capitalises on the others, resulting in a uniqueness for each school. Schools are stimulated to evaluate themselves.
In order to stimulate the schools' ability to pursue its own policy, the government invests in counselling bodies, which are allocated to the Nets.
The distinction between attainment levels and development objectives is not very large. Arguments exist, however, to maintain this distinction between attainment levels that schools should bet their pupils to achieve wherever possible, and development objectives, which they should strive for. These arguments concern the nature of the objectives, for example attitudes, or attainment levels

that cover different learning areas of different subjects. These also concern the uniqueness of the group of children for whom objectives are considered desirable. Objectives are striven for in the case of pre-school children and in the case of pupils within the B stream of the first stage of secondary education. For pupils in special education, objectives are selected and striven for. Attainment levels only apply to the conclusion of primary education and the end of the first stage of secondary education. They concern knowledge, understanding and skills linked to a certain learning area or subject. That is why these are such important orientation moments for pupils.

7.3 Professionalism of teachers

The Flemish educational policy is based on quality being visible in the classroom, in the teacher. That is why investments must be made in teacher training, refresher courses, and teacher coaching.
Teachers are needed who are in control of the complex interactions between teachers and pupils, including special-needs pupils, between teachers and other teachers, between pupils among themselves, and between teachers and the outside world. It is also believed that as teachers are given more responsibility, their motivation and job satisfaction will increase. This is in line with the desire to have schools include complex educational tasks in their package. For example concerning physiological, psychological, cultural and sociological backgrounds. This is another reason not to use central tests but to use a core curriculum. Teacher training courses are bound by legally determined basic competencies, which match attainment levels.

7.4 The evolution of the concept of freedom

Since the historic definition of the balance between the government and the organisations, the interpretation of the concept of 'freedom' has undergone an evolutionary process. This evolution concerns the following factors:
• the vagueness of the concepts 'level of studies' and 'minimum curriculum', which used to be the bases for subsidies, caused much indistinctness and easily led to subjective interpretations during inspections;
• the international evidence that the educational level of a population had to fit in with economic, cultural and psychological characteristics and situations;

• the progress of scientific research into learning processes and educational organisation;
• a legal form for the right of a minimum for vulnerable pupils;
• the growing articulation of education's customers and the resulting demand for transparency about what children are learning in school;
• the growing complexity of culture in a general sense. Not everything can be learned in school; that is why it should be democratically determined what is necessary for a citizen;
• the understanding that the legal right to equal opportunities for the underprivileged and people with a handicap does not guarantee actual equal opportunities for the minorities concerned.

These evolutions illustrate the fact that this concerns a dynamic balance. Attainment levels and development objectives are crucial for the indication of aspirational levels. Regarding the huge civil effect of basic education, this clarity is an important criterion for the democratic content of a broad basic education. A certificate should be granted on the basis of democratically determined contents.

8. Development and implementation of core objectives

Attainment levels and development objectives are formulated within the contours of the regulations and international agreements which Flanders or Belgium has entered into.
The actual development takes place within the contours of the following frames of reference:
• a general educational frame of reference;
• frames of reference per educational layer;
• a frame of reference that operationalises and describes the social interpretation of basic education;
• frames of reference per subject, domain, theme or learning area.

The government chooses to formulate attainment levels and development objectives, which, wherever possible, are interpreted by combining subjects, enable competency-developing learning environments, allow schools ample leeway, and pay attention to achievability and study load.

In addition to the generally applied principles discussed earlier, the interpretation of attainment levels and development objectives also includes elements that are typical for the different educational layers or sectors. For example, regular primary education puts a strong emphasis on broad care. Special primary education is looking for a balance between the specificness of persons with a disorder or handicap and social expectations. A specific example from the first stage of secondary education is the attention to the ability to choose regarding the further school career. Furthermore, in secondary education, the choices for a polyvalent second stage and a profiled third stage are important for the interpretation of attainment levels.

Interpretation of attainment levels or development objectives for the different subjects, domains, themes or learning areas should be done in function of the social interpretation of basic education and from the frames of reference described. However, each subject or domain should also be approached from its own vision or frame of reference and from its own structure or buildup. This vision comprises the choices of content that are made for a certain subject and determines the criteria for the selection of attainment levels or development objectives.

A 1990 Decree, specifically for secondary education, determines the subjects that should be taught during a particular school year to each and every pupil. This strongly subject-oriented approach obstructs schools in their efforts to realise a cohesive and balanced educational programme. For pupils, it is difficult to rise above the fragmentation of the subjects' reality and to acquire a combination of knowledge and experience. Attainment levels and development objectives that cover different subjects greatly meet this need.

Attainment levels and development objectives form a frame of reference for further curriculum development in compulsory education. The way in which curricula are developed, on the basis of attainment levels and development objectives, is the choice and the responsibility of education providers. They can choose for the creation of competency-developing learning environments. Curricula may be developed in a more competency-oriented manner by creating integrated clusters of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Attainment levels and development objectives describe a similar minimum quality for all schools and pupils. This is the school's social commitment. Schools themselves will determine the pedagogical methods they want to use to fulfil this commitment. Schools should also be able to choose which additional objectives they want to realise, according to their pedagogical project. Depending on their vision and mission, schools are able to place their own emphases. Attainment levels and development objectives should also respect and stimulate the professionalism of school teams and teachers. For all these reasons should attainment levels and development objectives provide sufficient leeway and not become a straitjacket for school teams and teachers. Therefore, next to contents prescribing attainment levels, there should be plenty of room for the school's own interpretation.

Attainment levels and development objectives indicate an aspirational level for a certain pupil population. Obviously, these should not require unreasonable expectations from that certain population. Achievability is an important criterion for the development and implementation of attainment levels and development objectives.
Attainment levels and development objectives are formulated by subject, learning area or theme. Each time, these form a part of the total curriculum for the pupil population concerned. Therefore, the attainment levels and development objectives written for each part, have to take into consideration their relative weight within the total programme. Attainment levels and development objectives should ensure that the study load does not become too much for pupils.

8.1 Design of attainment levels and development objectives

Before designing the attainment levels and development objectives, the way these are organised must be studied. The major organisational frameworks are clear and for a large part legally determined: learning areas, subjects, themes. However, attainment levels and development objectives may be organised in a different way for each learning area, subject or theme. This has to do with the internal logic and dynamism of the subjects or learning areas. After all, it is not possible, or even desirable, to organise all subjects and learning areas in the same way. Whichever way things are organised, for example according to skills, sub themes or otherwise, the organisational criteria may differ per subject or learning area.

Considering the fact that attainment levels and development objectives are criteria to guarantee a comparable minimum quality and aspirational level in all schools and for all pupils, they must be clearly defined. Attainment levels and development objectives should clearly indicate the scope of the schools' commitment. To a certain extent, clarity also involves concreteness. If objectives are too vague or too general, this will result in misunderstandings, misinterpretations and discussions. Often, objectives are given a maximum interpretation, which will lead to ornateness.

Attainment levels and development objectives should be sufficiently concrete to guarantee clarity and transparency, but not to the extent that they thwart the necessary space required by teachers and schools. In order to clarify attainment levels and development objectives, and curtail the application area, they are sometimes presented in a context. Here, also, contexts are only indicated where necessary. Further contextualisation should take place on curricular and school level. Attainment levels and development objectives should also be formulated in such a way that they are teachable within a scholarly context.

8.2 The procedure

The decree giver assumed that the attainment levels and development objectives for basic education should be supported by all of society. That is why a firmly balanced procedure has been drawn up. The stages within the procedure will provide a subtle balance between the different participants.
During the preparational stage, the Department of Educational Development draws up a design. This department will guarantee an independent, scientific

approach. This is done by means of work groups comprising various experts, with the emphasis on people from educational practice. This way, realism and feasibility are striven for.

During the advisory stage, it is the task of the Flemish Advisory Council for Education (VLOR) to advise the minister of education. Within the VLOR, all participants are heard: the organisations, the schools, the trade unions, the parents and the pupils.

Also during the early stages, other sectors besides the educational one were consulted. A broad social debate was conducted, and within the Department of Educational Development (DVO) an information and communication cell for attainment levels was set up.

During the decision-making stage, the Flemish government will decide whether to present the proposal and advise from the VLOR to the Flemish parliament for confirmation. In case of agreement, this will occur within a month, in case of disagreement, the dossier will be referred back to one of the previous stages for a new proposal. Finally, the Flemish parliament will confirm the attainment levels, if necessary after amendment.

This procedure comprises a succession of various inputs from society. This way, the attainment levels thus constructed will be assured of broad social support. The minimum or the aspirational level that is created thus will have the approval of the majority of interested parties. After all, in this procedure, realism and feasibility are striven for. Moreover, good practice is brought to all schools.

8.3 Evaluation of attainment levels

In the past, discussions about the concept of attainment levels were always linked to the question of how, for whom, and by whom the attainment levels are to be evaluated. This is quite understandable, because this question refers to the functions that are attributed to attainment levels. As far as the government is concerned, attainment levels first and foremost have a criterion function. After all, attainment levels are the criterion for the Parliament to guarantee a comparable minimum quality in all schools and for all pupils.

In the definitions of attainment levels and development objectives themselves, it is indicated how, during a school audit and the evaluation of the 'level of achievement of the attainment levels' carried out by the inspectorate, the school's context and school's population are taken into account. The inspectorate will

then make a pronouncement about the extent to which the school is fulfilling its social commitment. It is an evaluation at school level. The government, by way of the inspectorate, will not make any pronouncement about the attainment levels of individual pupils. This is, and should remain, the responsibility of the school, in this case the council of teachers, which will deliberate about the performances of individual pupils on the basis of internal evaluations and give their final appraisal. The council of teachers will not only base their deliberation and evaluation on the development objectives or attainment levels, but also on curricular objectives and any other objectives from the school's own pedagogical project.

Development objectives and attainment levels are essential, but not the only, reference points that are taken into consideration during the deliberation of the council of teachers. They are essential because they form the common core of the curriculum, which is taken by every pupil. Thanks to the fact that attainment levels and development objectives are contained in the curricula, this common core is guaranteed. Indirectly, attainment levels therefore form a reference point for the study sanctioning of individual pupils. But considering the focus of the attainment levels within the school, a school may decide to fail a pupil if he has only mastered the attainment levels. By choosing a school, parents accept the curricula of that school as a standard for passing or failing. This way, some schools will base their passing of pupils more on attainment levels than others. Therefore, a difference in the granting of certificates is built into this mechanism.

In addition to the evaluations at school level, as carried out by the inspectorate, and at pupil level, as carried out by the schools, the government organises an evaluation of the achievement of attainment levels at system level. This is done by means of assessments on the basis of anonymous random school surveys. As a service for the schools participating in the survey, they are given feedback about their global results, not by pupil, afterwards. The primary objective of the assessments, however, remains the collection of information and the interpretation on Flemish educational level. The mere fact that the possible impact of school or pupil features is included, does not imply that the assessments become evaluations at school or pupil level. This misunderstanding causes anxiety about the government's intentions where the assessments are concerned. It should be clear that the government does not choose to expand an assessment system that allows for external evaluations to be carried out of the performances of individual pupils, for example by central examinations, nor for a ranking of schools. On the contrary, the government intends to appeal to the schools' ability to pursue its own policy. Internal evaluation and monitoring of the own performance are basic facts in this. In order to enable schools to systematically collect information about pupils'

performances and pupils' school careers, more efficiently than they are doing now, the government wants to investigate which tools may be used to contribute to this. Examples are the development of parallel versions of the assessments. The government will provide schools with a parallel version, free of charge and free of obligations. This way, schools are able to evaluate their own performances regarding their social commitment, as far as the realisation of attainment levels are concerned, expressed in pupils' performances. Schools that use these instruments, will be able to compare their own results to those of comparable schools.

9. Implementation, activities undertaken, and their results

Approximately ten years after the implementation of attainment levels and development objectives in primary education and the first stage of secondary education, these development objectives and attainment levels will be updated. The implementation of the current attainment levels and development objectives was officially started for primary education on 1 September 1998, and for the first stage of secondary education on 1 September 1997.
The implementation was stimulated by the government, by distributing information folders and workbooks for educational practice. These contained service documents in which attainment levels were explained by means of examples and by writing out their vertical and horizontal cohesion. The vision on the attainment levels, taken from the explanatory memorandum to the decree, was presented in a rather more readable version.
In addition to the free distribution of these information folders and workbooks to all Flemish schools, many study days were organised as well, in order to prepare members of the inspectorate and pedagogical guidance for the further implementation and supervision of the use of attainment levels and development objectives.

Evaluation and updating are normal processes, which are a part of the cycle of permanent quality control. For primary education, such an evaluation and any necessary revision were included in the decree for the attainment levels and development objectives itself. Attainment levels and development objectives could not be changed until after a minimum term of 6 years. It was the decree giver's intention to build in guarantees of evaluation of the approved attainment levels and development objectives, to make sure they were kept up to date. Also, a buffer was built in, to give schools, teachers, and material and curriculum developers ample opportunity to properly implement the attainment levels and development objectives. A period of at least 6 years was envisaged.
No formal agreements were made concerning the evaluation and any necessary revision for the attainment levels and development objectives of the first stage of secondary education.

Since the attainment levels and development objectives were approved, the government created a number of platforms to collect evaluation data.

After an applied survey, a report was published in 2007 concerning the achievability and desirability of attainment levels and development objectives in primary education. These results formed a valuable empiric contribution concerning the satisfaction with and the use of attainment levels and development objectives in primary education.

The results of the survey can be summarised as follows. On the whole, pre-school teachers are satisfied with the current development objectives. They believe that the development objectives match their desires concerning the educational programme they want to present and that the development objectives allow sufficient room for own interpretation during their daily teaching practice. Most of the pre-school teachers also believe that the subdivision into different learning areas is useful and coherent. They are less than satisfied with the development objectives for technology, measuring and the media.

On the whole, primary-school teachers are satisfied with the current attainment levels. They believe that the attainment levels match the matter they want to teach their pupils and that the attainment levels allow sufficient room for own interpretation during their daily teaching practice. They also find the attitudinal attainment levels worthwhile. Also, they believe that the subdivision of attainment levels into learning areas and across different learning areas is useful and coherent. They are less than satisfied with the attainment levels for linguistics, technology, and the media.

Teachers regard attainment levels and development objectives as a guiding tool for the setting out of learning lines, the setting of teaching targets, the drawing up of plannings, and the filling in of the schedule. In addition, many pre-school teachers regularly use the development objectives to monitor the progress of pre-school children, in order to determine which children are in need of extra care.

From the survey, a number of policy recommendations followed.

• There is a continuing need for information and support. In order to raise the level of satisfaction in teachers concerning the use of attainment levels and development objectives, it is important to work on the development of competencies within education. By increasing the participation structure in schools, the schools' ability to pursue their own policies is reinforced. Raising the schools' ability to pursue their own policies affects quality control and the use of attainment levels and development objectives.

• The positioning of attainment levels and development objectives in relation to other curriculum products should be reviewed. The leeway for didactic actions, presented by the attainment levels, is greatly appreciated by teachers. However, teachers still often use curricula because these give them something to hold on to and are more detailed.

• Attainment levels and development objectives are suitable instruments for quality control and monitoring. Many teachers regularly use attainment levels for the improvement and renewal of their teaching, for the evaluation of activities and projects, and for self evaluation of the school. Different stakeholders have an interest in the development of clear indicators, in order to test whether the attainment levels are realised.

• There is room for improvement in the way attainment levels of the different layers are attuned to one another. The transition from pre-school to primary school, and from primary to secondary education in relation to attainment levels should be given more attention. Moreover, teachers are insufficiently familiar with the attainment levels of preceding or subsequent layers.

• The relationship between costs and available means linked to the implementation of attainment levels should be investigated. In spite of the fact that primary education is free, teachers are saying that the school does not have sufficient means to work on the attainment levels for musical and physical education. This particularly concerns the infrastructure.

• The attainment levels for linguistics, musical education and French should be revised. According to teachers, the attainment levels for musical education are difficult to implement in actual practice. Possible solutions would be a redefinition of attainment levels or addition support for teachers. As far as Dutch is concerned, more attention is needed for linguistics, and French, apparently, is in need of expansion into memorisation and the active production of the French language.

For the evaluation of trans-subject attainment levels in secondary education, a survey is presently being carried out. The results should be available next year.

By way of a framework agreement with a research group, the government started up a system of periodic assessments. The first assessments took place in primary education in 2002. In the meantime, a planning has been made that includes two assessments per year for the period 2006-2011. Different groups of attainment levels are systematically assessed during a random survey of pupils in both primary and secondary education. In June of 2007, the first assessment of 2002, reading

comprehension in primary education, was repeated. Eventually, such repeats should allow evolutions to be monitored.

The results of the assessments provide food for thought as to whom is professionally involved in education. The assessment provides an excellent impetus to the discussion about educational quality and any desired changes. Concerning attainment levels where pupils achieve good results, it is important to think about ways of maintaining or improving these results in future. In case of poor results, the cause must be discovered. Poor results may be caused by education itself. In that case, improvement must be sought by means of initiatives of pedagogical guidance, teacher training, and refresher courses. Perhaps teachers need more time and support to realise innovative attainment levels. Poor results may also be caused by the attainment levels themselves.

The assessors provided the schools participating in the assessment with a summary of their results. Schools can use these results for reflection and self evaluation. Pedagogical guidance services may discuss the results of the assessments with the schools, compare the results with their own findings, or look for possible explanations.

Based on the results, teacher trainers can start thinking about the contents and methods they are going to teach future teachers.

The inspectorate collected information about the implementation of the attainment levels and development objectives in the schools and the resulting new curricula. The inspectorate for primary education clearly based its assessments of the schools' educational functioning on the legally approved attainment levels and development objectives. In secondary education, this link was less evident. The inspectorate for secondary education did develop specific methods for the evaluation of the implementation of trans-subject themes. This way, the inspectorate's assessment reports contained evaluation data, which could serve as input for a debate about the updating of attainment levels and development objectives.

To make the revision process more controllable, the government made a number of strategic choices and choices concerning content. Not the whole package of attainment levels and development objectives is to be examined all at once, but this is done domain by domain. At the same time, the availability of reference data and policy priorities is taken into account.

During the first stage (2007-2009), the curriculum parts Science, Technology and Languages for basic education, both in primary and in secondary education, and

the trans-subject themes in secondary education are focussed upon. Also, the correlation between regular and special education is looked into further.

The progress of implementation is investigated, as well as the achievability of the envisaged objectives for the pupil population for which they are intended. Also, it is investigated whether new educational or social developments have occurred that may give rise to an update of attainment levels and development objectives. Prior to, or parallel to, the intrinsic discussion concerning the desirability and achievability of the current development objectives and attainment levels, questions will be asked as to the scope of the concept of attainment terms that is applicable here.

Updated attainment levels will occur as reference and evaluation data become available. These concern assessment results, applied surveys, inspectorate information, policy documents, projects, and 'experimental gardens'. This means, that the interpretation of attainment levels and development objectives are also determined by taking into consideration the evaluation results from assessments, reference information from projects, etc., and political choices contained in important policy documents, e.g. a language policy memorandum.

Moreover, by updating on the basis of reference data, the whole curriculum is not revised all at once. Updating is limited to those curriculum parts for which reference information is available. This method allows effective updating because strong and not-so-strong points are charted. Moreover, by regularly revising a part of the attainment levels, a certain continuity is built in for the field.

A recurring system is set up specifically for the assessment survey. The system includes a broad consultation concerning the results. This consultation serves as a preparation for an open conference concerning the assessed domain. The conferences will frame the results of the assessments in a broader quality debate. Possible causes and reasons will be looked for. The core issue of each conference is how to keep what's good and improve what is poor. The conferences will result in recommendations in the form of answers to those questions. Updating of attainment levels and development objectives may be a possible answer in addition to other initiatives in the areas of didactics, educational tools, curricula, guidance, and teacher training.

10. Observations and discussion

In Flanders, the laying down of a core curriculum based on attainment levels and development objectives, and the procedures and evaluation methods used, are extremely pupil-friendly. The system is not driven by tests, but rather by concrete attainment levels and a strongly recommended method of self-evaluation by means of assessments and good parallel tests. Pupils will receive a high-quality education with minimum pressure and maximum opportunities. This was, in short, the government's intention. However, historic achievements and the slogan 'pedagogical freedom' quickly overshadowed this vision.
The different Nets, in a strongly denominational Flanders, kept an iron grip on the contents of their education. The benefits of a core curriculum threatened to disappear as a result. Schools continued to use their Nets' curricula, which, in addition to the attainment levels, contained a Net-bound curriculum that was based on their pedagogical project.
In the composition of the Flemish Advisory Council, the Nets are strongly represented, resulting in their voice predominating the recommendations concerning attainment levels and development objectives. By their frantic efforts to include a strong reduction of the number of attainment levels in their advice, they are constantly creating more room in the curricula for their own objectives.

The inspectorate not only checks schools for their achievements concerning attainment levels, but also for their following of curricula. The different curricula reduce the transparency of contents and impede pupils' transitions from one school to another. Worse still, pupils are not evaluated on reaching the minimum, but on the total curriculum, unnecessarily burdening their programme in relation to the social aspirational level.
Also, the certificates granted thus contain discrepancies. Whereas one school may base its education entirely on the attainment levels, another will add a surplus to them. It is rather odd that attainment levels approved by the parliament do not form the basis for the granting of certificates. Instead, the own curricula of the many school boards determine it. And school boards may have quite different standards and requirements from the attainment levels. Strong pupils will not be harmed by this. Weak ones all the more. This may easily result in a waterfall system, draining more pupils than necessary away towards special education.

That is why Flanders has, for quite some time now, been contemplating an educational curriculum in which pupils throughout compulsory education can be

offered customised educational solutions whenever necessary. A clever framework of education and care determines the pupils' level of education and care, for which they will receive the support they need to develop in an optimum way. This way, more pupils can be given customised education in regular schools. More possibilities are created to differentiate, remedy, compensate and dispensate. To make the allowed levels of dispensation more transparent, a clear frame of reference, such as a legally approved core curriculum, is of the utmost importance. And this will not be limiting special-needs pupils. On the contrary, freedom of education will provide them with wonderful challenges.

Flanders differs from most other European countries in its strong differentiation of basic education. In Flanders, basic education continues throughout compulsory education, right up to the age of 18. An interesting fact. However, there are disadvantages. The interesting thing is that pupils can develop at their own pace. Basic education is clearly concerns 'development' and therefore differs from other types of schooling. The main disadvantage is that it is never quite clear what forms a part of basic education for everybody, and what is supporting knowledge for future educational or vocational purposes.
In primary education, the attainment levels for basic education are the same for everybody. In secondary education, the basic education is immediately split in an A and a B stream, and after the first stage, the attainment levels of basic education in the different educational systems strongly vary. Therefore, we can justifiably wonder whether this is consistent, if we define basic education as a guaranteed minimum or an aspirational level for each pupil. When updating the attainment levels, this question will also be kept in mind.

Summary

The mechanism of attainment levels and development objectives as a minimum or as an aspirational level actually refers to an interpretation concerning the content of what we may call compulsory education. At the same time, the rights of all pupils are officially introduced at that minimum. Besides, the educational organisations continue to be entitled to organise education according to their own pedagogical methods. They are even allowed to choose their own objectives, outside of the core curriculum. In the historically determined and over time evolving area of tension between the government and educational organisations, the laying down of a core curriculum is an important beacon for a modern education that can be evaluated on its results, or rather, on the minimum of the core curriculum.

The discussions about the limits of a minimum or aspirational level are permanently present. It is important to ensure that these discussions take place within the beacons of the democratic establishment so that they will lead to a broadly supported, socially substantial content.

A typical feature of education in Flanders, however, is that most schools are united in one of the various umbrella organisations and that these umbrellas, or Nets, as they are called, form an intermediate administrative layer between the minister and the schools. In all participation bodies, these Nets are considered to be representatives of the schools. As a result, they have a great impact on education.

Still, a socially broadly supported core curriculum in Flanders is considered of great importance. Regular evaluation and updating are therefore essential. Evaluation and new adjustments should, however, be carefully planned and carried out on the basis of thorough scientific and social research. At the same time, a changing environment and international tendencies should be kept in mind. Attainment levels and development objectives are important aspirations for an all-inclusive framework of education and care in which each pupil is entitled to customised education.

The procedure of updating attainment levels should be based upon evaluation data from assessments, surveys and reports by the inspectorate, and should take educational, social and policy evolutions into consideration. The results should always be tested by the global objectives of the attainment levels. For example concerning functions, contents, starting points and design. The results should also be tested by their contribution to the whole of the curriculum for the target

group concerned and for the progression of learning in the domain concerned. By systematically involving as many interested parties as possible, a broad social support is created for the updates, promoting implementation as well.

Flanders chooses to update its core curriculum by means of a phased approach, comprising the following steps: gathering of information, broad reporting of results, a quality debate with all parties involved, reaching of a consensus, updating the curriculum, preparing the implementation, testing the adjustments, fine-tuning the proposal, and finally: implementation in schools by means of a decree amendment.

Updating the curriculum should be approached as a system. In other words, changing an attainment level in itself is not a proper precondition for quality improvement. A great many factors, including curricula, didactic material, the vision of teachers and school boards, teacher training, and refreshment courses, all determine to a lesser or greater extent the way in which education is organised. Therefore, each of these actors should be actively involved.

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Appendix

To illustrate the Flemish attainment levels and development objectives, we will provide you with the principles and the objectives for the learning area of Dutch in pre-school and primary-school education.
For secondary education, you will find the objectives for the subject of Dutch in the A stream and the B stream of the first stage.

1 Core objectives primary education

1.1 Pre-school education: Principles for Dutch

You will undoubtedly have noticed that young children can make contact with others at a very early stage. They will give out certain signals to protest if something is not to their liking, or if they want to get something, etc. If they want to say 'I would like a biscuit', a child will demonstrate this at first by pointing at the biscuit tin and saying something like 'bicky'.
Action and language are closely linked at first. This happens in very concrete situations. Children are often involved in this with their whole being – physically, emotionally and mentally. A toddler will jump up and down, radiantly, and shout with joy as the biscuit tin is opened. Gradually, language will take over. The toddler learns to ask for a biscuit without having to make a gesture or needing the biscuit tin in his field of vision.
This way, an impressive language-learning process takes place, even before the child goes to school. By continuously interacting with others in a variety of situations, children learn to say what they mean, argue with a brother or sister, and protest when they feel wronged. While doing so, children make use of what they already know, feel, and do, in order to gain new knowledge and experiences and talk about these.
As children listen to language being used and are using it themselves, they are often thinking about language and its use.

When they start attending pre-school, most children will already have developed the most important elements of their language skills. It is essential to tune into this natural development process. You will help your pre-school pupils build up their language skills by consciously creating situations in which they are invited to use

language. The many daily class activities are ideal for this. Children will develop their listening and speaking skills during storytelling, when describing pictures, drawings, and paintings, while playing at the sand table, and during playtime. They learn to enjoy looking at picture books and retell stories. They discover that messages can be stored visually and thereby retrieved. By telling each other about their experiences, using language, and by listening to each other's ideas and comments, children learn that their personal way of speaking is effective and is respected.

Children are active. Whenever they can, they will take the opportunity to learn about language. Toddlers love to talk and will spontaneously tell about experiences that have a personal meaning to them. This way, they will use language to explore ideas and problems that are real to them. And they will create new words by combining words already known to them, for example 'bell drum' to indicate a tambourine. They will gradually learn to refine meanings and use words in the correct context. They participate actively in the development of their own language skills.

Your class will undoubtedly have toddlers who are used to speaking standard Dutch. Their own language differs little from the language they learn in school. Other children do not speak standard Dutch at home but use a dialect, or even a foreign language, in which case the language gap is even wider. These children will need more time and more help to bridge this gap. They must also be given the chance to become sufficiently linguistically competent to be able to develop further.

It will be clear to you that the development objectives for speaking, listening, 'reading', 'writing' and linguistics (thinking about language and language use) occur in continuous correlation in all class activities. Therefore, the four skills and linguistics are not meant to be treated as separate subjects in the classroom.

1.2 Primary-school education: Principles for Dutch

For Dutch, the following – more general – objectives apply:
• children are able to transfer information orally or in writing and process different oral or written messages from others in relevant situations both within and outside of the school;
• they are able to think critically about language, and about their own use of this language and the language use by others;
• they know which factors are important for communication and keep these in mind;

• they are willing to:
• use language in different situations in order to develop themselves and to give and obtain information;
• think about language and language use;
• they have an uninhibited attitude towards language diversity and variation;
• they enjoy using language and expressing themselves using language.

1.2.1 Core thoughts

Learning language in general
Children learn and use language by growing up in communicative situations. Even before children go to school, an impressive language-learning process is taking place. This is reflected in all forms of learning.

A child makes continuous use of language when associating with others: to tell things, to argue, to promise something, to protest, to fantasize, etc. From a very early age, a child is able to choose a language register in a certain situation. For example, a child uses a different language register for their peers, family members, teachers, strangers, etc. when telling them things, asking something, getting things done, or when they fantasize for themselves, or when they use language 'just for fun'. This way, he uses intuitive knowledge (terms, understandings, language elements) and gains new knowledge and experience. Language already learned is now applied to new situations. This way, the child develops his language and personality.

As children listen to language being used and are using it themselves, they are often reflecting about language and its use: 'Why do I say 'grandpa', while my friends use 'gramps' or 'granddad'? Or: 'Daddy, you are called Bob, and mummy's name is Penny. Our surname should have been 'Coyne'!'

Learning language at school
When they start attending primary school, most children will already have developed the most important elements of their language skills. The school would be wise to tune in to this natural development process. A specific feature about education is to help pupils build up their language skills by consciously creating situations in which they are invited to use language. More than used to be the case, Dutch language education today focuses on the language skills necessary in everyday life. In addition, the subjects chosen come straight from the child's living environment. It's all about language skills. In other words, it is more important for children to know what they can do with language in natural situations, rather than

what they should know about the theory of language. The emphasis is always put on communication.

Some children are used to speaking standard Dutch. Their language differs little from the language they learn at school. Other children may not speak standard Dutch at home, but use a dialect or even a foreign language, in which case the language gap is even wider. For the latter, language education should provide for a number of extra steps.

Increasingly, it is understood that language education supports education in other learning areas. For example, children need sufficient language skills to understand the information they receive during World orientation, Maths, Musical Education, etc.

On the other hand, many contents, and therefore objectives, of language education are dealt with outside of the actual language education. After all, children have to use their language skills in all learning areas, to speak, to listen, to read and to write. Therefore, the realisation grows that other learning areas should pay more attention to the language aspects of listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Present-day language education also fits in with the budding thoughts of young children about language and their own and others' use of language. This is called linguistics. The specific feature of linguistics education is to teach children to be alert and think about – to reflect – on language and language use in natural situations. Therefore, linguistics is an important domain in primary education, which requires a systematic approach.

Apart from language skills and linguistics, language education should be used to develop attitudes. To stimulate sound personal development and proper social functioning, people need certain attitudes. Examples are: being prepared to listen to others, speaking one's mind, and finding pleasure in reading.

1.2.2 The attainment levels for language and the description criteria

Language use is the general basic principle for the formulation of attainment levels for Dutch. Essential data include the situations in which the child finds itself, and the tasks he should be able to fulfil in those. To describe these data, text types were chosen that are meaningful to the children. Examples are letters, stories, invitations, test questions, and instructions. It is important that children should be able to imagine themselves in the situations they are confronted with in the text.

In addition, they should reasonably be able to deal with the information presented in this text.

In this context, the text refers to a message, orally or in writing, which should be produced or processed by the child, for example the contents of a letter, an oral instruction, a telephone conversation, etc.

The information may concern any type of content, which can be expressed using language, such as opinions, thoughts, feelings, etc.

To describe what children should be able to do with language at a certain stage, two criteria concerning the difficulty of texts are used:
• the target audience
• the level of processing.

Criterion: target audience

Each text, in the meaning indicated above, is intended for a certain target audience. A pre-school book is written for children in a certain age group; a question is aimed at a certain person. It is assumed that the difficulty of a text of the same type becomes greater as the target audience – the group of people for whom the text was written – is further removed from the child. On the one hand, this has to do with the extent to which the child is familiar with this target audience, and on the other with the age difference. According to this criterion, texts are categorised from easy to difficult.

Text meant for:
• me
• my peers, known to me
• my peers, unknown to me
• adults, known to me
• an unknown target audience.

According to this criterion, a text intended for an unknown target audience will be more difficult than a text of the same type intended for a known peer group. This means that children who are able to process or produce a certain text for an 'unknown target audience' will be able to do the same for a group of 'peers, known to them'. It may be assumed that children who, for example, should be able to write a letter to a known adult, will also be able to write a letter to a classmate. Only the highest attainable target audience was included in the list of attainment levels. The preceding layers are considered mastered.

A type of text children are confronted with, which does not apply to a target audience, are texts in which the child is using self-expression. Language expression involves the expression of feelings, expectations, emotions, etc. The purpose of this form of language use is language use itself, rather than the way the target

audience will process this language use. Indeed, when using language in an expressive way, no target audience is kept in mind at all. This means that self-expression is more a matter of attitude than a matter of skill that can be applied at a certain level.

It is very important to stimulate children to discover language as a means of expressing themselves. However, the keynote is not to set any preconditions about the level of language skills that should be used for the expression. That is why it was decided that this specific interpretation of expression would be best included in the attitudinal attainment levels.

Just to be perfectly clear, it should be noted that 'expression', in the forms of expressive speaking and expressive reading, is of a different nature than what is meant by expressive use of language within the framework of formulated attainment levels. Expressive speaking and reading are clearly aimed at an audience. These are variants of communicative use of language.

Criterion: level of processing
To describe what children should be able to do with language at a certain stage, a second limiting criterion is required. For example, a child may, at any time during his school time 'give an instruction' to his 'peers'. However, the demands made of such an instruction are rather different for a six-year old and an eleven-year old. To indicate this difference, the level of processing was used as a second criterion. This is the level at which pupils need to be able to process content in order to carry out the language task asked of them.

For all text types used in the attainment levels, both the target audience and the level of processing are described. These indications are found in the list of attainment levels, each time preceded by the attainment level to which they apply. Roughly, we distinguish four levels of processing:
• copying: quite literal reproduction of information;
• descriptive: roughly reproduce the information presented in texts;
• structural: arrange the information presented in texts in a personal and logical way;
• critical: arrange the information in a personal way and review this information, either based on one's own opinion, or based on information from other sources.
Only the highest attainable level of processing was included in the list of attainment levels.

1.2.3 Domains

The attainment levels for Dutch are arranged in six domains. Following the current practice, the first four domains cover the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In order to realise the attainment levels for listening, speaking, reading and writing, children should be able to handle adequate strategies. The - important - attainment level referring to these supporting strategies are listed separately in a fifth domain. To emphasise the importance of being able to think about language and the use of language, linguistics are listed as a sixth domain.

In short, the attainment levels for Dutch are arranged according to the following domains:
• Listening
• Speaking
• Reading
• Writing
• Skills/strategies
• Linguistics.

Note that many communicative situations can only be made to apply to one of the domains in a more or less artificial way. For example, in a conversation, it is rather difficult to separate speaking and listening skills. And talking about a book one has read could be referred to as either speaking or a reading activity. However, not to distinguish between these domains would mean trouble.

1.3 Attainment levels and development objectives

Development objectives for pre-school education Dutch	Attainment levels for regular primary education Dutch
1 Dutch listening The pre-school children are able to: 1.1 understand a verbal message, possibly supported by gestures or mime, related to a specific situation; 1.2 understand questions directed at them in specific situations; 1.3 understand a verbal message intended for them, supported by images and/or sounds; 1.4 understand tasks given by the pre-school teacher, relating to activities in the classroom or at school; 1.5 understand a story they have listened to , which is intended for their age group; 1.6 be prepared to listen to each other and respond to a message.	**1 Dutch – listening** The pupils are able to find information in (level of processing = descriptive): 1.1 a message directed at them relating to a school or class event; 1.2 an informative radio broadcast intended for them; 1.3 an explanation or instruction by a fellow pupil intended for the teacher; 1.4 a telephone conversation. The pupils are able to arrange the information in a personal and logical way (level of processing = structural) in: 1.5 an explanation or instruction by the teacher; 1.6 an instruction for an out-of-school situation, intended for them; 1.7 an informative TV programme intended for them. The pupils are able to evaluate the information (level of processing = critical) on the basis of their own opinion, or on the basis of information from other sources in: 1.8 a discussion with peers they know; 1.9 a conversation with peers they know; 1.10 a request formulated by peers.

2 Dutch speaking	2 Dutch - speaking
The pre-school children: 2.1 are able to (re)formulate a message and/or story intended for them in such a way that the content is transmitted in an identifiable way; 2.2 are able to speak about experiences or events in their own world or about things they have heard from others; 2.3 are able to speak about feelings such as joy, fear, sorrow, and surprise; 2.4 are able to explain how they plan to work or how they are working in an activity; 2.5 are able to describe someone or something in terms of colour, shape, size or a specific characteristic; 2.6 are able to answer specific questions in connection with meaning, content, intent, opinions, etc. in specific situations; 2.7 are able to respond in a conversation with simple but relevant questions or comments; 2.8 are able to pose questions to others , which will provide them with the information they require; 2.9 are able to call upon the assistance or cooperation of others; 2.10 are able to identify with clearly recognisable roles and situations and respond to these on the basis of their own imagination/experience; 2.11 to achieve the above-mentioned development objectives, use standard Dutch as much as possible, helped by adults; 2.12 are prepared to express their own feelings and desires in a personal way; 2.13 enjoy the use of language and playing with language in specific situations.	The pupils are able to use the appropriate language register (level of processing = descriptive) when they: 2.1 give peers information about themselves; 2.2 ask someone for information that is missing; 2.3 talk to the teacher about a subject covered at school; 2.4 exchange information in a telephone conversation; The pupils are able to use the appropriate language register (level of processing = structural) when they: 2.5 answer the teacher's questions in connection with a subject that has been covered; 2.6 provide a verbal/non-verbal interpretation of a subject that has been dealt with or an incident that they have experienced, which is understood by peers; 2.7 ask questions that are understood and can be answered by peers regarding a subject that has been dealt with; 2.8 give an instruction so that someone who is familiar with the situation is able to it out. The pupils are able to use the appropriate language register (level of processing = critical), while, on the basis of comparison, they use either their own point of view or that of others: *2.9 they respond critically in a discussion to the questions and comments of adults they know; *2.10 they put forward arguments about a subject that has been covered in a discussion, with adults they know.

3 Dutch 'reading'

The pre-school children:

3.1 are able to recreate a message using visual material;

3.2 are able to understand messages related to concrete activities , which are represented by symbols;

3.3 are able to distinguish letter signs from other signs on materials, in books and on signs;

3.4 are prepared to spontaneously and independently look at books and other sources of information intended for them.

3 Dutch - reading

The pupils are able to find the information (level of processing = descriptive) in:

3.1 instructions for a range of activities intended for them;

3.2 the data in tables and diagrams for public use;

3.3 magazine texts intended for them.

The pupils are able to arrange information (level of processing = structural) which is found in:

3.4 school and study texts intended for them and instructions for school assignments;

3.5 stories, children's books, dialogues, poems, children's magazines and youth encyclopaedias intended for them;

The pupils are able to evaluate information based on their own opinions , or information based on other sources (level of processing = evaluating) which is found in :

3.6 different letters and invitations intended for them;

3.7 advertising texts that are directly related to their own world.

4 Dutch 'writing'

The pre-school children are able to:

4.1 reproduce an experience by means of visual materials;

4.2 record their own messages and pass these on with the use of symbols and the help of adults;

4.3 complete simple incomplete images.

4 Dutch - writing

The pupils are able to (level of processing = copying):

4.1 write and copy summaries, notes, and messages.

The pupils are able to (level of processing = descriptive):

4.2 address a request, an invitation, or an instruction to their peers.

The pupils are able to (level of processing = structural):

4.3 write a letter to someone they know to pass on a personal message or experience;

4.4 (write a report of a story, an event, an informative text for a person they know);

4.5 complete a form with information about themselves;

4.6 provide a written answer to questions on material that has been covered.

4.7 to achieve the above-mentioned attainment levels the pupils are also able to:

• produce their texts, taking into account handwriting and layout;

• apply agreements and rules on spelling related to writing:

o words with a fixed word image:

• words that are spelled as they are pronounced;

• extremely common words that are not spelled as they are pronounced:

o words with a changing word image (words for which there are rules):

• verbs;

• vowel in open/closed syllable;

• double consonant

• final letter that is not spelled as it is pronounced;

o capital letters;

o punctuation marks (?!:);

4.8 In the development and achievement of the attainment levels for speaking, listening, reading and writing, the pupils develop the following attitudes:

• they are prepared to speak, listen, read and write;

• they enjoy speaking, listening, reading and writing;

• they are prepared to think about their own listening, speaking, reading and writing behaviour;

• they are prepared to observe listening, speaking, reading and writing conventions;

• resilience.

5 Dutch 'reflection on language'

5.1 the pre-school children are able to recognise clear forms of verbal communication.

5.2 they are aware that messages can be stored visually and can therefore be accessed again.

5.3 they are aware that people record messages in written form.

5.4 they are aware that particular symbols (pictograms, letter signs, etc.) serve to convey messages.

5.5 they ask questions and reflect on language and the use of language in specific situations:
• discrimination of sounds, words;
• rhythmic aspects of language, rhyme;
• intonation and mimicry in relation to feelings, message.

6 Dutch - linguistics

*6.1 Within a specific language context, the pupils are prepared to reflect on:
• the use of standard language, regional and social language variations;
• particular attitudes, prejudices and role behaviour in language;
• the rules of language behaviour;
• certain language activities;
• how certain points of view are adopted and/or revealed through language.

*6.2 The pupils are prepared to reflect on the listening, speaking, reading and writing strategies that are used.

*6.3 On the basis of a specific context, the pupils are prepared to reflect on the following aspects of language:
• sound level;
• word level (creation of words);
• sentence level (word order);
• text level (simple structures).

6.4 For the above-mentioned attainment levels the pupils are able to use the appropriate terms:
• sender, receiver, message, intent, situation;
• noun (+ article), diminutive, verb, stem, ending, prefixes and suffixes, other words;
• subject, verb ending, part of sentence;
• heading, paragraph.

*6.5 The pupils are prepared to reflect on language and use of language

5 Dutch - skills/ strategies

The pupils are able to use skills/strategies in relation to listening, speaking, reading and writing , which are needed to achieve the respective attainment level. In this they take into account, amongst other things:
• the total listening, speaking, reading and writing situation;
• the type of text;
• the level of processing;
as indicated in the attainment levels concerned.

2   Core objectives secondary education

2.1   Secondary education, first stage A stream: principles for Dutch

2.1.1 Vision on the subject of Dutch

When developing the attainment levels for Dutch, the practice of Dutch teaching in Flemish schools was taken into consideration, as well as an evolved vision on language and language education. The main objective is not what pupils know about language, but rather what they can do with it. The emphasis lies on communicability: pupils learn to use language with its different functions and in various communication situations. While doing so, in order to improve their language skills, they reflect on their own language use and that of others.
This vision was developed from an increased knowledge about the phenomenon of language, from the points of view of linguistics, textual skills, language psychology, and language sociology: language as a phenomenon in itself, language as an action, language and communication, language in conversations, language development, language within the family and within the social environment. A number of important understandings evolving from this still have to find their way into the classroom. Therefore, as far as emphasis on and approach of some language aspects are concerned, differences may occur between the proposed attainment levels and the current educational practice for Dutch.

2.1.2 Domains

Language skills also receive the primary focus in the attainment levels for Dutch for the first stage of secondary education. Four skill domains are distinguished here: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For each of these, the components of communicatively oriented language education are distinguished as well: communicative and strategic skills, linguistics and attitudes. Understanding and reflection of language and language use are important. Tat is why linguistics is treated as a fifth domain.
It should be noted that many communicative situations can only be made to apply to one of the domains in a more or less artificial way. In addition, the separation between language skills and linguistics is artificial. For example, when a book is

discussed, we do not just speak, listen and refer to the text (language skills), but the language use of the author is also commented on (linguistics). In reality, the five domains show a clear cohesion; however, not to distinguish between these in the formulation of attainment levels would mean trouble.

Language skills

The concept of language skills takes up a central place in the attainment levels. The ultimate objective of teaching language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) is to teach pupils to communicate fluently in natural situations. The emphasis does not just lie on skills needed within the school, but outside of the school as well, i.e. skills needed in everyday life. For example, pupils not only need sufficient language skills to cope with non-language subjects, but also to efficiently participate in communicative situations at home and elsewhere.

In communication education, much attention is needed for the processes young language users have to go through to plan, carry our, and evaluate their language tasks. The situation in which the communication takes place, plays an important part. If someone wants to invite another person to discuss something, he should first of all decide how to convey this message (by letter or by telephone?), how he should approach the 'person receiving the message' (is it someone he is close to?), and which information is to be given (to what extent is the person addressed familiar with the subject of discussion?).

Apart from the processes, knowledge pertaining to language and communication strategies are important. Among other things, these concern the knowledge the 'language learner' has about himself and the particular language task to be performed. Sometimes, pupils are aware of the fact that they are sometimes too hasty thinking they understand a text. Sometimes, they know how to divide up writing and speaking tasks into easily manageable chunks, how to avoid difficult words, how to derive the meaning of a word from the context, etc. In this respect, their knowledge of procedures in the first stage must be expanded.

However, the pupil's language skills increases by practicing language use itself. And linguistics are added to this: specific reflection about what you want to convey and how to carry out a language task improves one's language skills and raises their level. On the condition, however, that this reflection is carried out on the level of abstraction that matches the pupil's current skills.

By using language in a certain situation (language skills) and by thinking about language (linguistics) pupils will also develop attitudes about their own use of language and that of others. Examples of attitudes include: having faith in one's own abilities, having the courage to write, being prepared to listen, maintaining an open mind on language diversity and language variation (dialects, standard language, foreign languages) and on the speakers of other languages or language varieties.

Linguistics

The main function of linguistics is to support the development of language skills: it stimulates language skills by learning to understand various language phenomena and reflecting one's own use of language and that of others. For example: understanding of language variation, i.e. concerning the different forms language use takes on according to the situation; the objective; the means (orally, in writing); and the regional or social group to which language users belong. And in addition, concepts such as the language standard and the social acceptance of variants. For example, pupils need to know in which situations they should choose for Standard Dutch as the language standard. But also: what the characteristics of used text types are and in what way the textual coherence relates to the use of collocation and reference words.

In addition, linguistics is a goal in itself, a form of world orientation aimed at the exploration of language and language use and hence of the human being as an individual as well as a member of various groups. In this sense, linguistics contributes to general/cultural knowledge.

Attitudes

Education cannot be separated from personal development. That is why values and attitudes are important. A number of these are generally supported by society and that is why they must be included in the attainment levels.

Moreover, cognitive/communicative and affective behaviour are difficult to separate. The development of the first is greatly stimulated if motivation and a specially adapted affective climate are present in the classroom and in the school. Also, research into the so-called hidden curriculum has demonstrated that pupils learn many things in school that are not represented in the curricula. That is why the decree giver considered it necessary to include generally accepted attitudes in the attainment levels.

Attitudes are based upon values; however, these are not associated with a particular situation. They are given a concrete form by means of attitudes, which themselves emerge in concrete situations. Attitudes are recognisable by a certain amount of like or dislike regarding a situation, a person or an object. Contrary to the values upon which they are based, attitudes can therefore be observed in concrete behaviour. They are expressed in different ways by different people and concrete behaviour.

feature a gradual growth process. Examples of attitudes include:
• being included to use Standard Dutch.
• being prepared to go and look for information.

2.1.3 Founding objectives

After describing a vision on the subject, a very general objective is formulated for Dutch teaching in secondary education. This general objective serves the pupils' general social functioning within a pluralistic society, their personal development, and their preparation for future careers in study and profession. From this objective, founding objectives follow, which are at the basis of the concrete attainment levels.

General objective
To be able to and be prepared to use Dutch in a both productive and receptive way, both orally and in writing, in an efficient and effective manner.

Further concretisations
1. Transfer of information, both orally and in writing, and process different oral and written messages from others in relevant situations both within and outside of the school.
2. Apply the strategies that are important in communication.
3. Reflect upon and understand one's own use of language and that of others:
    • language variation,
    • language change,
    • communication situation,
    • text types.
4. Be prepared to
    • use language in various situations in order to develop oneself and to give and obtain information;
    • think about language and language use;
    • use Standard Dutch in situations that require this.
    • Enjoy using language and expressing oneself using language.
5. In language situations, use effective conventions relating to interpunction, spelling, idiom, syntax, text composition, characteristics of text types, and visual appearance.
6. Strive for the highest literary competency.

2.1.4 Selection criteria and structurisation of attainment levels

For listening, speaking, reading, and writing, separate attainment levels are formulated each time. These are based upon the pupils being able to carry out language tasks that occur in situations both within and outside of the school. In these tasks, different text types are used, for different target audiences, and at different processing levels. This way, the attainment levels of primary education are expanded upon; at the same time, the attainment levels of the second stage can be attuned to these as well.

2.1.5 Text types

Language skills cannot be separated from communication situations – they become manifest when receiving and producing texts, i.e. during listening, reading, speaking and writing. That is why the attainment levels are always linked to texts, or rather: to text types. After all, texts are easily categorised. This greatly facilitates the formulation of attainment levels.
For the first stage of secondary education, all text types that are relevant to pupils of that age, either within or outside of the school, are suitable. Fictional texts, for example, include poems, plays, stories, diaries, youth novels, youth serials, and comic strips. Some text types may be rather informal; others quite official.
With regard to these texts, and according to a generally accepted communication model, the pupils should, on the one hand, be able to formulate messages in a suitable form, either orally or in writing, and, on the other, be able to retrieve messages intended for them from oral or written texts. Concerning retrieval, any possible form of auditive or visual texts may be used.

2.1.6 Target audience

In order to describe what pupils have to be able to do with language, first of all the criterion 'target audience' is used. In the meaning indicated above, each text is intended for a certain audience. For example, a youth novel has been written for children from a certain age group, and a question will be aimed at a certain person or group. The concept 'target audience' points to the intended users of a text; not necessarily the actual users. For example, a newspaper article is written for an unknown audience and a youth magazine for an audience composed of unknown youths, regardless of whom the actual readers will be. Therefore, the pupil's answer

to a teacher's question will have that same teacher as a target audience, i.e. a known adult.

Texts of a similar type generally become more difficult for pupils as the target audience is further removed from them. The extent of familiarity and the age difference determine the distance. This results in the following arrangement, in order of increasing difficulty:
• texts intended for themselves;
• texts intended for known peers (classmates);
• texts intended for (unknown) peers (twelve and thirteen year olds);
• texts intended for known adults (the teacher);
• texts intended for an unknown audience (whomever).

According to this criterion, a text intended for an unknown target audience will be more difficult than a similar text intended for a known peer group. It was assumed that pupils who are able to process or produce a certain type of text for an 'unknown target audience' will be able to do the same for a group of 'peers, known to them'. And pupils who can write a certain type of letter to a known adult, will be able to write such a letter to a classmate as well. Only the highest attainment levels need to be achieved by the pupils; the preceding layers are considered mastered.

2.1.7 Level of processing

In order to describe what pupils have to be able to do with language, a second criterion 'level of processing' is used. This is the level at which to process content in order to carry out the required language task. For example, a pupil may, at any time during his school career give an instruction to or receive one from his peers. And a fourteen-year old is expected to do this quite differently from a nine-year old. For the attainment levels, four levels of processing are distinguished, each of which includes all preceding ones:

• copying:	literal reproduction of the information presented;
• descriptive:	rough retrieval of the information presented, or: reproduction, orally or in writing, in a similar way;
• structural:	retrieve the information and arrange it in a personal and logical way, or: reproduction, orally or in writing, in a similar way;
• critical:	retrieve the information, arrange it in a personal way, and evaluate it on the basis of information from other sources, or: reproduction, orally or in writing, in a similar way.

This arrangement of attainment levels for the first stage of secondary education is in line with those of primary education. It is clear that the concepts of 'copying' or 'descriptive' may cause some confusion, because they automatically relate to productive language skills. The structural and critical levels do not involve this danger; it is easier to understand the meaning of structural and critical listening and reading. And it's just those two levels that play a pivotal part in the attainment levels of the first stage. No more than two attainment levels occur on the descriptive level: these concern the filling in of forms and the taking of notes. Concerning the processing levels, two important remarks are worthy of note.

First and foremost, there is a substantial difference between the receiving and the producing of texts. Productive skills include that certain messages have to be converted into texts; receptive skills are intended to retrieve information from texts. When producing texts, the processing level can be deduced from the text itself; when receiving texts, the processing level does not become apparent from the text, but from the actions by the listener or reader. If someone gives his opinion of a certain book, based on carefully drawn up criteria, he is acting on the 'critical' processing level. Reading a book review of a book that one has not read oneself, however, is not considered critical reading, even though it concerns a very similar text. After all, the reader is not evaluating the review, but wants to know what information the reviewer has to give about the book. In that sense, this reading should be categorised under the heading 'descriptive', since only the contents of the review are learned. However, if a person is reading the review to check whether the reviewer's criteria agree with his own evaluation criteria, he is indeed acting on a 'critical' level.

Subsequently, each of the proposed processing levels implies the inclusion of all preceding levels. Whoever is able to read a review in order to compare the reviewer's point of view with his own, can do the same in a 'descriptive', as well as a 'structural' manner; after all, the 'critical' level is the highest one achievable. Therefore, in the list of attainment levels, only the highest processing level to be achieved by pupils is included.

Text types, processing levels, and target audiences are conveniently arranged in the following tables.

2.1.8 Coordination

Vertical correlation
When the attainment levels for the first stage of secondary education were drawn up, close collaboration took place with the commission for attainment levels Dutch

for primary education. Their influence is clearly recognisable in the vision on the subject and the way the attainment levels are designed and formulated.

Horizontal correlation

Although the teacher of Dutch is not the only one dealing with trans-subject themes, he does occupy an ideal position to integrate a number of trans-subject attainment levels in his subject. This obviously has to do with the trans-subject nature of a mother tongue.

For example, there is a strong interdisciplinary connection with history, thanks to the special role of language in this subject. Correctly explaining or expressing historic components is an example of the correlation between the two subjects. Another interdisciplinary connection is formed by their common learning methods: both in Dutch and history, the active and passive forms of language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) are intensively appealed to, and on the various processing levels (copying, descriptive, structural, and critical).

2.2 Secondary education, first stage B stream: principles for Dutch

2.2.1 Vision on the subject

Main objective

When developing the development objectives for Dutch, the current practice of Dutch teaching in Flemish schools was taken into consideration, as well as an evolved vision on language and language education. The main objective is not what pupils know about language, but rather what they can do with it. The emphasis, therefore, lies on communicability: pupils learn to use language with its different functions and in various communication situations. While doing so, in order to improve their language skills, they reflect on their own language use and that of others.

General lines of force

Language skills also receive the primary focus in the development objectives for Dutch. Four skill domains are distinguished here: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For each of these, the components of communicatively oriented language education are distinguished as well: communicative and strategic skills, linguistics and attitudes. It should be noted that many communicative situations can only be

made to apply to one of the domains in a more or less artificial way.

The concept of language skills takes up a central place in the development objectives. The ultimate objective of teaching language skills for the domains of listening, speaking, reading and writing is to teach pupils to communicate fluently in natural situations. The emphasis does not just lie on skills needed within the school, but outside of the school as well, i.e. skills used in everyday life. For example, pupils not only need sufficient language skills to cope with non-language subjects, but also to efficiently participate in communicative situations at home and elsewhere.

In communication education, much attention is needed for the processes young language users have to go through to plan, carry our, and evaluate language tasks. The situation in which the communication takes place, plays an important part. If someone wants to invite another person to discuss something, he should first of all decide how to convey this message (by letter or by telephone?), how he should approach the 'person receiving the message' (is it someone he is close to?), and which information is to be given (to what extent is the person addressed familiar with the subject of discussion?).

Apart from the processes, knowledge pertaining to language and communication strategies are important. Among other things, these concern the knowledge the language learner has about himself and the particular task to be performed. Sometimes, pupils are aware of the fact that they are sometimes too hasty thinking they understand a text. Sometimes, they know how to divide up writing and speaking tasks into easily manageable chunks, how to avoid difficult words, how to derive the meaning of a word from the context, etc.

Knowledge and understanding alone, however, do not suffice. The pupil's language skills increases by practicing language use itself. And linguistics are added to this: specific reflection about what you want to say and how to carry out a language task improves one's language skills and raises their level. On the condition, however, that this reflection is carried out on the level of abstraction that matches the pupil's current skills.

By using language in a certain situation (language skills) and by thinking about language (linguistics) pupils will also develop attitudes about their own use of language and that of others. Examples of attitudes are: having faith in one's own abilities, being prepared to listen, and having the courage to write.

Specific lines of force

The pupil population is very heterogeneous where language skills are concerned. Some pupils receive ample language education at home, but fail to master certain techniques. Others have limited learnability and find it hard to understand

concepts at an abstract level, resulting in a very concrete and direct use of language. A very important group, however, lacks the necessary language education within their own environment, causing them to be insufficiently prepared for language use in secondary education. This later group, especially, requires very special care.

From the attainment levels of primary education, a selection of development objectives was made for the four language skills domains, which deserve special attention where pupils who enjoyed insufficient language education in the past are concerned. Where much attention is naturally given to listening, speaking and reading, the writing skills lag behind in naturalness. However, it must not be forgotten that the initiation in the written language is extremely important, and especially these pupils should be stimulated to actively participate in the written language – on the condition that specially adapted methods are used.

A remedial working method
A remedial working method is needed, whereby the achievements of each individual pupil are determined on the one hand, and the gaps in basic knowledge and skills on the other. This way, it is possible to localise problem areas, reduce these problems to their actual perspectives, and remediate efficiently and effectively.

Where Dutch is concerned, two basic skills are striven for: decoding and reading. In addition to these basic skills, the increase of vocabulary is aimed at.

Decoding concerns the ability to fluently read words, as well as the ability to correctly spell words. Both skills should be fully automated at this age. However, considerable numbers of pupils have insufficient understanding of the morphology of Dutch and/or find it difficult to follow a conversation in Standard Dutch because of their dialect or non-native tongue. As a result, they do not succeed in effortlessly retrieving phonemes.

Reading particularly concerns the technique of asking questions about texts. Evidently, texts that will not pose any problems in the decoding department, i.e. concerning the technical aspects of reading, should be used. That is why ample attention should be given to methods that make use of reading levels.

2.2.2 Founding objectives

1. Use the Dutch language fluently as a means of communication.
2. Apply the strategies that are important in communication.
3. Reflect upon one's own use of language.
4. Be sufficiently assertive to give one's own opinion and critically assess the opinion of others.
5. Enjoy using language.
6. Express one's own feelings, desires and opinions in a personal manner.

2.2.3 Coordination

Vertical correlation
When drawing up the development objectives for the B stream, both the attainment levels of primary education and those of the A stream were taken into account. This becomes apparent from the way in which the development objectives are formulated.

Horizontal correlation
Although the teacher of Dutch is not the only one dealing with trans-subject themes, he does occupy an ideal position to integrate a number of trans-subject development objectives in his subject. This obviously has to do with the trans-subject nature of a mother tongue.

2.3 Attainment levels and development objectives

Attainment levels of the first stage of secondary education A stream DUTCH	Development objectives for the first stage of secondary education B stream DUTCH
	1 General The pupils 1 use Dutch as a means of communication. **2 Visual** The pupils can 2 correctly copy words and text from the board. **3 Auditive** The pupils 3 hear the difference between a short and a long sound; 4 can selectively listen to key words and key sounds in a simple text. **4 Writing** The pupils have 5 a good writing posture; 6 clear, easily legible handwriting. **5 Decoding** The pupils 7 recognise the component parts of word forms; 8 read frequently-occurring words faultlessly and without repetition; 9 write frequently-occurring unchangeable words faultlessly. **6 Vocabulary** The pupils 10 expand their active and passive basic vocabulary. **7 Technical reading** The pupils 11 can read aloud, faultlessly and without repetition, simple educational texts of less common words with sentences averaging around 12 words; 12 read and understand, on their own, simple educational texts and instruction manuals with sentences averaging around 15 words.

1 Listening
1 The pupils can listen to the following types of text (level of processing: structural):
• an explanation by the teacher of a component of subject matter in class;
• a dialogue, a conversation with several fellow pupils relating to school and classroom activities;
• a children's programme on radio and television;
• instructions relating to the performance of activities for unknown contemporaries;
• a telephone conversation with an unknown adult.

2 The pupils can listen to the following types of text for contemporaries (level of processing: evaluating):
• pronouncements in a discussion;
• calls and invitations to action;
• orally presented texts for relaxation;
• advertising messages in the media.

3 In the planning, implementation and evaluation of their listening tasks, the pupils can use the resources listed in 20.1.

* 4 Within suitable communication situations, the pupils develop a willingness to:
• listen;
• adopt an unprejudiced listening attitude;
• allow another to pronounce;
• reflect on their own listening attitude;
• test what they hear against their own knowledge and understanding.

8 Listening
The pupils
13 can retrieve the information from types of text intended for them, such as informative radio and television transmissions, instructions from teachers or fellow pupils, telephone conversations, announcements, informative texts and dramatic forms (level of processing: descriptive);

14 can listen in an evaluating manner to interaction with contemporaries, such as a discussion, a conversation, a call and a dramatisation (level of processing: evaluating);

15 are aware of the following resources for facilitating communication, which means that they can apply them at their level:
• define listening objective;
• use indications within the communication situation;
• concentrate their attention;
• take note of important information;
• ask questions if anything is unclear;

16 within the framework of the development objectives listed under 13, 14 and 15, learn:
to reflect on the use of language with respect to the intention of the speaker;
• to reflect on the text type;
• to reflect on their own listening behaviour;
• to observe listening conventions.

2 Speaking

5 The pupils can produce the following types of text (level of processing: structural):
- questions and answers related to subject matter components in class;
- instructions for known contemporaries;
- invitations to a known adult to take part in an activity;
- (telephone) conversations: giving information to or asking for information from an unknown adult;
- announcements: presenting the information that they have gathered relating to a certain subject, theme or assignment to the teacher and classmates;
- announcements: expressing feelings, perceptions and expectations with respect to classroom events to a known adult.

6 The pupils can take part in an exchange of ideas in the classroom, put a point of view into words and explain it (level of processing: evaluating).

7 In planning, implementing and evaluating their speaking tasks, the pupils can use the resources listed under 20.2.

* 8 Within suitable communication situations (see attainment levels 5 and 6) the pupils develop a willingness to:
- speak;
- speak standard Dutch;
- adopt a critical attitude towards their own communication behaviour.

9 Speaking

The pupils

17 can use the appropriate linguistic register:
in various situations, such as to fellow pupils, known adults, in telephone conversations and in dramatic forms;
- at different levels of processing:
- descriptive, such as providing and requesting information, producing a report and exchanging information;
- evaluating, such as reacting critically and arguing appropriately;

18 are aware of the following resources for facilitating communication, which means that they can apply them at their level:
- define speaking objective;
- gather information;
- draw up speaking plan;
- clearly formulate meaning;

19 acquire skill in expression. They can:
imagine themselves in a recognisable situation and express themselves and move flexibly and naturally;
express certain feelings using facial expressions and gestures;
look at and address the class in their own words;

20 within the framework of the development objectives listed under 17, 18 and 19, develop:
- courage to speak, in other words a positive willingness to speak up;
- willingness to reflect on their own speaking behaviour;
- a positive attitude towards speaking conventions to be observed;
- respect for the interlocutor;
- sufficient resistance to stand up for their own opinions.

3 Reading

9 The pupils can read the following types of text for contemporaries (level of processing: structural):
- charts and tables;
- the subtitles of informative and entertaining television programmes;
- educational texts;
- fictional texts.

10 The pupils can read the following types of text for contemporaries (level of processing: evaluating):
- letters;
- written calls or invitations to act;
- instructions;
- advertising texts and advertisements;
- informative texts, including sources of information.

11 In planning, implementing and evaluating their reading tasks, the pupils can use the resources listed under 20.3.

* 12 Within suitable situations, the pupils develop a willingness to:
- read;
- reflect on the content of a text;
- apply the resources listed under 20.3 while reading;
- test the information acquired against their own knowledge and understanding;
- immerse themselves in fictional types of text;
- express their personal appreciation and preference for certain texts.

10 Reading

The pupils

21 can retrieve the information from types of text intended for them, such as instructions, diagrams, informative and fictional texts and poems (level of processing: descriptive);

22 can arrange the information in a clear way in text types intended and structured for them, such as school and educational texts, instructions for school assignments (level of processing: structural);

23 can evaluate the information that appears in various letters addressed to them, children's newspapers, magazines, encyclopaedias and books of translation exercises for young people, notices and advertising texts (level of processing: evaluating);

24 are aware of the following resources for facilitating communication, which means that they can apply them at their level:
- define reading objective;
- use indications within the communication situation;
- concentrate their attention;
- look for information in a targeted way;
- reread any passages that are unclear;

25 within the framework of the development objectives listed under 21, 22, 23 and 24, learn:
- to reflect on the intention behind the writer addressing his reading audience, such as giving information or instructions, inviting;
- to reflect on their own reading behaviour;
- to acquire reading pleasure, such as for young people's literature, historic stories, reading as a hobby, cartoon strips.

4 Writing

13 The pupils can make notes in a prestructured framework.

14 The pupils can fill in forms intended for their age group.

15 The pupils can produce the following types of text (level of processing: structural):
• a call, an invitation to known contemporaries;
• an instruction to known contemporaries;
• a document with information about themselves for people they may or not know better;
• an informative document for known contemporaries;
• answers to questions from known adults about content dealt with at school;
• a report for known adults about a given school assignment.

16 In the planning, implementation and assessment of their written tasks, the pupils can use the resources listed in 20.4. In writing, this also involves taking care with the written text in terms of handwriting, spelling, arrangement and layout.

* 17 The pupils develop, within the appropriate situations (see attainment level 15), a willingness to:
• write;
• reflect on their own writing;
• take care with language, arrangement, spelling, handwriting and layout.

11 Writing

The pupils

26 can take down and copy summaries, notes and announcements (level of processing: copying);

27 can address a notice, an invitation or an instruction to contemporaries (level of processing: descriptive);

28 can write down their message in a clear way in various types of text, such as a personal letter, a report, a form and an answer to questions (level of processing: structural);

29 are aware of the following resources for facilitating communication, which means that they can apply them at their level:
• define writing objective;
• gather information;
• draw up writing plan;
• use dictionary;
• revise own text;

30 in achieving the development objectives listed under 26, 27, 28 and 29 can, moreover:
• produce their texts taking handwriting and layout into consideration;
• apply spelling arrangements and rules related to writing:
• words with a fixed spelling:
o words with pure sounds;
o high-frequency words without pure sounds;
• words with changeable spelling (rule words):
o verbs;
o vowel in open/closed syllable;
o double consonant;
o final letter without pure sound;
• capital letters;
• punctuation marks (.,?!:);

31 with a view to achieving the development objectives mentioned under 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30, learn to reflect on:
• language use in formal and informal written texts;
• the stages in the writing process;
• the use of resources;
• the writing objective.

5 Language studies

18 With a view to efficient communication, the pupils know the essential elements of the communication situation (sender, receiver, message, channel).

19 With a view to efficient communication, the pupils are aware of the existence of:
• standard languages and regional, social and situational linguistic varieties;
• standards, prejudices and role play.

20 The pupils are aware of the following resources for facilitating communication, which means that they can apply them at their level:
20.1 listening: define listening objective;
• use indications within the communication situation;
• concentrate their attention;
• take note of important information;
• ask questions if anything is unclear;
20.2 speaking: define speaking objective;
• gather information;
• draw up speaking plan;
• clearly formulate meaning;
20.3 reading: define reading objective;
• use indications within the communication situation;
• concentrate their attention;
• look for information in a targeted way;
• reread any passages that are unclear;
• unknown words: ask for context or consult dictionary;
20.4 writing: define writing objective;
• gather information;
• draw up writing plan;
• use dictionary;
• revise own text.

21 As far as text types are concerned, the pupils have acquired the knowledge that is necessary for performing the linguistic tasks listed when listening, speaking, reading and writing.

22 Within specific language use situations, the pupils recognise the following linguistic phenomena:
• connecting and referring words;
• simple and complex sentences;
• composition and derivation (formation process).

10 Reading

The pupils

21 can retrieve the information from types of text intended for them, such as instructions, diagrams, informative and fictional texts and poems (level of processing: descriptive);

22 can arrange the information in a clear way in text types intended and structured for them, such as school and educational texts, instructions for school assignments (level of processing: structural);

23 can evaluate the information that appears in various letters addressed to them, children's newspapers, magazines, encyclopaedias and books of translation exercises for young people, notices and advertising texts (level of processing: evaluating);

24 are aware of the following resources for facilitating communication, which means that they can apply them at their level:
• define reading objective;
• use indications within the communication situation;
• concentrate their attention;
• look for information in a targeted way;
• reread any passages that are unclear;

25 within the framework of the development objectives listed under 21, 22, 23 and 24, learn:
• to reflect on the intention behind the writer addressing his reading audience, such as giving information or instructions, inviting;
• to reflect on their own reading behaviour;
• to acquire reading pleasure, such as for young people's literature, historic stories, reading as a hobby, cartoon strips.