info@ncca

Painting with words
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NCCA

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

welcome...
...to 2007

In the real world people are getting to grips with keeping new year resolutions and promising that they will be fitter/better/richer/calmer/thinner in the months ahead.

In the education world it's less of a beginning and more of a turning point in the school year, and while those of us who work in education may well be about the business of being fitter/better/richer/calmer/thinner, we are half-way there already.

This edition has that half-way feel about it. Many of those working in primary schools will have already made use of one or more of the templates featured in the piece about the second phase of the primary curriculum review. The feedback so far is that they are proving useful, so if you haven't yet had those planning days, using the NCCA templates is something to think about.

Similarly we know that some primary schools used the report card templates in preparing end of term reports at the end of 2006. If you haven't heard about these, you can read all about them in this issue and see if they might offer some support in reporting to parents.

But it is the start of the calendar year and with a nod to things new, you can read about two educational settings that may be new to you. The first is the prison service and the educational programmes offered in particular to young offenders. The second is the range of early childhood settings. Read about the ground-breaking portraiture study being led by NCCA as part of the development of the *Framework for Early Learning*.

Many thanks for all the feedback on the last two issues; it seems that more teachers are getting their hands on **info@ncca**, and finding it useful.

This is a big year for the NCCA – we are celebrating 20 years this year and have some plans to mark the occasion. Watch this space for details!

Anne Looney
CEO
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

what's in this issue
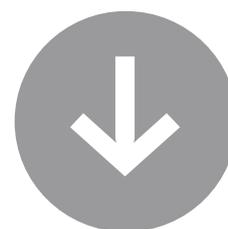
Supporting teaching and learning...

info@ncca is published three times over the school year, in September, January and April.

Copies are distributed to teachers in every primary and post-primary school in the country. Electronic versions of the newsletter, in both Irish and English, are available to download from our website, at **www.ncca.ie.** If your school requires extra copies of **info@ncca,** please send your request by email or post.

We welcome articles from teachers as well as comments and queries about content.

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24 Merrion Square, Dublin 2.**

SEN guidelines

All primary and post-primary teachers will receive a copy of the *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* on a CD-ROM in Spring 2007. First published in draft form in 2002, the guidelines have been revised following their use by teachers and schools. They were developed to provide practical examples of how students with general learning disabilities can be supported in their learning across the curriculum in primary and post-primary education. A further set of guidelines, *Guidelines to Inform the Teaching and Learning of Exceptionally Able Students* will also be included on the CD-ROM.

The guidelines will be available on **www.ncca.ie**.

Young people in care

The NCCA has recently been requested by the Department of Education and Science to advise on curriculum provision for young people whose needs are catered for in child detention schools and in special schools attached to special care and high support units. Students in these settings can range in age from 9 – 17 years and present with difficulties that require a specialised care and education service. In the coming months the work in this area will involve collaborating with the schools and units involved, to draft an enabling framework to include existing, or parts of existing, curricula to best meet the needs of the students.

LIA website

An interactive website for teachers to support the teaching and learning of Leaving Certificate Irish literature has been developed by the NCCA in collaboration with the NCTE. The website, LIA (Litríocht Idirghníomhach na hArdteistiméireachta), will go live following a pilot phase in a number of schools. It features the text of the prescribed poems, prose and video clips from the short film 'Clare sa Spéir'. You will also find audio recordings of all of the poems and a selection of prose made by students, teachers and well known Irish celebrities. Audio and video recordings, photographs and other images, music and songs all make this a dynamic interactive experience. And sample lesson plans and worksheets, developed by teachers for teachers in support of the teaching and learning of the literary works, should provide exciting, stimulating and practical resources for teachers of Gaeilge.

Teachers can contribute to the on-going development of the project by developing additional resources and uploading them to the website.

Future plans include the development of a satellite site where students can publish, showcase and share their own creative works in written, audio or video format.

LIA will be officially launched in the spring and will be found at the following addresses: **www.liaarline.ie or www.scoilnet.ie/lia**. As always, your feedback is welcome.

Post-primary Irish

We would like to take this opportunity to thank those who are participating in the consultation process on the discussion paper *Curriculum provision for Irish in post-primary education*, which was produced in the context of phase two of the review of languages in post-primary education. The discussion paper proposed a future provision for Irish comprising four courses for Junior Certificate and the established Leaving Certificate – Introductory, Ordinary, Higher 1 and Higher 2 – to address the learning needs of students ranging from the newcomer to the native speaker.

A report on the consultation will be available in spring 2007.

Framework for Early Learning

The NCCA is developing a curriculum framework for children from birth to six years, including junior and senior infants—the *Framework for Early Learning.* Unlike the Primary School Curriculum, this is a thematic framework which presents children's learning and development through broad interconnected themes:

→ Well-being
→ Identity and belonging
→ Communication
→ Exploring and thinking.

The framework is underpinned by a wealth of research on how children learn and develop and we are currently finalising a background paper which reviews this research and draws out key messages. You might find these messages helpful to you in your work with junior and/or senior infants. A copy of the background paper and a summary of the key messages will be available on the NCCA website in early 2007.

Development education

In partnership with Irish Aid, the NCCA recently launched '*A Study of the Opportunities for Development Education at Senior Cycle*'. The study maps out where opportunities exist for bringing a global perspective to teaching at senior cycle and provides lots of ideas for teachers both within individual subjects and across subjects.

In looking at the content of Leaving Certificate syllabuses the frequent recurrence of similar topics that relate to global justice and sustainable development is striking.

Students are often studying the same topic with a number of teachers who may not be aware of the opportunity to work collaboratively. This study offers some practical suggestions for making links across the curriculum.

If you would like to receive a copy of the report, contact The Development Education Unit, Irish Aid, Bishop's Square, Redmond's Hill, Dublin 2 (01-4082000). It can also be downloaded from **www.irishaid.gov.ie** and **www.ncca.ie**.

For further information on any of the projects mentioned on this page, please visit our website at www.ncca.ie
To comment on info@ncca or suggest topics for inclusion, email: newsletter@ncca.ie

Painting w

A portraiture study

Back in 2004, the NCCA organised a number of seminars and meetings around the country as part of a consultation with those who work with children from birth to six years, including teachers of infant classes. The consultation focused on our work in developing a curriculum framework for early learning. At that time, we wanted to find a way of consulting with children as well as with adults—to ask them:

What is it really like being in an early childhood setting such as an infant classroom?

Portraiture provided us with a way of doing just that.

What is portraiture?

Portraiture is about recording and interpreting people's perspectives and experiences in particular settings. In our study, we worked with twelve children in eleven settings: a child's home, a nursery, two crèches, a childminder's, a naíonra, a Montessori pre-school, an Early Start class, a Traveller pre-school and two junior infant classes.

By listening to the children, talking with them and sharing in their routines and activities over a number of weeks, we gained a greater understanding of each child's individual experience of his/her time in the setting. The children's teachers/practitioners and their parents also shared their reflections on the children's experiences in the different settings.

Gathering information

With our key question in mind, we used the following guiding questions to help us gather information from and about the children so that we could build an authentic portrait of each child:

→ What does the child enjoy doing in this setting? Why?
→ What places does he/she enjoy being in? Why?
→ Who does he/she enjoy being with? Why?
→ What would he/she like to change in the setting? Why?

As the youngest child in the study was nine months old (yes, nine months old!) we used a number of different ways to gather our information including observation, photography, audio- and video-recordings, walking tours, map-making and interviews.

The portraits

The children's experiences are presented in the portraits under the themes of Well-being, Identity and belonging, Communication, and Exploring and thinking as set out in the NCCA's consultation document *Towards a Framework for Early Learning* (2004). The individual portraits provide an insight into the themes in action across a range of early childhood settings in Ireland.

The following is a snapshot of some of the experiences which three children in the study shared with us. They might give you ideas to try out in your own Early Start or infant classroom. Read on for Caroline's, Andrew's and Matt's portraits.

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Caroline

Caroline is four and a half years old. She attends an Early Start unit attached to a large urban primary school five mornings a week. She likes to take the lead in activities, and is quite independent. She loves messy play, sand, water and márla. She also likes drawing and colouring as well as books and story-time. Her Mum appreciates the sheets that the school sends home each week with the words of the songs and rhymes the children are learning.

The current topic is *Animals*. The children have been doing animal jigsaws and matching games, and painting animal patterns like stripes and spots. They are learning the names of the different baby animals, and they will soon be going along with their parents to visit a farm. A favourite game of Caroline's involves a box of furry animal tails—especially the stripy tiger one! Caroline tucks these into her waistband and pretends to be a tiger, an elephant or a monkey. The teacher tells a story about a noisy tiger cub who creeps up on the other animals and frightens them.

Caroline joins in with the tiger's *rarrrrrhhhh* when the story calls for it. The children know the story well and Martina, their teacher, asks them to predict '*what happened next?*' or, '*what did the animals think then?*' before she turns over the page. Martina points out the expressions on the animals' faces and asks the children to guess what the animals are feeling. Then she asks them to make a surprised face or a scared face themselves. Caroline and her friend Sarah watch attentively— they love story-time. Caroline can't wait for her turn to take the book home and share it with her parents and her sister.

Caroline can recognise her own name in print and is starting to make attempts at writing it. She loves going to school and often plays *school* at home with her sister. According to Caroline, '*Teachers tell you what to do!*' For Caroline's mum, Early Start has meant not only that she has learned a lot but that: '*she has company, friends. She has news when she comes home, she can have a conversation, tell you how her day went, who was bold and who was good!*'

Andrew

Andrew is almost six years old. He is creative and enjoys using his hands. He is in junior infants in a rural four-teacher school in Munster. He likes learning new things especially in maths and science—both his teacher and his mother describe him as '*a sponge for knowledge.*' He says that his favourite thing at school is '*experiments*', such as finding out what will float and what will sink. Sometimes he would like to have more time to complete a piece of work as he is meticulous and often finds himself short of time to finish. He likes word games, especially when he wins! He loves singing and performing.

In Andrew's class, there is a regular *News Time*, when Andrew's teacher chooses two children to act as reporter and a cameraman/woman. They take a toy microphone and camera and interview a classmate who has brought something to school to talk about and show the class. Andrew loves being picked to be the reporter, relaying the other children's questions and asking questions of his own. Andrew asks Megan: '*Where did you get your toy dog?*' Megan responds: '*In Wales.*' No-one, including Megan, is quite sure where Wales is, or how you get there ('*It was dark*', says Megan). So, the teacher takes down the globe and shows them. This leads to an extended discussion, bringing in science and geography as well as language. The teacher records the news headlines on the board, and during the day Andrew and his classmates often look to see their own names there and to read what it says about them.

Andrew is not so keen on the rough and tumble of the yard at lunch-time, but he likes to play chasing and role-play games with a small group of his friends. He is looking forward to his birthday; all of his classmates have been invited to his party. He is also looking forward to going on to senior infants.
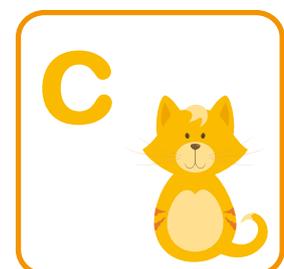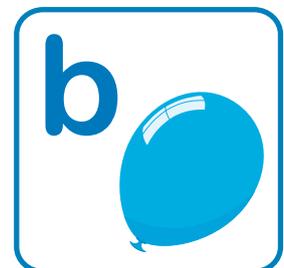
Matt

Matt is five years and nine months old. He is in junior infants in a large junior school in Dublin. Matt's mum recalls how quickly and easily he settled into school: *'He never looked back; he was delighted and excited about going.'*

Matt enjoys constructing with Lego, playing with toy cars and playing chase with the boys in the playground. As Matt says: *'Boys play with boys and girls play with girls, and that's it, we don't play together!'* (a rule devised by the children themselves). Matt also loves painting because, *'you can paint anything you want.'* He delights in sharing stories about his family and talks about his dad working in different countries and about his uncle in Australia who has so many pets in his garden, *'it's like a pet shop!'*

In the classroom the children's art, models and early writing are displayed. This gives Matt and the other children a real sense of identity as young learners. Matt loves pointing out his work and also showing books which he and his classmates made: *Our book of I love*, which included a page for each child to place a picture of something they loved while the teacher scribed for them. Matt also loves his *My toys* book, which identifies different toys he enjoys playing with including his favourite—toy cars!

Matt loves being active in his learning and when asked why he comes to school he replies: *'To do things.'* He enjoys learning through different types of play. His teacher frequently uses a *circus of play stations* to support Matt and his classmates in their learning across the curriculum. These stations include the water tray, the sand tray, the computer, jigsaws, small world sets such as farm sets, mathematical and language games, role-play and imaginative play, and a construction area. Each day, Matt has an opportunity to learn at a different station alongside some of his friends. His teacher moves from station to station supporting the children and guiding their learning. The water tray, the computer and the construction area are amongst Matt's favourite stations.

Matt enjoys his time in junior infants and describes his classmates as *'one big family of friends.'*

Key messages

While the portraits highlight the children's individual experiences in early childhood settings, they draw attention to some key messages about children's early learning. These include the importance of family and relationships in children's lives, the importance and enjoyment of learning through play and the role of the teacher in supporting and guiding the children's learning. These key messages, and others, will inform the NCCA's ongoing work in developing the *Framework for Early Learning*.

If you would like to read more from Caroline's, Andrew's and Matt's portraits, or indeed any of the other children's portraits, then log on to the NCCA website.

Míle buíochas

Many thanks to all the principals, teachers and parents who contributed to the portraiture study. And a special big thank you to Caroline, Andrew, and Matt for giving us permission to share time with them in their Early Start and infant classrooms, and for sharing their experiences with us.

Fictitious names have been used throughout this article.

Transition units
Developing new curriculum components

Many teachers and schools have found that the flexibility offered by Transition Year (TY) has opened up opportunities to develop exciting and innovative programmes of study. Over the years, schools have been supported in this work by the Transition Year Support Service and, more recently, by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS). Many organisations and agencies have also developed useful resources that are used by many schools as part of their TY programmes.

Clearly, any developments in the area of post-primary senior cycle should build on the experience and expertise already in place in schools, allowing opportunities for teacher-led curriculum innovation to continue and flourish.

What are transition units?

Transition units (TUs), are one of the new curriculum components currently being developed at senior cycle. They are 45 hour units of study designed to build on successful modules already offered by schools as part of their TY programmes.

In developing transition units, schools may create some 'from scratch' – opening up new areas of learning for students; they may decide to adapt some of the modules they already offer as part of their Transition Year programme, and redraft them as TUs; or schools may also work with external agencies, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

How will schools develop transition units?

Schools will prepare a written outline of each of the TUs they offer in senior cycle. The NCCA has developed a template to help schools write these unit outlines. The main elements covered in the template are

→ Title of transition unit
→ Area of study
→ Aims
→ Summary outline of unit
→ Learning outcomes
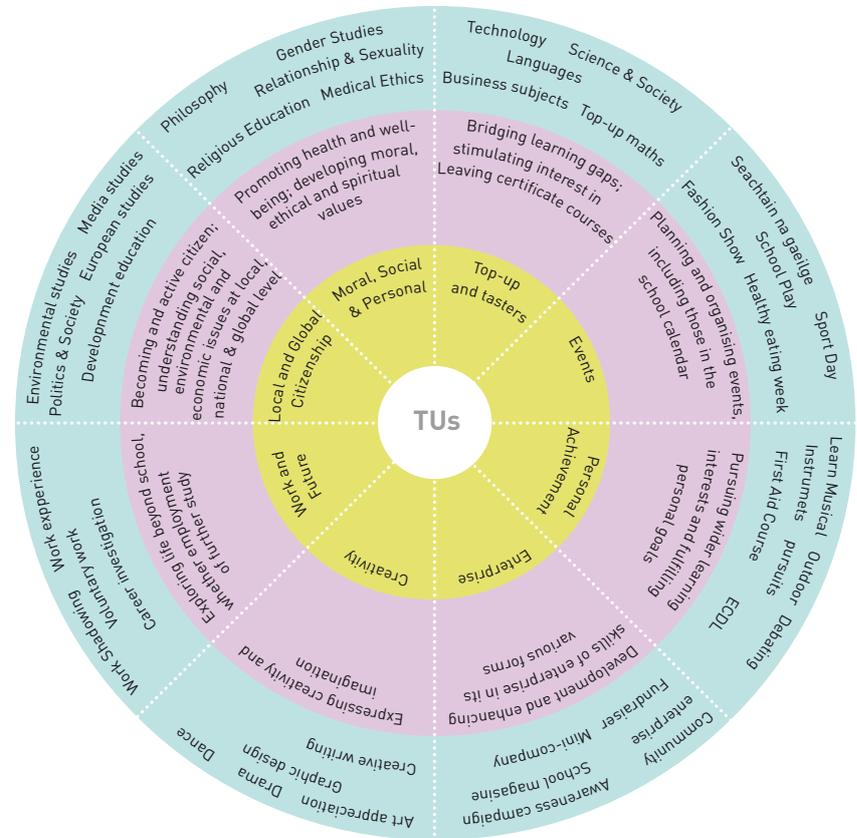
The TU 'wheel' gives you some idea of the main types of transition unit that schools could decide to develop.

→ Key skills
→ Links
→ Methodologies
→ Assessment methods
→ Evaluation
→ Resources.

Why should schools become involved in the development of TUs?

The introduction of transition units to the senior cycle curriculum provides an opportunity for schools to offer a broader range of educational experiences to their students. In keeping with the general approach in Transition Year, a wide range of methodologies will be used in teaching TUs, such as negotiated learning, activity-based learning, group work, discussion, debate, project work, research, use of ICT, study visits and work experience. This ensures that the needs of learners with different educational backgrounds and different learning styles are adequately catered for.

Assessment is built into the teaching and learning of each transition unit. While a variety of formative and summative methods may be used, particular emphasis is placed on the type of assessment that will provide quality feedback to learners with regard to their strengths and weaknesses — to help them improve their learning, and to assist teachers in planning.

What can schools do now?

While all the elements relating to transition units are not yet fully in place it would be worthwhile for schools to begin to take a look at their Transition Year Programmes – to see if any of the courses or modules already being offered could be modified to fit the TU template. If your school would like further information on developing transition units please contact **newsletter@ncca.ie**.

supporting **teaching** and **learning**

ICT Framework
A stuctured approach

ICT, digital, networking, broadband, podcasting, blogging.....

Sometimes it seems like the terminology is changing as fast as the technology. ICT tools like digital cameras, video camcorders, computers, scanners, and mobile devices have become a normal part of life for many people today, but how does that help me as a teacher in planning and providing for children's learning experiences in the classroom?

The NCCA has developed an *ICT Framework: A structured approach to ICT in curriculum and assessment.* This framework identifies the knowledge, understanding, attitudes, and skills for ICT which *all* students should be enabled to attain from primary to the end of junior cycle/compulsory education. It is a cross-curricular 'scaffold' — a practical tool to support teachers in planning and providing opportunities for students to develop their ICT literacy across the curriculum. The framework is organised in four interrelated areas of learning:

→ Foundational knowledge, skills and concepts
→ Creating, communicating and collaborating
→ Thinking critically and creatively
→ Social and personal impact of ICT.

School based developmental initiative

We are currently working with 5 primary schools (Dublin) and 6 post primary schools (Cork and Kildare) to gather information on the usability and feasibility of the ICT framework in a range of school contexts, and on the resources required to support its implementation. Teachers in these schools have been implementing the framework in their classes since November and will continue to do so until April 2007. Starting this month, they will provide feedback on progress and outcomes that will help to ensure that the refined framework is a useful support in the classroom.

Where and when?

The draft *ICT Framework* will be available on the NCCA website from early 2007, along with practical samples of work showing how it can be used to augment teaching and learning in different curriculum and subject areas. These examples will

→ show how the use of ICT relates to the curriculum or syllabus
→ provide detailed instructions on what to do
→ show real classroom activities using ICT in multimedia format.

Examples of work

The **first** example could be used in a junior class or adapted to suit the age group for older children.

Creating language experience resources

Junior Infants created their own 'books' for reading. Each group had a theme colour—red, blue, green and so on. The infants collected items in their colour and took photos of them using the digital camera. The teacher imported the pictures into Powerpoint, formatted the slides and printed them out to make books of *Colours*. In the same way, the infants also made books of *Shapes* and so on.

The children also took photos of one another, and the teacher cut these up to make a personal jigsaw of each child. As they made their own jigsaw and that of another child, the children developed their sense of self esteem, and learned to know and appreciate other children in the class.

How did ICT benefit the children's learning?

The activities helped the children to consolidate their learning about colours and shapes (**Maths**). They had opportunities to work collaboratively in groups, developing social skills, oral language, self identity and an understanding of others in the class (**SPHE**). They developed positive attitudes towards reading and practised basic reading skills as they read books created by themselves (**English**).

The **second** example could be used in an upper primary or lower second level class.

Using Google Earth to develop a sense of place

5th and 6th class children used Google Earth to get a bird's eye view of their local area at earth.google.com. By connecting the computer to a data projector, the children were able to zoom in from a global view to find their own town. They looked for local landmarks, transport routes and roads, and compared land use and so on. They explored how their town was connected to other places by road networks, and by rail. The aerial view allowed them to compare this perspective with their own local knowledge, and with maps of the local area by identifying known landmarks and routes. They found other places with the same latitude and used this as a starting point for a study of climate. Using the more up to date aerial view the children could see how the town had grown in recent years. The children also accessed historical maps and photographs of their local area for their project through the local library online.

How did ICT benefit the children's learning?

This activity helped the children to develop a *sense of their own place* in relation to other places in the world (**SESE: Geography**). They developed their knowledge of *mapping* concepts such as scale and perspective by comparing the online map with a local large scale map. They also learned how *symbols* are used in maps and checked the longitude and latitude of their own place. The children developed an understanding of change over time, by comparing the older map of the area with the modern map (**SESE: History**).

These and many more models of work for both primary and post primary teachers will be available on the NCCA website from early 2007. If you have good ideas for using ICT in the classroom, why not let us know about them at **newsletter@ncca.ie**.

Language and literacy

A big 'thank you' to all who participated in the NCCA's consultation on *Language and Literacy in Irish-medium Primary Schools,* which concluded at the end of September 2006. We received over 600 responses through questionnaires from principals, teachers, members of Boards of Management, parents, students currently attending Irish-medium primary schools and post-primary students who had attended primary schools where Irish was the medium of instruction. We also received more detailed submissions from a number of individuals and organisations.

Participants in the consultation raised a number of concerns. These included:

→ the level of competence a child has in oral language both in the home language and in the language of the school
→ the language in which literacy should be introduced first
→ the school type – whether a Gaelscoil or a school in a designated Gaeltacht area
→ the availability of learning support provision and of appropriate assessment tools and materials in Irish.

In Gaeltacht areas teachers expressed concern about the role of the school, if any, in language maintenance. Some parents of children in Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna were anxious about their role in adequately supporting their child in homework activities as the child progressed through school. Following the consultation, we organised an invitational seminar to focus on the implications of issues arising for the development of guidelines to support schools in this area. If you would like to find out more about the seminar, log on to the NCCA website.

Guidelines
The guidelines to support Irish-medium primary schools in developing children's language and literacy will be available to schools in the 2007/2008 school year. They will be informed by a review of national and international research on language and literacy in bilingual settings, which is also available to download from our website, at **www.ncca.ie**.

The NCCA again thanks all those who took time out of their busy schedules to take part in the consultation. It is through engaging directly with teachers and learning about the successes and challenges you experience in your day–to–day work with children that we can best support you in the classroom.

Assessment for

If you've been reading some of the Assessment for Learning (AfL) articles in the last few issues of **info@ncca** you will remember how this approach to teaching and learning emphasises the importance of giving clear, focused feedback to learners.

This feedback relates to the learning intention and the criteria for success, both of which the teacher will have shared with the students. So, when you are responding to homework or work done in class, what do you want to emphasise in feedback? You want to let the learner know **three things**:

→ what aspects of the work have been successful
→ what aspects might need to be improved upon
→ how to go about making the improvements.

The NCCA has been working with groups of teachers to develop models of this kind of feedback – what it looks like in everyday, ordinary post-primary junior cycle classrooms. The materials have been developed for uploading to our website, but here's a sneak preview of one or two.

An example in History for 3ʳᵈ Years

The syllabus area is *Understanding the Modern World* and the topic is *Social Change in the 20th Century.*

The learning Intention is described by the teacher as: *'Students will develop a deeper understanding of life in Nazi Germany from an in-depth study of women's roles in that society.'*

The criteria for success are:
Students will be able to:

→ *identify clearly the role of women in Nazi society*
→ *discuss the changes that have taken place in the lifestyle of women as a result of Hitler's rule.*

The task the teacher gave to her class was:
→ *Describe in detail, in diary form, the lifestyle of a woman in Nazi Germany.*

The teacher described the conditions under which the students did the task as:

'Having completed a class discussion on Nazi women based on primary and secondary sources, the students are given the task as homework, to be completed by the next class session.'

Student A

A Woman in Nazi Germany

Dear Diary,

As I went to pay a small repayment of my marriage loans today I was told that I have very old-fashioned views because of my outfits. I wear peasant dresses, flat shoes and generally my hair would be in a bun or in plaits.

I wanted to apply for politics but us women aren't allowed to have senior positions.

My daughters went to their everyday organisations today. This is a place where they are only taught two things: to take care of their bodies so they can have a many children as the state needs and to be loyal to National Socialism. I have been told that I will be removed from my job as a lawyer. This will be a huge money loss to my family.

Unfortunately not all women like my sister Margaret can get married, as there is a large lack of men. She will also lose out on the huge marriage loans. These are given to contracting parties who can borrow these sums from the government and are to be repaid slowly or to be cancelled entirely upon the birth of enough children.

We are always hearing Hitler and the Nazis complaining about people not having space, yet he tells us to have more kids.

It's very unfair; us women are deprived of all rights except that of childbirth and hard labour. We aren't permitted to participate in political life; in fact Hitler's plans eventually include the deprivation of the vote.

Here are the ten important rules to be observed when considering a husband:

→ *Remember you are a German.*
→ *Remain pure in mind and spirit!*
→ *Keep your body pure!*
→ *If hereditarily fit, do not remain single!*
→ *Marry only for love.*
→ *Being a German, only choose a spouse of similar or related blood!*
→ *When choosing your spouse, inquire into his forebears!*
→ *Health is essential to outward beauty as well.*
→ *Seek a companion in marriage, not a playmate.*
→ *Hope for as many children as possible! Your duty is to produce at least four offspring in order to ensure the future of the national stock.*

learning

On these pages you will see two examples of work produced by Students A and B in response to the task. The first one, from Student A, is a more complete and generally more successful response. So, for the purposes of this article we will concentrate on how to respond to the, not so successful, work presented by Student B.

Before continuing to read the advice actually given by the teacher to Student B, it might be a good idea to look back at the criteria for success and imagine (even if you are not a teacher of junior cycle history!) what you might want to say to this student to help her improve her work.

Feedback for student

You have done quite well here, especially in listing the kinds of detail that would have been familiar to people in their ordinary lives.

To improve, you should keep a clear focus on the changes that took place in their lives.
What do we know, for example, about their lifestyles in these areas:

→ work
→ personal appearance
→ education

In line with AfL practice the teacher hasn't offered a mark or grade for the piece of work. The first impulse is to draw attention to what worked – the detail from ordinary life. When the teacher wants to indicate how the student might improve she goes back to one of the criteria for success (indicating the changes in their lives) and prompts the learner to consider three areas for improvement. Notice that the prompts are in the form of questions for the student to consider. Simple enough, but effective! Is that how you would have approached it?

Now, here is the teacher's reflection on the standard of this piece of work, expressed as advice to a colleague, another teacher of history.

Commentary for teachers

→ Student has identified the role of women in Nazi Germany through her discussion of the awarding of medals for numerous childbirths, etc.
→ A limited description is given of changes in the lifestyle of women Accurate reference is made to 'her' son being a member of 'Hitler Youth' and the fact that it was considered wrong for a woman to be smoking in public
→ More detail might be explored, especially in relation to women's right to work outside the home
→ Overall, a moderate grasp of the task. Both of the criteria have been met and explored in some detail. Little evidence of independent learning and research, yet good detail is provided.

If this teacher were going to award a mark for this work, this is where the mark would have 'come from'. The criteria for success, as shared with the student, would then have become assessment criteria for the teacher and the student.

Update on the AfL exemplars

Thus far, we have gathered materials in the areas of English, history, home economics, geography, science, physical education, art, CSPE, materials technology (wood), and technical graphics. We are currently putting together examples in other junior cycle subject areas including Gaeilge, mathematics, modern languages, classics, business, music, and religious education, all of which will be available on our website.
For further information, email:
newsletter@ncca.ie

Student B
Diary entry for a woman in Nazi Germany

Dear Diary,

Today was a remarkable day, with everything that happened. I received a gold medal for having eight children to account for in my family. This is my third medal to receive now for this reason. Today was also the day we paid off the final debt of the loan. Since having Olga recently, Heinrich and I only had to pay a total of 550 marks, thanks to Hitler.

He is a great and generous man, whom we are lucky to have as our leader. My young Ernst is now a member of 'Hitler Youth', since turning fourteen.

Also note, Helga Himmler is a disgrace to Germany, I saw her in the centre of the public eye, smoking!! I hope it does not ruin people's image of me, being a past friend! 'Heil Hitler'

" **When the teacher wants to indicate how the student might improve she goes back to one of the criteria for success** "

Senior cycle subject review

Helping to shape the future

'...to have a positive input into the shaping of senior cycle'.

Norma Murray, English teacher, Glanmire Community School.

Last spring twenty schools formed a network to work with the NCCA on the developments in curriculum and assessment for senior cycle. This school network provides us with a direct link to schools, where teachers are well placed to explore how the developments can be implemented and what supports are needed.

Given that schools are already such busy places what motivates them to become involved in something that means more work? Siobhan Corry, Principal of St. Joseph's Secondary School in Lucan, Co Dublin, sees many benefits to her school being involved.

'Often teachers feel that they have no voice, no influence. In the past things were handed down to schools. This is a chance to get involved and make a difference. Sharing ideas on what works for them in the classroom enhances teachers' confidence and affirms them in what they are doing. The network also gives teachers the opportunity to learn from other schools.'

In Glanmire Community College the Principal, Pat McKelvey, sees the network as a chance for teachers to take much-needed time out for reflection and personal development.

'The teachers in our school are interested in professional development and many are pursuing courses in their own time. We see this as a great opportunity to reflect on teaching and learning within the context of influencing change. And it's giving young teachers an opportunity to get involved.'

Teachers from the network are currently involved in three areas of work: **key skills, transition units and flexible programmes.**

Key Skills

Many teachers lament the fact that for most senior cycle students the typical way of learning is passive – often sitting in desks, taking notes or reading from a text book. They also comment on the increasing pressure to spoon-feed students with answers and

formulas for use in 'the exam'. One teacher comments,

'Students have no idea how to work things out for themselves. They want immediate results and won't try and test and persevere. They don't realise that you can learn from not succeeding.'

Network teachers express a hope that change to the curriculum will allow more time for the teaching of skills that are important for life and for learning – the ability to think critically, to innovate and adapt to change, to process information, to work independently and as part of a team. Helen Barrett, a teacher in North Presentation Secondary school, Cork puts it this way,

'I'd like to get away from static learning to a more dynamic and active approach that can enable learning for life.'

A group of teachers from within the network schools has taken on the task of reflecting on their own teaching and how the key skills are being

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The Effective Learner

- Information Processing
- Communicating
- Being Personally Effective
- Working with others
- Critical and creative thinking

embedded within their teaching of a specific subject. They intend to focus on their own teaching with a series of questions in mind:

→ What skills are most readily embedded in each subject?
→ How are those skills brought to life?
→ What teaching methods are best suited to developing skills?
→ What are the barriers to more deeply embedding key skills within the curriculum?

They will also look at how different assessment methods can support the development of key skills.

Transition units

Transition units (TUs) are one of the curriculum components that will make up the new senior cycle. In developing transition units schools may devise some new units that open up a new area of learning for students. They may decide to adapt some of the modules they already offer as part of their Transition Year programme and redraft them as TUs. Schools may also work with external agencies or community groups to develop TUs.

The NCCA is working alongside Transition Year teachers from the network to support them in developing the first collection of transition units. The idea is to make these available on the web as samples to guide schools in generating their own units. Among the sample transition units already available are video production, legal studies, food matters, discovering Irish art, introduction to biotechnology, sports science and disaster studies. More TUs are on the way on subjects such as environmental education, Spanish, Irish, practical maths, classics, film studies, R.E., ICT and more. Find them at: **www.ncca.ie** or, for more information on transition units, read the article on page 9.

Flexible programmes

'We've found a huge challenge in meeting the needs of all the different students that make up senior cycle'.

Triona Glacken, Principal, St. Paul's Secondary School, Greenhills, Dublin.

Eight schools from the Network have begun work on developing more

flexible, targeted and personalised programmes of study for their students at senior cycle. These programmes would include a variety of curriculum components in different combinations. Ciaran Cooke, Principal of North Presentation Secondary School, Cork comments:

'I know that a 'one size fits all' approach does not suit all students. We need to begin with their needs and give students more choice and ownership of their learning.'

As well as exploring creative ways that schools can better serve their students by developing a curriculum that suits their needs this project will also look at the influence of teaching and the school environment in stimulating greater student engagement, motivation and success.

'A variety of natural talents not recognised by the traditional Leaving Certificate should be accredited by the introduction of new more flexible teaching and assessment methods, thereby making the whole system more inclusive for all the students'.

Séan McCarthy, Principal, Listowel Community College

Other areas of work

Down the road the NCCA will be working with network teachers in exploring how students can become more effective and successful as learners, how students can become more autonomous and self-directed in their learning and what kinds of approaches to teaching and learning can support these changes. We will also be looking at different approaches to assessment, both assessment for learning and assessment of learning.

Some of the student perspectives on aspects of senior cycle will be featured in the Spring issue of info.

More information on developments at senior cycle is available on our website.

Teaching in a custodial setting

NCCA Education Officers tend to come from a variety of teaching settings, not least one of our newer members, Pierce Nolan, who has been teaching engineering technology, ICT and technical drawing for the past 17 years through the prison education service. Through his work as assistant supervising teacher/student liaison teacher, he has worked to introduce prisoners to the education unit and to deal with educational problems they might be experiencing. Curious to find out what teaching or being in school in a prison is actually like, we put some questions to Pierce.

Prisoner's Art. Title: Bounds.

Q. How is education in prison organised?

The Prison Education Service in Ireland consists of a partnership between the Irish Prison Service and a range of educational agencies from the community. These include The Vocational Education Committees, The Public Library Service, The Open University, The National College of Art and Design, and The Arts Council.

Q. What is the primary objective of the service?

To provide a high quality, broad and flexible programme of education that meets the needs of those in custody. It helps them cope with a prison sentence, achieve personal development, prepare for life after release, and establish an appetite and capacity for lifelong learning.

Q. What kinds of courses do prisoners have access to?

The range and number of courses is very varied and the education provided is truly student-centred, with students choosing their own programmes of study. There are courses available in:

→ **basic education** (including literacy and numeracy)
→ **general subjects** (English, history, geography, mathematics, languages, computers)
→ **physical education**
→ **home economics**
→ **health education**
→ **the arts** (visual arts, music, drama, creative writing, photography)
→ **practical subjects** (metalwork, woodwork, horticulture, technical drawing, CAD)
→ **courses based on specific needs of prisoners** (pre-release courses, addiction awareness, childcare, group

skills, anger management, personal development, communications, life skills, and so on).

Home economics could be said to be the most popular subject in most education units (for obvious reasons!) with other practical subjects and the arts in general coming in a close second.

Q. How are teaching and learning organised?

There are a number of striking aspects to the style of teaching and learning in Irish prisons. As is appropriate for adult education, a great deal is left to the professional judgement of teachers in the way classes, courses and activities are planned and conducted.

The use of the prisoners' personal experiences and their interest in the learning process has influenced the methodology underlying prison education. Teachers make great efforts to adapt to the specific prison environment whether they are working with juveniles, with older men, with women, or with sex offenders. Prison classrooms usually have an informal look about them, helping to create a non-threatening, flexible and encouraging learning environment for the students.

There are small numbers in classes and this strengthens the teacher-student bond and allows for more individualised tuition. The school timetable is designed to fit into the daily prison regime, with classes between breakfast and the midday meal and classes again in the afternoon. Evening classes also are held In the majority of prisons.

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Q. How do they fit in other activities?

At the same time that classes are running, the prison regime facilitates prison visits, court appearances, doctor and dentist clinics, training workshops and prison duties. This means that students' attendance at class can be limited and unpredictable at times. The turn over of short term prisoners and the length of stay of longer term prisoners offers another challenge to the teachers in terms of differentiation of the learning experiences.

Q. Sounds like a pretty complex environment in which to be teaching?

Yes, I suppose so, in a way. Teachers work with prisoners who are coping daily with the reality and consequences of imprisonment, issues like depression, anger, fear, poor health, anxieties about their families or about personal relationships. Sometimes, contrary to what you might expect, visits from outside can be a source of stress and anxiety for the prisoners. Many can be suffering the ravages of addiction. And when it comes to schooling as such, they are frequently grappling with serious difficulties in literacy and numeracy.

Q. What about achievement levels and certification?

Students sit for examinations at all levels and are accredited by a wide range of awarding bodies. A key area is the in-house certification of courses developed by the teachers in the prison education service, and certificated by some of the VECs, in direct response to the interests and needs of the students. Recognition of success helps to build confidence and self-esteem in the students, something sadly lacking in other areas of their lives. Public recognition of such achievements, even on a small and confined scale, is important too. Bringing the work to the public arena is a reminder to the outside world that prisoners have not simply disappeared but are still part of our community.

" **There are small numbers in classes and this strengthens the teacher-student bond and allows for more individualised tuition.** "

Social and political education

Why social and political education?

Globalisation is changing the world in which our young people live. The increase in speed and ease of communication has enabled a cultural exchange to take place between different parts of the globe. In a world in which Guinness is the favourite drink of Rwanda and Riverdance is a hit in China, cultural influences from other parts of the world are felt in Ireland too, and our culture abounds with American music and television programmes, Australian soap operas, action movies from Hong Kong, sudoku puzzles from Japan, food from Italy, and hairstyles from Africa. This process gives young people many more choices as to how they want to be when compared to previous generations, but it also brings challenges: the need to be able to make skilled choices as to how to manage their own identity and to be able to manage or avoid the anxiety that can be associated with such a range of choices. It also presents them with the challenge of how to engage critically with the richness of what is offered to them so that they can make choices which value their own culture within the context of cultural diversity.

Globalisation also gives rise to other opportunities and challenges for young people:

→ New communication technologies make it possible to access information on almost any topic at the click of a button. The skills of critically evaluating information sources become increasingly important.
→ Globalisation in our economy has changed the sort of jobs available to people in Ireland as well as the sorts of skills they need to prosper in this new economy. The skills which our young people need are often intercultural and interpersonal as much as technical and vocational.
→ While globalisation has contributed to economic growth in Ireland, not all countries have been so lucky. Surveys of Irish young people show that they care about poverty in the Third World. An understanding of the processes which play a role in development and environmental issues are, therefore, crucial if our young people are to be equipped to have the impact upon their world that they desire.
→ Globalisation in politics also impacts upon their lives. Super

national bodies such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation and – especially – the European Union all have an increasing impact upon the lives of young people. Yet the increasing influence of such groups can seem to make young people distant from the sites of political power and, along with a growing individualisation, can lead to disengagement from political issues, or to the development of new and non-traditional forms of political action such as ethical consuming or joining new social movements.

Internationally such changes have seen social and political education become increasingly important. Citizenship education has become central to the European Union's Lisbon strategy to develop the EU as the most competitive knowledge-based society in the world. Therefore it

→ is a key theme in the EU framework for life-long learning
→ has been a focus for the Council of Europe
→ is central to the UN's 2005-2015 Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

In a changing world

In Ireland, it is undoubtedly linked to the work of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship recently appointed by An Taoiseach.

How will social and political education in senior cycle support young people in gaining the knowledge and skills they need to effectively set and achieve their own goals in today's world?

Research on the international experience of social and political education highlights a growing consensus that it should focus on 'nurturing an open-minded, critical-minded, democratic minded and action oriented generation that is…likely to respect the rights of others'. Such a subject should draw on disciplines like political studies, sociology and philosophy, should focus on enabling young people to understand their social and political world, to engage critically with the positions presented to them by others, to make up their own minds and to take action based on their own decisions. Such a subject could link effectively with and support the on-going development of junior cycle Civic Social and Political Education and would, with CSPE, contribute significantly to the needs of Irish young people in our changing world.

As part of the senior cycle developments, the NCCA has started to develop a new subject in the area of social and political education. This will be proposed as a full, optional Leaving Certificate subject. Work has commenced with the publication of a Background Paper that sets out the nature of this area and a framework for developing the subject. A draft syllabus will be presented during 2007 for full consultation.

Primary school curriculum
Phase 2 of review.

It's hard to believe that our in-service on Gaeilge began four years ago, and three years ago in the case of Science and SPHE. But it's true and so it's a good time to take stock of how well the curriculum in these three subjects is doing in classrooms up and down the country.

Following the tremendous response from teachers on the usefulness of the templates for English, mathematics and visual arts back in 2003/2004, the NCCA has developed another *Review and Reflection Template for Teachers*, this time focusing on Gaeilge, Science and SPHE. The template has been available on www.ncca.ie since the end of October and you will have received a hard copy in November for your own personal use. The purpose of the template is to help you reflect on your classroom experiences with the three subjects:

→ What parts of the subjects are working well for you?
→ What parts are presenting a bit of a challenge?

→ How is the curriculum for the three subjects impacting on children's learning?
→ How are the three subjects settling in as part of the curriculum as a whole?
→ What aspects of each subject would you like to prioritise in your teaching during the coming months?

When we uploaded the template onto the website last October, we invited teachers in 200 schools throughout the country to share their personal experiences of implementing the curriculum in Gaeilge, Science and SPHE and we are grateful to all who agreed to take part. If you are a teacher in one of these schools, have *you* completed and returned your template? If you have done so, 'thank you!'. If not, it would be helpful if you could do so in the next few weeks. We will use the information to highlight what parts of the curriculum for Gaeilge, Science and SPHE are working well, and what curriculum supports, if any, teachers feel would help them in their teaching. We will also learn if parts of the curriculum are not working!

If your school was not one of the 200 invited to take part in Phase 2 of our review of the curriculum, and you would like to share your experience of teaching Gaeilge, Science and/or SPHE, please log on to **www.ncca.ie** to submit your reflections online.

Report card templates

'Where does the time go?' It's a question that preys on everyone's mind, but it seems to be more relevant in school than anywhere else. Christmas has come and gone and half of the school year has almost passed. On the other hand, it may seem somewhat early to mention end-of-year school reports.

You may remember reading a description of reporting practice in primary schools in other countries in the summer issue of **info@ncca**. Drawing on this work, the NCCA developed draft Report Card Templates to support schools in reporting to parents on their children's achievement and progress. And we are now finding out what schools think of these templates.

A number of these draft templates are available on the website at www.ncca.ie. These include

→ **interim templates** - for sharing information with parents during the school year, for example, during parent/teacher meetings.
→ **end-of-year templates** - for reporting assessment information to parents at the end of the school year.

As children learn in different ways at different stages in their primary education, some of the templates focus on reporting to parents of children in the infant classes, while other templates are for reporting to parents of children from 1st to 6th class.

"Perhaps I possess the kind of wisdom that only comes with age."

The interim templates have a *formative* emphasis—looking at where the child's learning is going, and on ways parents can support that learning. You might think of using this type of template when preparing for one-to-one meetings with the parents of the children in your class(es). The interim templates enable you to provide pointers and practical tips for parents as to how they could support their child's learning during the rest of the school year. For example, you might focus on how the parents could help their child locate information on a website for a history project or to carry out a simple science investigation. Maybe parents could focus more on sharing story-time and make more time for talk and discussion with their child.

As you would expect, the end-of-year templates are naturally more *summative* in emphasis—they support the teacher in reporting on what the child has achieved during the school year, as well as suggesting directions for the child's learning in the following year.

Road-testing the templates

The NCCA is currently working with 14 schools around the country to find out how useful and manageable the templates are for reporting to parents.

A big 'thank you' to the principals, teachers, parents and children in these schools for agreeing to share their experiences in using the templates during this school year.

Why not get involved in this initiative too? The templates, along with pointers for using them, are available on the NCCA website for any school to try them out. Whether you make use of the mid-year or end-of-year templates, we would love to hear from you:

→ Did you find the templates useful in creating reports for parents in your school?
→ Which part or parts of the templates did you find most useful / least useful?
→ Did the templates encourage you to think differently about how you report to parents? How?
→ How did parents respond to changes in your reporting practice?

The NCCA will use feedback from schools to finalise the templates during summer 2007. The final versions will be available to all schools during the 2007/2008 school year.

Learning even more about reporting

As well as working directly with schools in trying out the draft templates, we have also commissioned research on reporting to parents. The purpose of this research is to create a bigger picture of reporting practice across our primary schools. The research will complement the information gathered from schools road-testing the draft templates and inform the ongoing development of reporting practice in primary schools.

If you would like further information on the draft Report Card Templates, email **newsletter@ncca.ie**.