

A new steer!

Time to change direction?

Radio Conversation ... Newfoundland, October 1995

Americans: *Please divert your course 15 degrees to the North to avoid collision.*

Canadians: *Recommend you divert YOUR course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.*

Americans: *This is the captain of a US Navy Ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.*

Canadians: *No, I say again...You divert YOUR course.*

Americans: *THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS ENTERPRISE, WE ARE A LARGE WARSHIP OF THE US NAVY, DIVERT YOUR COURSE...NOW!!!!*

Canadians: *This is a lighthouse. Your call.*

This genuine transcript between a US naval ship and Canadian authorities makes you think about how easy it is sometimes to believe that others have to change their 'direction' to fit in to your plan or way of thinking. In a similar way, often when we talk about inclusion, the focus is on how the student with special educational needs has to change to fit in to mainstream education. Like the naval ship, maybe it's time to adopt a new course, a more accommodating and flexible one, in an attempt to meet the diverse needs of students at junior cycle....

The NCCA is taking a new steer by looking at ways that curriculum and assessment can best meet the needs of students with special educational needs. In particular, we are focusing on those students who, even with the support of teachers using the most sophisticated approaches to differentiation, would never access the mainstream junior cycle curriculum.

To be clear, we are talking about a very small number of students who have very specific and particular learning needs. These are students within the range of general learning disabilities and their priority learning needs are focused on personal, social and vocational skills. They require opportunities that explicitly develop these skills, which will prepare them for adult living and lifelong learning.

While recognising that all young people in junior cycle can display different



degrees of maturity and rates of progress, preparation for adult living often occurs implicitly for them. For the students in question however, this may not be the case.

With this in mind, the NCCA is exploring the development of a junior cycle curriculum framework that would encompass the learning that is most important, relevant and beneficial to the students in question. Learning at junior cycle is currently supported by a single qualification – the Junior Certificate, which is at level three on the National Framework of Qualifications. However, some students can't access this qualification even though they are in junior cycle. Giving students access to a national qualification is a key feature of the proposed curriculum framework. Thinking in this area needs to take into account other developments in the area of qualifications, such as the FETAC awards at Levels 1 and 2.

A key feature of frameworks is that they are a support for planning, for local development and for ensuring that, where local or school-based development occurs, there are some consistent elements to support quality and equity. The framework would allow schools the flexibility and autonomy to tailor and develop learning programmes in this context.





New frameworks are like climbing a mountain - the larger view encompasses rather than rejects the earlier more restricted view.

Albert Einstein



To date, work on the framework has been developmental in nature and informed by direct engagement with schools where these students are enrolled. Work is underway with a group of schools and teachers to generate a range of sample learning programmes that will exemplify the framework in use. It is envisaged that the next phase of this work will include the voices of the students in question and their parents.

For further details check out the  **Inclusion** page on the NCCA website. Keep an eye on  **info@ncca** for more updates on the framework.