



Irish National Teachers' Organisation
Cumann Múinteoirí Éireann

The Review of the Primary Curriculum

Consultative Conference on Education 2019

Athbhreithniú ar an gCuraclam Bunscoile

Comhdháil Chomairleach ar Oideachas 2019



Newpark Hotel, Kilkenny
15ú – 16ú Samhain 2019



Fáilte

We are delighted to welcome you to Kilkenny for the 2019 INTO Consultative Conference on Education. This year, the theme of the conference is 'Review of the Primary Curriculum'.

Twenty years ago, our current *Primary School Curriculum* was welcomed as child-centred and innovative. However, a curriculum has to be fit for purpose and meet the challenges that societal changes bring. Irish society has seen unprecedented change since the 1999 Curriculum was published.

Many of the students going through schools now are from a whole new generation: Generation Alpha. Children born since 2010 have grown up in a different world from older generations. They have never lived in a world without smartphones, drones, tablet computing, apps, and 3D televisions.

This unprecedented access to technology means our students have more information available to them than we could have dreamed of, even a couple of decades ago. They can teach themselves almost anything they want to know using the resources available to them.

As educators, we are tasked with helping these capable, intelligent children prepare for challenges we can't fully foresee. That requires a curriculum that is different than any we have seen before, but not entirely different as much of our current curriculum still serves our pupils very well.

The National Council for Curriculum Assessment (NCCA) has begun the process of reviewing the curriculum. However, any new curriculum must harness the strengths of the 1999 Curriculum, while using the opportunity of a revision to address the current challenges, particularly the issue of curriculum overload and paperwork for teachers.

The INTO has always led teacher involvement in curriculum change and curriculum development, and the current review will be no different.

It is vital that the teacher's voice be heard at all stages of curriculum development and review as we continue to be key decision makers regarding the type of primary curriculum that is developed for children now and for the years ahead.

Tá súil againn go mbainfidh sibh uilig taitneamh agus tairbhe as an gcomhdháil.

Yours sincerely,

Feargal Brougham
INTO President

John Boyle
General Secretary

Clár

Friday, 15 November

- 2.30 pm. Registration
- 3.00 pm Opening of conference
Feargal Brougham, INTO President
Siobhán Lynskey, Cathaoirleach,
INTO Education Committee
- John Boyle, INTO General Secretary
- Deirbhile Nic Craith, INTO Director of Education and Research
- Arlene Forster, NCCA Deputy Chief Executive
- Pupil Voice
- 4.30 pm Tea/Coffee
- 5.00 pm Discussion groups
- 6.10 pm Keynote Speaker
Curriculum in Ireland: Past, Present and Possibilities
Dr Thomas Walsh, Maynooth University
- 6.45 pm Wine reception
Sponsored by Comhar Linn

Saturday, 16 November

- 9.30 am Workshop A
- 10.45 am Tea/Coffee
- 11.10 am Workshop B
- 12.25 pm Presentation to INTO Bursary winners
- Keynote Speaker
Leaving the Harbour for the Sea in Search of the Pedagogical 'Holy Grail': Why, as Teachers, We Alone Can Steer the Ship
Professor Emer Ring, Mary Immaculate College
- 1.15 pm Críoch

General information

Registration

Registration opens at 2.30 pm on Friday, 15 November. We ask you to assist INTO staff by completing your delegate card, which is in your pack, prior to your arrival at the registration desk.

Absence from school

The Department of Education and Skills has given approval for leave of absence for delegates to attend the conference. A copy of the letter is included in your pack and is also available on the Education Conference page on the INTO website. However, substitute cover is not available.

INTO communication policy

Please be advised that photography, videography and/or live streaming will be taking place at this event. These materials may be used by the INTO and included in publications, media materials, promotional materials, digital platforms and social platforms. If you do not wish the INTO to use your image, please go to the registration desk and inform staff. The INTO can then take reasonable steps to comply with your wishes.

Conference evaluation

Delegates will be contacted after the conference with a link to a short online questionnaire, for the purposes of evaluating the conference.

Car parking

There are 350 complimentary car parking spaces available on site.

INTO conference app

The INTO Conference app will allow you to view the conference agenda, find your way to the conference venue, and receive reminders of key events and news alerts during the event.

The free app is available for download for both iPad, iPhone and Android devices.



Wine reception

The wine reception has been kindly sponsored by Comhar Linn INTO Credit Union.

Exhibitors

The following are the exhibitors in attendance and their stands will be located in the lobby area outside the main conference hall:

- ✦ INTO Credit Union Comhar Linn
- ✦ Cornmarket Financial Services
- ✦ EMU Ink Schools' Publishing Programme
- ✦ Outside the Box Learning Resources
- ✦ Cusken
- ✦ Edco, the Educational Company of Ireland
- ✦ Tralee Education Centre
- ✦ INTO Global Solidarity Network



Follow the conference on social media @INTOnews #EdConf19
Full coverage of the conference plenary sessions is available on the INTO website

INTO Education Committee





Keynote speakers



DR THOMAS WALSH is a lecturer and deputy head of department 2019-2020 in Maynooth University Department of Education. Tom joined the department in 2014 having previously worked as a primary school teacher, an early years education researcher and a primary school inspector at the Department of Education and Skills. He holds a BEd from St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, and an MEd and PhD from the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. His doctoral thesis focused on the development and implementation of successive primary school curricula between 1897 and 1990. His book, *Primary Education in Ireland 1897-1990: Curriculum and Context*, was published by Peter Lang International Academic Publishers in 2012.

Further information and a selection of his recent presentations and publications can be found at: www.maynoothuniversity.ie/education/our-people/thomas-walsh.

PROFESSOR EMER RING is dean of Early Childhood and Teacher Education at Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick. Emer previously worked as a primary mainstream, learning support and resource teacher and a senior inspector with the Department of Education and Skills. In her work with the Inspectorate, in addition to school inspection and probationary work with teachers, Emer was involved in a wide range of research projects related to inclusion.

Emer has published widely in the area of early childhood and primary education. She has recently co-authored the paper commissioned by the NCCA: *A Melange or a Mosaic of Theories? How Theoretical Perspectives on Children's Learning and Development can Inform a Responsive Pedagogy in a Redeveloped Primary School Curriculum* with Dr Lisha O'Sullivan, Marie Ryan and Patrick Burke at MIC.



ARLENE FORSTER is deputy chief executive in the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The NCCA advises the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment in early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools.

Arlene began her teaching career in a two-teacher school in Co Monaghan followed by a year in Co Tyrone before moving to Dublin where she taught in Kill O' The Grange PS. As a director in NCCA, she led the development of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. She has also worked in the areas of assessment and reporting at primary level, primary curriculum review, language and mathematics. She was appointed deputy CEO in 2016 and has responsibility for leading the NCCA's work in early childhood and primary education.

Workshop presenters



PATRICK BURKE is a primary school teacher who now works as a lecturer in the Department of Language and Literacy Education in Mary Immaculate College. He formerly worked as a mainstream teacher and post-holder in Scoil Chormaic Community NS, Balbriggan, as an International Fellow in the Children's Literature Centre at Frostburg State University, Maryland, and as an advisor with the Professional Development Service for Teachers. He has recently been a member of the NCCA development group for the Primary Language Curriculum (2019). He has also participated in a number of other research projects relating to literacy and the primary school curriculum more generally. Patrick is particularly interested in the cross-curricular teaching of literacy, an area which is the focus of his doctoral studies at Dublin City University.



DENIS DALY is a teacher in St Thomas' SNS, Jobstown. Since transitioning from post-primary he has acquired a Masters in Education, where he explored how personal development plans impact on student resilience. He has continued his examination of student holistic development through partaking in Michael Daly's research in child-directed differentiation.



MICHAEL DALY is a teaching principal in St Michael's NS, Meath. He also spent 12 years teaching in St Mark's SNS, Tallaght. Michael has particular interests in the development of inclusive environments and self-regulated learning. Michael has presented material on similar topics at Féilte and for his Master of Teaching degree in DCU.



DR ELIZABETH DUNPHY taught and coordinated a range of pre-service and in-service early childhood education courses as associate professor in Early Childhood Education, DCU. She has recently retired but continues her involvement with the university. Prior to working in third-level Liz worked as a primary teacher for almost two decades. She has worked on assignments with a number of external agencies including the INTO, the NCCA and the DES. She was chairperson of The Expert Advisory Group established by the NCCA to develop *Aistear: The Framework for Early Learning*.

Liz is currently chairperson of the Early Childhood and Primary Maths Development Group established by the NCCA to support the development of the new *Primary Mathematics Curriculum*. The committee was established in 2016 and its work is ongoing.



DR MICHAEL FLANNERY is head of the Department of Arts, Maths, PE and Early Childhood within the School of Education and Childhood at Marino Institute of Education, an associated college of Trinity College Dublin. He has been teaching visual arts education across different undergraduate and postgraduate programmes since 2000. He completed postgraduate studies at Trinity College Dublin, the National College of Art and Design and Canterbury Christ Church University. Michael worked as a primary school teacher for 12 years in Dublin and Kilkenny. His research interests concern co-equal visual arts integration, children's ideation development, teachers' creative self-efficacy and creative habits of mind development. Other interests include creative use of technologies. Michael is a research fellow with the Arts and Education Research group (AERG) at TCD.



DR DÉIRDRE KIRWAN has taught in both mainstream and special schools. From 1987 until 2015, she was Principal of Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní) in West Dublin. In 2008, Déirdre was awarded European Ambassador for Languages (Léargas) for her active promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity within the school. In 2009, she received a PhD from Trinity College Dublin for her research in the area of language education. Her most recent publication co-authored with David Little (2019) is entitled *Engaging with Linguistic Diversity: A Study of Educational Inclusion in an Irish Primary School*, London: Bloomsbury Academic. Déirdre is currently working with the European Centre for Modern Languages on the topic of language learning (Inspiring Language Learning in the Early Years (ILLEY)) at pre-primary and primary level.



MÁIRÉAD NALLY is a primary teacher, with 12 years of teaching experience. She is currently teaching first class in Holywell Educate Together NS, Swords. She is also currently conducting research into inquiry and the primary school curriculum at Trinity College Dublin. She completed a Masters in Early Education, specialising in inquiry-based learning. Máiréad teaches a module on inquiry-based learning on the Masters in Early Education in Marino Institute of Education (MIE).

Máiréad has supervised educational research at undergraduate and masters level at MIE. Her research interests include inquiry-based learning, democracy and children's agency in learning, learning dispositions and habits of mind.



Discussion group and workshop venues

Room	Discussion Group Friday 5.00 pm	Workshop A Saturday 9.30 am	Workshop B Saturday 11.10 am
BALLROOM	–	Teachmeet/ Researchmeet	Child-directed differentiation
PARK ROOM	A	One school fifty languages: why good EAL teaching is good for everyone	One school fifty languages: why good EAL teaching is good for everyone
ROSSMORE SUITE	B	Literacy in a broad and balanced curriculum: how can research inform practice	Literacy in a broad and balanced curriculum how can research inform practice
LARCH AND LIME SUITE	C	Visual arts and the arts: analysing arts, intergrated arts and arts integration	Visual arts and the arts: analysing arts, intergrated arts and arts integration
WILLOW AND WALNUT SUITE	D	Early childhood pedagogy in primary schools in the context of curriculum renewal (mathematics)	Early childhood pedagogy in primary schools in the context of curriculum renewal (mathematics)
DANCE STUDIO	E	Integrating curriculum through inquiry-based learning	Integrating curriculum through inquiry-based learning

Workshop details Saturday, 16 November

Delegates may choose **TWO** workshops by signing up at registration.

Please be aware that workshops will be filled on a first come, first served basis.

Workshops

Teachmeet / Researchmeet

Aoife Mullen

A **Teachmeet** is an organized (but informal) meeting where participants are called on to share good practice, practical ideas and personal insights into their role as a teacher. Delegates can opt to present a nano (two minute) or a macro (five minute) presentation. Participants can be actively involved as presenters, or can simply relax and listen to all that will be on offer.

A **Researchmeet** is a similar process with teachers presenting the findings of their own research.

Early childhood pedagogy in primary schools in the context of curriculum renewal (mathematics)

Liz Dunphy

In the course of this workshop participants will revisit some of the principles underpinning good practice in early childhood classrooms. They will consider some of the features of good pedagogy in early childhood mathematics, and they will discuss a range of strategies that can be effective in supporting children's mathematical learning in infant classes in the context of the redeveloped curriculum.

Literacy in a broad and balanced curriculum: How can research inform practice?

Patrick Burke

This session will outline key ideas from the research on how language and literacy can be developed throughout the curriculum. It will focus on the implications of the *Primary Language Curriculum* for integrating literacy with other subjects in the senior classes. Practical strategies and children's book recommendations will be explored. The session will also look towards the upcoming review of the *Primary Language Curriculum* and the role that literacy might play therein.

Child-directed differentiation

Michael and Denis Daly

Child-directed differentiation is a pedagogical approach that is based around the teacher identifying and removing barriers to learning for pupils using Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The pupils themselves are directly involved through their awareness of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences or alternatively learning styles. The children direct their learning of the topic using these multiple intelligences/learning styles in a UDL environment which the teacher creates.

Visual arts and the arts: Analysing arts, integrated arts and arts integration

Dr Michael Flannery

This presentation/workshop reminds participants of the essentiality of visual arts in the curriculum. It unpacks the key characteristics of quality arts practice. Through discussion and arts-based methods, it explores the potential pearls and perils of arts integration. It aims to rejuvenate classroom practice.

Integrating curriculum through inquiry-based learning

Mairead Nally

This workshop will introduce inquiry-based learning and explore how this approach to teaching and learning can facilitate curriculum integration. Participants will look at some aspects of planning for learning across disciplines through an inquiry stance.

One school fifty languages: why good EAL teaching is good teaching for everyone

Dr Déirdre Kirwan

This presentation provides insights into how an integrated approach to language learning, in a school where 80% of pupils came from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, resulted in unexpected educational benefits for all learners. The voices of teachers, pupils and parents describe their response to this integrated approach where the use and status of Gaeilge increased and pupils developed autonomous learning skills. This may be of particular interest in teaching the new *Primary Language Curriculum*.



Reviewing curriculum – having our say

Introduction

A curriculum process is cyclical. To be relevant it must be created, taught, reviewed, and adjusted. In our rapidly changing environment, it is important to review the curriculum and make necessary adjustments in a targeted way. In an Irish context, the curriculum has undergone significant change with the development of a *Framework for Early Years (Aistear)*, a new *Junior Cycle Framework* and the commencement of a review of senior cycle education. *The Primary Curriculum* is the next key piece of the jigsaw that we must consider, ensuring that it 'fits into' the overall education structure, serving all pupils, including children with special education needs. *Aistear*, which was introduced a decade ago in 2009, is the curriculum framework for all children in Ireland from birth to six years, describing the types of learning that are important for children at this stage in their lives. Whilst it was never formally introduced or properly resourced, *Aistear* was embraced and complimented by many teachers. The new *Junior Cycle Framework* introduced (on a phased basis) in 2014, features revised subjects and short courses, a focus on key skills, new approaches to assessment and reporting and Level Two programmes for pupils with special needs. The revised framework allows schools more freedom to design junior cycle programmes that meet the learning needs of all students.

The aim of curriculum review and redevelopment is to enhance student learning, engagement, experience and outcomes, therefore, as we mark 20 years since the launch of the 'new' *Primary School Curriculum (1999)*, it is timely that the Department of Education and Skills (DES) seeks to review the curriculum in order to ensure that it reflects the reality of the society in which we live. In Northern Ireland, a similar review took place in 2007 seeking "to retain the best of current practice while seeking to give greater emphasis to important elements, such as children's personal development and mutual understanding and the explicit development of thinking skills and personal capabilities".

The centrality of the teacher

"Without a doubt, the most important person in the curriculum implementation process is the teacher. With their knowledge, experiences, and competencies, teachers are central to any curriculum development effort" (Merfat Ayesh Alsubaie, *Journal of Education and Practice* Vol 7, No 9, 2016 p106).

Irish teachers have a unique role in curriculum design. The 1999 curriculum was a combined effort, developed through a partnership process involving teachers, parents, school management and the DES. Primary teachers and the

INTO were active participants in preparing the revised curriculum of 1999 through their participation on committees designing and preparing curriculum content. The input of teachers cannot be underestimated as their contributions are based on real-life situations and lived experiences in a school context and we must ensure that the voice of the teacher continues to resonate in any updated curriculum. In Ireland, we are renowned for the high calibre of our primary school teachers and, as noted by Sugrue (2004) when considering the INTO's involvement with the NCCA in the process and structure of the 1999 curriculum, "the level of ownership afforded to our teachers resulted in professional buy-in."

In general, while the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* was well-received by teachers, it emerged over the years that certain aspects posed challenges, including a strong sense of curriculum overload and increasing pressure to participate in a plethora of initiatives and programmes that were introduced to support the curriculum.

A vision for primary education

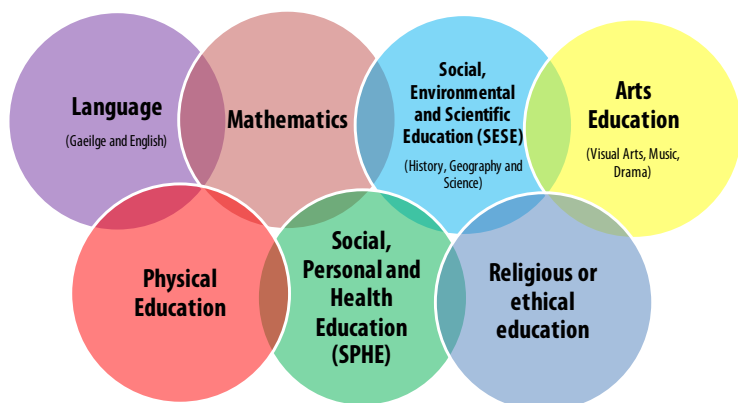
The overall vision of the *Primary School Curriculum (1999)* "is to enable children to meet, with self-confidence and assurance, the demands of life, both now and in the future". This statement effectively encapsulates the aim of the *Primary School Curriculum* which celebrates the uniqueness of the child, as it is expressed in each child's personality, intelligence and potential for development and strives to lay solid foundations for the child in all dimensions of his or her life—spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical. Within the 'vision' of the 1999 curriculum was an acknowledgement that children are woven into the fabric of society and thus their personal growth and development are deeply influenced by their dynamic relationships with others at home and in the wider community. In our rapidly changing society, there is a clear need to reflect on the curriculum and its effectiveness to serve the needs of our children, yet the key element at the core of the vision outlined in 1999 still prevails - to cultivate the assurance and confidence in our pupils which will prepare them for life not just in the immediate future but as they grow into adulthood.

The curriculum is characterised by its breadth and balance within a clear and structured national framework, replicating a broader global context. Looking at our curriculum composition through a global lens we strive to meet sustainable development goals through policies of inclusion and diversity. In our modern-day, changed society, acknowledging the diversity within classrooms, we

must consider if we can retain the breadth and balance within our primary curriculum while promoting the wellbeing of the pupils we teach.

Subjects

Reflecting its vision to ensure a well-rounded, holistic education, the 1999 curriculum encompasses seven curriculum areas, some of which are further subdivided into subjects, namely:



The above areas seek to provide a 'broad and balanced' learning experience for all primary school pupils, and whilst the range of content within these areas fulfils the ambition of offering a 'broad' curriculum, striking the 'balance' can often pose a challenge for teachers. As outlined previously, the allocation of time is weighted in favour of literacy and numeracy, and the sheer volume of other subjects to be taught can result in pressure within a teaching context.

The Primary Language Curriculum 2019 acknowledges the evolving language-learning journeys that all children are on, in both English and Irish, whilst also recognising and harnessing the diversity of languages spoken in Irish primary schools. Supporting the introduction of modern foreign languages may be considered as building incrementally on children's existing knowledge and awareness of language, with a pilot scheme (1998-2012) broadly welcomed by teachers. The technological and digital-oriented society we live in also gives rise to the need to promote digital literacy in our curriculum with many schools already engaging in coding and computational thinking. Such changes to content and pedagogy, along with further developments concerning Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and demands for ethics education, place even more work on teachers which we must ensure does not exacerbate the pressure felt about workload and time.

Integration

The merits of integration have long since been highlighted, with the value of an integrated approach endorsed in the 1971 curriculum. Integration is a key method for teachers to ensure that they are allowing children to access a variety of subjects and approaches within a common theme – an

approach which is the premise of the *Aistear* framework at infant level. *Aistear* describes children's learning and development using the four themes of:



In reviewing the curriculum, we must consider the way in which subjects are presented and grouped. We seek to support younger children's learning and development in stages by building on and extending their earlier learning experiences in preschool through *Aistear*. The areas are designed to support an interdisciplinary approach, optimising curriculum integration and flexibility while supporting progression in learning. Pedagogies in *Aistear* should underpin curriculum for infant classes. For the young child, the distinctions between subjects are not relevant: what is more important is that he or she experiences a coherent learning process that accommodates a variety of elements.

Subjects should be considered in an integrated, organic way which will allow for thematic approaches to learning, combining subjects where appropriate, similar to the Northern Ireland Curriculum which states that "although the (six) areas of learning are set out separately teachers should, where appropriate, integrate learning across the six areas to make relevant connections for children". The curriculum recognises the need for "considerable flexibility" for teachers "to select from within the learning areas those aspects they consider appropriate to the ability and interests of their pupils". (*The Northern Ireland Curriculum: Primary* (2007, p2).

The challenge for us as we devise a new curriculum is how we can develop the pedagogies which prove successful in *Aistear* through the various stages of the primary curriculum.

Time is of the essence

One of the challenges faced by teachers, and a factor that features in all INTO research and consultation with members, is time management. Time is a precious resource, but the range and depth of the curriculum subjects which must be taught, coupled with other additional initiatives, make it difficult to address all aspects to the extent that is merited. Teachers do like guidance (for example current weekly guidelines) about how they should allocate their time, although it is abundantly evident that the use of discretionary time is also extremely important.

With the advent of the *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, the DES issued guidelines for teachers (*DES Circular*



0056/2011) marking the beginning of a major national effort to improve literacy and numeracy standards among children and young people. Ideally, a review of the curriculum as a whole would be a logical first step, but the Minister for Education and Skills identified literacy and numeracy as “among the most important skills taught in our schools ... fundamental to a person’s ability to succeed in education, to gain fulfilling employment and to lead a satisfying and rewarding life” and initiated a review of these two areas.

The five key elements that the Minister sought to address were:



(Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life; The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020)

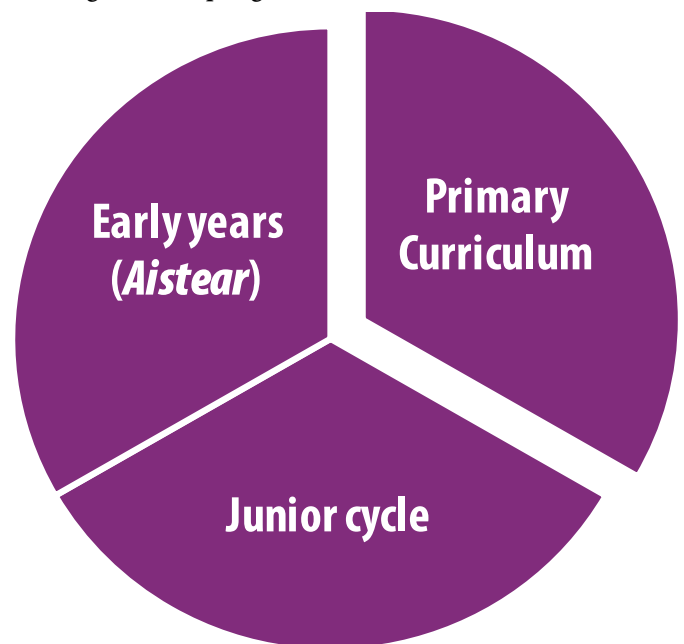
The increase of time available for the teaching of literacy and numeracy came from what would previously have been part of a teacher’s discretionary time as well as teaching literacy and numeracy across the entire curriculum. This greater amount of time allocated to these areas may have had implications for other aspects of the curriculum. The value of flexible time for the teacher is immense, and in keeping with the overall aims and holistic vision of the curriculum, exploration of creative aspects of the curriculum is hugely important. INTO consultations with members on time reveal that teachers, in general, are supportive of weekly guidelines in language and mathematics and favour monthly guidelines in other curriculum areas (as this allows for block teaching in certain curricular areas). Whilst a broad framework is needed, the desire for flexibility is strong and autonomy for schools on how time is used must be considered central.

Key competencies

On analysing and reviewing curricula in an international context, the focus appears to be on competency development to ensure a well-rounded, holistic education. In her *Research-Informed Analysis of 21st Century Competencies in a Redeveloped Primary Curriculum*, Carol McGuinness spoke of learning as much more than “to be remembered material” and thus the development of curricula seeks to ensure that children develop thinking plans and strategies rather than routine learning. The former affords the children a deeper understanding as they are – this is an idea that has been strongly rooted in our 1999 curriculum, with the pupil seen to be an active learner and

the benefit of exploratory work emphasised. In McGuinness’ research, she considered the modern competency-based curricula in seven different states, namely her native Northern Ireland, New Zealand, Singapore, Victoria (Australia), British Columbia (Canada) and Finland. Key competency development can be seen as part of a more general thrust in educational systems. Learning how to learn, developing thinking plans and strategies is critical for children to build foundations for later life.

As we review the curriculum, we consider the competencies that we would like to see included in the framework. The aim is to enable and foster effective and deep learning while also contributing to the holistic development of the child. Children’s progress towards potential key competencies will be influenced by their varying circumstances, experiences and abilities in the same way as progress towards learning outcomes. It would be envisaged that competencies will link closely to *Aistear’s* four themes and the six key skills in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*¹ in order to make connections with children’s prior learning in preschool and future learning in post-primary school. Many competencies might mirror the skills underpinning the 1999 curriculum such as creating an effective learning space, where pupils can draw upon elements of their environment to enhance their skills of locating and critiquing.



Transitions

The current redevelopment of the primary school curriculum could be used as an opportunity to ensure better alignment in the curriculum across pre-school, primary and post-primary education. *The Education Passport* has facilitated the sharing of information with post-primary schools. Teachers are supportive of a continuum of learning and more linkage between pre-schools and primary schools

¹ Six key skills in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*:

1. Communicating; 2. Staying Well; 3. Managing Information and Thinking; 4. Managing Myself; 5. Working with Others; 6. Being Creative.

to ensure continuity of learning and experience into early years of primary education. It is evident from previous INTO consultations with members that teachers would welcome more opportunities to share information with the pre-school sector concerning transitions although they cautioned that it must not put an unreasonable administrative or time burden on teachers and schools who are, as previously mentioned, already overwhelmed by paperwork and initiative overload.

In their transition from pre-school to early years of primary school, teachers often acknowledge a discontinuity in structures and experiences for children in terms of the physical environment, the complexity of the school setting, the level of individual attention they receive and a different approach to learning. In light of the extension of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme there is a need to address the issue of consistency and INTO previously proposed that consideration should be given to the provision of the second year of the ECCE scheme in the primary school with fully qualified teachers to ensure that continuity be better facilitated.

Conclusion

There is much discussion about a 'knowledge-based' versus 'skills-based' curriculum – both are intertwined. Fundamentally the challenge for a revised curriculum is how to achieve the right relationship between a knowledge-based and a skills-based approach. Knowledge remains important because you cannot develop other attributes in a vacuum - you can only do so through interaction with information and knowledge – therefore, you cannot have a 'skills-based' approach without developing knowledge.

Many aspects of the 1999 curriculum are deeply valued including the holistic and child-centred approach; the emphasis on collaboration and active learning; the clarity of strands, strand units, and objectives for each class level and the support and guidance for planning. The INTO is of the view that any new curriculum should harness the strength of the 1999 curriculum while using the opportunity of a revision to address the current challenges and favourably considers proposals that seek to address the issue of

curriculum overload and paperwork for teachers. The INTO supports a play-based, thematic and integrative approach to teaching and learning, however, several pre-requisites underpin the successful implementation of such an approach. A substantial reduction in class size, which was one of our key Budget priorities in recent years, is essential to ensure the effective implementation of either of these proposed models. The INTO insists that a comprehensive programme of professional development be available through pre-service, in-service and follow up support to facilitate changes to the current curriculum. Consideration must also be given to the fact that infrastructure and physical resources in many primary schools do not currently support a play-based, active approach to teaching and learning. The INTO recommends that the curriculum in the infant classes should be adjusted to reflect the thinking and philosophy and approaches in *Aistear*, removing the structure of 12 individual subjects, but not losing the richness of the current curriculum or strong focus on early literacy and mathematics. The move towards discrete subjects should occur incrementally and gradually from first or second class, with clear guidelines for schools around flexibility to address the needs of multi-grade classes. While teachers would welcome flexible time and monthly and weekly guidelines for time allocation, the INTO reiterates that any accompanying guidance should reflect teacher autonomy, trust, and professional judgement.

In conclusion, Irish society has seen an unprecedented change since the 1999 curriculum was published. The education system and children themselves are also shaped by different experiences of family life, different cultures, different beliefs and viewpoints, different abilities and needs. Consequently, schools and teachers face a growing challenge to recognise and respond to this diversity in a way that enables all children to learn and make progress. This raises an all-important question about the type of primary curriculum we choose to develop for children now and the years ahead.

Mar a deir an seanrá, “is de réir a chéile a thógtar na caisleáin”.



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