STRATEGIES TO TACKLE CHALLENGES IN DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING CURRICULUM

Challenge 4: Effective implementation

Gaining wide support for curriculum and implementation is a challenge faced by many countries. Without "buy-in" from those who are to implement a change or a new idea, any reform may fail. And the "buy-in" or "consensus" cannot be built – without sufficient and strategic consultation – at the implementation stage.

It is also a challenge to implement the change or new idea without support. The kind of support required for effective implementation depends on various characteristics of the staff as well as contexts.

Furthermore, preparing conditions for staff to effectively implement the curriculum is another challenge. Insufficient guidelines and resources are likely to enhance difficulties, especially for inexperienced, new staff or staff with lower qualifications. Certain working environments, such as having too many children to look after, may hinder practising the pedagogy guided in the curriculum.

Monitoring or evaluation of effective implementation at the programme level is another challenge for national governments.

Ensuring stakeholder buy-in by involving them in the design process

- Australia involved ECEC bodies and organisations in the design process and prepared a national implementation plan of the Early Years Learning Framework. All states and territories agreed to follow the plan in their respective jurisdictions using an additional range of strategies. With stakeholders involved in the design process, the framework had their support upon implementation.

- In Scotland (United Kingdom), anyone with an interest in education was invited to be part of the feedback and revision process of the Curriculum for Excellence. The draft experiences and outcomes were published online and were accompanied by an online questionnaire for individuals, groups, schools and organisations to feed back their thoughts and views. Additionally, 37 focus groups were held, covering each curriculum area and involving practitioners, senior education managers, representatives from professional bodies, industry, parents and learners to discuss the draft experiences and outcomes. The University of Glasgow was commissioned to analyse the feedback on the draft experiences and outcomes.
During the formulation process (1992-95) of the developmental objectives for nursery education in Flanders (Belgium), a number of measures were taken to create the largest possible support. In the development commissions which formulated the first proposals, academics, but also teachers and school management teams, were represented. After that, the proposals of the development commissions were checked by board groups in which teachers, school heads, advisors and inspectors gave feedback. Finally, a social debate was organised about the proposals. The wider public, individuals and organisations (e.g., socio-cultural organisations, trade-unions, parent associations) had an opportunity to comment on the proposals by written communication and at discussion evenings. All reactions were taken into account when adapting the proposal.

In Slovenia, at the time of curricular reform at the national level, particular attention was paid to the participation of all interested parties. First, a public call for comments on the draft version was organised, in which institutions, such as faculties, schools, societies, non-governmental organisations and others, took part. Curricular commissions, composed of 500 experts, were involved in revising the initial curricula from preschools to upper-secondary education, taking into account the comments received. Another 300 experts were involved as reviewers or consultants. Furthermore, the curricular commissions held meetings with representatives of local governments, parents, and preschool and school representatives to present the proposals of the reform. Slovenian legislation stipulates that curriculum changes should be introduced gradually, which means that the number of preschool institutions and schools implementing the changes increased every year, i.e. not all kindergartens implemented the changes at the same time. Institutions were eligible for implementation when they met certain requirements regarding human (in-service training) and other resources. Before the implementation of the new curriculum, each preschool institution and school had to appoint a team in charge of the introduction and implementation process to oversee the work.

Norway’s revised Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens is a regulation to the Kindergarten Act. Norway consulted intensively with stakeholders before revising the plan, therefore receiving large support for legislation of the plan.

Piloting before implementing nationwide/statewide

In the Netherlands, centres and municipalities are free to choose an ECEC programme. They may develop their own or adopt existing programmes. The Piramide programme is the most widely used programme based on the Van Kuyk-Slavin model, which uses a play-based curriculum giving flexibility for staff to adapt to children’s needs. Kaleidoscope is the Dutch adaptation of the High/Scope Preschool Programme of the United States. Both programmes were piloted for three years in primary and preschools before implementation. The pilot evaluation concluded that: 1) both programmes offered a better work structure for the staff; 2) positive effects were found on cognitive and linguistic development of the participating children, although they are minor; and 3) the effects were largest for children who started the programmes from preschool. After the pilot period, other preschools were free to implement these “government approved” programmes. Funding is available for implementation.

In Australia, the draft Early Years Learning Framework and its supporting documentation were trialled in 28 case study sites across Australia from February to April 2009 to test the Framework and its application in early childhood settings prior to implementation. The sites represented a wide variety of early childhood settings and
services, including preschools, early childhood settings on school sites, Long Day Care Centres, Family Day Care, Multipurpose Aboriginal Children’s Services, early intervention and occasional child care in metropolitan, regional and remote settings.

- More than 600 early years establishments and schools in Scotland (United Kingdom) took part in a formal trialling process to test specific experiences and outcomes from the Curriculum for Excellence in practice across all curriculum areas. Schools and centres chose experiences and outcomes to trial based on their planned programmes of work. They submitted reports containing detailed feedback, which was used to inform the revision process.

- Luxembourg published the new curriculum programme for basic education (including preschool) in June 2008. The document included the core skills children should achieve at the end of the four education cycles. Before nationwide implementation, it was tested in five schools. The opinions of these five schools were considered when revising the document.

- In Mexico, the Ministry of Education planned a pilot phase (from November 2010 to December 2011) for the implementation of the curriculum framework to ensure successful implementation.

- When revising the developmental objectives regarding “technology” in Flanders (Belgium), the attainment targets were first piloted in 17 settings before they were implemented nationally.

Providing “practical” support materials

- Early Childhood Australia, the peak national, non-profit, non-government early childhood advocacy organisation in Australia, was contracted to develop support materials for ECEC centres and staff. All materials were developed with an Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and Educators’ Guide to the EYLF focus. The Guide consists of two parts: the first focuses on curriculum decision-making, promotes reflective practice and inquiry and provides best practice examples and case studies; the second contains educators’ stories and models of their plans for the outcomes of children’s learning with questions to provoke thinking and generate discussion relative to the principles, practice and outcomes of the EYLF. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations developed a Remote Indigenous Professional Development support package for the EYLF, which includes a DVD, a book, a set of 50 cards to support learning outcomes, a set of posters and a CD ROM, to benefit locally engaged Indigenous staff.

- Scotland’s (United Kingdom) Pre-Birth to Three includes practical case studies, which staff can use for implementation. Additionally, a national implementation guide and accompanying staff support materials have been developed, including a DVD, a CD and a poster that are relevant for all adults working with and for babies and young children. This pack is issued to all early years establishments; and the interactive online version combines all materials contained in the pack. Scotland also developed a communication toolkit for staff with tools that address what Curriculum for Excellence means at different educational stages. The kit includes ready-made materials such as posters for use at ECEC centres and schools, a series of leaflets with the summary of a case study from
the child’s and the parent’s points of view, a “pupil voice” video and a “practitioner voice” video as well as additional resources and links.

- In **England (United Kingdom)**, a *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* booklet has been made available. It includes non-statutory guidance, information on the areas of learning and development, and advice to professionals.

- The **curriculum framework** for ECEC in **New Zealand** provides professionals with examples of experiences that help meet the outcomes of the curriculum. The support guidance is divided in experiences helpful for infants, toddlers and young children to ensure practices and activities are age-appropriate. It provides ideas for activities and what is important to keep in mind for staff working with children. It also sets out questions for reflection for staff members, which help professionals analyse what they could improve when implementing the curriculum.

- **Mexico** created a guide on how to implement the new curriculum for staff in the initial training phase. The guides were used by a sample of teachers, and an evaluation showed that staff still had many questions about how to implement the new curriculum. While teachers are more prepared, 50% of them are not yet fully implementing the new curriculum; so further measures are being developed.

- In **Ireland**, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment created the *Aistear Toolkit*, which includes tip-sheets, information leaflets, podcasts, presentations and activities and helps ECEC staff, as well as parents, to understand the framework. Ireland also prepared training videos for ECEC staff with an aim to inform them about curriculum changes and train them to effectively implement the changes.

- To support the implementation of its Framework Plan, **Norway** has issued guiding booklets on relevant themes, such as pedagogy for the youngest children, multiculturalism, children’s agency and participation, language and language stimulation, numeracy, outdoor activities and gender equality. These booklets have been commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Research and were authored by experts. The intention behind the booklets is to promote reflection and discussion between staff on the Framework and the realisation of goals in local contexts.

- **Portugal** carried out a study to identify what areas are in need of materials to support the implementation of the curriculum guidelines. Based on the study, booklets were prepared for teaching literacy, maths and experimental science. Additionally, the Social Security Office developed a Guidance Manual for social security nursery care services. The manual gives guidance on implementing curricular practices and advises on pedagogical activities.

- In 2001, experts from **Slovenia** prepared a manual for the national curriculum, “The child in the preschool”, with the purpose of offering starting points and examples of good practice for work in preschools.

- The National Agency for Education in **Sweden** publishes support material and General Guidelines with comments for guidance and supervision for municipality management, heads of preschools and staff in preschools.
• In **Japan**, explanatory guidelines accompany the *Course of Study for Kindergartens*, and a DVD accompanies the *National Curriculum of Day Care Centres*: they were prepared for all prefectural and city government officials.

• **Korea** is currently developing explanatory guidelines, a teaching manual, DVDs, CD-ROMs, PowerPoint presentations and websites in order to increase the level of familiarity of ECEC staff with the *Nuri Curriculum for Age 5*.

• In **Estonia**, the Ministry of Education and Research published handbooks for teachers and parents to support the implementation of the national curriculum for preschool child care institutions. The handbooks treat all fields of education and schooling activities and their organisation, the development of general skills in early ages, and the evaluation and support of children’s development in a preschool child care institution. In 2010, a practical study material, “Values at preschool age: Education on values in preschool child care institutions”, was issued on the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Research and in co-operation with the Centre for Ethics of Tartu University and the Institute of Educational Sciences of Tallinn University. In co-operation between the National Examinations and Qualifications Centre and Lasteveeb OÜ, an internet-based study material has been developed for supporting the learning of Estonian as a second language in preschool.

• **Slovak Republic** and **Turkey** developed handbooks for ECEC staff that provide implementation support. Slovak Republic has the *Manual for the Design of School Educational Programmes*, while Turkey developed the *Preschool Education Curriculum Guidebook*. Slovak Republic also developed the *Methodology for Pre-Primary Education*, which includes methodological advice and recommendations for kindergarten teachers on how to develop key competences of children. Additionally, training videos were distributed to ECEC staff, informing them about curriculum changes and training them in how to implement the changes.

• The responsible ministries of ECEC in **Flanders** (Belgium), **Luxembourg** and **Spain** developed guides and booklets on their (new) curriculum or changes in their framework to ensure staff had practical support tool for implementation.

**Setting out guidelines for materials or prescribing materials**

• Materials which staff and caregivers can use in the setting are prescribed by the national or regional authorities in **Australia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain** and **Turkey**.

• In several states in the **United States**, local authorities prescribe which materials ECEC providers are allowed to use.

• In **Manitoba** (Canada), Manitoba Education has developed a kindergarten-level resource for kindergarten teachers to improve and encourage language competences of children. *Listening and Speaking: First Steps into Literacy: A Support Document for Kindergarten Teachers and Speech Language Pathologists* (2008) assists kindergarten teachers in stimulating the oral and language skills of all kindergarten.
Revising initial education and providing demands-driven training

- Before the curricular reform took place, Slovenia extended the initial education programme of ECEC preschool teachers to improve quality in the preschools. After the introduction of the new preschool curriculum, selected topics were included in the initial study programme and in-service training of preschool teachers.

- In Italy, universities that train future ECEC professionals embedded courses on the new curriculum into the initial education programme. Education institutes that provide initial ECEC education, organised workshops and activities for ECEC professionals to teach them about the curriculum changes. The national government also sent out training videos to staff to ensure all students are well informed on the new curriculum and prepared for implementation.

- Prince Edward Island (Canada) provided developmental and implementation funding to allow for entry-level training of all uncertified staff working within Early Years Centres so they could be educated as an Early Years educator and learn about the new Learning Framework. The province also provides in-service training to early childhood directors and educators already working in the centres on the newly established Early Learning Framework, a curriculum document for the early childhood sector focusing on children from birth to school entry.

- Early Childhood Australia, a non-profit, non-government early childhood advocacy organisation, was contracted to provide nationwide training for early childhood educators in the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYL). An online forum, master classes and an online newsletter about the framework have been developed as well. Australia also introduced the framework into undergraduate courses. Additionally, the network of Professional Support Coordinators, Indigenous Professional Support Units and Inclusion Support Agencies in each state provided EYLF support and training to early childhood educators.

- In Luxembourg, ECEC staff members are legally obliged to follow a certain minimum number of hours of continuous training. This in-service training provision informs staff about any changes in curriculum and furthers their professionalization. There were also training courses organised on child observation and assessment when changes in the curriculum were made. Additionally, peers (ECEC workers) are trained to educate and inform their colleagues on, for example, changes in curriculum. This is found to be an effective method in training staff since they feel more comfortable asking questions to peers.

- Each year, Flanders (Belgium) allocates financial resources for in-service training to early education institutions. The government lays down priorities for the staff regarding in-service training initiatives that are necessary for supporting the implementation of educational reforms.

- In the United States, many states incorporate Early Learning and Development Standards (ELDSs) into professional education systems; and a large number of states offer training on the ELDSs and incorporate them into professional development systems.
The Ministry of Education in Mexico developed a training course for staff to effectively implement the revised curriculum. Centres of Permanent Training were established to provide in-service training to ECEC workers and teachers. For the Early Childhood Health and Care and Welfare Curriculum framework, special training strategies were set up to ensure that it is properly implemented and that children will receive quality service.

Turkey provided in-service training to practitioners, headmasters and education inspectors. Headmasters also provided training to teachers in their preschools.

Portugal organises training sessions for ECEC staff working with children ages three to six on areas for which staff have indicated there is a need for training, including literacy, maths and experimental science.

In Norway, project funding was made available for the revised Framework Plan by the Ministry of Education for improving staff competences and recruitment of staff from 2007-10. Grants were conditional upon municipalities establishing plans for competence development, as well as an implementation plan aligned with national priorities, which are pedagogical leadership, children’s participation, language environment and linguistic stimulation, and collaboration and coherence between kindergartens and schools.

England (United Kingdom) will develop training for ECEC staff to implement the revised Early Years Foundation Stage.

Providing expert assistance to ECEC providers

In Slovenia, educational advisers of the National Education Institute provided implementation assistance to ECEC providers. Project-team counsellors maintained ongoing contacts with preschools implementing the new curriculum and assisted them in solving problems encountered in practice.

In Australia, the Professional Support Coordinators (PSC) and the Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU) networks in each state and territory are funded by the national government to deliver training and mentoring services to ECEC services to support their implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). The Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Programme (EYLF PLP), developed for the government by Early Childhood Australia, also provides ongoing professional support and assistance to services as they engage in the EYLF implementation process. The programme is a national initiative that started in 2010 and continues through 2011. As part of this programme, ECEC professionals have access to an online interactive EYLF PLP Forum where they can raise questions, share ideas and interact with other educators implementing the EYLF. High-calibre early childhood experts and practitioners from across Australia are available on the Forum to respond to questions and conduct topical discussions – about issues raised by experts and practitioners via the forum and the national workshop programme – regarding implementation of the EYLF.

Each educational network in Flanders (Belgium), an umbrella organisation of nursery schools/kindergartens and schools, has its own educational/pedagogical guidance service (PBD). This service provides professional internal support to kindergartens, and they are tasked with supporting education institutions in implementing their pedagogical projects.
• The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Prince Edward Island (Canada) has a support team to provide in-service and job-impeded support to early childhood educators and directors as they implement the newly introduced Early Learning Framework. This is a permanent team within the department, which supports the maintenance of the framework in addition to any further quality enhancement initiatives introduced by either the early learning and child care programme or the government.

Improving working conditions to stimulate effective implementation

• In Flanders (Belgium), child care workers can assist kindergarten teachers in their work to reduce workload and provide a better staff-child ratio in a large classroom.

• Australia is progressively implementing changes to staff-child ratios, which should contribute to effective curriculum implementation. On 1 January 2012, Australia will start with the new 1:4 ratio for children from birth to two years.

• In Sweden, in 2004, a grant of SEK 2 billion increased state funding to local authorities for the employment of 6 000 additional preschool teachers and child assistants. The grant was intended to reduce class sizes and improve staff-child ratios to 1:5 on average for zero to six years to improve the quality of ECEC and qualitative curriculum implementation.