

Curriculum design and the CEFR

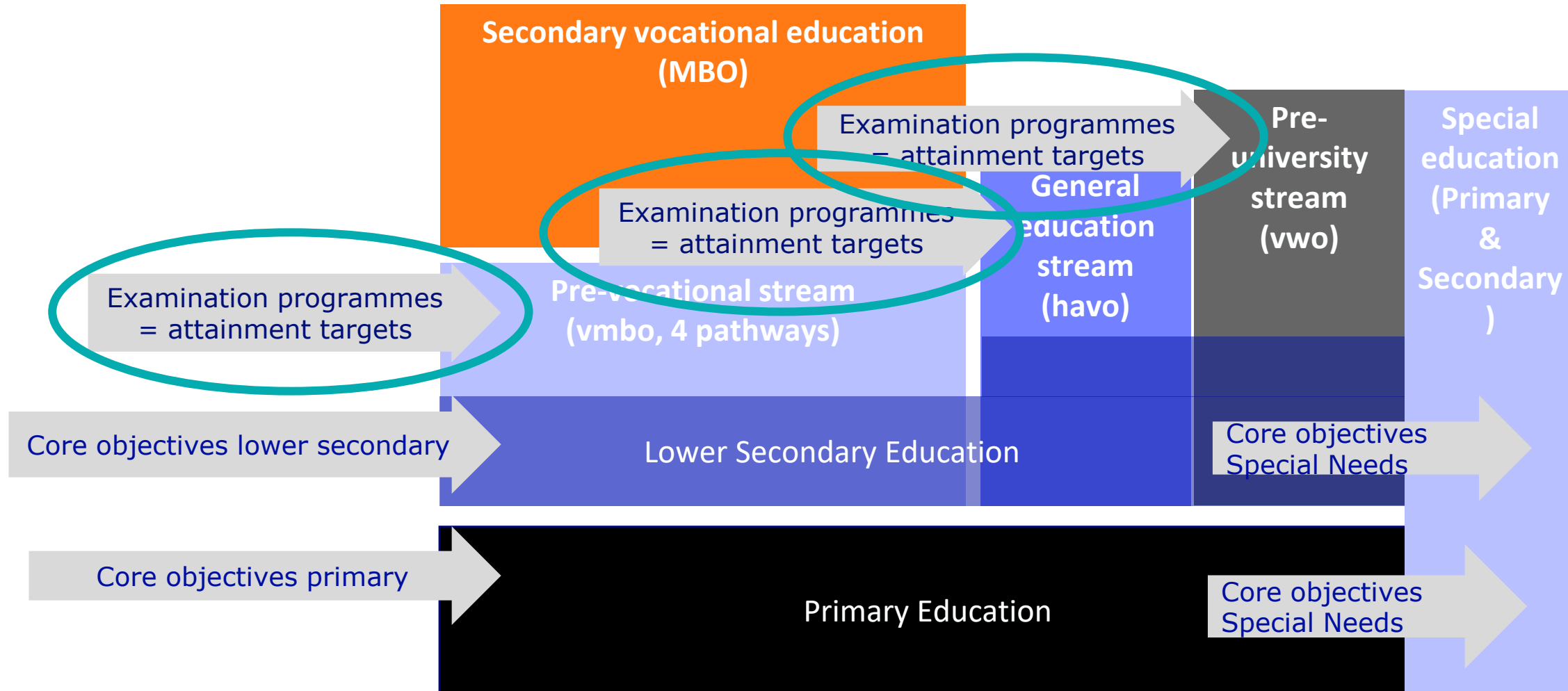
Opportunities, pitfalls, constraints

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Dutch Education System





National educational targets

What are we talking about?

- Curriculum documents laid down by law and other regulations
- Defined at the level of the end of upper secondary education
- Mastery attainment targets arranged per subject, in (sub)domains
- Assignment of content to central and/or school examination
- NO pedagogy, methodology or prescribed teaching time
- NO learning targets per school year
- NO specifications for the content of the central exam (syllabi by the Board of Tests and Examinations provide those)

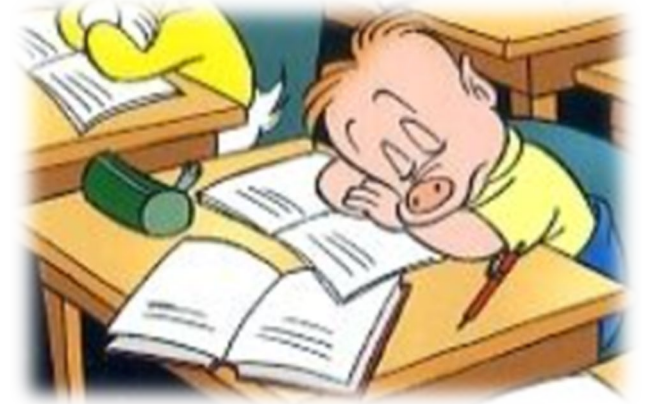
Language subjects

- Arabic
- Chinese
- English (core subject)
- French
- German
- Italian
- Russian
- Spanish
- Turkish

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Why renew our national targets?

Who are today's pupils?



Digital natives
Online engagement
Use of technology

living in a changing world

Creativity
Critical thinking
Problem solving
Collaborative work

Globalisation
Increasing language and cultural
diversity
Individualisation



Three interconnected core educational purposes

Education should not only equip for examination and employment, but above all for life

Qualification

Knowledge and skills for further education and the job market

Socialisation

Find your place in society
Engage with democratic values
Engage with different cultures

Subjectification

Grow as individual
Develop critical thinking
Relate meaningfully to the world

Great ambitions

Shift away from

- Result-driven education
- Centred on measurable results

Focus on

- Make learning meaningful
- Facilitate students' development
- Pursue principles of equity and inclusion
- Emphasize complexity of teaching and learning



At all possible in a results-driven culture???

Content richness, coherence, clarity

- Rich content
- Meaningful knowledge

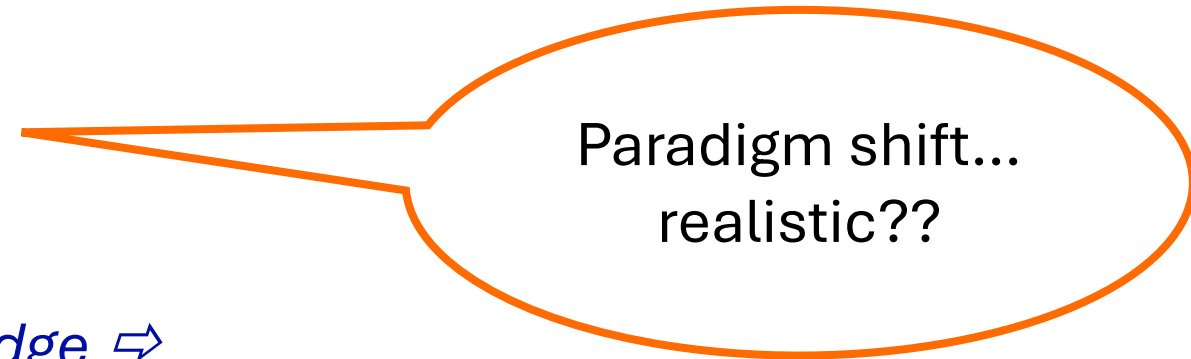
⇒ *engage with knowledge* ⇒

- Complex skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving

Integrating knowledge and skills

Consistency

Co-creation



Identify contexts and needs of modern language education



Contextual analysis

- . review relevant written sources
- . explore comparable contexts (Finland, Ireland, New Zealand)
- . consult teachers, teacher association, teacher educators, researchers, test developers
- . map out developments in policy, research, practice, society

Language subjects need a boost!!

Need for an integrated approach to communicative language skills and the inclusion of new subject-specific content in goals, assessment and implementation of the curriculum.

Include

- digital literacy;
- cultural awareness;
- knowledge about, and reflection on language;
- creative language use;
- insights in literary texts and other fictional texts.

Enhance alignment of communication with goals, audience, medium and sociocultural context.

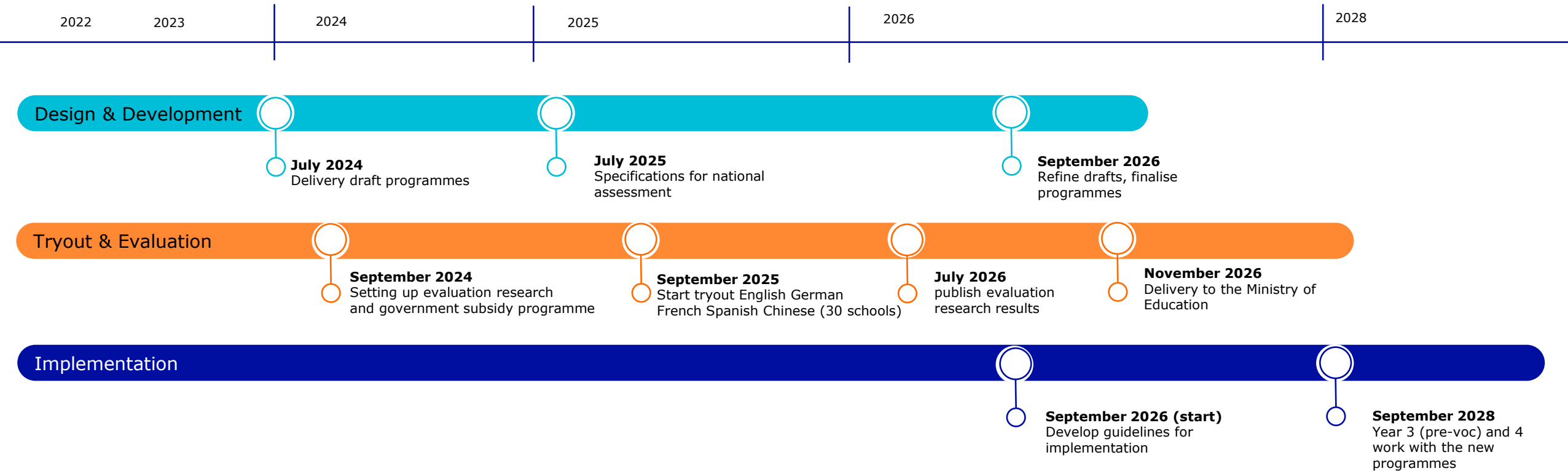
Investigate how aspects of plurilingualism and language awareness should take a prominent place in national objectives.



Timeline

teachers, teacher association, teacher trainers, policy makers, researchers, test developers, school principals, material developers

Curriculum development doesn't happen overnight...

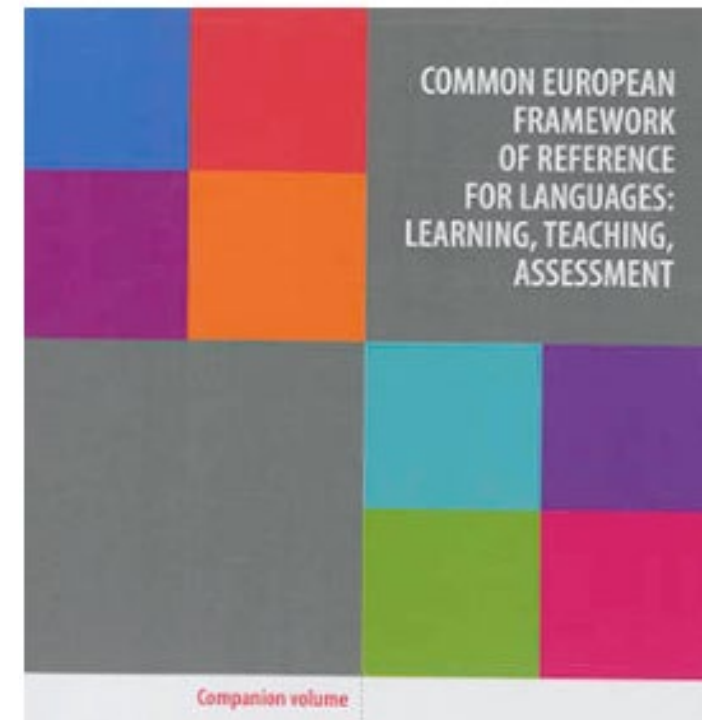




The CEFR Companion Volume is what we need!

A framework to:

- substantiate our rationale,
- align rationale to objectives and teaching,
- align with assessment?



1. The CEFR as backbone for our rationale

Our three pillars

- Language users need language in order to perform all kinds of tasks and to achieve various goals – often collaboratively – in diverse contexts, and thereby to participate in society as active citizens. Placing language learning in a **social perspective** requires a holistic and integrated approach to language teaching (Piccardo & North 2019; Council of Europe 2020: 30).
- Language subjects encompass not only language skills but also have **subject-specific contents** that are linked to language as a social phenomenon and as part of identity. Think of knowledge and awareness of language structures, similarities and differences among languages and language varieties; of various effects of language contact; of the emotional, social, and even political dimensions of language use (James & Garrett 1991; Kaal & Dönszelmann 2020; van den Broek et al. 2022).
- Language and **culture** are deeply intertwined (e.g. Byrnes 2010). Linguistic expressions are not just a tool for communication but are also carriers of culture.

COMMUNICATION



LANGUAGE AWARENESS

CULTURAL AWARENESS

Domain A - Communication	
• A.1: Rich language experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich input • Creative use
• A.2: Reception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral reception • Written reception • Information literacy
• A.3: Production and interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral production • Oral interaction • Written production and interaction
Domain B – Language awareness	
• B.1: Language as a phenomenon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similarities and differences between languages • Language variety • Effects of language use
• B.2: Language and individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language learning processes • Plurilingual repertoire • Digital literacy • Further education and future
Domain C – Cultural awareness	
• C.1: Culture in fiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich input • Insight into fiction • Literary competence
• C.2: Cultuur in society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture-related aspects in sources • Culture-related aspects in encounters

Attainment targets tested in national assessment (50% of the final mark)

At least one scenario-based question

Sabatini et a. 2018

Domain	Subdomain	Title
Communication	Reception	Oral reception
		Written reception
		Information literacy
Language awareness	Language as a phenomenon	Effects of language use
Cultural awareness	Culture in fiction	Insight into fiction
	Culture in society	Culture-related aspects in sources

2. The CEFR as framework to align proficiency targets

Some principles AND challenges

- Define challenging and achievable proficiency levels for each educational level, language, and skill
- Integrate indicators of CEFR levels in the formulation of the targets
 - Lack of research on achieved levels
 - Lack of familiarity with the CEFR Companion Volume

HAVO					
	Mondelinge receptie (luisteren)	Schriftelijke receptie (lezen)	Mondelinge productie (spreken)	Mondelinge interactie (gesprekken voeren)	Schriftelijke communicatie (schrijven)
Engels	B2	B2	B2	B2	B1
Duits	B1	B1	B1	B1	A2+
Frans	B1	B1	A2+	A2+	A2+
Spaans	B1	B1	A2+	A2+	A2+
Arabisch	A2+	A2+	A2+	A2+	A2+
Chinees	A1	A1	A1	A1	A1 (digitale en handmatige karakters)
Italiaans	B1	B1	A2+	A2+	A2+
Russisch	A2	A2	A2	A2	A2
Turks	A2+	A2+	A2+	A2	A2

VWO					
	Mondelinge receptie (luisteren)	Schriftelijke receptie (lezen)	Mondelinge productie (spreken)	Mondelinge interactie (gesprekken voeren)	Schriftelijke communicatie (schrijven)
Engels	C1	C1	C1	B2+	B2
Duits	B2	B2	B2	B1+	B1
Frans	B2	B2	B1	B1	B1
Spaans	B2	B2	B1	B1	B1
Arabisch	B1	B1	B1	A2+	A2+
Chinees	A2	A2	A2	A2	A2 (digitaal) A1 (handmatige karakters)
Italiaans	B2	B2	B1	B1	B1
Russisch	A2	B1	A2	A2+	A2+
Turks	B1	B1	B1	A2+	A2+

3. The CEFR as framework to align rationale, goals, learning activities, and assessment

Some challenges as it comes to assessment:

- Development of assessment constructs and rating scales that make level assessment possible (CEFR levels themselves are not designed for rating purposes)
- Need for trials, validation, standard setting, training materials...

A renewed vision of language teaching requires a renewed vision of assessment

Two paradigms at odds? Some quality aspects

School-leaving examination ⇒ High stakes	Constructive alignment: connecting learning objectives, learning activities, and assessment
Reliable, and as valid as possible	Valid, and as reliable as possible
Quantitative	Qualitative
Standardised, repeatability	Holistic, learner-centred, authenticity
Objective and context-independent; neutrality of the test-taker	Professional subjectivity is also valuable in the assessment: different perspectives
Observable behaviour allows conclusions on proficiency (often by means of one single measurement)	Whole learning process as a basis for assessment and interpretation (descriptive, triangulation, reflection)
<i>Less suitable for complex skills, open answers, rich language tasks</i>	<i>Teacher bias, time-consuming, requires a lot of expertise from the teacher, less comparable results</i>

Testing from a curriculum perspective: what questions should we ask ourselves?

- Setting goals: what should learners be able to do?
- What do I need to see in order to state that learners have attained the target? In what situations?
- Which assessment form is suitable to see what I need to see?
- How do I judge? (for example: comparative judgement, anchor samples, rubric, assessment interview)
- How do I take decisions based on what I have assessed? (for example: pass / fail; degree obtained or not)

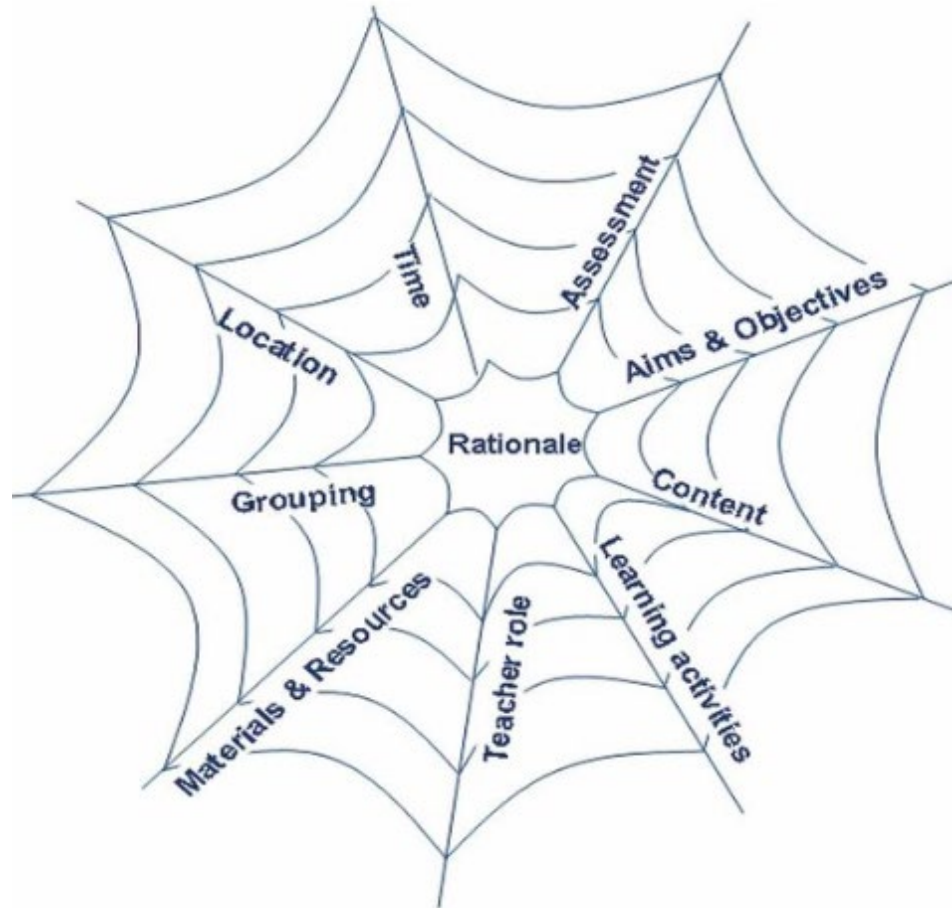
CEFR-based assessment: the left or the right column?

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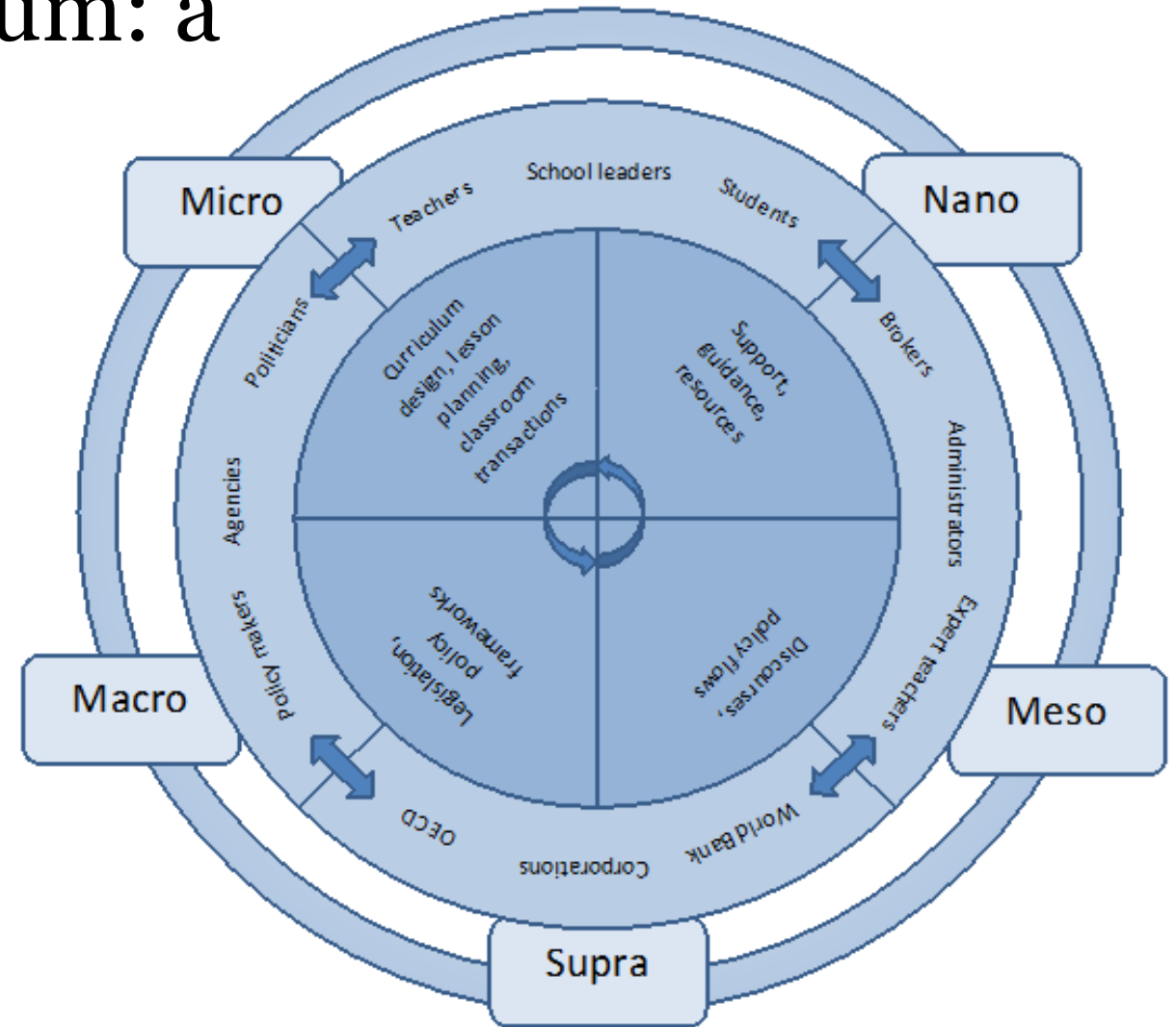
Curriculum renewal: align assessment with the purpose of the curriculum

- Assessment should be based on the same paradigm in order to reach alignment between rationale, learning goals, learning activities, and assessment.
- A central examination can only provide some indications of the learner's proficiency level.
- It is in the classroom examination where the CEFR comes into its own through rich, diversified assessment form and suitable evaluation criteria.
- We must consider what types of decisions we want to make at what point in time, and what minimum reliable information we need.
- However, this requires a lot of expertise and can be time-consuming.

Conceptualising curriculum: a complex thing...

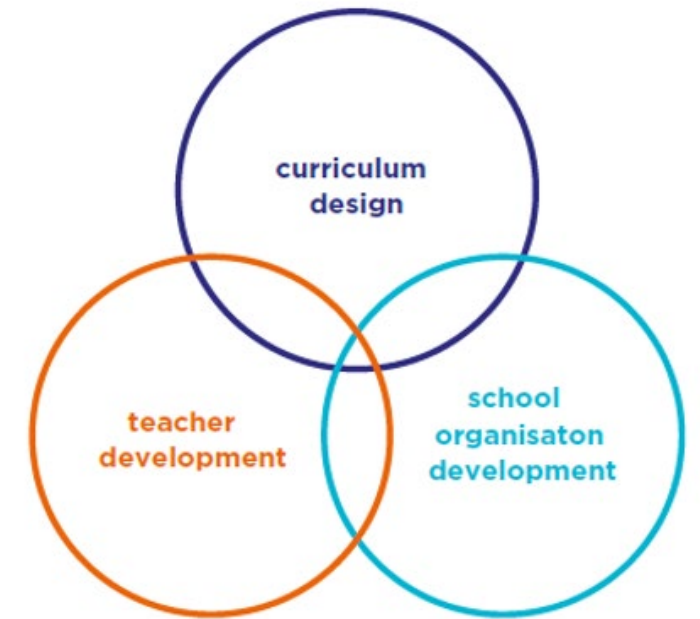


(Thijs & van den Akker 2009)



(Priestley et al. 2021)

Curriculum renewal: align people, content, and system?



reason, such as:

- subject innovation, core/choice
- continuous learning lines
- coherence in educational offer
- customise, tailor to needs
- formative/summative assessment

change:

- ambitions, profiling, vision
- curriculum at school, class and pupil level

competences:

- subject content
- pedagogy
- curriculum
- design and research
- collaboration
- change management

but also:

- commitment
- willingness to change
- ownership

school culture:

- cooperation
- shared curricular leadership
- respect and trust
- energy and space

school infrastructures:

time, budget
communication
consultation
the school as a teaching,
learning and design environment

Encourage the curriculum discussion at school

- Choose a change in the curriculum that you find interesting to discuss.
- Look at the learning objectives associated with this change.
- Discuss whether this change will impact any threads of the spider web.
- Jot down how.





A tool for the language teacher to make the own classroom curriculum:

Taalprofielen

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