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supporting teaching and learning

Global perspectives

Educating for participative citizenship

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and much more...

NCCA 

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta

welcome...

...to the second issue of info@ncca. Designed to get you started for 2006, it builds on some of the comments and suggestions made in response to the first issue. So there is another piece on how to use assessment for learning in the classroom, and some 'real life' experiences of using ICT in teaching and learning..... and surviving!

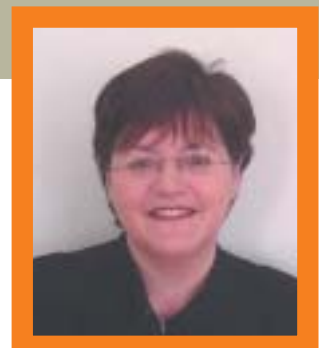
We are still thinking about the issue of distribution, and how best to get info@ncca where teachers can get their hands on it. Burying it in the staffroom mail pile may not be the best solution. Some teachers accessed the online version, but the preference was for the hard-copy, for 'something to flick through, pick up and put down' as one teacher commented. There was an extremely positive response to the idea of including items of primary and post-primary interest in the same newsletter - a first in Irish education, but long overdue.

We are adding an additional feature in this issue in response to a number of requests to give summaries of how school systems work in other countries, what's on the curriculum and how assessment is organised. We decided to ask Irish teachers working in these systems to 'tell it like it is' as well as including a summary of some of the main policies and issues in the 'official' versions! Our first stop is Italy, not because of any particular policy trends there, but because we thought it might be a sunnier picture in the middle of the damp and dark of an Irish winter.

The new NCCA website is continuing to develop apace and should make planning easier for primary and post-primary teachers alike. Samples of student work will be made available in the next stage of the development, along with commentaries on the work. This will be a valuable resource for all.

Many thanks for all the comments and feedback; it gave the team the confidence to tackle the second issue! They are already planning issue three.....!

Anne Looney
CEO
National Council for Curri



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Intercultural education

Following the publication of guidelines on intercultural education in primary schools last year, the eagerly anticipated post-primary guidelines will issue to all post-primary teachers in March.

Information on what intercultural education is, and why it is important, is accompanied by some very practical advice on issues such as:



selecting suitable resources, handling conflict situations, welcoming newcomer students to the school, guidelines for setting homework and assessment questions and managing a multi-lingual classroom.

Ideas for teachers on how to build an intercultural perspective into each subject and exemplars for classwork will be available on the NCCA website.

Maths review

A consultation on the issues raised in the NCCA discussion paper on post-primary mathematics education and a companion paper on international trends in mathematics education, was held during October and November. Submissions and comments were received by post, online, by email, and by text messaging (a first for the NCCA).

The Maths Review page of our website carries updates on the review, including a report on the consultation, and an overall report on the review itself is currently being prepared. This report will also be available on the website.

Research report

The second report from the Economic and Social Research Institute into how students experience the curriculum and junior cycle will be published shortly by The Liffey Press.

This major research project follows a group of students from their transition to post-primary school to the completion of their Junior Certificate in 12 schools. The first report, *Moving Up*, published in 2004, focused on the experiences of first-year students. Phase 2 of the research concerns students' experiences of second year and includes themes such as:

- the experience of subject choice
- the allocation of students to class groups and the particular effects of streaming and ability grouping on teacher and student expectations and student self-esteem
- student perspectives on good teaching
- engagement with the curriculum
- changing attitudes to school over time.

Summaries of both the first and second reports are available to download at www.ncca.ie.

Curriculum overload

In response to concerns expressed by the Junior Cycle Review Committee about curriculum overload and repetition within and between subjects, the NCCA is currently involved in phase two of rebalancing

the junior cycle curriculum. Art, craft, design, environmental and social studies, Gaeilge, geography and mathematics are the main focus of this work.

When completed, the re-balanced syllabuses will be published in a single document along with those completed in phase one (business studies, English, history, home economics and music). This ought to ensure that students can engage with their learning in the way that it was envisaged when the junior cycle was first established.

ICT exemplars

The ICT Framework, a Structured Approach to ICT in Curriculum and Assessment, is being developed by the NCCA to guide primary and post-primary schools in using ICT across the curriculum. The framework will be illustrated with classroom-based exemplars, which will 'show' rather than 'tell' teachers how ICT can be used to add value to teaching and learning. An exemplar can be a lesson plan, a project or a series of lessons.

A number of teachers are currently working with the NCCA to create exemplars of ICT use in a specific subject or integrated across subjects. These exemplars, which will be available on the NCCA website, will have a standard format and will include audio, visual, video and image materials as well as samples of class work.

If you are using ICT in innovative ways to support teaching and learning in your classroom we'd love you to share your ideas by sending them to newsletter@ncca.ie.

Young children as citizens

Messages from an international conference



Back in September while teachers were knee deep in curriculum documents, planning for a demanding year teaching infants, the international early childhood community was making its way to Dublin for the 15th

European Early Childhood Education Research Association's (EECERA) Conference.

Delegates presented 300 papers on the theme, *Young Children as Citizens: Identity, Belonging and Participation* and there was much to interest infant teachers in the symposia that took place, some of which are summarised below.

Transitions

The papers delivered at the 'Transitions' symposium explored children's experiences of moving to 'big school' from preschool. Mary O'Kane (Dublin Institute of Technology) described the transition as a 'change in location, curriculum, teacher and philosophy'. Gabrielle White and Caroline Sharp (National Foundation for Educational Research, UK) focused on children's experiences of moving from an integrated play-based methodology to a more subject-based curriculum and a more 'formal' teaching style. Leida Talts (Tallinn University, Estonia) showed how good social skills provide children with a base for coping successfully at school. The researchers concluded that effective transition strategies can support children as they move to 'big school'.

As an infant teacher, strategies of interest to you might include

- planning for children's learning using themes and topics which they find interesting and enjoyable
- providing opportunities for children to learn actively, collaboratively and through play
- building children's self-esteem as learners by motivating and encouraging them.

Curriculum, pedagogy and assessment

Another symposium explored the relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in early learning. Elizabeth Wood (University of Exeter, England) described two types of assessment:

- Assessment *of* learning focuses on 'curriculum auditing'. Doing this, you ask 'Have I covered X in the curriculum?'
- Assessment *for* learning focuses on the development of children's knowledge, skills, concepts and attitudes. Doing this, you ask 'Has my teaching of X helped the child to learn? What can I do to further support the child's learning?'

Margaret Carr and Sally Peters (University of Waikato, New Zealand) presented 'learning stories' as an approach to assessment in the early years. They identified 4 Ds of learning stories:

- describing (children's learning)
- discussing (children's successes, challenges and priorities)
- documenting (children's learning)
- deciding (how to support children's future learning).

By capturing a child's learning in this way (and by using video and sound), a learning story provides the basis for planning to extend learning - a template for 'assessment for learning.'

Hearing children's voices

Linked to assessment, this symposium explored how children's voices can influence your daily interactions with them. In particular, it examined the use of video in getting children to think and talk about their own learning experiences - self-assessment really.

Tony Bertram and Christine Pascal (Centre for Research in Early Childhood, University of Worcester, England) described how they video-taped small groups of 2-4 year olds and later invited the children to view the tape and talk about what they saw. In terms of classroom practice, this technique presents possibilities for supporting teachers in

- listening to children's ideas and opinions about their learning (How does the child perceive his/her progress/achievement in learning, and how do you use this information to plan for further learning?)
- developing children's oral language
- motivating children to reflect on their own learning and that of their peers.

Find out more at www.eecera2005.org and www.ncca.ie/earlychildhoodframework.



What is the standard?

Another chapter in the assessment for learning story

How do students in the junior cycle of post-primary schools know what to aim for? How do we help them to see the bigger picture, especially what a finished piece of work looks like?

Many of us will answer that question in this way: I show them the examination paper because that's what sets the standard for them. And up to a point that seems a satisfactory answer. Students can and do learn a lot from the tests they do as part of their school work and from the sample and past examination papers for the courses they are following, that is for those courses for which there are examinations in the Junior Certificate. Examiners' reports produced by the State Examinations Commission can be a good source of information, too, especially when they contain exemplars of standard. This is how the examiners indicate the standards they have applied to the answers produced by our students in the exam halls around the country every June.

Keeping examples of good work from year to year

Relying entirely on the examination to provide both the goal for students and the target standard for teachers is a bit limited, though. For junior cycle students the examination represents the standard they must have reached after three years, when all the learning and all the revision have already been done, as it were.

Equally, presenting the students with examination questions tells them very little about the criteria for

success that will be applied to their work when judgements are being made. That's why many teachers keep examples of good work from one year to the next, to show students who are new to a particular topic what good work 'looks like' in that area.

So, how and where do we pick up our sense of what is good work (not perfection, but work of a good standard) in our subject area? And more importantly, how do we share our sense of the standard with our students? Assessment for learning considers this to be a very important part of the guidance and direction we give to learners. We can encourage students to browse through websites to find tips and model answers but we, as teachers, sometimes find these to be of limited value because they don't exemplify what is crucially important - what real teachers say to real students about real pieces of work. That is what the NCCA is working to provide in the current phase of its assessment for learning initiative. How?

Drawing on the expertise of teachers involved in assessment for learning, the NCCA has put together a number of subject-specific teams to collect examples of work from students in junior cycle (1st, 2nd, and 3rd years). Compiling the first set of exemplars is currently underway in the following subject areas:

- art
- history
- physical education
- English
- geography
- home economics
- CSPE
- science
- technology.

All going to plan, we will have begun uploading the exemplars to the NCCA website by the time you read this article.

How will the exemplars be presented on the website?

Each piece of student work will include the following details:

- the syllabus area or topic
- the learning intention



“May I remind you that my core worth as a human being remains constant and isn't tied to external validation”



- the task that arose from the learning intention
- the criteria for success in that task
- task conditions (whether it was done in class or as homework, the length of time allowed, whether it was produced individually or by students working in a group, and so on)
- the piece of work produced by the student/s
- feedback (commentary) related to the task and the criteria for success.

This last section, the feedback, is vital because it is the part where the student is shown what he/she has done right (what criteria for success have been met most fully), where he/she has been less successful, and what to focus on in order to improve. Most importantly, perhaps, this provides an over-the-shoulder glimpse of the work of teachers in classrooms very similar to our own. It gives an indication of what they value in the work produced by their students and

the kind of direction and advice they believe is worthwhile for learners. It represents an important opportunity for teachers to share their judgements with others and we would like to put on record our thanks to those teachers and students who are taking part. So...watch the space in the Assessment for Learning (AfL) section of our website: www.ncca.ie/afl.



And the NCCA initiative in AfL continues, so if you have a query feel free to contact a member of the AfL team:

Hal O'Neill hal.oneill@ncca.ie

Peter Johnson peter.johnson@ncca.ie

John Halbert john.halbert@ncca.ie

For an overview of some of the fundamental approaches of Assessment for Learning (AfL), see [info@ncca](mailto:info@ncca.ie), Issue 1, September 2005.

Primary assessment

Assessment can support the learning of pupils in the primary classroom too. With the benefit of insights gained from the assessment for learning initiatives in Ireland and elsewhere, the NCCA aims to support teachers in our primary schools in making use of formative assessment.

This is the kind of assessment that helps learners to

- set out learning intentions
- recognise what good work looks like
- share in the evaluation of work done, with the help of feedback
- understand how that work can be improved
- become involved in assessing their own work.

We will keep you posted here in [info@ncca](mailto:info@ncca.ie) about this work as it moves forward. To contact the Primary Assessment team:

Arlene Forster
arlene.forster@ncca.ie

Pat Naughton
pat.naughton@ncca.ie

Engaging parents

As teachers, we all know that when parents are actively engaged in their child's learning there are many obvious benefits for the child, the family, ourselves as teachers and the school community as a whole. That is why in recent years there has been a great deal of activity aimed at promoting and supporting parental engagement in the work of the school. In this respect, the NCCA will be launching a DVD for parents early in 2006. The central aims of the DVD are to inform parents about their child's learning through the curriculum in primary schools and to show them how they can support that learning in simple, effective and practical ways at home. It should prove useful also to teachers in terms of establishing a common base of knowledge that facilitates communication with parents.

In developing the DVD we talked to a broad spectrum of parents from different backgrounds about their needs in relation to supporting their child's learning in school. They told us that they would like information on:

- what their child is learning in each subject at each class level of primary school and in particular an emphasis on 'what has changed since my day.'
- how best to support their child's learning at home and in particular how to help with homework

The DVD seeks to address those needs in an informative and engaging way. We aim to give parents information about the curriculum and particularly about the changes in curriculum emphasis since they themselves were in school. Parents will learn about the different teaching approaches and methodologies used by teachers in schools and about the benefits of these for their child. Practical ways in which they can support their child's learning at home are also suggested. The DVD medium will allow for the inclusion of different languages so that newcomer families can also access the materials.

While parents are the main target audience for this attractive, interactive and user-friendly DVD, we would hope that it will also be useful to you the teacher in supporting communication with parents about what and how their children are learning in your own classroom and school. We look forward to receiving your feedback on how you have used the DVD.

A curriculum for guidance

The remit of the NCCA committee for guidance in post-primary education is to offer advice on the curricular implications of the 1998 Education Act which states the need for schools to 'ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance'.

This means that the focus of the committee's work is on the guidance needs of students, and on discussion of the ways in which those needs can be met through a broad curriculum framework. In this sense the committee is not engaged in writing a syllabus for guidance.

The kinds of questions that the committee is addressing are:

- What are the key elements in guidance for students in junior cycle and in senior cycle?

- What learning outcomes does guidance seek to achieve?
- What are the key skills that guidance seeks to develop in students?

We will keep you informed of the progress of these deliberations in future issues of *info@ncca* and through the NCCA website.



Profile: Frank Nugent M. A., M.I.I.T.D.

Member of NCCA Senior Cycle Committee

Education

Born in Dublin, I attended St Gabriel's National School, off Aughrim Street, progressing to Capel Street Technical School for my Group Certificate. Later I undertook FÁS and IMI trainer and training manager development. I subsequently engaged in a series of Train the Trainer distance learning programmes with NUIG at Certificate and Diploma level, which culminated in a First Class degree in Education and Training. I later participated in the pilot NUIG Masters programme in Adult Learning and Development, which was largely delivered on-line and was conferred in 2003.

Work

Following my apprenticeship as a mechanical engineering fitter I worked in a variety of construction companies and plant and equipment suppliers for about seven years before moving to AnCO (which became Fás) as an instructor. Within FÁS I moved from instructing and managing training to curriculum design and was appointed a Project Manager in the review and design of the new apprenticeship programmes in the early 1990's.

Mountaineering

My early years in the cubs and scouts cultivated a deep love of hiking, camping and of countryside. I joined An Óige and became a Wicklow weekend hill-walker. I spent my summer holidays each year climbing in the Scottish highlands and islands and later in the Alps, progressing to serious

alpinism in my late teens mostly in the Mont Blanc Massif. I met my wife Carol at that time in Dublin and was married in 1972.

In later years, I was involved in three Irish Himalayan Expeditions, which culminated in the First Irish Ascent of Everest by Dawson Stelfox in May 1993. I was joint leader of the South Aris expedition, which traced the steps of Shackleton's Endurance expedition's small boat rescue. In 2003, I was part of the crew of Northabout, the first Irish navigation of the Northwest Passage. My book *Seek the Frozen Lands- Irish Polar Explorers 1740-1922* was published that year.

NCCA Role

In 1999, I was nominated by FÁS to represent them on the NCCA Senior Cycle Committee. I was then manager of the innovative new Traineeship Programme. My current role in FÁS brings me daily into contact with employers in many sectors of Irish business to meet their employment, training and qualification needs. I bring to the NCCA Senior Cycle Committee an awareness and knowledge of the active labour market skill needs and trends, curriculum and assessment expertise and a deep understanding of the learning process from the perspective of the mature life-long learner as well as a parent who has supported my children through from primary to third level education.

Hope for the Future

I believe in the need for on-going substantial investment in Irish education and training as a vital requirement to the continued growth and well being of Irish society into the future. I strongly support the concept of access for all to life long learning opportunities enabling and facilitating growth, development and enlightenment for individuals.

Connecting with classrooms

Part-time education officers and the school connection

Cahil Doherty: Education officer for Design and Communication Graphics and Technical Graphics



Although I have been teaching in St. Louis Community School in Kiltimagh, County Mayo since 1988 my roots are in Donegal, in Moville and Killybegs to be precise. I completed my

Leaving Certificate in St. Catherine's vocational school in Killybegs before attending Thomond College of Education in Limerick. Currently the Transition Year Co-ordinator at the school, I also teach Technical Drawing and Mathematics.

In 1996 I joined the Design and Communication graphic course committee at the NCCA, representing the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools. Last January I was seconded to the organisation as Education Officer for Design and Communication Graphics and Technical Graphics.

My work as an education officer is to act as secretary to the course committee and to progress the work of the committee. Currently I am drafting teacher guidelines and considering possible approaches for the assessment of Design and Communication Graphics.

For the most part my work takes place at home, which requires a good deal of discipline as it is not always clear where one job starts and the other job ends!

Despite working away from the NCCA offices I do not feel isolated as I

receive regular reports on the work of the organisation and there are occasional meetings with the education officers from the other technological subjects. I also have a director whom I can contact if any issues or problems arise. The annual Education Officer Conference also provides a means of keeping up with current issues in education.

We live in a rapidly changing world, advances in CAD and technology have made the need for the implementation of the new syllabuses a real imperative. The new syllabus in Design and Communication Graphics, which makes CAD a compulsory component of an assignment, will help to modernise and enliven the subject.

There are of course cost implications for implementation in terms of equipment and in-service. However I do feel that in both national and international contexts the cost of not implementing the new technology subjects will be much greater than the cost of doing so.

Anne Looney: CEO, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment



In 1994 I joined the ranks of the NCCA part-time education officers, seconded from my school one day a week. My initial brief was

to prepare a background paper on the possibilities of introducing Religious Education as an examination subject. The offices of the NCCA were in Dublin Castle then. Walking across the cobbles of the Upper Yard for my first

NCCA meeting, I felt the hand of history upon me. Once I got in the door and saw the standard issue civil service offices inside, and the pile of files in front of me, the feeling soon passed!

Cahil notes that it's hard to tell where one job starts and the other one ends. That's the point of having part-time education officers working in schools. One day you can be at a meeting discussing the future shape of a particular subject or curriculum area. The next you are in front of second class or 3C faced with the current reality. The checks and balances are clear. Staff-room colleagues are a readily available sounding board for ideas in progress. When I began my part-time work in the NCCA, there were five full time staff working on curriculum and assessment; the rest were part-time. Now the balance is better, with more full-time staff who work with part-time colleagues.

The NCCA offices are now in Merrion Square (although decentralisation will see us moving to Portarlinton) where we have a number of so-called 'hot desks' for part-time staff. While the jokes about these desks are many, they serve another important purpose. Part-time staff will generally spend one of their NCCA days each month working in the office. While the pile of files is still part of the work routine, hot-deskers can also connect with other work going on in the NCCA, arrange to visit the Resource Room to do research, organise committee mailings and meet with full-time colleagues based in and out of Dublin.

While my journey took me from part-time work to full-time NCCA work, other part-time staff have built on their NCCA experiences to take their careers in other directions. Some have gone on to take up posts as principals and deputy-principals, as directors of education centres, as academics and researchers, and as Inspectors in the Department of Education and Science. And some have continued their work at the chalk-face, teaching the courses they helped to design!

The NCCA advertises for part-time staff at least once a year. Think about it. There may be a hot desk warming for you!

Education in Italy



The Italian job

Kay McCarthy reflects on 20 years spent teaching English in Italy.



At first it was all Greek to me: a flamboyant baroque machine with many feet of clay. It took me a lifetime to work it out, but, as soon as I'd mastered it, they 'reformed' it, making it more incomprehensible than ever. Now it's Arabic.

Like most Italian institutions the educational system, a mix of private and public, state and church, appearance and reality, shouldn't work but does, thanks to the zeal of poorly paid teachers, the patience of parents and learners and the will of Italians to survive regardless.

Working in an Italian senior secondary school within the public system can be exasperating, delightful, energy-consuming, exciting, voice-straining (Italians are famous for their sense of 'agora', which inclines them to raise their voices considerably) hard work.

At the vocational school for tour escorts where I was 'stationed' for thirteen years and where I gained most of my teaching experience, lessons began at 08.10 in the morning. School was out at 14.10, Monday to Friday, 12.30 on Saturdays. Students attended forty fifty-minute periods per week, slotted into six half days. As a full-time teacher I taught my three 25-student classes for six periods each and had to be available, weekly, for a further fifty-minute parent-reception slot of my choice. Like all of my colleagues I was allowed to choose my own free day: always Monday. So, my school-week began on Tuesdays, at 10.50, just after the ten-minute morning break.

Teaching English for Tourism in a city like Rome can be truly stimulating. . . for teachers. Making it equally attractive to reluctant Italian teenage girls (while Italian schools are usually co-ed, the student population in my

school was 99% female) can be somewhat of a challenge. My main tasks consisted of bridging the gap between the students' poor language skills and tourist jargon, between the professional world and theirs (because vocational education lies so very low on the social scale, most students come from culturally deprived backgrounds), between their fuzzy idea of history and art and the syllabus' exact and exacting requirements. Some patient tailoring of the syllabus to the students' levels and interests and sagacious exploitation of opportunities to take classes on foot to visit landmarks helped.

Overall assessment was ongoing, with formal written and oral tests each week. The oral plays a very important part in everyday school life in Italy, as well as at both continuous assessment and exam levels. Except when dealing with grammar, no Italian was used in the classroom. English for hotels, agencies and airports was gradually grafted onto the general English programme, spiralling up and out with it as the three years passed. Planning tours of the city and the hinterland became the centre of the third year and the object of the final exams, which are set and marked by the teachers themselves, at the end of the year. Over the three-year cycle leading to the Tour Escort certificate, the girls got their ears, tongues, eyes and pens around a sufficient quantity of general and specific English to apply for work or proceed to the two-year cycle for Tour Operators.

All told, I enjoyed my twenty years of hard work as a teacher in the Italian high-school system. Having moved into the music world, I don't really miss it too much, as what I do now is quite akin to teaching: empathetic relations with classes and audiences is more or less the same thing. What I do miss, however, is the daily contact with the students and the view of contemporary reality they provide.

The System

Facts and figures from Eurydice and INCA

Reform

Reform of the Italian education system was approved by law in 2003 and is being gradually implemented.

Educational phases

At present, there are four principal phases in the education structure in Italy, as follows:

- Pre-compulsory pre-school (scuola dell'infanzia), age 3 - 6
- Compulsory primary (scuola primaria), age 6 - 11
- Compulsory lower secondary (scuola secondaria di primo grado), age 11 - 14
- Upper secondary, age 14 +

Since the 1999 - 2000 academic year the first year of upper secondary has been compulsory and the compulsory and upper secondary phases are known as the first and second cycles of education.

School year

The school year comprises at least 200 days between the beginning of September and the end of June. Schools open five or six days a week, full day or half day, depending on the institution. Daily schedules vary, but are usually from around 8.30 am to 4.30 pm over five days or 8 am to 1 pm or 8.30 am to 1.30 pm over six days.

Primary and lower secondary

At primary level, classes are generally composed of 10 to 25 pupils. There is usually more than one teacher in each class. The reform of the first cycle of education introduced the function of tutor teacher. The tutor teacher has her/his ordinary teaching tasks, and is also responsible for co-ordinating of educational and teaching activities, counselling and guidance and documenting pupils' educational path. At lower secondary level, students have separate subject teachers and the tutor teacher is also a feature.

Curriculum and assessment

The national guidelines for individualised study plans were introduced as a reform measure, for primary school and lower secondary school. These guidelines define the essential performance levels that should be ensured by each school. Specific learning objectives at primary school level were defined for the following subjects: catholic religion, Italian, English, history, geography, mathematics, science, technical education and ICT, music, art and drawing, physical education and information and communication technology literacy.

As for the lower secondary school, specific learning objectives have been defined for the following subjects: catholic religion, Italian, English language, a second Community language, history, geography, mathematics, science, technical education, information and communication technology, music, art and drawing, physical education and civic education. The guidelines are nationally determined and adapted to local needs by each school according to the principle of school autonomy.

At both educational levels, periodic and annual assessment of pupils' learning and behaviour is carried out by teachers. Progression from primary school to the lower secondary school takes the form of an appraisal made at the end of primary level, as primary school and lower secondary

school are now part of one school cycle. Since the start of the school year 2004/2005, pupils no longer take oral and written examinations to obtain the primary school leaving certificate. On completion of the compulsory first school cycle, students take a state examination to be admitted to the upper secondary education level.

Upper secondary education

On completion of lower secondary education students can choose between the upper secondary 'liceo' route or a vocational training stream. The five year liceo is a general/academic school specialising in either: arts, classics, human science, economics, languages, music, science or technology. Vocational education and training schools (such as the one where Kay McCarthy worked) specialise in either: agri-environmental education, textiles and fashion, mechanics, chemistry and biology, graphic design and multimedia, electricity/electronics/IT, building and town/district planning, tourism and leisure/hotels, commerce and administration, or the social and health sector. On completion of the four-year vocational course, students wishing to go on to higher education have to follow a university foundation year.

Curriculum and assessment

Central government determines basic curricula for each branch of upper secondary education and gives guidance on teaching methods. Core subjects common to all institutions are Italian, history, a modern foreign language, mathematics and physical education.

At upper secondary level, students' oral and written work is assessed every three or four months. The final examination, at the end of upper secondary education, is the upper secondary school leaving examination.

For further information about the Italian education system:
www.eurydice.org, www.inca.org.uk



Teaching a global perspective

Educating for participative citizenship

Why teach the global dimension?

- The growing presence of students from a variety of cultures in Irish schools makes teaching global issues more relevant and immediate than ever.
- A global perspective enriches students' understanding of the world around them.

The global dimension

- can help create respect for diversity and enhance understanding of the interconnections between people in Ireland and people in other parts of the world.
- can reinvigorate teaching and enliven students' interest as they address issues of relevance and concern to them.
- can provide students with a sense of empowerment and opportunities to make a difference, both locally and globally.



In recent years, we have all become more aware of the global context in which education takes place and of the need to develop 'global literacy' in order to better understand our world. Each day the news reports a rise in petrol prices, an increase in global warming or another food crisis in Africa we are reminded of the

interdependent and interconnected nature of our world. Government policy documents repeatedly stress the need for education to address such issues. In fact one of the aims of the Junior Certificate programme is 'to prepare the young person for the responsibilities of citizenship in the national context and in the context of

the wider European and global communities.' This is echoed in the aims of senior cycle education which includes the aim 'to educate for participative citizenship at local, national, European and global levels'.

Whose business is it?

The NCCA recently undertook, on behalf of Development Cooperation Ireland, to identify areas where opportunities exist for bringing a global perspective to teaching at senior cycle. Transition Year, Leaving Certificate Applied (Social Education) and Leaving Certificate Geography immediately jump to mind as presenting rich opportunities for exploring issues of justice, human rights and development from both a local and global perspective. However the study shows that most Leaving Certificate subjects and programmes provide opportunities for students to explore issues that impact on themselves and the wider world.

There also exist numerous possibilities for developing cross-curricular learning around development education themes. Topics such as trade, aid, sustainable development, globalisation, ecology, war, famine and disease, are studied in a range of Leaving Certificate subjects and senior cycle programmes.

Mathematics and global awareness

The mathematics teacher, for instance, is presented with opportunities for promoting a global awareness. By choosing problems that present a real life issue (e.g. percentage of the world's resources consumed by different parts of the world, population flows, military spending versus spending on health and education as a percentage of GNP, etc.) teachers can play an important role in developing student's innate sense of justice and equality. Students can use data from the social sciences (such as surveys and reports) to study trends, projections, charts, graphs and percentages. Thus, the United Nations Development Programme annual report could be a surprisingly useful resource for the mathematics teacher www.undp.org.

Art and cross cultural values

The Leaving Certificate art teacher could approach Craftwork by inviting students to explore and appreciate the cross cultural value of craft work such as wood cuts, weaving, pottery, etc. Students might consider the working conditions of those who produce crafts, and the fact that in some cases they may be produced under exploitative work conditions or even with the use of child labour (for example, weaving and gem making in India.) This can lead to discussion on a fair wage, Fair Trade and the Fair Trade Mark. Or when studying photography students might investigate how photography can act as an agent of justice and as a witness and chronicler of important events, e.g. Vietnam war, Ethiopia famine (1984) and Niger (2005). Students can also critically examine images of Africa and the developing world in the media and become aware of stereotyping.

Development themes in LCVP

If you teach the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) there are many ways of integrating development themes in the Enterprise Activity. Linked with their art and economics classes, students could set up a Fair Trade mini company to sell products from the developing world. Linked with their studies in agricultural science and construction studies, students could visit a sustainably managed forestry project and investigate the work of organisations protecting the environment both locally and globally.

At the heart of it all

At the heart of education is the heart of the educator. The most significant factor in influencing whether a class will pursue issues of justice and human rights is the commitment and awareness of the individual teacher. Teachers who are self consciously aware of the values out of which they teach and wish to promote a sense of global responsibility and stewardship will find the opportunities to do so.

This is especially so in the case of 'open-ended'

syllabuses such as Art, Music, English, Irish and Modern Languages where the teacher can exercise great choice in the selection of texts and resources. Where syllabuses are framed more tightly (such as Geography, History, Religious Education and the Sciences) there are usually options which offer possibilities for exploring wider world issues.

A range of possibilities for incorporating a global perspective at senior cycle are mapped out in the report *A Study of the Opportunities for Development Education at Senior Cycle* (NCCA/Development Cooperation Ireland, 2006)



Profile: Arlene Foy, Clerical Officer, NCCA.

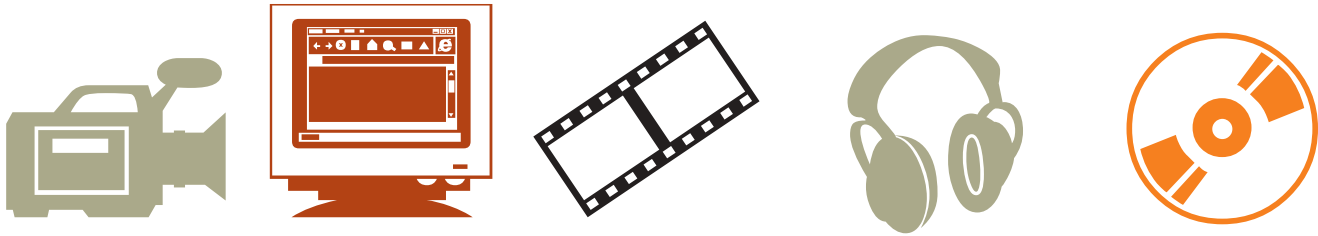
In many ways Arlene Foy is a reminder of the future for the rest of the NCCA team. And it's not just her tender years that have us looking ahead. Arlene, you see, comes from Portarlinton, the place to which the rest of us will be heading, and to which she will be returning, once our decentralisation card is finally dealt.

She started work in our administration department just over a year ago and recalls being 'thrown straight in at the deep end'. She quickly learned to float, however, developing the capacity to keep calm no matter how busy the day becomes. And she has had some very busy days. Looking after the database, acting as Personal Assistant to the CEO and dealing with general administrative duties such as mailings and organising committee meetings keep her fully occupied.

Her favourite part of the job? 'Doing the PA work for Anne Looney, because I get to talk to lots of different people and to build up a working relationship with them.' Arlene's day starts early but the consolation when she arrives home in the evening is a hot dinner cooked by a caring mother. And there is another consolation in the fact that 'home' is a pub.

Arlene has lived in, or to be precise - above, the pub for 17 of her 21 years, her parents having moved there from Dublin when she was 4 years old. It was clearly a successful move because in spite of the daily office banter she has to endure about pulling pints in Portarlinton she has been a great ambassador for her home town. 'I suppose for everyone there is no place like home, but Portarlinton is a very friendly place to live. It has become quite built up lately but there is plenty to do.'

Arlene has had to learn patience since she came to the NCCA. Her dream of taking her job back to her home town has, perhaps, been put on a longer finger than she might wish and the daily commute does take its toll. However, there is a consolation in the fact that she enjoys her job. 'It's sometimes stressful, always busy - especially during term time - but I have been given lots of opportunities to take on extra responsibilities since I came here and I feel what we do is very worthwhile.'



Early 2005 saw the completion of a two year project which investigated the use of ICT as a tool in the learning, teaching and assessment of physical education. Digital video provided the central focus for this project, which aimed to train a selection of teachers in the use of both hardware and software with a view to assessing the practical application of the tools.

Thirteen schools in Cork participated in the project and each school was supplied with an Apple Digital Media Lab (laptop, camcorder, digital camera) plus a second Canon camcorder and tripod. The teachers received in-service training on the operating of the equipment and the relevant software plus

- setting up video recording in a PE lesson
- assessment for learning
- electronic folio compilation
- best practice in Physical Education.

Two of the teachers who participated in the Physical Education Video Project are Seán McGrath from Glanmire Community College and Siobhán Woods from St. Vincent's Secondary School, Cork. Both Seán and Siobhán saw the professional development opportunities the project had to offer and they were also attracted by the prospect of being party to the development of innovative methodologies in their subject area. While Siobhán had previously been involved in the teaching of ICT, Seán's ICT skills were limited to word and data processing and he had 'no experience of the use of digital image software.'

On reflection

Issues relating to time feature strongly in their reflections on the project. Seán observed that 'the set up of the technology consumed a significant amount of lesson time.' While Siobhán found this aspect less of a problem, post-lesson editing was seen as a burden.

Part of the project design provided for students to become

involved in the taping and editing process and students in both schools were enthused by this opportunity. In attempting to rationalise the amount of material taped (thereby reducing the editing time required later) teachers and students found that they began to identify the essential elements of the activity or performance. They were then able to record that which was most relevant to the learning in hand.

Seán was encouraged by the manner in which his students began to become more engaged with the subject and to take responsibility for organising the ICT practicalities. This was equally true of Siobhán's experience: 'the students learned more from each other than they learned from me and I began to realise that maybe I'm not needed in here as much as I thought I was.'

Assessment and student engagement

The concept of e-portfolios was introduced in an effort to capitalise on the newly acquired expertise of the teachers and students. This involved the students, having consulted with their teacher on the tasks they had completed, assembling digital video images of their work which had been taken over a period of time. A record of the images that best represented their learning was then presented.

As with many such developments, some students thrived on being given the scope to make decisions about what to present in answer to the task. The quality of the work and the eagerness to complete it, along with the care with which the ICT hardware entrusted to them was treated, provided the teachers with the greatest satisfaction. Both were quick to point out that two elements were crucial in compiling the portfolios. Firstly, the portfolio template provided by the project steering committee was invaluable and even more important was the ease of access to the ICT resources. Providing students with enough time for editing continued to be a challenge even with improved availability of resources. Seán solved this problem by adapting some of the other computers in the school to carry the 'project' software.

Although both Seán and Siobhán had extremely positive experiences in using ICT in their teaching, they still find the time demands of its ongoing use challenging. Siobhán commented that she knew 'very few physical education teachers who could regularly set aside 10 minutes prior to a



lesson to set up equipment and the few class periods later to carry out editing'. Increased student involvement (including some training of students in the use of ICT equipment) and further refinement of the teachers' ICT skills appear to offer the best option for addressing this issue.

Seán and Siobhán enjoyed the collegiality which emerged within the project group and derived great sustenance from the energy and enthusiasm generated. Learning about their own teaching and students' physical education experiences with students and other teachers proved challenging but ultimately fulfilling

This project was funded by the National Council for Technology in Education (NCTE). The NCTE is producing a CD-Rom which will offer further details of the project and its outcomes together with samples of students' work. For further information logon to

<http://www.ncte.ie/video/project>.



'the students learned more from each other than they learned from me and I began to realise that maybe I'm not needed in here as much as I thought I was.'

Modern Languages in primary schools

The NCCA has initiated some innovative pilot projects with teachers in order to gather information about approaches to teaching modern languages in primary schools. The studies are being conducted in a range of school types, including gaelscoileanna, and involve class teachers and visiting language teachers. The support of the Modern Languages in Primary School Initiative (MLPSI), based in Kildare Education Centre, has been key to developing the projects, which will inform future advice to the Department of Education and Science on the place of modern languages in primary schools.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

The first project, the CLIL study, involves teachers trying out a strand or strand unit of a subject such as Music or Geography through the medium of a language which is not the medium of instruction in the school. For the purpose of this particular pilot project, the teachers involved are teaching through Italian, Spanish, German or French. This will clearly present challenges for planning both the language content and the subject content of lessons. Watch this space and we'll let you know in future issues of *info@ncca* how the teachers involved are rising to those challenges.

Language awareness

Language awareness is already a component of the Language area of the Primary School Curriculum. In this study, teachers are engaged in exploring ways in which language awareness activities can contribute towards laying the foundation for future language learning.

Both the CLIL study and the language awareness study will be conducted over the course of the current school year. The findings will contribute towards advice on the place of modern languages in the Primary School Curriculum.

Supporting the exceptionally able

Developing guidelines for teachers



As teachers we are often so concerned with supporting students with general learning disabilities that we may neglect the students who are far ahead in terms of their abilities in one or more areas of the curriculum. These students also have special educational needs. But their needs are often more difficult to identify, to respond to and to prioritise.

The key challenge for teachers is to provide learning experiences which challenge the pace of learning of the exceptionally able student. By including learning experiences that are more demanding, allowing for differences in capacity and in the range of intelligence, these students can receive the level of stimulation necessary to enable them to develop their natural strengths.

Recognising the challenges involved in teaching the exceptionally able

student, we intend to focus this year on developing guidelines in this area. While we have no current data on the exact numbers of such students, national and international trends suggest that regardless of the student profile within a school, approximately 5% of all students (a figure supported also by the Irish Centre for Talented Youth at Dublin City University) fall within this category. It is not uncommon for these students to go unrecognised in school. Some deliberately hide their ability in an effort to fit in and be the same as everyone else. There are others who are frequently bored in school and literally switch off, while others still present with emotional and behavioural difficulties. This latter group often change school frequently and present a real challenge to parents and teachers.

There are many definitions of students classified as exceptionally able but the working definition in developing guidelines for teachers will be as outlined in the *Report of the Special Education Review Committee (1993)*. Thus, the exceptionally able student will be one who demonstrates high levels of

- general intellectual ability
- specific academic aptitude
- creative or productive thinking
- leadership ability
- visual and performing arts abilities
- mechanical aptitude
- psychomotor ability, e.g. athletics, gymnastics.

Aim of the guidelines

These guidelines will provide support for teachers by giving information and advice on

- definitions of exceptionally able students
- identification of exceptionally able pupils
- school policy for exceptionally able students
- school and classroom planning
- assessment and methods of recording the student's progress
- sample units of work to provide additional challenge throughout different areas of the curriculum
- strategies for differentiating the curriculum, teaching approaches and methodologies to meet these students' learning needs
- resources.

What can the teacher do?

For pupils whose attainment significantly exceeds the expected level of attainment within one or more subjects, the guidelines will enable teachers to

- identify what constitutes higher level performance in any subject area
- plan suitably challenging work
- set tasks which provide opportunities for higher order thinking skills e.g. comparing and contrasting rather than straight description in poetry/art/story
- differentiate the content, the learning process and the outcomes.



New faces

Differentiating the *content* involves selecting content specifically for these students which lifts the ceiling on what they can learn by providing opportunities to

- work increasingly in analytical ways
- handle more complex material and ideas
- construct their own inquiries
- move into content areas that technically lie outside the specified curriculum.

Differentiating the *learning process* involves adopting approaches to learning for these students which provide opportunities to

- investigate, problem-solve and to engage in exploratory approaches that can be sustained over a number of lessons (including homework)
- use the knowledge and understanding that they already have in more challenging ways e.g. allow them to start at a different level, to instruct others, to plan and set their own learning targets
- lead projects and research the background content/context
- promote special interest groups e.g. chess groups, debating teams, astrology groups.

Differentiating the *outcome* involves identifying more challenging learning outcomes for exceptionally able students by providing opportunities to produce a piece of work that relates to, and reflects their potential and/or interests. Useful strategies for enhancing the outcome include providing opportunities for students to engage in

- resolving dilemmas
- open-ended project work
- devising different ways of showing their learning
- learning at a faster pace (while taking into account the social and emotional needs of the student)
- research in an area of interest.

How can I find out more?

For further information on our work in this area contact a member of the Special Education Team:

emer.oconnor@ncca.ie

margaret.odonnell@ncca.ie

peter.johnson@ncca.ie

Such is the level of activity at the NCCA of late that we have taken on several new education officers since our last issue, to share the load.

Working part-time at post-primary:

Susan Dennison: Education Officer, Junior Certificate School Programme

Michael Halton: Education Officer, Physics and Chemistry

Tom Nelson: Education Officer, Leaving Certificate Applied

Peter Tiernan: Education Officer, Mathematics

Colette Brophy: Education Officer, Home Economics

Pat Naughton is a welcome addition to the Cork contingent who live up our Dublin days on a regular basis. Pat is working in the area of assessment at primary level in a full-time capacity. Meanwhile, **Karin Bacon** is working on SESE: Geography and **Geraldine O'Connor** has returned to the fold to work on SESE: History. Both have joined the team on a part-time basis.

Proving that when you gain some you do lose at least one, we recently bid a fond farewell to **Seán Bracken**, our full-time Education Officer for Primary Modern Languages. Seán is currently revitalising the education system on the South Pacific island of Tonga where he has taken up a post with the Ministry of Education.



Back to the front: confessions of a rookie teacher

Looking back on last term, which was also the first term of my second year as a fully fledged teacher, I am realising how unprepared I was for the onslaught of the new school year.

After a summer of travelling around Asia, and getting paid for it, I couldn't honestly say I was dying to get back to school.

'But in the last issue you said you were looking forward to it with energy, enthusiasm and confidence'... (I know, I know, it'll haunt me!). Well, that was easy to say with three months holidays ahead of me. It must have taken all of 5 minutes for me to forget the frantic year of spending my weekends in front of piles of copies, learning the syllabus just before teaching it and only being a couple of scenes ahead in King Lear. 'Does Lear die, miss?'...err, 'Girls! You don't really think I'd spoil the ending for you now, do you?' Hmmmm.

It was a different story once the school year started again in September. How could it be that in my second year of teaching I'm still terrified of the unknown syllabuses, students etc? I was sure I'd be feeling expert by now. However, I now have four exam classes, a couple of completely new syllabuses to contend with and, frankly, I've been feeling the pressure. Only a week in and I was back to last year's routine, only it's worse than ever and, whoa!!! what's with all these essays in front of me? Then a HDip student asks me if she can observe my lesson ...Oh God! What do I know?

These are long, hard days. Based on the hours I worked last week, I got paid less than the basic wage I had earned waitressing when I was a student. AND I got no tips...well, none of the monetary variety anyway.

Sometimes, there doesn't seem to be that much help available for teachers either. For example, this year our school is offering Italian to LCA for the first time, which I'm delighted about, as I love teaching LCA and I absolutely love Italian. However, getting some support materials really isn't so easy. It took two emails and three phone calls to get sent the 2002 exam paper (which I had already downloaded), some general information about LCA (which I had from last year) and six measly sheets specifically about Italian, including an incorrectly labelled map of Italy. It's things like this that I have to say can be frustrating.

Am I moaning? No, it was great seeing both staff and students again and I guess I would have eventually become bored with the summer (yeah, right!). The good aspects? Well, the students most of all. The sixth year students have definitely notched it up a gear and I've just written for the first time 'a joy to read' as the comment on an essay. I've seen a notable improvement in their work and it's really heartening to see the progress.

Other highlights so far include seeing a student who 'hated' school last year blossoming in LCA and thoroughly enjoying and benefiting from the more applied curriculum, the girls in fourth year coming up with brilliant, creative ideas in their reworking of a Shakespearian scene, and loving the different methodologies of transition year. And I'm still laughing; sometimes simultaneously stifling a yawn (I was always good at multitasking). The students are still funny, charming, clever and, really, never dull. The same can be said for teaching; no two minutes, let alone days, are the same. And you can't say fairer than that!

Aoife McArdle teaches English and Italian at Coláiste Bríde, Clondalkin, Dublin 22.



Share your views...

The response to our first issue of **info@ncca** was overwhelmingly positive and we would like to thank those of you who emailed and phoned your appreciation. It is the opinions and requirements of teachers that help to shape this newsletter and we welcome all suggestions, contributions and questions.

This could be seen as an opportunity to

- tell us what topics you would like to see featured in our next issue
- tell us what features you don't like
- wax lyrical about our website, or tell us if it's driving you crazy trying to find what you want.

Whatever way you look at it, it's an opportunity.

All contributions will be gratefully received, either by email: **newsletter@ncca.ie**, by fax: **01 6617180**,

or through the postal service to :
**Editor, info@ncca,
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment,
24 Merrion Square,
Dublin 2.**