

Primary Curriculum Review and Redevelopment

Written submission template for organisations, groups and individuals responding to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*

This template is intended to support you (and your colleagues/organisation) in developing a written submission in response to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Please e-mail your completed submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Individual submission details

Name	
Date	
E-mail	

Organisation submission details

Name	
Position	
Organisation	Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education
Date	
E-mail	

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

The NCCA will publish written submissions received during the consultation. The submissions will include the author's/contributor's name/organisation. Do you consent to this submission being posted online?

Please provide some brief background information on your organisation (if applicable).

The Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education within Maynooth University is a publicly funded initial teacher education provider for primary teacher education. Founded on the principles and practices of educational philosopher, Friedrich Froebel, this university department offers the following programmes:

- Bachelor of Education
- Professional Master of Education (Primary Teaching)
- BA Early Childhood – Teaching and Learning
- Postgraduate Diploma in Inclusive and Special Education
- Master of Education (Research in Practice).

The remainder of the template includes two sections. Section 1 invites your overall comments and observations on the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*. Section 2 is structured to align with the six key messages related to the framework. Each message is summarised as a support for you in working on the submission.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

Section 1

Please outline your overall response to the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework*.

Abbreviations used throughout this document:

DPCF – Draft Primary Curriculum Framework

PCF - Primary Curriculum Framework

PSC - Primary School Curriculum

Aistear – Aistear Curricular Framework

GCE – Global Citizenship Education

*Please note that implications for support for teachers in the implementation phase of the PCF, in the form of CPD, have been included in context under each section.

Preamble

The Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education welcomes the DPCF and the key messages, principles and learning competencies identified for child development. The potential for a more inclusive vision of curriculum is particularly welcomed, as the DPCF lays emphasis on the inclusion of every child. In line with current educational thinking and research, the principle of teacher agency and flexibility within curriculum planning to suit school needs, is endorsed. In this section, consideration is given to key concerns of the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, in terms of the continuity of play as pedagogy throughout the primary school, planning for integrated learning, and the role of Global Citizen Education in curriculum.

The Nature of Play as Pedagogy and its Continuity in Curriculum

In this section, the nature of play and learning along with play and creativity are discussed, with a focus on particular aspects of play pedagogy and its continuity across the primary school.

The Nature of Play

The nature of play endorsed by the DPCF, and its planning, is paramount to how it is negotiated between teacher, child, and other children in the school context. Thus, how play is conceived in *Aistear* (2009), is an important starting point. The welcome extension of Aistear-led learning to 2nd Class, and the transition between this curricular stage and the next, are critical to both its loyal and successful implementation.

Rather than play structured by place or resourcing, free-flow play is that which ‘emphasises the freedom essential to play, for children to choose, take control, explore, create, imagine and go beyond the here and now ‘ (Tovey, 2013:17). Play is conceived as a process, rather than a product or outcome, which would change the play’s status from free-flowing (Bruce, 2001). Thus, the child can become an agentic player, free to respond to events or change its direction, essentially with ‘permission granted to resist’ themes suggested by the classroom context either directly or indirectly through resourcing, space, or the presence of other players, which may include the teacher (Stokes, 2016). According to Froebel, ‘free play encompasses all the child’s imaginative thoughts and physical movements, using their senses to create and explore their environment (Ó Néill, 2020). To safe-guard its access for children, opportunities for free-flow, school-based play must be named and secured by the PCF.

Play Pedagogy

The South Australian and Scottish curricular frameworks have encouraged greater alignment between early childhood and primary school pedagogies. In this regard, the DPCF is appropriately developing the transition from *Aistear* (2009). Historically, a play-based pedagogy has its roots in the work of early childhood pioneers such as Froebel, MacMillan and Isaacs (Moyle, 2010), and ‘the enactment of play pedagogy reinforces children’s natural curiosity and desire to learn’ (Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019:38). However, recent publications such as that of Walsh & Fallon (2019) have cited numerous international studies exploring the tensions between play and learning. Significant in the Irish curriculum context are the suggestions of Wood & Attfield (2005, cited in Martlew et al., 2011) to examine an approach combining curriculum-generated play to develop skills and knowledge with a play-generated curriculum, where teachers, equipped with a clear

rationale for, and understanding of play, respond to the interests of the children through curriculum.

While endorsing the playful approach to language learning exemplified in the Primary Languages Curriculum (2019), a stronger emphasis on the value of play is called for within the DPCF, both as an activity and as an activity in its own right. The NCCA website features a series of short video interviews with Elizabeth Wood which explore the development of play pedagogies at primary level (<https://curriculumonline.ie/Early-Childhood/Support-Materials-Primary-School/>). These are more connected to specific curricular learning outcomes, and the work of Froebel (1782-1852), which supports the value of play-based learning and the importance of playful enterprise right through the class levels of the primary school.

As children progress through primary school, the form play takes may change from that of younger players, where:

‘the level of provocation might be greater, the interaction more challenging, and the experiences on offer might be different, but the school environment should be conducive to play’ (Education Scotland, 2020:46).

Thus, intentional and responsive planning for play are advocated in Scotland, where, similarly to *Aistear* (2009), skilled teachers observe and respond to children in play. Emphasising the potential of play throughout the primary school in the PCF is critical to realising it.

The Support and Development of Play Spaces

A stronger emphasis on the support and development of play, and particularly, play and learning in the outdoors, throughout the primary school in the DPCF, is duly advocated. By laying emphasis on the cultivation and development of indoor and outdoor school-based learning environments that facilitate play, more opportunities to support players throughout the primary school can be provided.

A variety of spaces can create different play experiences, in the increased affordances on offer to players. Outdoor environments can present problems to be solved as well as materials to be combined creatively (Bruce, 2011). They provide potential for the development of the child’s imagination and creativity, adding ‘open-ended prospects for

problem-solving and risk-taking' (Ó Néill, 2020). Thus, outdoor play strengthens children's play possibilities by increasing children's access to its natural environmental affordances (Gibson, 1979).

Every learning environment, with associated spaces, experiences, and interactions therein, tells a story to children and the wider school community, about how play is valued (Education Scotland, 2020). Well-documented physical and cognitive benefits associated with free play in outdoor spaces are matched by opportunities for the development of social and emotional learning through peer interactions, which can build communication skills, including skills of negotiation and conflict resolution, as well as discovering means by which tension and strong emotions can be relieved (Ó Néill, 2020).

Play and Creativity

Froebel (1826) claimed play as the highest phase of child development. Further, Vygotsky (1978:102) termed play 'the highest possible level of pre-school development', with the origins of creative process arising from young children's symbolic play. Through play, creativity is awakened, the imagination is stimulated, problem-solving, risk-taking, and divergent thinking skills are enabled. By creating curricular emphasis for the development of these skills and dispositions through play alone, its autotelic worth, or the intrinsic value of play, can be given due recognition (Lester and Russell, 2008). Further, the child can be equipped with a capacity for critical engagement as an approach to learning and a way of working. Kampylis and Berki(2014:8) state:

'creativity is not only a privilege of the arts or people associated with the arts. Creative thinking can also be fostered and demonstrated in all school subjects and curriculum areas. Even trivial subject-specific content can nurture creativity in students, provided that the pedagogical approach allows for the expression of creative thinking and imagination'

Bruce (2011) explains play and creativity as processes in the brain which assist humans in reaching the highest moments of understanding. Creativity, when cultivated, contributes in deep and far-reaching ways to our learning. Furthermore, the nature of play as free flowing is critical to the awakening of creativity.

To conclude, the identification of play as a means of learning can be realised through its inclusion as both an attribute of the competency, 'being creative', and as a named methodology from 3rd-6th Class, rather than risking its conflation with active learning.

The Role of Global Citizenship Education in Curriculum

In addition to a play-based approach, which encompasses outdoor play, it is important to advocate for a child-centred and world-minded approach to education which stresses the importance of values, attitudinal and skill development, which is explored more fully as part of the role of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in Curriculum.

In an increasingly globalised world, issues that once seemed extraneous to primary educators are now essential to meaningful teaching and learning in a modern classroom. If the Covid-19 crisis has taught us anything, it is that the world is shrinking every day; with the effects of what is happening in other countries having a direct impact on life in Ireland and vice-versa. All children should be afforded the opportunity to try to make sense of their wider world through curriculum to understand the undeniable interconnectedness of modern life. GCE is a vehicle which can support pupils to understand what it means to be a global citizen in a changing world.

The DPCF makes reference to the changing nature of our society in several places; changing society (NCCA, 2020:1); unprecedented change since the PSC (DES, 1999 in 2020:2); global challenges and the need for skill development in children (2020:3). This content acknowledges the need for a global citizenship approach, without naming it as a pedagogical approach. Thus, it is necessary to make explicit in the PCF the inclusion of GCE to encourage teachers to become familiar with the pedagogical content knowledge within this area. This, in turn, can support teachers to scaffold in their pupils the skills and competencies needed to become active global citizens.

Given the investment in, and prevalence of, GCE in teacher education, it is important to ensure that the principles and practice of GCE are also supported in the new PCF. GCE encourages all learners to understand how people, places, spaces, economies, and environments are inextricably interrelated and how we are linked to people in other countries through the consumer choices we make and the systems on which we depend. Opportunities for rich and meaningful integrated learning can be provided by connecting

mutual issues experienced globally to learning outcomes in the PCF, such as climate change, climate action, human rights, equality, and anti-racism.

For instance, the climate crisis and ways to mitigate against it, can be explored extensively through science education and SPHE. An explicit emphasis on climate change and environmental education in the PCF may take the current onus off the Green Schools Programme and ensure a central rather than peripheral role for GCE in this regard. Embedding sustainability as a thread in the PCF is essential in the current crisis and for the years ahead in emphasising the importance of reconnecting with the natural world and developing children's eco-literacy (see section *Section 2: Emerging Priorities for Children's Learning* for further detail).

Planning for Integrated Learning

The DCPF highlights continuity in relation to principles and themes exemplified within *Aistear* (2009), which is welcomed. However, the strong emphasis on the integration of curricular areas has not clearly transferred into the documentation from earlier NCCA stakeholder consultations on Time, Structure, and Key Messages. This is regrettable as integration constitutes a vital element in terms of maintaining a balanced and holistic curriculum.

The current PCF structure does not make the integration possibilities sufficiently clear. For instance, the competency. 'Being an active citizen' necessitates a cross-curricular manner for meaningful connections to be made by and for children in making a corresponding commitment to action. Furthermore, it is not clear how curriculum areas such as Wellbeing are to be translated into outcomes, which could be achieved by multiple means, for example, through Arts Education, as well as through SPHE.

In the absence of the appointment of curricular subject-specific teams, as per the structures established to support the induction of the PSC, care needs to be taken to match the learning outcomes with domain-specific learning in terms of knowledge and skills in discrete subject areas. This denotes a necessary precursor to an examination of the possibilities for integration and cross-curricular learning links in planning for learning outcomes.

The synthesised approach exemplified through the interwoven strands of *Aistear* (2009), can inform the development of the PCF extending throughout the school experience of the child. In the promotion of play-based and active learning methods, organically connected learning content can be explored. High level integration arising out of making natural connections forged by thematic learning enables integrated planning and assessment throughout *Aistear* (2009).

While integration is discussed in the DPCF, specific details or approaches about how it might be realised need to be included. For example, the broadening of Arts Education to include film and dance in a reduced timeslot, demands the introduction of domain-specific skills within each subject area, prior to examining opportunities for deep integration through cross-curricular approaches across the disciplines. In order to achieve this potential, it is recommended that the NCCA stipulate flexible yet fair guidelines which offer schools opportunities to focus on each arts area discretely from 3rd- 6th class. For example, by dedicating one of three terms per discipline in 3rd and 4th classes, the foundation domain-specific knowledge and skills may realise deep integrated learning opportunities in 5th and 6th Classes.

Ultimately, the planning and practice of high-level integration from a teaching viewpoint demands a skilled, agentic, and confident practitioner. Therefore, support needs to be made available to enable this, by building upon these capacities in the workforce for teachers of various stages of career development (See *Section 2: Agency and Flexibility* for further detail).

Languages and Integration

In relation to the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), an important clarification is needed in terms of the specific time allocated both English and Gaeilge across the three different schools' contexts listed. It is strongly suggested that this detail, currently contained within footnotes (NCCA, 2020:17-18), be more clearly represented in constructed tables which show the relevant time allocation for both Gaeilge and English in English-medium schools, and in Irish-medium schools, in Gaelscoileanna and in Scoileanna sa Ghaeltacht.

With regards to integration, as all other areas are taught using languages, the visual presentation of curricular structure ought to reflect this. In Figure 3 in the DPCF (NCCA:

2020:11), by presenting languages horizontally, below all the other areas, the foundational nature of languages in teaching and learning across all subject areas would be reflected. This revision would also serve to acknowledge the role of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), as advocated in the Primary Language Curriculum (2019), while highlighting the development of content-specific language and literacy across the curriculum.

Section 2

Agency and flexibility in schools

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Be for every child.
- Recognise teachers' and principals' agency and professionalism to enact the curriculum in their individual school context.
- Give more flexibility to schools in terms of planning and timetabling to identify and respond to priorities and opportunities.
- Connect with different school contexts in the education system.
- Give greater opportunities for flexibility and choice for children's learning.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework outlines important messages in relation to agency and flexibility in schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

The emphasis on every child in the DCPF is commendable in leading the way for a more inclusive vision of curriculum. Flexibility at a school-level is endorsed for the opportunities it brings to enlist the teaching staff as curriculum makers for their individual school, and the children they know best. Offering choice in children's learning and its assessment is also affirmed as an approach to motivating learning and fostering life-long learning attitudes and capacities. Aspects of choice for children should extend to play as one of many learning methodologies and approaches to enquiry offered children.

In this section, teacher agency in the role of curriculum maker is discussed.

Teacher Agency

The emphasis on teacher agency and flexibility was clearly communicated at consultation day briefings for the revision of the PSC. This research-informed thrust is welcomed by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. However, it denotes a seismic cultural shift in teaching, and about how teaching and planning are viewed more widely.

The approach outlined in the DPCF recognises teachers as curriculum makers, which it should be acknowledged, comes with both rights and responsibilities. The skill, knowledge, confidence, and experience demanded for a teacher to create a well-balanced and tailored curriculum for his or her class is considerable. It hinges, not least, on the pedagogical content knowledge of the teacher (Shulman, 1986). Thus, the nature and medium of in-service professional support offered by the DES to teachers, to reflect their new status as agentic professionals, will be paramount to its success. This dimension will also need to be reflected within initial teacher education programmes. The principle of teacher agency as a practice and a responsibility must be more clearly articulated in the PCF in terms of a child-centred pedagogy, in order for teacher agency to be deeply embedded in shared educational principles and research-informed practices from initial teacher education right through to in-service professional practice.

The onus will lay on in-service and ongoing professional support for teachers to embrace this significant change in their role. It may require of some teachers to transgress through a complex process of growth and change to realise this shift. In the absence of ongoing structured in-service support programmes for teachers, the danger of reverting to engrained practices looms large, such as through an over-reliance on textbook learning and template materials. This would be most regrettable and needs to be mitigated against by a partnership approach at policy level.

Curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Provide a clear vision for children’s learning across the eight years of primary school.
- Link with learning experiences provided through the themes of the *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* and connect with the subjects, key skills and statements of learning in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*.
- Support educational transitions by connecting with what and how children learn at home, in preschool and post-primary school.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to curriculum connections between preschool, primary and post-primary schools. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

In order to support a clear vision for children’s learning across the eight years of primary school, this section focuses on extending learning experiences offered by *Aistear* (2009) and examines supporting educational transitions for children between each preliminary stage of their education and schooling.

Linking with learning experiences provided through Aistear (2009)

Linking with learning experiences provided through the themes of *Aistear* (2009) is essential in the development of a curriculum which offers coherence for both the learner as he/she progresses on his/her learning journey, and the team of teachers planning for that provision. It is imperative for the PCF to examine the themes of *Aistear* (2009) to identify ways in which the emphases offered learners can be both transferred and extended in the progression of curriculum. For instance, the theme of *Exploring and Thinking* constitutes children making sense of their world, questioning, and investigating through the formation, testing and refinement of ideas, largely through play and discovery learning. These methods need more explicit emphasis in the PCF, for example, through the competency, ‘being mathematical’, anchored by specific learning outcomes.

Strand *Exploring and Thinking Aim 2* of *Aistear* (2009:44) stipulates that children, in partnership with the adult, will ‘use their creativity and imagination to think of new ways to solve problems’. In order to realise this throughout primary school, and through a range of competencies from ‘being mathematical’ to ‘fostering well-being’, it is vital that the formation of such problem-solving skills and capacities in children at infant level be nurtured and supported in a structured, developmental fashion through curricular learning modes and outcomes. Further, the rate of progression can be tailored to the individual child through assessment and differentiated instruction. For example, the key competence of being creative must translate into outcomes related to specific attributes extending from 3rd to 6th Class. For example, if linked with expected outcomes that demonstrate staged skill, understanding and competency levels, competencies such as ‘being curious’, ‘being imaginative’, ‘being innovative’ may offer choice to children, in addition to structure and guidance to teachers.

‘Children will be creative and spiritual’, as stipulated by *Aim 3* of the Wellbeing strand of *Aistear* (2009:17) has much insight to offer in terms of both the breadth achievable. In partnership with the adult, children will:

1. *Express themselves creatively and experience the arts*
2. *Express themselves through a variety of types of play*
3. *Develop and nurture their sense of wonder and awe*
4. *Become reflective and think flexibly*
5. *Care for the environment*
6. *Understand that others may have beliefs and values different to their own.*

Each of the six aspects of *Aim 3* 'Children are creative and spiritual' merit extending and deepening at an age-appropriate level, similar to one of the key strengths of the spiral nature of the PSC (1999), where content is revisited cyclically at a deeper level, matched by developmental learning outcomes.

Drama and Dramatic Play in Transition

With relation to the second aspect of *Aim 3 Wellbeing*, ('*express themselves through a variety of types of play*'), the opportunities *Aistear* (2009) offers in terms of the 'umbrella' term of pretend play make real the possibilities of strong confident socio-dramatic players emerging from senior infants into 1st and 2nd class. The observation, planning, review, and development of pretend play from infant level to 1st and 2nd Class, and the transition from 2nd to 3rd class is equally critical for drama within Arts Education, as well as for securing a play-based pedagogy extending though the school.

The prerequisite drama knowledge and understanding must, therefore, be built upon from its establishment at infant level, as part of the 1st and 2nd class programmes, to provide the foundation children need to develop their skill, understanding and knowledge across the field of Arts Education from 3rd Class onwards. McCabe's (2013) research highlights the important role of the adult in helping the child to develop his/her play scripts in socio-dramatic play. Her recent research indicates that children notice when adults are willing to engage in role and seek out the involvement of the adults (McCabe, 2020). Thus, emphasis on the role of the adult in the support of children to develop their pretend play narratives through dramatisation, is critical for the development of the PCF.

Aistear (2009:56) stipulates the adult must take 'time to observe, consult, plan and participate in play'. To this end, the teacher must receive clear guidance within the PCF

and through its subsequent in-service as to how to manage teachers' play involvement, building upon existing skill and experience in so doing.

The critical role of the teacher in harnessing the potential development of role-play must continue to be highlighted beyond infant level throughout the PCF. Further to modelling play, children's needs dictate appropriate 'teacher intervention' into pretend play. This allows the ownership of the play script to rest firmly amongst the children. Thus, the teacher intervenes judiciously, either spontaneously or planned to support emergent learning content. In accordance to *Aistear* (2009), the observant and engaged teacher, contributes to, rather than interrupts or controls play themes (Sandberg, 2002). Thus, the teacher constitutes a 'sensitive' participant and co-player (Fallon, 2014). Further, play guided by the teacher can subtly support the attainment of potential learning benefits, curricular outcomes, broad and specific, while preserving it as child-directed: '*mid-ground between direct instruction and playful learning, a way to design a strong curricular approach for learning that includes an optimal pedagogical approach*' (Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff, 2015:2).

Critically, the PCF must make clear how the transition from the *Aistear*-based four years, to the latter stages can uphold the principles of *Aistear* (2009) and build on its gains. According to the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, this is critical, not only to preserve the strengths of *Aistear* (2009) established in the junior half of primary school, but more so, to avoid a further unintended transition emerging between 2nd and 3rd class.

Transitions – An Overview

It is positive to see transitions between early years and post-primary education sectors being formally embraced in the DPCF, with a focus now on how best to support the child as he/she grows and his/her identity emerges and subsequently develops. In this section transitions from preschool to primary, and primary to post-primary, are discussed.

The key proposal in the DPCF involves extending the preschool curriculum of *Aistear* (2009) further into the early years of the primary school. Currently, the transition from a child-led play-based approach to learning to a predominantly more traditional classroom signifies a sizeable leap for children to make. This extension of *Aistear* (2009) is seen as a very welcome proposal as it strengthens the position of *Aistear* (2009) within the school sphere

and leads to more coherence between the settings of the early childcare and education and primary school, thus helping to ease the transition for children entering primary school.

The DPCF centralises relationship-building between preschools and primary schools which in turn, help to support children and their families at this point of transition (NCCA, 2020). The absence of the critical role of parents as partners in the whole process of transition is regrettable and should be reviewed in the PCF. It is imperative that relationship-building be established between preschools, primary schools, and parents, as a recognised key stakeholder in this process. In addition, other external professionals involved with the support of the educational and care needs of the child should be highlighted here.

It is important that key participants in a complex process such as transition, engage collaboratively in that process and consequently, the importance of relationships, support, mutual respect, and a shared vision are key elements to the success of that endeavour. There is a need for greater consistency with regards to the information that is shared, in terms of the transfer of documentation, and when and how this sharing will happen to support the child's progress throughout school.

Whilst there has been a very positive shift towards building more capacity for quality learning experiences in pre-schools through *Aistear (2009)* and *Síolta (2006)*, challenges remain with the multitude of qualifications in the Early Childhood sector (DCYA, 2018). A lack of training can adversely affect knowledge, practice, and values.

While there has been a yearly percentage increase in Level 8 qualifications since 2015-2016, the overall proportion of staff without formal childcare qualifications remains at 6% in 2017-2018 (DCYA, 2018). Thus, there is still some way to go, while ever closer alignment is realised with the stated governmental goal for early childhood of 'an appropriately qualified and valued workforce' (First 5, 2018:14). Practitioners self-report that their highest qualification did not prepare them very well, or at all, for working in ELC settings. This reflects a lack of confidence in the sector which impacts upon the extent to which its employees are viewed and may contribute to a lack of consistency in practices across ECCE settings. This may result in children's experiences of play and learning being shaped very differently across different early childhood settings. It can also indirectly affect the transition process as staff may not ultimately feel competent to support a child's transition from pre-school to Junior Infants.

There is due acknowledgement in the DPCF that children's rich and varied set of experiences with which they begin school, encompasses their time in early childhood settings and preschools (NCCA, 2020). This poses challenges for schools receiving children from a variety of early childhood settings, who may have encountered significantly different emphasis therein, effectively negating the possibility of a 'level playing field'. Whilst this may be beyond the scope of the NCCA, it is important to note the challenge it represents for transition to primary school.

Transition to Post-Primary School

In the ESRI Report for NCCA (Smyth et al., 2004), the transition from primary to post primary education has been recognised as a crucial stage in the schooling career of young people, as their experiences of the transition process can influence their subsequent academic and social development. Further, difficulties during the transfer from primary to post-primary school can contribute to later educational failure and to falling levels of achievement for some children.

The materials in the Education Passport contained within the DPCF represent a very positive development to address the needs of children transitioning to post-primary school. It comprises three main learning assessments completed by primary schools to assist with the evaluation of individual pupils at post-primary level. However, it could be asserted that the key learning competencies outlined in the DPCF are better aligned with the key principles inherent in the Junior Cycle Framework. The closer alignment of the curriculum in primary and post-primary schools is viewed as another positive step towards enabling children to make smooth transitions from primary to post-primary school, building on key competencies acquired by children in the primary school. It may, therefore, be useful to reflect upon the key contributory factors to a smooth transition within the PCF, as identified below.

The following were identified as key contributory factors to a smooth transition:

- Interventions before the student enters Post-Primary
- Interventions after the student starts Post-Primary
- First experience of a new curriculum
- Subject Choice in First Year

- Class/Ability grouping in First Year
- Learning Support in First Year
- Views of Parents (Smyth et al., 2004)

Transitions for Children with Additional Needs

Transition, particularly for children with additional needs, requires competent staff working in collaboration, and consistent policies between the agencies tasked with supporting the child which include the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) under the DCYA and the New Resource Allocation Model by the National Council for Special Education.

There are lower adult : child ratios in the early childhood setting and yet the child with SEN transitions to a bigger class, for a longer period of time during the day, and may have reduced access to an SNAs a result, transitions can be overwhelming for a Junior Infant child with SEN. SNAs need to be trained before the child joins the school and parents need to be involved in a transition process at least six months before the child transitions.

In terms of education and training, many primary teachers and early childhood practitioners have little or no training in meeting the needs of children with additional needs. For example, 73.9% of early childhood sector participants surveyed in 'Teach Me as I am Early Years Programme' (2018) had never undertaken professional development in autism. The varied profile of practitioners' qualifications and experiences emerging from recent research is a cause for concern in relation to the lack of certainty regarding all early childhood teachers' knowledge, practices, and values for ensuring the effective inclusion of children with diverse disabilities.

There is an acknowledgement of the fact that at post-primary level, all teachers hold responsibility for teaching students with SEN. Thus, there is an acknowledgment that all staff members must engage in appropriate CPD to develop school capacity in meeting the educational needs of all students (DES, 2017). Whole-school, comprehensive CPD is required, rather than a menu range of practices from completion of audit instruments and involvement with local professional networks to links to associated support networks. Moreover, there are many primary teachers who have yet to be trained in Special Needs and or attend CPD on Special Education. The failure of the PSC (1999) to address Special Education was evidenced by an absence of in-service on Special Education for mainstream

teachers. In-service on the PCF needs to address this gap in teachers' education and training.

Emerging priorities for children's learning

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Embed seven key competencies across children's learning outcomes from junior infants to sixth class.
- Focus on developing children's skills, knowledge, dispositions, values and attitudes. The Learning Outcomes and the Key Competencies are broad in nature to describe this wider understanding of learning.
- Have increased emphasis on some existing areas such as PE and SPHE (Wellbeing) and digital learning, and have new aspects such as Modern Foreign Languages, Technology, Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, and a broader Arts Education.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to emerging priorities for children's learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

The key competencies of the DPCF are strong and represent a balance of desirable attributes to be developed as the child progresses through primary school.

In this section, the following areas are addressed: communicating and using language; being a digital learner; the increased emphasis on PE and SPHE; Wellbeing and 'being creative'.

Some of the key competencies are discussed in relation to their addition or expansion. For example, some of the emphases discussed in section 1 under Global Citizenship Education and Scientific Education, could be achieved in a number of ways structurally in the framework, such as through the addition of 'being scientific' as a competency, or through

extending the competency of 'being mathematical' to 'being scientific and mathematical', given the clear consistency of pedagogical approaches within the disciplines.

Communicating and Using Language

The re-introduction of Modern Foreign Languages is welcomed as a means of developing language acquisition and skill in building on the successes of the approach of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019). It has been established that the early learning of modern foreign languages from pre-school holds multiple advantages for learners, from enriching their skills of socialisation, to developing their sense of language, and increasing motivation for learning another language (Roussinova and Garanova, 2019). To further reflect the plurilingual nature of the DPCF, using 'languages' or 'language(s)' rather than the singular 'language' in naming this competency and in reference to languages throughout, would appear to be more reflective of the curriculum. In addition, it might be appropriate to note listening and speaking within the attribute 'oracy', as this term can be misinterpreted as emphasising the expressive component only.

Being a Digital Learner

The second key competency identified, being a digital learner, is a significant indication of the recognition afforded by DPCF of emerging priorities and reflects the need to respond to changing needs and priorities. The publication of the Digital Strategy for Schools (DES, 2015), and through the provision of grants and excellent support provided by the PDST to support schools in this area demonstrates a proactive approach to responding to needs and priorities.

In response to the recent publication of the Inspectorate report in June 2020 (DES, 2020), the PCF should look to the example of schools where the purposeful integration of technology is ongoing. With consideration of the SAMR model (SAMR denotes Substitution, Augmentation, Redefinition and Redefinition), developed by Puentedura (2015), specific learning outcomes can be enhanced through higher-order learning experiences where ICT is included as a meaningful methodology. This pedagogical approach from the PSC (1999) where technology was presented as a methodology, rather than a curricular area, is still appropriate.

Fostering Wellbeing

'Fostering wellbeing' is conceptualised both as one of seven key competencies in addition to the representation of 'wellbeing' as a curriculum area in the DPCF. Given the broad and diverse nature of that which wellbeing encompasses, a definition of how wellbeing is interpreted within the new curriculum would be welcomed. While it is understood that it refers to mental, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing, the need is evident to develop areas such as physical education and physical activity, in addition to nutrition and health and substance misuse. The inclusion of these components can ensure their visibility, and subsequent development as targeted learning outcomes. This may serve the dual benefit of informing schools and those providing Initial Teacher Education of the parameters of wellbeing, for their respective learners. Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and its revision as a programme through close consultation with stakeholders also needs to be made visible in the PCF. Given the mandatory positioning of child protection within all education programmes catering for children under eighteen years, its position needs to be strengthened therein.

The additional time allocation for Social Personal Health Education is welcomed. However, it has been changed to become Social Personal Values Education, without a clear rationale for the change of focus. It is recommended that the structure of the PSC (1999), made visible by the strong foundation of knowledge, skills and attitudes, be retained to preserve the quintessential nature of SPHE, in order that such curriculum not be overlooked in order to meet the changing demands represented by various different initiatives and programmes offered to schools.

In the absence of the availability of related outcomes, which wellbeing might arguably constitute, a closer examination of the related listed attributes is warranted. 'Showing awareness of how to make good choices in relation to wellbeing' holds clear links with Social Personal and Health Education and yet is sufficiently open to being addressed by multiple means. Similarly, both 'acting responsibly and showing care towards self and others' and 'being able to assess risk and respond' have a clear and established curricular thrust. 'Being spiritual', however, needs to be clearly defined by the NCCA for the purposes of its clear articulation within the PCF.

Other attributes in this grouping, such as 'being self-aware and resilient' while laudable and necessary, are at risk of becoming less tangible in the absence of the provision of clear and achievable outcomes relating clearly to PE or SPHE curricular content. Similarly, 'being persistent and flexible in problem-solving' needs to connect more readily to the broader curriculum.

Given Ireland's last place in Europe in time allocation for physical education (European Union, 2013), and the findings of an ESRI and NCCA report, the DPCF statement proposing increased emphasis on some existing areas such as SPHE and PE is to be welcomed. The development of physical literacy and foundational movement skills needs to be targeted earlier than Stage 3, as research indicates Stage 1 and 2 are likely to be the most significant windows of opportunity to facilitate the development of key skill areas of agility, balance and coordination.

Defining learning under separate areas of physical education and physical activity in the PCF is required to enable clear development of the experiences and outcomes demanded to enable children to develop competence, confidence, and appreciation of movement. Once the specific learning outcomes for wellbeing are developed through named curricular areas, the promotion of positive attitudes to lifelong physical activity habits can be emphasised. Furthermore, integration of PE curricular content can then promote many other of the key competencies such as being creative, communicating and using language, learning to be a learner and fostering wellbeing.

Being Creative

Significant societal change, as that which is being experienced in Ireland, creates an urgency to offer children an education that will enable them to navigate their unknown futures. This sentiment is echoed in the DPCF and its implications for curriculum:

'Society, too, has changed and continues to change with growing expectations of a primary education. And so, we need to ensure that the curriculum can continue to provide children with relevant and engaging experiences as we look to the third decade and beyond in the twenty-first century' (NCCA, 2020:1).

Hicks (2003:26) strongly advocates for the 'sort of education that will promote creative exploration of future issues', and states that this 'must begin with the students themselves

and where they stand in relation to the future'. This creative, learner-centred mode is contingent on the atmosphere and curriculum in the educational context being conducive. Such a curriculum requires teachers who are open to, and skilled in, implementing it. It demands an over-arching philosophy of creativity so that children have the skill set to face the future, yet unknown.

Creative Thinking and Vision

In order to realise 'the strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish' committed to in the DPCF and in 'supporting them in realising their full potential as members of communities and society during childhood and into the future'(NCCA, 2020:5), it is useful to acknowledge and explore research on creativity.

Kampylis and Berki (2014:6) contend that:

'everyone has creative thinking skills and ideas, but children have more because they are not yet fully aware of rigid logic and convergent views. They are divergent, open, inventive, and playful, which are features of creativity'

Inclusion of the word creative within the PCF vision would be useful to assist in embedding this concept across the curriculum, while also recognising that 'creative moments in one's everyday life contribute to peoples' and society's wellbeing' (OECD, 2019:52).

Creative and critical thinking skills are often described as higher order as they are cognitively more demanding' than social and behavioural 'conative' skills (2019:53).The World Economic Forum (WEF) 'Future of Job Survey', 2016, highlighted critical thinking and creativity as two of the most important skills in the labour market in 2015. Furthermore, it forecasts that creativity will lead the rankings in 2022. While education should not be tailored to economics, it is worthy to note the emphasis that is being placed on the value of creativity, in an ever-changing world (OECD, 2019). The importance of skills such as 'creativity, originality and initiative, critical thinking, persuasion and negotiation', are judged as being 'more human', hence more difficult to replicate in a technology-led automated world (WEF, 2016 cited in OECD, 2019:49). Due consideration of these points is essential in designing curricula for children who will be citizens in a world which is technology-dominant.

Teaching Skills of Creativity

Although, creativity is traditionally aligned closely to Arts Education, in the OECD-commissioned report, *Fostering Students' Creativity and Critical Thinking Report (2019)*, this common perception was contested. According to Bamford (2017), the arts should not be the sole conduit to explore creativity within the school curriculum, while worthy of exploration as an entity in themselves. It was deemed crucial that a cross-curricular approach be employed for creativity and critical thinking skills to be taught and implemented effectively. Thus, this OECD report (2019) posits that creativity and critical thinking must be acquired and experienced as part of the learning within the subjects, rather than as a discrete class on creativity or critical thinking. Thus, in the development of the PCF, skills of creativity, their development, progression, and assessment must be linked to specific learning outcomes.

Changing how the curriculum is structured and presented

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Be broad and balanced in purpose and content.
- Be structured in five broad curriculum areas;
 - Language
 - Mathematics, Science and Technology Education
 - Wellbeing
 - Social and Environmental Education
 - Arts Education.

(In addition to the five areas above, the Patron's Programme is developed by a school's patron with the aim of contributing to the child's holistic development particularly from the religious and/or ethical perspective and in the process, underpins and supports the characteristic spirit of the school. These areas connect to the themes of *Aistear* and to the subject-based work in Junior Cycle.)

- Provide for an integrated learning experience, with curriculum areas in Stages 1 and 2 (junior Infants – second Class) and more subject-based learning in Stages 3 and 4 (third class – sixth class).
- Use broad learning outcomes to describe the expected learning and development for children.

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- Incorporate the new *Primary Language Curriculum / Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to changing how the curriculum is structured and presented. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

The structure and presentation of the curriculum will be discussed under the following subheadings: Principles; The Broadening of Arts Education, and Children as Citizens. Each area seeks closer alignment with the DPCF with existing policy documentation. Future iterations of the PCF should also align targeted learning outcomes with the broad learning outcomes associated with key competencies, such as ‘being an active citizen’.

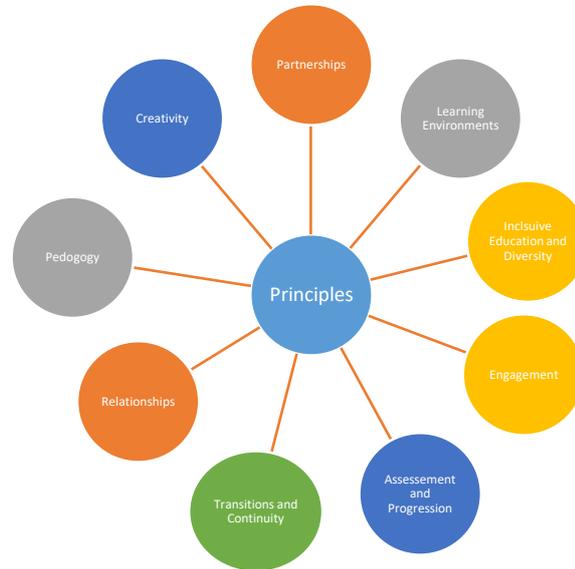
Principles

Boden defines creativity as a person's ‘ability to come up with new ideas that are surprising yet intelligible, and also valuable in some way’ (2001:95). The importance of creativity is now widely recognised as a key component of education and must therefore, find foothold in the principles of the PCF. Sternberg (2012:4) advocates:

‘for creative thinking to deepen and extend learning, rather than be an enjoyable but superficial activity, it must be grounded in understanding of the content being investigated. It is vital that learners have sufficient understanding of the material with which they are being asked to be creative. Creative practice needs to complement diligent and deliberate practice that develops foundational skills – not be a substitute for it’

Further to the suggested inclusion of creativity within the vision within DPCF, informed and supported by research outlined in this document, it is recommended that creativity also be named as one of the over-arching principles of the curriculum (Fig. 1). Children’s ability to be creative can be nurtured through the lens of Little ‘c’ creativity, defined as everyday displays of creativity through problem-solving across all subject areas (Csikszentmihalyi 1998, cited in Craft, 2002).

Fig 1. Adapted Slide to reflect Creativity as a core Principle



Introduction of a Broader Arts Education

In this section, consideration is given to the value of the arts for their own sake, followed by the need for discrete learning opportunities for each art form on the curriculum, and resourcing and CPD in Arts Education for schools.

Valuing Arts Education for Arts Education's sake, rather than as a conduit for integration is of paramount importance for the overall development of the child. The welcome inclusion of dance and film in the DPCF as means of embodied learning are noted.

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge the role of the arts in education as life-enhancing in a broader sense, and to emphasise the benefits of participation therein to the whole person. Irish research tells us that where individual artistic expression is valued, self-esteem is enhanced, spontaneity and risk-taking are encouraged and difference is celebrated (DES:1999).

Secondly, each subject area within Arts Education has its own skills, knowledge and concepts which need discrete introduction, prior to any efforts at meaningful cross-curricular integration. A solid foundation in discrete arts subjects can also greatly support children in choosing to continue to study visual art education, music, film, or drama at senior cycles. Bamford (2017:3) asserts that: '*Education in the arts would mean dedicated curriculum time is afforded to music, visual arts, drama, dance and digital media*'.

Thirdly, stages in artistic development cannot be bypassed, but rather be more quickly succeeded. Due to the significantly reduced time available for Arts Education, it would be regrettable if the performance and product strengths of film, dance, and digital media were substituted for drama education over a school term, for example, as these are often performance and product-focused.

Arts Education needs to be firmly embedded in the primary curriculum, to ensure that its discrete disciplines are not viewed as elitist or for those perceived to be most talented in the particular subject areas represented. A fully rounded, holistic Arts Education, underpinned by specific terminology in the discrete disciplines, skills and concepts is required. Equal emphases on 'creating and making', 'appreciating' and 'performing' across dance, drama and film could afford rich integration opportunities, supported by digital media. It is imperative that these shared emphases be captured across associated learning outcomes in the PCF. Ongoing CPD will, therefore, be necessary to support teachers engaging with the PCF, to instil confidence to facilitate the exploration of skills, competencies, and elements across Arts Education, particularly in its new guise.

Opportunities for Training and Education for Teachers in Arts Education

Critical periods of transition, such as that between 2nd and 3rd classes in correspondence with the staged curricular structure offered by the DPCF need to be supported by teachers who are confident and skilled across the newly revised arts education components, to ensure that high quality teaching and learning is being facilitated at all levels, and across a broad range of strands, as in the PSC. Findings from 'An Evaluation of Curriculum Implementation in Primary Schools', highlighted the need for greater rigour in whole-school planning where more than half of teachers were deemed not to be planning adequately for their pupils' skills or concept development in the area of Visual Arts (DES, 2005:43).

The creative ability of children is most likely to be developed in an environment in which the teacher's creative capacities are fully engaged (NACCEE, 1999). Craft (2005) emphasises the importance of teachers' ability to work as co-creators with children, employing strategies such as 'creative thinking aloud' or through demonstrating troubleshooting to children. To support teachers in this way demands the provision of professional opportunities to explore, follow and develop their own artistic skill and ability. Moreover, the shared experience of 'emotional discomfort' for the adult and child engaged in artmaking is critical to enhancing the child's agency in the creative process. It follows that within any CPD programme for in-service teachers, dedicated time be afforded to teachers' process-based experiential arts learning therein. This is considered by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education as critical to supporting the developing confident and agentic professional teacher.

In the absence of support to develop teachers' own artistic abilities, a lack of confidence can result in teachers and in children. It can also result in a diminished understanding of 'reading the world' aesthetically, and how that can be achieved. Without support for teachers' own artistic development, the idea can be compounded that one has to be good at art or playing music in order to be creative. Clearly, this mindset is detrimental to flourishing both in the creative arts, and in terms of creativity, more generally. It has been suggested that in the absence of support and CPD, many teachers lack the confidence to facilitate the style of learning Arts Education promotes. Ultimately, *'the importance of teachers' pedagogical knowledge of and confidence in using, teaching and learning, cultivates learners who can think more creatively and critically'* (OECD, 2019:162).

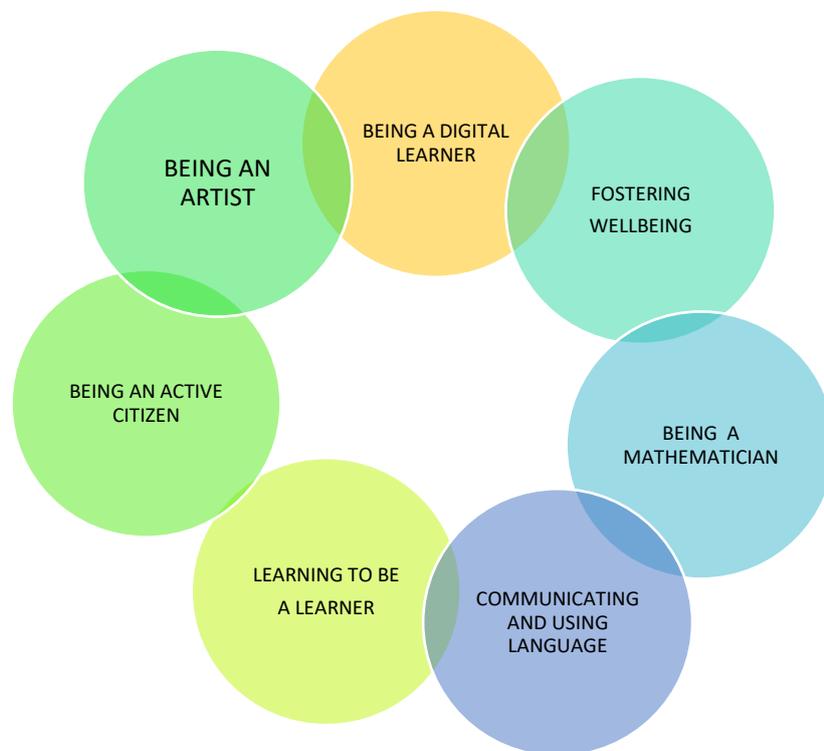
Being an Artist as Competency

The introduction to the PSC (1999b:52) outlines the nature of arts education in both a succinct and illuminating fashion:

'Arts education... affords them[children] the opportunity to respond as viewers, listeners or readers to the expressive creativity of the artist, the composer, the writer, and the performer. It involves both the cognitive and affective domains and deals with a dimension of experience that contributes uniquely to the child's conceptual development and to the expansion and refinement of their view of the world'.

By including 'being an artist' as a key competency, a strong message can be sent about the value of each individual's artistic potential and ability to create art. Critically, it places the onus on artistic development firmly within the arts in curriculum, while reinforcing the concept of 'being creative' as a broader trait with application across all disciplines and in varied skill-sets. To this end, the proposed principle of 'being creative' is separated from the competency of 'being an artist' which highlights the acclaimed but distinct value of each. Moreover, as a consequence of this distinction it could be argued that 'being creative' could be added as a Key Competency in addition to 'Being an artist'.

Fig 2 Adapted figure to reflect inclusion of Being an Artist amongst the Key Competencies



Children as Citizens

In terms of the key competency of 'being an active citizen', a number of factors need to be considered. GCE is already a cross-curricular aspect of the primary classroom. In that sense, it locates itself within standard education policy developed by the Department of Education and Skills and other related departments. However, there is a disconnect between the existing policy climate and the DPCF, which makes no overt reference to the

significance of GCE in this context. For the PCF, with reference to GCE, congruence will with other policy documents be will important, such as that stipulated in Irish Aid policy, as outlined below.

There is clearly much complexity associated with the conceptualisation and implementation of GCE, stemming from its diverse and pluralistic nature (Bryan & Bracken, 2011). The richness and diversity of the existing policy climate is not yet reflected, and it will be important for this to be addressed in the PCF. The DPCF aims for teachers to become 'committed, skilful and agentic professionals (NCCA, 2020:5).

Within the PCF, key messages from recent policy documents merit reflection. These include 'developing capacity to make choices in favour of a sustainable future', the thrust of the *National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development in Ireland 2014-2020* (DES, 2014), highlighting the importance of the curriculum in providing primary school pupils with the knowledge and skills that will motivate them to behave more sustainably. It is essential that teachers are supported to develop the necessary confidence and competence to deliver this aspect of curriculum in a meaningful way, to address the attribute.

In terms of recent Irish Aid publications, there is an emphasis on the development of stronger public engagement and development education around climate action through *A Better World: Ireland's Policy for International Development (2019)*, and also on the global dimension, with calls for increased coherence between development education and 'relevant criteria and guidelines for teacher learning' (Irish Aid, 2016: 30). The DPCF should also endeavour to reflect the fruits of the extensive consultation undertaken by the Teaching Council *Céim: Standards for Initial Teacher Education, including School Placement*, where global social justice issues were foregrounded.

Both the *Intercultural Education Strategy* (DES, 2010); and the *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (NCCA, 2005) outline the value of intercultural education in raising children's awareness of other cultures, affirming the need for schools to respect, appreciate and 'celebrate' diversity and the equality of access to intercultural education. The *Intercultural Education Guidelines* (NCCA, 2005) conceptualises ICE by framing it within a Human Rights perspective. Thus, it affords ICE the responsibility to support children in identifying and learning to challenge, racial prejudice and unfair discrimination in their lives. There is

an opportunity in the structure of the PCF under 'being an active citizen' to mirror this framing with targeted outcomes serving the attribute, 'Developing an understanding and acting on the rights and responsibilities of myself and others'.

Given the layered nature of citizenship, it is therefore proposed that the overall competency in the DCPF be changed to read, 'being an active global citizen'. This would have the benefit of aligning with existing policy documentation, as previously outlined, and policy documentation at the wider European level. This represents a small but crucial change proposed to send a clear message to teachers about the importance of infusing the global dimension into teaching and learning in the primary classroom.

Supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

- Promote high quality teaching, learning and assessment.
- Conceptualise assessment as an essential and critical part of teaching and learning.
- Highlight the importance of teachers' professional judgement in supporting progression in children's learning.
- Encourage teachers to make meaningful connections with children's interests and experiences.
- Recognise the significance of quality relationships and their impact on children's learning.
- Recognise the role and influence of parents and families in children's education.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to supporting a variety of pedagogical approaches and strategies with assessment central to teaching and learning. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

This section will examine some key questions in relation to assessment practices and explore diversity and inclusion as means by which the role of parental support and teachers' professional practice and judgment must be supported to achieve the goals outlined in the DPCF.

Assessment

Assessment is conceptualised as a principle of the DPCF and the associated sub-headings included under assessment reflect the prioritisation of overarching messages: 'Assessment exists upon a continuum', 'Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning' and 'Assessment provides information for various stakeholders'. Endorsement of the key messages within *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* (NCCA, 2007) indicates the welcome intention of building upon the established body of work on assessment to date within the Irish context. It corroborates a commendable view of assessment as a collaborative exercise with, and primarily for, its immediate stakeholders, namely the children and families involved, and their teachers.

The recognition of time as a necessary resource to support teacher collaboration in assessment is welcomed, along with the acknowledgement of the need for collaboration as 'especially relevant when working with learning outcomes, requiring a breadth of evidence and shared professional judgements to assess and report on progress and achievement (NCCA, 2020:25). The success of the supporting assessment materials available to view as video files collated by the NCCA since 2007 should be noted, with a recommendation to examine how the application of such materials might enhance teacher confidence by building upon the existing knowledge and skill base. However, further detail is sought to clarify the overall conceptualisation of assessment in the DPCF, prior to the provision of further guidance in terms of specifications produced for each curriculum area.

The three assessment types ('Intuitive assessment'; 'Planned interactions'; 'Assessment events') are described as 'complementary and necessary to gain a comprehensive picture

of a child's progress and achievement' (NCCA, 2020: 23). However, the role of the child in assessment in the DPCF remains unclear, with an absence of emphasis on the realisation of his/ her potential as agentic learner through and from assessment processes. Hence, prior to the development of any further assessment materials, it is suggested that an overarching statement be added to the PCF about the purpose and nature of assessment and the role of the child therein.

Supporting Assessment with Digital Tools

The Inspectorate Report recommended that 'schools should continue to work to make digital technologies an integrated feature of teaching, learning and assessment in all classrooms' (DES, 2020: 36). The learning outcomes developed could support this finding by the provision of online illustrations of effective assessment using digital tools such as portfolios which include pupil-created content. Clear digital outcomes for integrated projects and curricular areas should be included to both support assessment and achieve the redefinition of learning by tasking children with creating new content. In this active way, pupils will develop their digital skills and knowledge as constructors rather than consumers, using devices purely as a research and information tool.

The Inspectorate Report recommendations will only be realised if the PCF names clear outcomes for each discipline and learning stage across the curriculum. The problem-solving and creativity opportunities afforded by technology should not be confined to STEM or digital media. The continued investment in infrastructure, clear exemplars of practice across a variety of platforms, and customised school CPD opportunities will be essential to deliver these planned technology-supported learning experiences. The work undertaken to support the implementation of the Primary Language Curriculum (2019) is noteworthy. This extends to the provision of *The Primary Language Toolkit- Curriculum Online*, supplemented by the range and quality of videos and support materials, both under development and readily available to teachers.

Teaching in a changing society

Societal changes since the introduction of the PSC have triggered a major review and significant overhaul of teacher education. Current policy and practice have developed to encapsulate the changes in society with a view to better understanding the issues and

challenges associated with diversity and teaching for inclusion. Diversity and Inclusive/Special Education are considered here, vis a vis the shared role of the parent and teacher in both affirming the child's identity and in supporting the child within the school system through curriculum.

Diversity and Disability and its representation in Education Spheres

A theme arising in several places in the DCPF is that of 'diversity'. However, the increased diversity that is mentioned on the second page of the document, is only referenced in relation to parental choice of school types. The document states:

'...mirroring society, primary school classrooms are more dynamic and busy places in which teachers support and respond to a greater diversity of learning, helping each to grow and develop. The diversity is evident in the rich kaleidoscope of ages, competencies, cultures, and ethnicities' (NCCA, 2020:3). Unfortunately, the DCPF does not go far enough in terms of affirming the ethnic identity of the child. We would, therefore, suggest that 'ethnicity' should be named here in this section, to avoid a potentially problematic 'colour blind' approach to policy.

Diversity is described in terms of Special Educational Needs (SEN), social class, race, ethnicity, gender, language, ability, religion and so forth, and it is mainly related to the understanding of difference and the development of an informed and ethical professional response to diverse educational needs. Evidence points to a particular focus on developing empathy and on encouraging democratic schools and classrooms where learners are respected and engaged with as individuals in a world where it is indeed 'normal to be different' (EADSNE, 2012:12, cited in NCSE, Research Report No.26, 2019).

There is an important distinction to be made in this context. While teachers are working in primary classrooms with high levels of ethnic diversity and children with a range of disabilities, such diversity is not mirrored in the demographics of the teaching population. An awareness of this position within Initial Teacher Education has resulted in laying emphasis on intercultural and special education and responsive pedagogy within the Froebel Department programmes. Mindful of the evidence which reveals that student teachers tend to be overwhelmingly white, female, settled, Catholic and middle-class, student teachers' exposure to diversity tends to be very limited (Leavy, 2005; Keane & Heinz, 2016).

Disability is overwhelmingly underrepresented in the teaching population (Keane et al., 2018). In 2014, 95.8–96.2% of undergraduate primary teaching entrants claimed only Irish nationality and further 2.8–3.5% of undergraduate primary student teachers claimed Irish nationality and a secondary non-Irish nationality (Heinz and Keane, 2018: 9). This is very revealing, showing an overwhelming majority (approximately 99% at upper level of the data) identifying as ‘White Irish’ based on the census categorisations. In relation to ethnic diversity, it would be more appropriate to use terminology relating to intercultural education, or culturally responsive pedagogy, in this context. Conflating culturally related teaching with inclusive education can dilute the discrete differences between the two disciplines. While it is obviously important to address the idea of making teaching and learning accessible for all, in the context of ethnic diversity, and in particular, anti-racism, once positioned between an ‘umbrella’ term of inclusive education, it creates a disconnect between theory and enactment. Furthermore, the use of the word ‘celebrates’, in this context within the DPCF, is considered quite reductive, and can be replaced by ‘affirms’ or ‘respects’ diversity, in this instance:

Inclusive education and Special Education: *‘Inclusive education provides for equity of opportunity and participation in children’s learning. Inclusive education celebrates diversity and responds to the uniqueness of every child’* (NCCA, 2020:6).

Framing Inclusive Education/ Special Education

The theoretical and conceptual debates around the term Inclusive Education continue to be played out in terms of varied understandings of what inclusion, inclusive education and inclusive pedagogy means and implies in terms of policy and practice. There is considerable debate about the definition of the term inclusion. It can be taken to comprise concepts such as access, quality, equity, plurality, diversity, social justice, democracy, equal opportunity of involvement, and to some extent of outcome (Hick et al., 2019). There are also variations in terms of the extent to which inclusion is a term related specifically to special educational needs and disability, or, is understood more broadly in terms of how society considers and relates to difference in general (Hick et al., 2019). Thus, it is recommended that the language of inclusive education be defined and the parameters of what is included in these terms be more clearly delineated in the DPCF. Nonetheless, it is understood that the caveat in identifying these parameters is the danger of omitting a particular ‘needs grouping’.

There is a risk that the move away from the labelling and withdrawal of students with special needs coupled with the move towards approaches such as team teaching and Universal

Design for Learning means that the needs of children with SEN are becoming subsumed under the heading of 'inclusive education for all' and subsequently, at risk of becoming lost in the system. It can be viewed as extremely reductionist in its approach and does not take account of 'goodness of fit', as one size cannot fit all. For instance, some children flourish when withdrawn from the classroom as it offers a break away from the business of the classroom and can offer children with special educational needs the right to be afforded an education which is in addition to that in the classroom. Careful consideration should be made, therefore, in future iterations of the PCF as to the framing and labelling of particular groupings within society, through which the individual child is represented.

Building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to the challenges and changing needs and priorities.

The 1999 curriculum contributed to many successes including:

- Enhanced enjoyment of learning for children.
- Increased use of active methodologies for teaching and learning.
- Improved attainment levels in reading, mathematics and science as evidenced in national and international assessments.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework proposes that the redeveloped curriculum will:

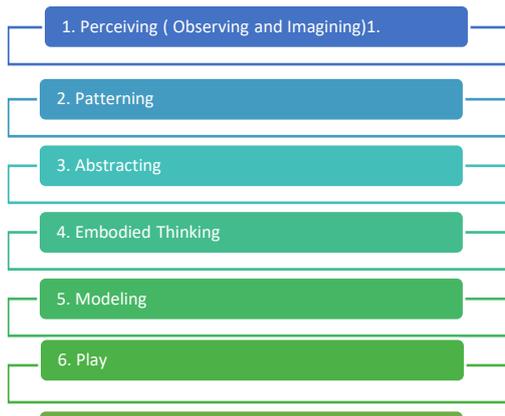
- Address curriculum overload at primary level.
- Take stock of strategies, initiatives and programmes and clarify priorities for children's learning.
- Link with *Aistear* and *the Framework for Junior Cycle*.

The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* outlines important messages in relation to building on the successes and strengths of the 1999 curriculum while recognising and responding to challenges and changing needs and priorities. Please give your overall feedback in relation to this key message.

The successes of the PSC include its principles, its spiral nature, and its child-centred focus, and its emphasis on holistic education, which are referenced throughout this response document. Further, the emphasis laid on integration and the structures that support it represent a strength of it. The series of research papers commissioned by the NCCA to foreground the writing of *Aistear* (2009), and subsequently the language paper series, which informed the process of creating the Primary Language Curriculum (2015; 2019), represent both a strength and a commitment to learning from best practice internationally, and adapting it to suit the Irish context.

The strength of the PSC in terms of its focus on the importance of a holistic education are particularly noteworthy. Root-Bernsteins (2001:316) states that ‘the purpose of education should be understanding rather than simply knowing: its focus should be the active process of learning and creating rather than the passive acquisition of facts.’ These values reflect those espoused in the PSC and are worthy of further development in the PCF, to ensure that children are provided with opportunities to explore creatively, through play and active learning, across all subject areas. Such opportunities should be evident across both curriculum structures and across all stages of primary education, up to 6th Class. Understanding and implementation of the Transdisciplinary Thinking Skills (see Fig.1 below) required to support creativity in the future ‘will therefore depend upon our ability to create synthetic understanding by integrating ways of knowing’ (Root-Bernsteins, 2001:314).

Fig. 1 Transdisciplinary Thinking Skills



Henriksen (2018:1) proposes educational provision that encompasses a ‘constellation of interconnected ideas for thinking, learning and teaching in the twenty-first century’

Developed from Root- Bernsteins' *Thirteen Thinking Skills* into *Transdisciplinary Thinking Skills*, this set of seven domains constitute core cognitive skills utilised without boundaries by creative practitioners, across all subject areas.

Concluding Statement

The Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education welcomes the DPCF and has responded to it under the headings provided. Recommendations have been made in terms of the overall emphasis on play throughout the school, and on strengthening the position of integration and Global Citizenship Education. Particular points have been made regarding new curricular structures, such as the broadening of Arts Education and the consideration of creativity and wellbeing as leading aspects. The express need for the Continuing Professional Development teachers will require to support them in their implementation of the revised curriculum has been interlaced throughout the document.

The Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood welcomes the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework and to reiterate its support for the process, and willingness to offer advice and support hereafter, as appropriate.

Data Protection

The NCCA fully respects your right to privacy. Any personal information which you volunteer to the NCCA will be treated with the highest standards of security and confidentiality, strictly in accordance with the Data Protection Acts. If you require further information related to data protection please visit www.ncca.ie/en/privacy-statement or you can contact the NCCA's Data Protection Officer at dpo@ncca.ie.

Thank you for your submission.

Please email your submission to PCRRsubmissions@ncca.ie

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