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TOWARDS A NEW LANGUAGE CURRICULUM FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Audit of language objectives in the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) and language goals in *Aistear* (2009)

For information



An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
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1. Context

A number of developments provide the context for the new primary Language Curriculum. The primary curriculum reviews (NCCA, 2005a, 2008); the *English Curriculum: Additional Support Material* (NCCA, 2005b); and more recently the work to address curriculum overload (NCCA, 2010); and the re-presentation of curriculum content objectives; have highlighted a number of recommendations for change, both in the curriculum and in the learning experiences of children and young people. Taking the spotlight from the classroom back to the curriculum documents, this report presents findings from audits of objectives in the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) for individual subjects, English, Gaeilge, Drama and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). An audit of the place of language across subjects in the 1999 curriculum and an audit of the learning goals in *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) are also included. The audits are intended to highlight key points for the development of learning outcomes in the new language curriculum, towards ...*ensuring that the curriculum is presented in clear learning outcomes and supported by examples of students' learning so as to enable teachers to use assessment to inform their teaching* (DES, 2011a, p. 8).

The *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) when launched was described as evolutionary rather than revolutionary as it was founded on its predecessor *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (DE, 1971) and was developed through widespread engagement with the partners in education. The scale of the task to develop the whole curriculum at the same time, and the challenge to integrate and connect the components of it was significant. It was noted that the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) was innovative and was *built on a framework that emphasised the role of language in all aspects of literacy and sought to capitalise on similarities across the language modes* (Shiel et al, 2012, p. 34). Key among the strengths of the 1999 *Language Curriculum* is the stronger emphasis placed on oral language than in its predecessor. For the first time, oral language was viewed in its' own right, as well as being important for children's development in reading and writing.

Following from earlier reviews of the curriculum in classrooms (NCCA, 2005a, 2008) which addressed questions about the effectiveness of the curriculum and the extent to which it enables teachers to support children in their learning, these audits are a type of internal analysis of curriculum objectives and as such, provide an interesting lens through which to revisit issues and challenges outlined in the reviews and in previous studies of the curriculum in classrooms.

1.1 Primary Curriculum Reviews

The structure of the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999) was a key challenge reported by teachers in the *Primary Curriculum Review* (NCCA, 2005a). In response, the NCCA developed the *English Curriculum: Additional support material* (NCCA, 2005b). It represents the content of the curriculum by replacing the strands with the strand units. The strands became *oral language*, *reading* and *writing*. However, the size or physical face of the curriculum was again reported by teachers as a key impediment to curriculum implementation (NCCA, 2008) and in subsequent engagement with schools to address the issue of curriculum overload.

In the second phase of the review, teachers reported on their experience with *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999). Findings showed that children responded well to the communicative approach, especially in the infant classes. There was a strong emphasis on the children singing songs, reciting poetry and playing language games. However, while these are valid methods of teaching new vocabulary they do not require language production and therefore are not developing fluency in the language. The increased use of oral language, both formally during Gaeilge lessons and informally throughout the school day, the increased enjoyment of and engagement in ranganna Gaeilge and the fostering of a sense of pride in and love for, their language, culture, heritage and even community (in the case of students in the Gaeltacht areas) were identified as the key influences of the curriculum on children's learning. An issue which was reported to be causing difficulty for teachers was that of encouraging accuracy without discouraging fluency. Teachers believed that at times too much emphasis was placed on communication rather than form (which would in turn have a negative effect on written work). The cuspóirí (objectives) of *léitheoireacht* (reading) and *scríbhneoireacht* (writing) were considered too broad and many teachers reported difficulties with teaching two different phonetic codes.

Similar to the findings of the review of the English Curriculum (NCCA, 2005a), the writing process was under-used by many teachers.

To respond to challenges identified in the reviews, the NCCA initiated and began to work with school networks on a range of initiatives concerning assessment, language progression, curriculum overload and *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009).

1.2 Primary school networks

To begin to address the issue of curriculum overload the NCCA worked with networks of primary schools to re-present the content objectives of the curriculum for English, Gaeilge, Maths, Science, and Physical Education¹. During 2009-2010 teachers used and engaged with these re-presented materials and provided feedback to the NCCA on their experiences. The structure adopted for the re-presentation sought to enhance the clarity and navigability of the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999). This structure provides teachers with practical support for planning in English and raises teachers' awareness of points of overlap in content objectives across class levels.

This re-presentation was challenging. Some of the key challenges involved:

- finding a new structure to re-present all 428 content objectives, having removed the strand unit structure
- selecting meaningful terminology to 'categorise' and 'group' such a large volume of content objectives
- identifying listening skills and speaking skills which were grouped together under the *oral language* strand.

Teachers and principals who engaged with drafts of the re-presented curriculum objectives were positive in their response. Teachers found them useful aids for

¹ The curriculum content objectives were re-presented, in order to make the content of the curriculum books more accessible and user-friendly. The re-presented materials are available here:

http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary_School_Curriculum/PSN_Curriculum_Overload/Re-presentation_of_the_PSC/Re-presented_PSC.html

planning and for thinking about progression in children's learning. The re-presented content objectives have also been a stimulus for dialogue with teachers about the curriculum. It gave the teachers and principals involved the opportunity to highlight the positive features of the curriculum, its omissions and its limits. At the outset, some teachers commented negatively on the language of the objectives in the curriculum, noting that they found the curriculum lacking specifics and very unclear.

A number of the findings from this work are of particular relevance to the development of the new language curriculum. Some of the key findings were as follows:

- a clear **lack of progression** was identified in objectives, for example:
 - Infant classes: *(the child should be enabled to)... build up a sight vocabulary of common words from personal experience, from experience of environmental print and from books read.*
 - First and second classes: *(the child should be enabled to)...continue to build a sight vocabulary of common words from books read and from personal experience.*
- there was an explicit **lack of continuity and progression** in instances where a particular objective was introduced in junior classes, did not appear in the middle classes, but was included again in senior classes, for example:
 - Infant classes: *(the child should be enabled to)...learn about the basic terminology and conventions of books.*
 - Fifth and sixth classes: *(the child should be enabled to)...know the structure and terminology of books.*

There are no related outcomes in first and second class or third and fourth class.

- some objectives across class levels were similar but not identical, in that **different terminology** was used, but the intent of the objective was the same, for example:
 - Third and fourth classes: *(the child should be enabled to)...continue to develop a range of comprehension strategies to deal with narrative, expository and representational reading material.*
 - Fifth and sixth classes: *(the child should be enabled to)...use comprehension skills such as analysing, confirming, evaluating, synthesising and correlating to aid deduction, problem solving and prediction.*

- some objectives were not actually an objective in the true sense, but were more an **input or throughput**, e.g. *(the child should be enabled to)...experience a classroom environment that encourages writing.*
- 36% of the teachers/principals involved in the initiative to respond to curriculum overload by re-presenting the curriculum felt there were **gaps in the *English Curriculum*** (DES, 1999). Some teachers noted omissions concerning reading fluency, phonics, reading comprehension and word identification.

The work of the primary school network to re-present *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999) highlighted similar issues. Teachers reported that within the curriculum there were areas where progression in a content objective was not clear from infant classes to sixth class and where gaps existed between strands. For example, for third and fourth classes in English-medium schools, although simple dramas were a feature of both *speaking* and *listening*, they were not mentioned in the strands of *reading* and *writing*, as might be expected in an integrated approach. The inclusion of objectives related to developing an understanding of grammar in only the *labhairt* (*speaking*) strand for all classes except fifth and sixth classes in Irish-medium schools is another example.

The wording of some of the objectives means that they are more similar to teaching principles than content objectives. For example:

Scríbhneoireacht 1.3 *aischothú dearfach a fháil ar obair phearsanta*
(*receive positive feedback for personal work*)

Labhairt 2.1 *éisteacht leis an nGaeilge á labhairt go fíorchumarsáideach ar na hócáidí céanna gach lá chun nathanna cainte agus foirmlí teanga a dhaingniú*
(*listen to Irish spoken in a communicative manner at the same time each day to consolidate common sayings and language formula*)

The development of the online curriculum planning tool, with its searchable database of content objectives, was a direct response to teachers' reports of issues of access to the curriculum and planning for learning. However, it was noted that teachers' comments about the sheer volume of content, the unsuitability of some of the language used in the curriculum and the ambiguous nature of progression could not be addressed by re-presentation alone.

1.3 Current work

In recent years there have been a number of additional developments that relate specifically to the new language curriculum. These include:

- The desktop study *Effective Language Teaching: A Synthesis of Research* (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011) which synthesised **research in the area of second language teaching and learning with a focus on classroom. The research identified practices** that are considered effective for second language learners in contexts similar to primary schools in Ireland. The report also includes additional general principles for effective language teaching drawn from descriptive qualitative research.
- The **comparative analysis of language curricula**² (2011) for children from 3 years old to the end of compulsory education, gathered information from 11 jurisdictions on priorities for language teaching and learning, the structure of the curriculum, the articulation of targets, expectations, outcomes and/or standards, and assessment. This information was presented in an online database to facilitate access to and navigation of key findings.
- **Three research reports** commissioned by the NCCA, were launched in May 2012 to inform the new language curriculum for primary schools, beginning with infant classes.
 - *Oral Language in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-8 years)*
Drs. Gerry Shiel et al. (2012)
 - *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-8 years)*
Drs. Eithne Kennedy et al. (2012)
 - *Towards an Integrated Language Curriculum in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-12 years)*
Dr. Pádraig Ó Duibhir and Prof. Jim Cummins (2012)
- The report on **priorities for primary education** (NCCA, 2012) gathered the views of 960 respondents (75% teachers and 25% parents) on what matters most in the primary developments. The primary priorities initiative will gather further input and engagement on the shape of the primary curriculum and will inform the primary developments.

The development of the new primary Language Curriculum is a priority area of work in Council's current strategic plan. The national strategy for literacy and numeracy, *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (DES, 2011a) calls on the NCCA to develop a new language curriculum which defines clear learning outcomes, provides samples of student work to illustrate expected standard and, in this way, supports

² To access and use searchable database of language curricula:
www.nccalanguagecurricula.ie Username: comparelang Password: comparelang

teacher judgement. This audit is a key step in developing learning outcomes for the new language curriculum.

2. English Curriculum audit

The purpose of this audit is to review the content objectives of the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999) and identify the extent to which the content objectives can inform the development of outcomes in the new language curriculum.

2.1 The auditing process

This audit began by asking to what extent, and to what effects, the content objectives in the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999) could inform the development of learning outcomes in the new language curriculum. At the outset, some re-structuring of content objectives was necessary. This work involved retaining the strands (*oral language, reading and writing*), revising the strand units, and renaming these as general outcomes. The general outcomes described the child's learning in broad terms and were used to organise the content objectives. The general outcomes for all strands were informed by the broad objectives of the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999) and the groupings used in the curriculum re-presentation work³. The general outcomes were set out in a sequence that sought to promote clarity in the child's development and they apply to all four class levels. The general outcomes used for the purpose of this audit are set out in Tables 1 – 3 below.

Using the definition of a learning outcome it was possible to identify the extent to which the content objectives met the criteria of a learning outcome. Learning outcomes are defined as the knowledge, skills and attitudes that children are expected to demonstrate on completion of a period of learning. Teacher-focused objectives were deleted, objectives which contained the same learning were collapsed together and ambiguous objectives were reworded so they could be termed specific learning outcomes. The content objectives/specific learning outcomes were also set against current research to identify gaps since the development of the curriculum in 1999. The *English Curriculum audit* is included as Appendix A.

³ Available at:
http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Early_Childhood_and_Primary_Education/Primary_School_Curriculum/PSN_Curriculum_Overload/Re-presentation_of_the_PSC/english.html

Table 1: General learning outcomes for the *reading* strand

Reading
<p><i>The child will</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Perceive reading as a shared, enjoyable experience. 2. Develop an awareness and understanding of the purposes of print. 3. Engage with and read a wide variety of texts of gradually increasing complexity. 4. Read with increasing levels of independence. 5. Use a variety of comprehension strategies to construct meaning from a text.

Table 2: General outcomes for the *writing* strand

Writing
<p><i>The child will:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write in a variety of genres for a variety of purposes and different audiences. 2. Explore and express reactions to texts and the arts, and refine aesthetic response through writing. 3. Develop an awareness and understanding of the writing process. 4. Understand and use the conventions of print necessary for writing.

Table 3: General outcomes for the *oral language* strand

Oral Language
<p><i>The child will:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explore, experiment with and enjoy the playful aspects of language. 2. Use and understand the conventions of oral language interaction in a variety of social situations (listener-speaker-relationship). 3. Communicate information, ideas, experiences, opinions, feelings and imaginings fluently and explicitly (language use). 4. Explore and express reactions to text and the arts, and refine aesthetic response through oral language activity. 5. Expand his/her vocabulary and develop a command of grammar, syntax and punctuation (content and structure).

2.2 Observations

During the process of auditing the content objectives to determine the feasibility of each as a learning outcome, a number of observations were made.

- **A number of the content objectives were stated in very broad terms** which made it difficult to term them as specific learning outcomes e.g. *(the child should be enabled to)... develop reading skills through engaging with reading material appropriate to his/her stage of development.*
- The large number of specific learning outcomes echoed **the ‘overload’ concerns** of the teachers and principals involved in the overload initiative. In

cases where overlap was identified, specific learning outcomes were merged. However, this process did not significantly reduce the number of specific learning outcomes as many did not lend themselves to being combined because the overlap was not obvious.

- **The language used in some content objectives did not clearly communicate what the learner would be able to do at the end of each class level.** The stems of the content objectives had to be re-worded in an effort to bring greater clarity when expressing them as specific learning outcomes. For example, stems such as *have access to*, *engage in* and *experience* were replaced with verbs that clarify the actual learning rather than how the learning would be supported. However, the wording used in many of the content objectives was not conducive to the framing of learning outcomes. The **passive nature of some verbs** such as *see* and *hear* or the **ambiguous nature of other verbs** such as *learn* used at the start of some content objectives did not provide the clarity required for specific learning outcomes.
- **The suitability of some of the language used in the general outcomes and the specific learning outcomes was unclear.** For example, the words *print* and *text* were used regularly but no definitions were provided.
- Some content objectives related more to what the **teacher would do to support learning rather than what a child would learn.**
- The audit of the content objectives towards learning outcomes continued to highlight **the lack of progression or ambiguous nature of progression** in the language curriculum. The wording of some of the objectives made progression unclear or difficult to map. Progression, in some instances, relied on the use of the term *continue to* or on the simple repetition of objectives from one class level to the next with little or no development. The terms *skills* and *strategies* were used interchangeably across specific learning outcomes in the four class levels in General outcome 5 of the *reading* strand, which brought further ambiguity about progression.
- The auditing process highlighted **gaps and shortcomings in the curriculum** when set against current research. For infant classes, there was a very limited range of reading genres identified in the specific learning outcomes. There was no clear reference to vocabulary development and progression from infant classes to sixth class in *reading* or *writing*. Fluency development, comprehension strategies, metacognition and digital literacy also appeared to be under-represented in the current content objectives.
- **The language of the content objectives did not always support assessment** because they did not support the teacher in identifying what specific learning had taken place, and therefore determining what was to be assessed was challenging. For example, a content objective as presented in Appendix A:

Become more adept in using appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviour in order to secure and maintain the attention of the listener.

- A number of content objectives included **illustrations of learning and/or teacher guidelines about achieving learning through the use of the italicised text** which followed the content objective.

Play with language to develop an awareness of sounds 'language games, phoneme and morpheme sound relationships, nursery rhymes, chants, singing games, action songs and poems with a wide variety of rhythms, attempts at writing words appropriate to a particular need such as the child's own name'.

- In a number of instances the actual **learning was included in the italics of the content objective and the objective itself was vague and unspecific.**

Learn to adopt appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviour to secure and maintain the attention of a partner 'establishing eye contact, using appropriate head movements, gestures and facial expressions, ensuring audibility and clarity'.

This is an example of the tension between reducing the number of outcomes to respond to the issue of overload and yet ensuring the learning intent was clear.

2.3 Observations: Linkage and integration

Following the first phase of the audit, the content objectives were then audited to identify links across the strands. The *English Teacher Guidelines* (DES, 1999) highlights the fact that *listening, speaking, reading and writing are integrated in the process of language learning* (p. 2). The *English Curriculum audit* materials (Appendix A) were used as the starting point and specific learning outcomes that had a link to a specific learning outcome from another strand were labelled to identify the strand⁴, the general outcome and the specific learning outcome that it was linked to e.g. **OL>>G.O.5>>B4.4.**

Two forms of linkage (i.e. integration within a subject) were identified through the course of this audit. The first form of linkage is when the knowledge, skill or attitude in the outcome of one strand matches the knowledge, skill or attitude of an outcome

⁴ **R** - Reading, **W** - Writing, **OL** - Oral language

in another strand. Thus, while the method through which the knowledge, skill or attitude is demonstrated may vary, the learning is the same. For example:

Argue points of view from the perspective of agreement and disagreement through informal discussion and in the context of formal debates.

Argue the case in writing for a particular point of view with which he/she agrees or disagrees.

The second type of link is when the outcome from one strand cannot be achieved without first achieving an outcome from another strand. For example:

Continue to listen to and enjoy stories and poems being read aloud.

React to poems through improvisational drama.

This second type of link was intended to identify outcomes which were pre-requisites for others. Integration across subjects was highlighted by labeling the learning outcomes with **I**. Through the process of the audit for linkage a number of observations were made and issues were identified. These include the following:

- Approximately **30% of the content objectives in each strand could be linked** to a content objective in another strand of the *English Curriculum*. For example:

Experiment with descriptive words to add elaborative detail.

Write naming words and add descriptive words.

In some instances links were evident across all three strands. For example:

Continue to share response to an ever increasing variety of texts with the wider community of readers.

Express individual responses to poems and literature and discuss different interpretations.

Express and communicate reactions to reading experiences.

- In both *reading* and *writing* the number of **links with oral language outweighed the links with the other strand**.
- The number of **links between oral language and reading** was greater than the number of links between *oral language* and *Writing*.
- **Exploring and expressing reactions to text was common across all three strands**. The *writing* and *oral language* strands were linked to the *reading* strand in such a way that the general outcomes themselves reflected this link:

Explore and express reactions to text and the arts, and refine aesthetic response through writing.

Explore and express reactions to text and the arts, and refine aesthetic response through oral language activity.

- In some instances, **a specific learning outcome could be linked with a strand but linking to a specific learning outcome within that strand proved difficult.** For example, the *oral language* specific learning outcome *....combine simple sentences through the use of connecting words* could be linked with *writing* because combining sentences in writing using connecting words is part of writing development that is not re-presented as a specific learning outcome. In instances such as these the outcome was labeled as linking with the strand only e.g. **W** for the *writing* strand.
- **Gaps in progression or the ambiguous nature of progression were further highlighted** by the audit of the linkages between the content objectives. In the *oral language* strand, developing the ability to question was included as content objectives across all four levels. However, developing an active approach to a text through questioning was not progressed through the levels as there was only one content objective of this nature at first and second class level. *Adopt an active approach to a text by posing his/hers own questions.*
- **Integration with other curriculum subjects was evident and significant in the curriculum.** *Oral language* was integrated to a large extent with drama. The *English Teacher Guidelines* (DES, 1999) recognised this link with drama stating that *the curriculum envisages a central role for improvisational drama in oral language activity in every class (p.48)* and the *integration of drama with English is indicated in twenty or more content objectives (p. 49)*. Other subjects with noteworthy examples of integration with English include; Music, Visual Arts and Social Environmental and Scientific Education.
- **Some content objectives in the *oral language* strand gave specific guidance on the method through which the outcome is achieved** e.g. *Explore and express conflicts of opinion through improvisational drama.* The question therefore arises about the prescriptive nature of this form of guidance in a content objective and whether or not this is a process-focused content objective.

The next section outlines the findings of the *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999) audit.

3. Curaclam na Gaeilge audit

Ireland has two official languages, and primary school children in Ireland learn both English and Gaeilge, but in a variety of different ways. At present there are two *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (Irish language curriculum), one for scoileanna Gaeltachta and scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge (Teanga 1, T1 – first language for Gaeltacht schools and Irish-medium schools) and another for schools in which English is the language of instruction (Teanga 2, T2 – second language). Both curricula are presented in one document and are available only in the Irish language. Both curricula have the same snáitheanna (strands) *éisteacht, labhairt, léitheoireacht agus scríbhneoireacht* (*listening, talking, reading and writing*) and snáithaonaid (strand units).

The strand units, ag cothú spéise, ag tuiscint teanga, ag úsáid teanga, ag cothú fonn léitheoireachta and ag cothú fonn scríbhneoireachta (fostering an interest, understanding language, using language, motivation to read and motivation to write) are common to both curricula. However in scoileanna Gaeltachta and lán-Ghaeilge there is an extra division in the strand units ag tuiscint teanga and ag úsáid teanga, these are cumas agus muinín and samhlaíocht agus mothúcháin (ability and confidence, imagination and feelings).

In addition, the curriculum for Gaeilge identifies 6 categories of feidhmeanna teanga (language functions). The language functions are at the heart of the curriculum and are clearly presented for each class level. There are also ten themes - Na Téamaí for use with both curricula which cover areas of interest to children, mé féin, sa bhaile, an scoil, bia, an teilifís, siopadóireacht, caitheamh aimsire, éadaí, an aimsir and ócáidí speisialta (myself, at home, the school, food, the television, shopping, past times, clothes, the weather and special occasions).

3.1 The auditing process

For the purpose of this audit, and similar to the audit for English described in the previous section, the re-presented curriculum materials for *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999) were used. In April 2010, the re-presented cuspóirí an churaclaim (curriculum objectives) were presented for use by teachers and principals in their short-term, long-term and school planning. The strands, themes, language functions

and curriculum objectives (*na téamaí, na feidhmeanna teanga and na cuspóirí an churaclaim*) remained unchanged.

The objectives themselves remained exactly the same but the strand units were set aside and the curriculum objectives were re-arranged into eight new groups of content objectives (*cuspóirí ábhair*). The same eight content objectives are used throughout, the curriculum. All the curriculum objectives were number coded to allow for ease of referral to the original *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999) These differ from the general outcomes used to audit the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999) as they span the four strands.

Cuspóirí Ábhair (Content Objectives)

- An Ghaeilge a úsáid go neamhfhoirmiúil (to use Irish informally).
- Ionchur taitneamhach teanga (rainn, amhráin, drámaí, scéalta) (enjoyable language input; rhymes, songs, dramas and stories).
- Cur chuige: cluichí agus tascanna cumarsáide (approach: games and communicative tasks).
- Scileanna cumarsáide a fhorbairt (to develop communicative skills).
- Cur le líofacht agus le saibhreas teanga (to improve fluency and wealth of language).
- Cur le cruinneas foghraíochta agus litrithe (to improve phonetic and spelling accuracy).
- Feasacht teanga agus cultúrtha a chothú (to foster an awareness of language and culture).
- Tuiscint a fháil ar ghramadach na Gaeilge (to gain an understanding of Irish grammar).

The content objectives have been very carefully re-presented in a manner which

- highlights the links between the objectives and daily teaching and learning activities
- highlights and clarifies integration between the four strands
- reduces the number of lists which teachers have to consult when planning
- presents the content for each class group in a manner which is easily accessible and teacher-friendly for short-term planning
- presents the objectives for each class group in a way which is very useful for whole-school planning and clarifying progression between class levels
- enable measurement of progression and development of methodology and content from one class level to the next.

The content objectives were derived from the broad aims and general objectives of the curriculum and were used across all four strands of the curriculum lending themselves to natural linkage and integration.

The report on the initiative to respond to *Curriculum Overload* (NCCA, 2010b) noted that 95% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they preferred the eight new content objectives to the original strand units.

Table 4: Re-classification of curriculum aims and general objectives as content objectives

<i>Aidhmeanna an churaclaim Ghaeilge (lch. 14)</i> Aims of the Gaeilge curriculum (p. 14)	<i>Cuspóirí ginearálta (lch. 14-15)</i> General objectives (pp. 14-15)	<i>Rangú nua</i> New classification
<i>Úsáid na Gaeilge mar ghnáth-theanga chumarsáide a chur chun cinn (to promote the use of Irish as the language of communication)</i>	<i>Eisteacht go neamhfhoirmiúil agus brí a bhaint as caint nó comhrá nach bhfuil sé/sí páirteach ann. (listen informally and gain meaning from a conversation or speech which they are not involved in)</i> <i>An Ghaeilge a úsáid i gcomhthéacsanna éagsúla chun caidreamh sóisialta a dhéanamh. (to use Irish in various context to create social relationships)</i> <i>Foghlaim trí Ghaeilge in ábhair eile an churaclaim. (learn other curriculum subjects through Irish)</i>	<i>An Ghaeilge a úsáid go neamhfhoirmiúil (to use Irish informally)</i>

Table 4 gives an example of how the new content objectives , ‘an Ghaeilge a úsáid go neamhfhoirmiúil’ (to use Gaeilge informally) was derived; by combining the aims of the curriculum and the general objectives to create new content objectives which could be linked between strands and class groups. These content objectives are used to organise the original curriculum objectives.

The purpose of this audit is to review the curriculum objectives of *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999) and identify the extent to which the curriculum objectives can inform the development of outcomes in the new language curriculum. The 344 (T1) and 236 (T2) curriculum objectives were investigated carefully and altered where feasible to be presented as *torthaí foghlama* (learning outcomes). All learning outcomes were number coded to allow for clear identification of the original curriculum objectives and relevant strand agus strand unit. To ensure the focus of the new learning outcomes was on the knowledge, skills and attitudes that pupils are expected to demonstrate on completion of a period of learning, a number of the curriculum objectives were reworded or rephrased. Curriculum objectives identified as teacher focused were deleted however, this was noted and the original coding left in place. Exemplars provided in italics following curriculum objective were, where possible, merged with the learning outcomes, when this did not occur in a natural way they were deleted. *Torthaí foghlama* within a particular strand which appeared to have the same measurable outcome were collapsed together.

The curriculum audits for English and Gaeilge used the same criteria to identify learning outcomes in order to ensure consistency and to facilitate auditing between the languages in the next stage of the development of the new language curriculum. The audits of *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999) (T1 and T2) are included as Appendix B and Appendix C.

3.2 Observations

A number of observations were made during the process of auditing the curriculum objectives to determine the feasibility of each as a learning outcome;

- Teachers identified time as a key challenge in the review of Gaeilge (NCCA 2008). At present there are **236** curriculum objectives for English medium schools (T2) and **344** curriculum objectives for *scoileanna* Gaeltachta and *scoileanna lán-Ghaeilge* (T1). Where overlap was identified, curriculum objectives were merged (*curtha le chéile*) but this did not significantly reduce the large number of *cuspoirí*. However it was observed there are in both curricula a significant percentage of *cuspoirí* which have very similar outcomes and yet are classified and presented in each of the four strands, perhaps adding to a **perception of overload of curriculum objectives** and **shortage of time** within which to achieve objectives:

- A number of the cuspóirí an churaclaim were stated in **very broad terms** which made it difficult to determine clearly what the learner would be able to do at the end of that class level.

T1 – Cuspóir Ábhair – Ionchur taitneamhach teanga – *labhairt*
Ba chóir go gcuirfí ar chumas an pháiste súgradh le focal.
(the child should be enabled to play with words)
rainn agus amhráin ina bhfuil curfá gan brí a fhoghlaim nó a chumadh,
rabhlóga, scéalta seafóideacha, seanfhocail a úsáid agus saíocht a
phlé.
(to learn and or compose rhymes and poems which have a chorus
without meaning, to use and discuss the wisdom of tongue twisters,
nonsensical stories and proverbs)

It is interesting to see that the illustrations of learning or **italicised exemplars contain the specific details** and not the curriculum objective.

- Several curriculum objectives were very clearly **focused on what the teacher would do to support learning rather than what the child would learn** and therefore deleted:

T1–Rang 1/2 - An Ghaeilge a úsáid go neamhfhoirmiúil -
scríbhneoireacht

1.4 an múinteoir a fheiceáil ag scríobh agus ag baint taitnimh as
(to see the teacher writing and enjoying writing)

T1 – Naíonáin – scileanna cumarsáide a fhorbairt - *scríbhneoireacht*
2A.2 *cabhair a lorg ón múinteoir.*
(to look for help from the teacher)

- The **complete omission** of *reading* and *writing* in any form from infant classes in English medium schools (T2) leaves a clear omission in the curriculum when set against research and practice in other jurisdictions.
- It is also of note that the strategies [*which teachers reported*] *making least use of in this area [pre-reading]* were **specific teaching of the alphabet and letter sounds** and the use of *graph-phonocues* (NCCA, 2008, p. 22).

In the T1 curriculum there is an outcome which **does not appear at all in the T2 curriculum:**

Naíonáin – scileanna cumarsáide a fhorbairt – *léitheoireacht*
Ba chóir go gcuirfí ar chumas an pháiste
2.11 *litreacha na haibítire a aithint agus a ainmniú*
(to recognise and name letters of the alphabet).

Equally there are outcomes in the T2 curriculum which are not mentioned in T1 schools even though they occur daily.

- A significant **difference** in the wealth of language or **language enrichment** is also evident between the two language curricula.

T1 Naíonáin – scileanna cumarsáide a fhorbairt- *léitheoireacht*
Ba chóir go gcuirfí ar chumas an pháiste

*2.5 an téarmaíocht ar leith a bhaineann le léitheoireacht agus le leabhair a chloisteáil agus a thuiscint
(to hear and understand the terminology which relates to reading and books)*

‘Féach/amharc ar an bpictiúr ar leathanach a do! Teideal, clúdach, leathanach, líne, focal clé/deas, barr/bun, tús/deireadh’.

T2 Rang 3/4 – scileanna cumarsáide a fhorbairt – léitheoireacht

Ba chóir go gcuirfí ar chumas an pháiste

2.2 an téarmaíocht ar leith a bhaineann leis an léitheoireacht a chloisteáil as Gaeilge agus a thuiscint

(to hear and understand the terminology which relates to reading and books)

‘Féachaigí ar leathanach tríocha! Barr, lár agus bun an leathanaigh.

It is of note that the language exemplars provided for the same learning outcome seem much richer for an infant class in an Irish medium school than *third and fourth class* in an English medium school.

- There is an imbalance in the number of curriculum objectives for T1 in English and Gaeilge, i.e., **428 curriculum objectives for English T1 and 344 for Gaeilge T1, perhaps suggesting lack of enrichment for children studying Gaeilge as their first language**. The area of greatest difference between curriculum objectives for the two first language curricula concerns *writing* and *scríbhneoireacht*, with 162 specific *writing* objectives for English T1 and only 99 for Gaeilge T1. There is some discrepancy between *reading* and *léitheoireacht* but it is not as significant: *reading* 127, *léitheoireacht* 104. When *oral language* is mapped against *éisteacht* and *labhairt* as one combined strand there are slightly more Gaeilge objectives. *Oral language* has 139 objectives while a combined *éisteacht* and *labhairt* has 141.
- It is interesting to see the variety of roles played by the **exemplars provided in italics** in both curricula. The role of these exemplars is varied. At times they recommend **vocabulary** to be used:

T1 - Rang 1/2 - ionchur taitneamhacha teanga: téacsanna – éisteacht

Ba chóir go gcuirfí ar chumas an pháiste

2A.6 taitní an fháil ar éisteacht aireach trí ghníomhaíochtaí simplí a dhéanamh;

(to experience listening attentively through simple activities)

roimh éisteacht le comhrá nó scéal taifeadta, “Éist agus abair cén t-ainmhí a luaitear”. Tar éis éisteachta “Cé na páistí a bhí sa scéal?

Céard a tharla ansin, meas tú?”

They provide **an experience or guidelines** through which the curriculum objective could be achieved:

T1-Naíonáin - Cur Chuige: cluichí agus tascanna cumarsáide - *éisteacht*

2A.3 cluichí éisteachta a imirt;

(to play listening games)

éisteacht agus aithint nó taispeáint, éisteacht agus aimsiú, cur síos ar dhuine nó rud agus é a aimsiú l bpictiúr, Éisteacht agus meaitseáil, Snap agus biongó le pictiúir

They can indicate **progression** between the different levels:

Ba chóir go gcuirfí ar chumas an pháiste

T2 -scríbhneoireacht feidhmiúil agus cumarsáid a chleachtadh/dhéanamh.

3.14 cártaí d'ócáidí áirithe, lá breithe, an Nollaig, Lá Fhéile Pádraig Rang 1/2

3.8 ainm i nGaeilge ar chóipleabhar, cuirí, cártaí Gaeilge d'ócáidí speisialta, nótaí Rang 3/4

3.6 litir shimplí, ainm, seoladh agus síniú pearsanta, cártaí poist, teachtaireachtaí, litir iarratais chuig raidió na Gaeltachta, Tg4 Rang 5/6

Here, the **curriculum objectives only changes from cleachtadh (practice) to déanamh (do), however progression from writing cards to letters of application is presented within the italicised exemplars.**

- It is also worth noting that in the re-presentation of the curriculum objectives there are at times **discrepancies between the content objectives under which the identical or nearly identical learning outcomes are placed**, for example:

Ba chóir go gcuirfí ar chumas an pháiste

T2 – Rang 1/2 a (h) ainm féin a scríobh (to write their own name) scríbhneoireacht– an Ghaeilge a úsáid go neamhfhoirmiúil.

T1 – Naíonáin a (h) ainm féin a scríobh(to write their own name) scríbhneoireacht – scileanna cumarsáide a fhorbairt.

The same learning outcome is placed at **two different class settings and also under two different content objectives.** Perhaps this is related to the language usage in the different school settings. With the development of the new curriculum it is worth noting that **many similar outcomes can be achieved in both curricula but at different levels of progression.**

- Within the two curricula there are cuspóirí an churaclaim which refer to **comprehension strategy** instruction. **Prediction, discussion, questioning, memorising, summarising and determining importance** are all covered within the exemplars in italics at the end of these torthaí foghlama. However, visualisation, making connections, inferring and synthesis are not specifically mentioned in either curriculum. Also in the T2 curriculum there is a limited number of comprehension strategies included. The curriculum notes **that comprehension and higher-order reading skills are of great importance** but at times the number of relevant curriculum objectives does not support

this. Recent research has shown the importance of explicit teaching of **comprehension strategies** suggesting that a more explicit, approach to teaching comprehension strategies is needed for the new language curriculum.

- **Neither *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999) nor the *Gaeilge: Treoirínite do Mhúinteoirí (Teacher Guidelines)* (DES, 1999) are available in English** and this has been a source of concern to some primary teachers. Likewise, parents who wish to support their children's progression in Gaeilge are often unable to access the contents of the documents.

3.3 Observations: Linkage and integration

As mentioned **previously, the curriculum objectives have been carefully re-presented in a manner which highlights and clarifies linkage between the four strands**, in light of the curriculum premise that links across the strands was a natural occurrence, *tá na snáithe sin scartha óna cheile sa churaclam ach beidh siad comhtháite chomh minic agus is féidir sa cheacht Gaeilge* (the strands are separate in the curriculum but will be integrated as often as possible in the Irish lesson), (p. 3). The *Treoirínite do Mhúinteoirí (Gaeilge Teacher Guidelines)* (DES, 1999) (which were not the focus of the re-presentation) outline the integrated manner in which Irish lessons are to be taught, *an contanam cumarsáide (communication continuum)*. This approach presents the cyclical nature in which language is taught, used and embedded, building on prior knowledge. It is a feature of this approach that all four strand areas are regularly together in one lesson, and that communication is involved in all four strands. The guidelines presented for teachers in relation to the use of this approach, the methodologies, sample lesson plans, the resources and the examples of work which could be covered under each of the strand, constantly reinforce the importance of, and the need for, regular links across the four strands. The following observations arose from a further audit of the Gaeilge curriculum objectives to identify links across the strands and integration with other curriculum subjects.

- As with the English Curriculum audit, **a large majority of learning outcomes could not be achieved in isolation** for example:

Ionchur taitneamhach teanga – Rang 1/2

Éisteacht – 1.3 ag éisteacht gan bhrú le hábhar tarraingteach, rainn thaitneamhacha, dánta, rabhlóga, scéalta, amhráin, ábhar dúchasach san áireamh (to listen to attractive traditional materials including enjoyable rhymes, poems, tongue-twisters, stories and songs)

Labhairt – 3b.2 ag rá rannta agus dánta beaga agus 3b.3 ag canadh amhrán aeracha le gníomhartha (to say poems, sings songs)

Léitheoireacht - 3b.4 ag léamh, ag éisteacht le agus ag freagairt do dhánta (ss) (i dtéarmaí nua) (to listen to and respond to poems)

For the children to respond to poems the children must first of all hear (*éisteacht*) or read (*léitheoireacht*) the poem. This is a clear example of where three of the four strands are linked. However, there is no relevant learning outcome for writing at this class level.

- At times the learning outcomes are so similar in the knowledge, skill or attitude being achieved that it is **unclear whether learning outcomes appear within the most appropriate strand**, for example:
Ionchur taitneamhach teanga - Léitheoireacht Rang 1-2
1.1& 3B.1 ag éisteacht le scéalta agus rainn tarraingteacha á léamh os ard ag an múinteoir (curtha le cheile) (to listen to attractive poems and stories read aloud by the teacher)

The above example could be presented under listening and not reading, given that the children listening is as important as the act of the teacher reading.

- There are **significant links in *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999) between the two strands *éisteacht* agus *labhairt***: *cé go bhfuil béim ar an éisteacht sa snáithe seo tiocfaidh na snáitheanna eile i gceist freisin. (even though the emphasis is on listening the other strands will come into play also)*, (p. 4). The curriculum notes that even though *listening* and *speaking* are two separate strands they are to be integrated as often as possible (p. 31). Over 75% of the learning outcomes in *listening* could be linked to a content objective in *speaking*.

T1 – Rang 1/2 - An Ghaeilge a úsáid go neamhfhoirmiúil
Éisteacht ag éisteacht leis an nGaeilge á húsáid go teagmhasach neamhfhoirmiúil mar ghnáth-theanga chumarsáide an ranga agus na scoile.

Labhairt – an Ghaeilge a labhairt go teagmhasach neamhfhoirmiúil sa seomra ranga agus sa scoil.

T2 – Rang 5/6 – ionchur taitneamhach teanga
Éisteacht – rogha níos minice a fháil faoin rogha éisteachta.
Labhairt – rogha a dhéanamh ó am go ham faoin ábhar cainte.

- It is worth noting that when the content objectives were re-presented as learning outcomes there was a **significant decrease in the number of learning outcomes under the strand unit, *writing***. Nearly 20% of content objectives were deleted as they were **teacher-focused** and not in line with the definition of a learning outcome. This leads to an imbalance between links from other strands to *writing*.

In sum, it's clear that many of these learning outcomes cannot be treated in isolation and that the new language curriculum should present outcomes in a manner which

enables teachers to clearly identify connections between outcomes across strands, beyond the columns which are used at present.

In *Curaclam na Gaeilge T2* (DES, 1999) a variety of subjects, strand areas and topics are specifically presented for **integration** with specific areas of *Curaclam na Gaeilge*. The subjects recommended to be integrated with Gaeilge are **Corp Oideachais, Ceol, Matamaitic, na hAmharcealaíona, Eolaíocht, Oideachas Sóisialta Pearsanta agus Sláinte, Stair agus Tíreolaíocht** (Physical Education, Music, Mathematics, Arts Education, Science, Social, Personal and Health Education, History and Geography).

While there are no such recommendations in *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (T1), the curriculum notes that in Irish-medium schools, there will be real communication in all the school subjects, allowing for discussion, debate, conversations and paired work and this could lead to transfer of language skills. However, there is no specific mention of this in the content objectives. **There is limited direction for teachers with regard to supporting language development across the curriculum or cross-lingual transfer as recommended by recent research.**

Integration with other curriculum subjects is evident for T1 & T2 within the torthaí foghlama, for example:

- Ceol (Music):
 - T1 – Rang 1/2 – Ionchur taitneamhach teanga
 - Labhairt - 3B.3 ag canadh amhrán aeracha le gníomhartha.
- Drámaíocht (Drama):
 - T2 – rang 5/6 – Ionchur taitneamhach teanga
 - Labhairt – 3.9 ag déanamh rólghlactha i suímh (ss).
- Matamaitic (Mathematic):
 - T1 – rang 5/6 -Cur chuige: cluichí agus tascanna cumarsáide
 - Labhairt – 3A.7 ag déanamh suirbhéanna.
- Oideachas Sóisialta Pearsanta agus Sláinte (Social Personal and Health Education)
 - T2 – Rang1/2 - Cur le líofacht agus le saibhreas teanga
 - Scríbhneoireacht -3.7 & 3.8 ag tarraingt pictiúr de rudaí a thaitníonn nó nach dtaitníonn leis/léi agus ag cur lipéad orthu agus ag tarraingt pictiúr a léiríonn mothúcháin agus lipéid a chur leo (ss) (i dtéarmaí nua).

The significant potential for integration especially with Ceol (Music), Drámaíocht (Drama) and OSPS (SPHE) suggests that these subjects or strands of these subjects

could be taught completely through the medium of Gaeilge, thus an Ghaeilge *would be used i ngnéithe eile den churaclam (in other aspects of the curriculum)* as recommended in *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999, p. 11). Ó Duibhir & Cummins (2012) **highlighted the potential for integrating learning outcomes across languages and the benefits for children of cross-lingual transfer.**

Auditing the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999) and *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999) has ensured a solid foundation from which the new Language Curriculum can be developed.

4. Drama Curriculum audit

This audit of the *Drama Curriculum* (DES, 1999) aims to identify where and to what extent content objectives are reflected, supported or complemented in (a) the audited content of the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999) and *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999), and (b) content objectives for other subjects of the Primary School Curriculum.

4.1 The auditing process

This audit began by reviewing content objectives of the *Drama Curriculum* (DES, 1999) for infant classes and for first and second classes which are set out under one strand and its three strand units. The outcomes of the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999) were then audited to identify where the objectives of the *Drama Curriculum* (DES, 1999) were embodied, and if they were, in what form.

4.2 Observations

The most striking feature of the *Drama Curriculum* (DES, 1999) is the relatively self-contained nature of its content objectives. They are stated in such a way as to assert Drama's own internal *raison d'être*: the subject is presented as its own justification, standing apart from others, and not in need of any other subject, even though it may draw some of its content from across the curriculum. Notable is the fact that nowhere in the content objectives are there any suggestions for integration with other subjects. Conversely, suggestions for integration appear throughout the curricula of other subjects, some advocating integration with Drama. It should be acknowledged that the *Drama Teacher Guidelines* (DES, 1999) do present an example of integration with other subjects. However, it's clear that the integrity of the drama process is foregrounded and protected. The *English Teacher Guidelines* (DES, 1999) recognise the integrity of drama stating that *although drama can be a powerful teaching strategy it is important to remember that it is an activity and an experience that has a discrete value of its own* (p. 48).

A consequence of this largely self-contained nature of the curriculum is that a one-way relationship exists between Drama and the other areas of the curriculum. While most subjects look upon drama as a methodology which may be exploited in the

service of the learning goals of those subjects, drama does not see itself in that way. Indeed in one instance, the relationship is presented the other way round:

Some Irish language exemplars are included so as to remind the teacher that in schools where English is the medium of instruction, Irish language teaching can be woven into the drama and that, through drama, facility with Irish can achieve the fluency and registers of life. (Drama Curriculum, 1999, p. 6)

In the context of the audit, this relationship between Drama and the other areas of the curriculum had implications for the task in hand. Due to the fact that Drama content objectives strongly emphasise *process drama*, it was difficult to 'match' the Drama objectives to those of other subjects. Drama's objectives are about drama itself. It was possible to identify the extent to which Drama is proposed as a useful methodology for other subjects, within content objectives for those subjects, rather than from Drama. The findings from this audit are presented below and the connections are detailed in Appendix D and E.

- It was possible to identify shared **content or learning intentions between 7 of the 11 content objectives in the infant *Drama Curriculum* (DES, 1999) and the content objectives of the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999)**. In addition, 8 of 13 Drama objectives for first and second classes could be connected with the English content objectives. **Almost all such 'connections' were to the oral language outcomes**, and some were more apparent than others. The *English Teacher Guidelines* (DES, 1999) state that *improvisational drama should be an essential element of oral language activity....It is a teaching medium which can be used in many areas of the curriculum* (p. 36). These guidelines also refer to improvisational drama is one of the five principal contexts through which oral language can be taught.
- Auditing ***Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999)** (for T1 schools) showed very clearly that **Drama was viewed as a methodology in the service of the teaching of Gaeilge**, reflecting the use of *drámaíocht* in the teaching of the language. However, this audit highlighted that a **considerable range of specific drama strategies is recommended in *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999)**, not limited to role-play for example.
- In **Physical Education**, the strand which has a relationship with Drama is Dance, yet surprisingly, **nowhere in the objectives of the *Physical Education Curriculum* (DES, 1999) are links with Drama highlighted** or suggestions on integration with Drama mentioned.
- In **Music**, as in Physical Education, there's **little or no reference to Drama as a potential partner for integration with Music**.

- The **Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Teacher Guidelines (DES, 1999)** suggest integration of SPHE with several subjects, among them Drama, to which it makes reference as follows:

Drama: using drama: to recognise and manage feelings, to learn to trust and respect others in a group, to experience open and healthy relationships, to foster respect for differences in people, and to help the child understand and moderate his/her temperament. (p. 39)

The *SPHE Curriculum* (DES, 1999) stresses the central role of active learning methodologies in the subject. In the *SPHE Teacher Guidelines* (DES 1999), *Drama activities* are set out in some detail as exemplars of the use of drama specifically (pp. 58-64). Activities are presented for pairs, for groups or for the whole class. **The approach throughout is the use of drama as a methodology in support of the aims of SPHE.** However, some key elements of drama are emphasised within these exemplars, e.g. improvisation, mime, roleplaying, thought tracking, still imaging, discussion, and creating a sense of tension. It again proved difficult to link Drama objectives to specific objectives, in this instance to those of SPHE.

- The **History Teacher Guidelines** (DES, 1999) note that **Drama is an ideal methodology for the teaching of history (p. 109)**. It adds that *almost any topic, story or event can become the basis of a drama experience for children*. The *role-play method* is suggested as being particularly suitable. Exemplars 16 and 17 (pp. 110-113) are provided as illustrations of the methodology in use. One strand unit, in suggesting opportunities for integration, refers specifically to the Drama strand *Drama to explore feelings, knowledge and ideas, leading to understanding*.
- In the **Visual Arts Curriculum** (DES, 1999), **a number of specific recommendations are made for integration with Drama**. These range across the strands of *Drawing, Construction, Clay, and Fabric and fibre*.

Summary

In conclusion, it can be said that integration between curriculum subjects and Drama depends largely upon the nature of learning within the individual subject. Clear and obvious relationships and even common purposes exist between language learning and Drama, where language is central. In History, it may be role-playing and getting inside the mind of a historical character that matters, while acting-out relationships or resolving conflict may be the focus in SPHE. It seems reasonable to conclude from this audit that while Drama can be seen to have 'something for everyone' in curriculum terms, it stakes a strong claim to be respected as a discipline in itself.

5. Social, Personal and Health Education Curriculum audit

5.1 The auditing process

This audit examines the place of language in the *Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum* (DES, 1999). Language is used by children to achieve *SPHE Curriculum* (DES, 1999) objectives, while SPHE content simultaneously serves to develop children's language skills. In Appendix F, relevant SPHE objectives are mapped onto the revised outcomes of the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999).

The curriculum introduction notes that the child's experience is a starting point for learning and development:

Social, personal and health education provides particular opportunities to foster the personal development, health and well-being of the individual child, to help him/her to create and maintain supportive relationships and become an active and responsible citizen in society. (p. 2)

The curriculum is structured around three strands: *Myself*, *Myself and others*; *Myself and the wider world*. The strands and strand units are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Strands and strand units of the *SPHE Curriculum* (DES, 1999)

Strand	Strand Units
Myself	Self-identity Taking care of my body Growing and changing Safety and protection
Myself and others	Myself and my family My friends and other people Relating to others Making decisions (this strand unit for third to sixth classes)
Myself and the wider world	Developing citizenship Media education

Both the *SPHE Curriculum* (DES, 1999) and the *SPHE Teacher Guidelines* (DES, 1999) clearly emphasise the central role of language in teaching and learning. The *SPHE Curriculum* (DES, 1999) notes that *[t]he exploration of language and its usage in relating to others is central to any SPHE programme* (p. 7).

It is also clear that the role of language in SPHE isn't simply one of communicating information and ideas. Language has a number of functions in the SPHE learning environment arising from the central concerns of SPHE, namely the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes around self-care and self-understanding, relationships with others and concern with the *wider world*.

While the curriculum states that *children are given opportunities to develop and enhance their language skills and to increase their vocabulary related to the social, personal and health aspects of their lives* (p. 7), it also proposes that the subject develops language itself by means of [SPHE] methodologies: *[children] become increasingly fluent in their use of language and can improve many of the skills they may have learned in other areas of the curriculum* (p. 7). This reciprocal view of language—serving and being served—can be proposed as a feature of all subject areas; however, it is a very significant feature of the SPHE Curriculum. The audit of the SPHE content objectives and (italicised) illustrations of learning provides evidence of this dual language relationship within SPHE.

5.2 Observations

Broad objectives

The central place of language is clear when the broad objectives of the *SPHE Curriculum* (DES, 1999) are considered. These include the following with the preamble that *'children should be enabled to*

- *be self-confident and have a positive sense of self-esteem*
- *develop and enhance the social skills of communication, co-operation and conflict resolution*
- *create and maintain supportive relationships both now and in the future*
- *develop some of the skills and abilities necessary for participating fully in groups and in society.*

Content objectives

While many SPHE content objectives do not explicitly indicate the use of language, virtually all require language content. At every class level, a large proportion of these objectives are phrased with an explicit language element, as are the accompanying 'illustrations of learning'. Some examples from the infant class levels are included in Table 6, below.

Table 6: Sample content objectives from Infant classes

Strand	Strand unit		Content objectives/illustrations of learning
Myself	Growing and changing	Feelings and emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name a variety of feelings and talk about situations where these may be experienced Explore and discuss occasions that can promote positive feelings in himself/herself
	Safety and protection	Personal safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowing how and when to seek help Knowing who to ask, people I can trust and tell
Myself and others	My friends and other people		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify, discuss and appreciate his/her own friends Discuss and examine the different aspects of friendship
	Relating to others		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen and respond to the opinions and views of others Use verbal and non-verbal behaviour to perform social functions
Myself and the wider world	Developing citizenship	Living in the local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggest ways of helping other people at home, in school and in the local community
	Media education		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin to explore and talk about the difference between advertisements and favourite programmes

Table 6 shows that in SPHE, children use a range of language skills, both receptive and expressive, e.g., *name, talk about, explore, discuss, ask, tell, examine, listen, respond, suggest*. It is of note that oral language skills are the main focus, with talk and discussion predominating. Appendix F illustrates this point clearly, where links

with the (revised) English language outcomes are almost always between *oral language* objectives and outcomes. The relatively few links across *reading* and *writing* outcomes emphasises the predominance of oral language in SPHE objectives and methodologies.

A similar pattern of language use in SPHE can be noted across all the class levels. However, the language skills gradually become more developed through the class levels, requiring higher-order thinking. In the content objectives for fifth and sixth classes for example, the language skills include: *recognise, discuss and understand, reflect on, comment critically and constructively, assert his/her rights, differentiate between, compare and contrast.*

A further consideration in auditing the language content of any area of learning is its 'register', namely the terminology and vocabulary specific to that area of learning or discipline, as well as its particular language patterns. In some strand units of SPHE, the teacher is required to teach specific terms explicitly, in order to fulfil one of the aims of the curriculum, i.e. *to increase [children's] vocabulary related to the social, personal and health aspects of their lives.* Examples of this are the *names of parts of the male and female body using appropriate anatomical terms*; names of unsafe substances such as *detergents, fertilisers*; terms describing personal attributes such as *loyalty, trust*; social issues such as *racism, discrimination*; health conditions such as *coeliac, diabetes, anorexia.*

Methodologies and exemplars

Active learning strategies are proposed as essential to successful teaching and learning in SPHE (*SPHE Curriculum*, p. 6). Some strategies and methodologies are very clearly language-dependent, i.e. brainstorming, debate, role play, conflict-resolution, discussion. In *Approaches and methodologies (SPHE Teacher Guidelines*, pp. 54-59), the role of language is largely implicit within many suggested methodologies. However, it is made explicit in some instances:

Active learning is a process . . . in which [children] can begin from what they already know, explore possibilities, question, draw conclusions and reflect on outcomes. (p. 54)

[Children] can be involved [in their learning] at an emotional level as they explore their feelings about a particular topic, hypothesise or give a personal opinion,

whereas analysing, questioning, reflecting, negotiating or summarising require participation at a cognitive level. (p. 55)

The latter ‘cognitive-level’ learning echoes the research report *Oral Language in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3-8 years) (Shiel et al, 2012)* which notes that *language can be used as a tool for reflection (p. 15).*

A wider range of language skills is proposed in the exemplars provided in the *SPHE Teacher Guidelines* (pp. 41-51). Here, the language work is supported by suggested resources, such as stories, circle time, or exploring pictures and photographs. Two examples of the suggested language activities in exemplars will illustrate this in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Suggested language activities in SPHE exemplars

<p>Exemplar 1 Infant classes</p> <p>Strand unit: Taking care of my body</p> <p>Topic: Food and nutrition</p>
<p>Language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • talking about favourite foods • exploring the term ‘healthy food’ • collecting words that describe food • matching illustrations of food with initial sounds or letters • using language for describing food: sweet, sour, bitter, salty, sharp
<p>Exemplar 3 Third and fourth classes</p> <p>Strand unit: Media education Topic: Media</p>
<p>Language:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creating and exploring captions • comparing and contrasting headlines • summarising and prioritising ideas • engaging in and talking about books: favourite characters or authors, plot, motives • distinguishing between fact and fiction in various media • exploring some of the language used in advertising

Summary

This audit of language in the *SPHE Curriculum* (DES, 1999) confirms that language is central to teaching and learning in the subject. The aims and objectives of SPHE are dependent upon language use and development, given their thrust towards children's personal and social development. Significantly in the case of SPHE, even the language used outside of direct teaching of the subject contributes to learning within it, as school ethos and atmosphere become relevant sites of learning, down to the manner in which those within a school relate to each other, including the way children are dealt with, referred to, named, praised or sanctioned. Thus language is the means of representation and communication not only of information and ideas, but also of the quality of day-to-day relationships within the school.

Language in SPHE facilitates children's understanding of concepts, it empowers children to express themselves, to assert their rights, to relate and communicate at levels appropriate to their age and stage of development. Language is seen to have the power to build someone up or put them down. It enables *explanation, apologising, justifying, comparing*: all functions and skills integral to the aims of SPHE. Even simply naming feelings can empower children. SPHE's language skills may serve children into time well beyond school, providing a base for the development of a critical faculty that enables them deal with the many messages that come through the medium of language.

No more than in any other area of learning, language does not exist in a vacuum, but has meaning in real events. SPHE attempts to teach children that language both reflects and creates the culture around us, and helps to build our identity.

6. Language across the Primary School Curriculum

This section focuses on language ⁵The *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) describes the role of language in the curriculum as 'pervasive' and the curriculum for individual subjects supports this claim:

Language is such a universal influence in the teaching and learning process, in every curriculum area, that particular exemplars of its integration with visual arts education are not given in the curriculum. (Visual Arts Curriculum, p.8)

The curriculum notes that language provides access to knowledge. At the same time, the content of diverse areas of learning provides the means by which language itself is developed and enriched. This two-way reciprocal relationship is recognised explicitly or implicitly throughout the curriculum.

It is of note that each subject also has a vocabulary particular to itself: 'terminology,' the meaning of which is specific to that subject's context. Thus, subjects can be said to have their own 'literacy'. The *History Curriculum* (DES, 1999) says that *history has a language of its own* (p. 11). Similarly, music has its notation, mathematics its symbols and diagrams, science its definitions and processes, and of course language's own literacy of words, sounds, grammar, syntax and so on. However, these varied literacies cannot by themselves represent the concepts of their disciplines. They require everyday language in order to enable understanding and communication of those concepts.

Most subjects in the primary curriculum contain a statement of the role and importance of language within that subject. Before considering the particular nature of those roles, the following statement of the role of language – in this instance in respect of the *Visual Arts Curriculum* (DES, 1999) - could well apply to all areas of the curriculum:

Language is a way for the child to name and classify things, to express and modify ideas, to formulate questions and hypotheses, to

⁵ The focus of this section is not on curriculum objectives but on language across the curriculum.

enunciate conclusions and judgements, to access and retrieve information, and through language development, he/she acquires a vocabulary with which to perform these tasks. In this way, language helps to clarify ideas and expand the child's conceptual framework.
(p. 8)

6.1 Subjects

Each subject in the curriculum – other than English and Gaeilge – refers to the relationship between language and the content of that particular subject. The relationship between language and the *Drama Curriculum* (DES, 1999) and the *SPHE Curriculum* (DES, 1999) has been outlined in detail in sections 4 and 5 of this document. An overview of language throughout the curriculum subjects is presented below.

Mathematics

Mathematics is an interesting example, not least because the *Mathematics Curriculum* (DES, 1999) describes mathematics itself to be both a *science* and a *universal language*, before considering the role of verbal language in mathematics learning:

[Mathematics] gives the child a language and a system through which he/she may analyse, describe and explain a wide range of experiences, make predictions, and solve problems. (p. 2)

There is reference to *mathematical literacy* in the *Mathematics Teacher Guidelines* (DES, 1999, p. 2). Music is another subject where its own *language* is similarly named, i.e. *musical literacy* (*Music Curriculum*, DES, 1999, p. 7). While the mathematics language includes knowledge of symbols and diagrams, it also highlights within the mathematics objectives those terms and vocabulary relevant to the strand unit. Examples include (for first class) *heavy, heavier, heaviest* (strand unit – *weight*); (for fourth class) *chance, likely, never, definitely* (strand unit – *Chance*); (for fifth class) *positive seven, negative three* (strand unit – *directed numbers*). Surprisingly, this vocabulary is quite sparsely highlighted through the curriculum objectives, in spite of the fact that the curriculum talks of mathematical language as being *precise, accurate* and *concise*.

The *Mathematics Teacher Guidelines* (DES, 1999) make reference to the fact that *all children come to school with some mathematical knowledge and language* (p. 9). One of the tasks of the teacher is to ensure that children understand the exact

meaning of terms which are required for the comprehension of mathematical concepts, words such as *increase/decrease, odd/even, difference*. This mathematical language, it states, *must be spoken before being read, and read before being written* (*Mathematics Teacher Guidelines*, DES, 1999, p. 19).

The stage of development in oral language of children arriving into infant classes has significant implications for their progress in mathematics. In the *algebra* strand for example, children should be enabled to *translate verbal problems into algebraic expressions* (*Mathematics Curriculum*, p. 13). In *Skills development*, they should be enabled to *recall and understand mathematical terminology, facts, definitions, and formulae* (*Mathematics Curriculum*, p. 12). Similarly communicating, expressing, discussing and explaining are all also in *Skills development*. Teachers commonly note the additional difficulties faced by children in mathematical learning where their attainment in *reading and/or oral language* is low.

Science

The *Science Curriculum* (DES, 1999) says that much of the child's learning in science takes place *in the interaction between language, whether Irish or English, and experience*.

Through language children name and classify things, express and modify ideas, formulate questions and hypotheses, and report conclusions. In this way language contributes to the expansion of the child's conceptual development. (Science Curriculum, p.10)

In *Science Skills development*, it is clear that language is critical, when the skills to be developed include *questioning, observing, predicting, recording and communicating*. (*Science Curriculum*, pp. 20-21). Providing an example of the two-way relationship between language and subject content as suggested above, the curriculum notes that:

The teacher uses language to question, to explain, to suggest, to prompt, and to stimulate the child to think. The children are encouraged to describe, discuss, predict, explain, hypothesise and analyse ideas. (Science Curriculum, p. 10)

Thus, language is developed to enable description and narration of the science experience, while the scientific concepts are in turn identified and made accessible by the appropriate vocabulary.

History

The *History Curriculum* (DES, 1999) makes an even stronger claim to benefit language:

Language develops primarily through its purposeful use and effective learning often involves and occurs through talk and writing. Because of this, history can make a critical contribution to the child's language development: the growth of the child's historical understanding and the acquisition of language skills are interdependent and mutually enriching.
(p. 10)

The curriculum goes on to list the varied skills of the historian, each of them in one way or another requiring language for its development, while at the same time 'providing rich opportunities for the enrichment and extension of children's language'. (*History Curriculum*, p 10). A significant language activity in learning history is *the examination of oral and written evidence in a critical and sensitive manner* (p. 10). The 'literacy' of history is underlined by the statement that children can *learn to read historical evidence*, while, as mentioned earlier, the subject also claims to *have a language of its own*. (*History Curriculum*, p. 11).

Geography

Geography also states that it has a language of its own. As with history, it claims to have an 'interdependent and mutually enriching' relationship with language.

It is largely through language that children describe and interpret their experience, organise their thinking and attempt to make sense of the world around them (*Geography Curriculum*, p.12).

The *Geography Curriculum* (DES, 1999) outlines *investigation skills* including *questioning, observing, predicting, analysing, recording and communicating, and evaluating* (p. 23), skills which will both require and facilitate language use and development. An interesting suggestion in the integration section of this curriculum is the identification of relationships between geographical features and place names in Irish and English. (*Geography Teacher Guidelines*, DES, p. 46)

Music

Music is another subject that refers to its own *literacy*, one of its strand units is in fact called *literacy*. Music makes claims similar to other subjects about its mutually beneficial relationship with language: *Language is developed through music, while in*

turn, musical knowledge can be developed through language (Music Curriculum, DES, p. 10).

However, music goes somewhat further than other subjects in its claim to benefit all learning in the curriculum.

Music education is part of a balanced curriculum which aims to develop the whole spectrum of the child's intelligence. It involves learning in the major domains of knowledge, skills, attitudes and feelings, and the senses. It therefore contributes to the wider curriculum in a myriad of ways. (Music Curriculum, DES, 1999, p. 5)

Visual Arts

Visual Arts asserts the important role of language in its relationship with visual representation: *in visual arts education, language is vitally important in stimulating ideas and recalling experiences so that they are vividly present as he/she tries to express them visually (Visual Arts Curriculum, p. 8).*

The introduction to the curriculum also says that *being able to talk about art is also an essential part of the child's development in art (p. 8)*. Indeed, many of the Visual Arts objectives are phrased as *should be enabled to look at and talk about*. The *Visual Arts Teacher Guidelines (NCCA,1999)* point out that

[v]isual arts activities provide many opportunities for incidental language development. Children are encouraged to talk about work in hand, about the challenges they meet, the decisions they make about their choice of subject and how they use materials and tools. (Visual Arts Teacher Guidelines, p. 36)

There is also a strong emphasis on *oral language*—of teacher and children—in the *Looking and responding to art* section of Approaches and methodologies in the *Visual Arts Teacher Guidelines (pp. 121-127)*.

Physical Education

The *Physical Education Curriculum (DES, 1999)* also emphasises the important role of language in learning within the subject. Although the subject is first and foremost a curriculum of physical activity, each of its strands contains a strand unit *understanding and appreciation*, where children should be enabled to reflect on and talk about the activities they engage in, ask and answer questions about them, and gain an understanding of aspects such as rules of games, their tactics and

strategies, and health and safety issues. All of these will require language skills such as discussion, describing, and questioning.

Drama

In the case of the *Drama Curriculum* (DES, 1999), language is obviously a very significant element. Among its contributions to the child's development, the curriculum explains that it gives the child *a rich oral language experience and affords the opportunity to experiment with different registers of language* (*Drama Teacher Guidelines*, DES, p. 4). Many of the curriculum's objectives include language dimensions: *share insights, discuss and decide, listen and contribute, explore and ask questions*. Indeed, language permeates the Drama activities suggested in the Teacher Guidelines. As noted elsewhere, it is oral language that is almost always being developed. Again, following the pattern of other subjects, it is clear that Drama requires language, but language—especially oral language—can also benefit greatly by the learning that Drama facilitates.

Social, Personal and Health Education

Echoing the relationship between language learning and Drama, the *Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum* (DES, 1999) states that *[t]he exploration of language and its usage in relating to others is central to any SPHE programme* (p. 7). As discussed elsewhere, a range of language skills, both receptive and expressive, may be developed in SPHE learning: *name, talk about, explore, discuss, ask, tell, examine, listen, respond, suggest*. Many SPHE strategies and methodologies are very clearly language-dependent, for example brainstorming, debate, role play, conflict-resolution, and discussion. However, as with Drama, it is largely oral language skills that are developed in these objectives, with talk and discussion predominating. In SPHE, given the nature and content of the subject, with its emphasis on personal and interpersonal development, language is undoubtedly central.

Summary

The *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (DES, 1999) states that *language has a vital role to play in children's development, and that much learning takes place through the interaction of language and experience* (p. 15). This audit of the particular relationships between language and subjects of the curriculum demonstrates that, without exception, language is indeed crucial to children's

learning. Each subject emphasises that language is the means of access to its particular discipline, and the means by which its key concepts are understood. Each subject also explains that learning of its content serves in turn to develop children's language skills. Subjects are seen to vary in their emphasis on their relationship with language, depending upon the nature of the learning of that particular subject.

The principal function of language is communication. While all strands of language, and many functions of language, are employed in learning across the curriculum, *oral language* receives the greatest emphasis, being the primary form of communication in language. It is seen to complement physical and dramatic activity, visual and musical expression, understanding of mathematical and scientific principles, and the nurturing of personal relationships. It can also be seen that language use in all subjects is developmental, increasing in complexity of use and in range of vocabulary as children progress through the class levels.

7. Audit of *Aistear*

This section presents an audit of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009) in comparison to the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) for English and Irish (T1 and T2). The purpose of the audit is to explore the level of connection between *Aistear's* learning goals and in particular, its focus on children's language and literacy development, with the content objectives in the language area in the primary school curriculum. It is important at the outset to note that rather than focusing on English and/or Irish, *Aistear* emphasises the importance of children becoming proficient users of at least one language (English, Irish or another) as well as developing an awareness and appreciation of other languages.

While the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) supports children's learning from 4- 12 years, this audit relates to the curriculum for Junior and Senior Infant classes only given that *Aistear* covers the period from birth to 6 years. Equally it is important to bear in mind that *Aistear* is a curriculum framework rather than a curriculum. It defines a framework as *a scaffold or support which helps adults to develop a curriculum for the children in their setting*, and a curriculum as *all the experiences, formal and informal, planned and unplanned in the indoor and outdoor environment, which contribute to children's learning and development* (*Aistear*, p.54). From the outset, we are therefore comparing two different constructions.

The section begins with some philosophical and structural differences between *Aistear*(NCCA, 2009) and the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999), as these are relevant in the context of comparing and contrasting the elements of children's language development supported by the two. The section also outlines the process through which the audit was completed and concludes with some observations to inform the development of the new integrated language curriculum for primary schools.

7.1 Differences

Aistear has 12 principles many of which are similar to those in the curriculum including the importance of a relevant and a broad and balanced curriculum. Both the framework and the curriculum also highlight the importance of children learning through language. It is interesting, however, to note some of the differences in how this is conceptualised across the two. In the case of *Aistear*, learning through language and indeed language development itself is subsumed into the overarching concept of communication. This reflects the developmental continuum from birth to 6 years and draws on the Reggio Emilia concept of the ‘100’ languages through which children share their ideas, thoughts and experiences. Table 8 presents the principle of *Communication and language* which underpins *Aistear*. The principle begins with a philosophical statement followed by a detailed interpretation from the child’s perspective of what this requires of the adult/teacher in practice.

Table 8: *Aistear*’s principle of ‘Communication and language’

<p>Communication and language</p>	<p>The ability to communicate is at the very heart of early learning and development. Communication helps children learn to think about and make sense of their world. They communicate from birth using many different ways of giving and receiving information. Each of these ways is important in its own right. Learning to communicate in early childhood is shaped by two main factors: children’s own ability and their environment.</p> <p>Support me to communicate to the best of my ability from the earliest age possible. Watch out in case I have any communication and/or language delays or difficulties, since the earlier I get help the better it is for me.</p> <p>Remember that I give and receive information in many different ways. I can communicate using words, sign language, Braille, rhythm, number, movement, gesture, drama, art, and Information and Communications Technology (ICT). When I am ready, support me in my writing and reading in a way that suits my needs best, and don’t rush me.</p> <p>You have a key role in supporting my communication and language skills. Talk to me, listen to me, respond to me, interpret what I say, and provide a place for me where I get the opportunity to share my experiences, thoughts, ideas, and feelings with others in all the ways that I can. Model communication and language skills for me.</p> <p>My parents will be keen for me to learn English and/or Irish if I have a different home language. Remember to tell my parents that it is important for me to maintain my home language too. Reassure them that I can learn English and/or Irish as well as keeping my home language.</p>
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The 1999 curriculum defines language in a somewhat more limited manner and interprets it largely from the perspective of mastery of the verbal form. The curriculum emphasises the importance of interactions with others for the purpose of extending language, interpreting experience and deepening understanding.

Presenting learning

One of the most significant structural differences between *Aistear* and the Primary School Language Curriculum concerns **how** the content of children’s learning is articulated. Building on good practice internationally, *Aistear* presents the ‘what’ of children’s learning using 4 themes as shown in Figure 1 while the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) uses 11 subjects within 6 curriculum areas, one of these being Language (English and Irish).

Figure 1: Aistear’s four interconnected themes



Aistear's themes of *Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking* are highly interconnected and as such do not map neatly to individual subjects such as English and Irish making a comparison of the two all the more complex and challenging. Instead, aspects of the two languages are identifiable to varying degrees in each of the four themes. Nonetheless, as illustrated in the audit itself, the two key themes in *Aistear* which support children's language and literacy development are *Communicating* and *Exploring and Thinking*.

Each of *Aistear's* themes contains aims and broad learning goals. These goals, relevant from birth to 6 years, describe what children should be able to do, should know and understand, should value, and how they should approach and think about learning. Each goal begins with the stem, *In partnership with the adult, children will ...* In this way, the learning goals represent a departure from the use of content objectives to articulate children's learning as in the case of the Language Curriculum, and a move towards the use of learning outcomes as planned for the new integrated language curriculum.

Aistear and the Primary School Language Curriculum also differ in the level of detail each provides about what children should learn in the area of language. By using broad learning goals, the former prioritises less detail and is descriptive in nature. The curriculum provides more detail in terms of what children should be enabled to learn and the types of activities in which they might participate to facilitate this learning. Due to this difference in level of detail, individual learning goals from *Aistear* do not connect neatly to single content objectives in the curriculum. *Aistear* has more than 40⁶ learning goals which are concerned with children's development and use of language compared to the English Curriculum's 88 content objectives, the T₂ Irish Curriculum's 20 objectives and the T₁'s 72 objectives for the infant curriculum. Table 9 provides a practical illustration of this comparison.

⁶ Given the broad nature of some of the learning goals and the centrality of language to children's communication, thoughts and actions, it is difficult to be definitive about the number of learning goals which support language development.

Table 9: Illustration: Mapping learning goals to content objectives

Learning goal - <i>Aistear</i>	Content objectives – Language Curriculum
<p>In partnership with the adult, children will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use letters, words, sentences, numbers, signs, pictures, colour, and shapes to give and record information, to describe and to make sense of their own and others' experiences. <p>(<i>Exploring and Thinking</i>, A3, LG5)</p>	<p>The child shall be enabled to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • write and draw frequently. (<i>English</i>, S: Writing, SU: Receptiveness to language) • reflect on and talk about a wide range of everyday experience and feelings. (<i>English</i>, S: <i>oral language</i>, SU: Developing cognitive abilities through language) • recall and talk about significant events and details in stories • respond to characters, situations and story details, relating them to personal experience. (<i>English</i>, S: <i>reading</i>, SU: Developing cognitive abilities through language; Emotional and imaginative development through language). <p>Ba chóir go gcuirfí ar chumas an pháiste</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scríobh faoi pictiúr (write about a picture) • pictiúr a tharraingt a léiríonn mothúcháin agus na céadfaí agus lipéid a chur orthu.(draw a picture to illustrate feelings and senses and to label them) <p>(<i>Gaeilge</i>, T₁, S: <i>scríbhneoireacht</i>, SA: Ag úsáid teanga)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • taithí a fháil ar an bhfocal scríofa sa timpeallacht, go háirithe sa seomra ranga, agus a thuiscint go bhfuil brí leis.(to experience the written word in the environment, especially in the classroom and to understand that there is meaning in the written word) <p>(<i>Gaeilge</i> T₁, S: <i>léitheoireacht</i>, SA: Ag cothú fonn léitheoireachta)</p>

7.2 The auditing process

This section provides an outline of how the audit of *Aistear* and the Primary School Language Curriculum for English and Irish was completed.

1. The content objectives from the curriculum provided the starting point. These included the objectives from the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999) and both the T1 and T2 *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999).

2. Each objective was mapped to the learning goal from *Aistear* which the author deemed to provide the 'best match or fit' in terms of the element of language learning being supported. As noted earlier, given the differences in how the content of children's learning is articulated across *Aistear* and the Primary School Language Curriculum and the complexity of matching individual content objectives with individual learning goals (see Table 9), this mapping process was somewhat challenging. Where the author considered a second learning goal to be especially relevant, this was indicated under the heading 'Other aims and goals'.
3. On completion of the initial mapping, *Aistear's* learning goals were used to cluster the content objectives from the three language curricula. Through a variety of codes which are presented in the audit, each content objective was referenced back to its particular curriculum (English, Irish T1 or Irish T2), its strand and strand unit.
4. Finally, *Aistear's* themes of Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking were used to further group the clustered content objectives. See Appendix G.

7.3 Observations

The colour coding and clustering of content objectives according to the learning goals of *Aistear* enables a number of observations to be made. These are described below.

Imbalances and gaps

It is interesting to see the balances and imbalances in the physical numbers of content objectives from the three language curricula mapped to an individual learning goal from *Aistear*. Imbalances are particularly evident in relation to the use of language in a symbolic form. Three learning goals from *Aistear's* theme of *Exploring and Thinking* focus specifically on language in its symbolic form:

- children will become familiar with and associate symbols (pictures, numbers, letters, and words) with the things they represent (A3, LG2)
- children will build awareness of the variety of symbols (pictures, print, numbers) used to communicate, and use these in an enjoyable and meaningful way leading to early reading and writing (A3, LG3)
- children will use letters, words, sentences, numbers, signs, pictures, colour, and shapes to give and record information, to describe and to make sense of their own and others' experiences (A3, LG5).

The audit highlights a significant difference in the emphasis given by the two Irish curricula to this aspect of children's language learning with the Irish T1 giving considerable attention to this area and T2 giving little or none borne out by the relative absence of any content objectives related to this aspect of development. On

an initial analysis, perhaps this is not surprising given that children's development of the symbolic system for *reading* and *writing* progresses at a slower rate in their L2 than in their L1. Research in recent years has, however, highlighted the importance of supporting children's emergent literacy—enabling them to see themselves as, and want to take on the roles of, readers and writers long before they can do this in the conventional sense. As the consultative document informing the development of *Aistear* highlighted (NCCA, 2004), this focus on emergent literacy lays important foundations for later success in *reading* and *writing*. Currently, the Irish T2 curriculum pays little attention to this area.

Another observation worth noting relates to non-verbal communication. One of the four aims in *Aistear's* theme of *Communicating* focuses on the development of children's non-verbal communication skills. While this aspect of communication is especially important in the first few years of a child's life, it can remain a key aspect of communication for children who experience language delay and/or difficulties, long after they begin their primary education. The three current language curricula have few content objectives supporting the development of the non-verbal aspect of communication. Constructing the new integrated language curriculum on a continuum of progression and ensuring that continuum supports *all* children's development, will require greater attention to non-verbal communication.

Higher-order thinking

Aistear is premised on an image of children as capable and competent individuals. One of the purposes of the framework is to develop children as curious and resilient explorers and creative thinkers. To this end, the framework emphasises the importance of developing their creative, imaginative, thinking and problem-solving skills, all of which require children to use language in sophisticated ways. While this focus is evident across the four themes, it is especially so in the theme of *Exploring and Thinking* and to a lesser extent, in the theme of *Communicating*. The audit draws attention to the more limited focus which the three language curricula place on the development of higher-order thinking skills by comparison to *Aistear*. This is evident not so much in which content objectives map to which learning goals but in the

identification of learning goals absent from the audit⁷ and in particular those which support Aims 2 and 4 in the theme of Exploring and Thinking. In the case of the *Communicating* theme, Aim 2, LG4 focuses on children using *language with confidence and competence for giving and receiving information, asking questions, requesting, refusing, negotiating, problem-solving, imagining and recreating roles and situations, and clarifying thinking, ideas and feelings*. While a number of content objectives from all three language curricula map to this learning goal, it is interesting to see that the numbers are smaller than in the case of learning goals which focus on more constrained and lower-order thinking skills such as recognising sounds and letters. While the early years of primary school are an important period for mastering these latter skills, they are also an important time for developing higher-order skills such as predicting, analysing, justifying, negotiating and reasoning.

Dispositions

Following the publication of *Aistear* in 2009, the NCCA undertook to compare and contrast *Aistear* and the infant level of the primary school curriculum, and *Aistear* and *Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (2006). In the case of the former, many similarities were found alongside some significant differences. One of these related to the importance of nurturing positive dispositions in young children. *Aistear* defines dispositions as *enduring habits of mind and action*. *A disposition is the tendency to respond to situations in characteristic ways* (*Aistear*, p. 54). Within the context of language development, a number of learning goals support the development of children's dispositions (Communicating, A4, LG6; Exploring and thinking, Aim 4, LGs 1, 2, 3, and 6). With the exception of the last learning goal listed which focuses on nurturing children's curiosity and their openness to new ideas, the current audit results in no content objectives mapping to these thereby re-affirming one of the main findings from the 2009 audit, that *Aistear* puts significant emphasis on children's dispositions compared to the primary curriculum.

Summary

The audit of *Aistear* and the *Primary School Language Curriculum* provides some interesting points for consideration in the development of the new integrated

⁷ The audit is unidirectional in that it uses the content objectives in the three primary school language curricula as its starting point, and maps these to *Aistear's* learning goals.

language curriculum. While these are not necessarily new findings, the audit provides a further and important confirmation of some of the differences between the two in the areas of children's language learning and development. In considering these differences, it is important, however, to recognise the different timelines and hence bodies of research underpinning the framework and curriculum given that both documents were 'of their time' and separated by a decade of literature and research on children's learning and development. A more interesting and perhaps important outcome of the audit is the initiation of work in comparing and contrasting the three language curricula directly with each other and in particular from the perspective of supporting children's L1 and L2.

8. Implications

This final section explores implications of the audits for the development of the new language curriculum, focusing on curriculum content (what), curriculum specification (how) and the integration of language development across curriculum areas.

8.1 Curriculum content

The following points outline some implications of the audits for the content of the new, integrated primary language curriculum:

- Outcomes in **English and Gaeilge** should be **developed simultaneously** to embed opportunities for integration at the curriculum development stage of our work.
- The content of the language curriculum should reflect important **research findings about children’s language learning** and the gaps identified in these audits should be used as a reference point. Notable gaps to be addressed include non-verbal communication, comprehension strategies, fluency, vocabulary, digital literacy and phonemic awareness.
- Research in recent years, highlights the significance of developing children’s **higher-order thinking** and the new language curriculum should include a focus on developing children’s skills in predicting, analysing, justifying, reasoning, negotiating, and so on.
- Explicit reference should be made to the **dispositions** to be nurtured in children’s language learning in the early years and these dispositions should be embedded in curriculum outcomes, and examples of teaching and learning within the new language curriculum.
- The **number of learning outcomes** in the language curriculum should be reduced while **ensuring that there is clarity** on key milestones for children’s language learning in the early primary years and teachers can support children’s progress with regard to both constrained and unconstrained skills.
- **Consistent and clear terminology** is needed across all strands of the language curriculum and in the curriculum terms used across languages.
- A **definition of text and/or print** is essential to ensure the clarity and transparency of the outcomes.
- The influence of **Aistear** should be reflected in the new language curriculum, including the importance of developing children’s non-verbal, communication skills, supporting children to use language in a symbolic form and providing opportunities for children to develop their language through play.

8.2 Curriculum specification

The findings from the audits reinforce the need to look again at how the curriculum is presented for teachers, parents and children, given the opportunity to develop one specification for the language curriculum for primary and Junior Cycle at this time:

- Clarity is needed on how we **define outcomes**, for whom they are to be developed (e.g. teachers alone or perhaps parents and children also), their scope (e.g. generic or specific or both) and how outcomes will relate to levels of progression in the new language curriculum for primary schools.
- The **organisational framework** of the curriculum should be **accessible for teachers, parents** and perhaps to **children** themselves. The curriculum presentation should enable teachers to plan for, and to support children's learning.
- To ensure **accessibility of the Gaeilge curriculum** for parents and children it will be necessary to use a language register which is meaningful and useful to teachers and to provide an English translation. This is in line with practice elsewhere, e.g., both Northern Ireland and Wales provide a translated version of their second language curricula.
- The use of italic text to present the outcome or an experience (within curriculum objectives) has been shown to be ineffective and inconsistent. It is necessary to **develop the experiential component of the curriculum and clarify its relationship with learning outcomes**.
- The shift in **focus from 'prescribing' towards 'showing'** what teaching and learning can look and sound like will be reflected in the new language curriculum, with links to audio-visual resources for teachers on the ACTION website.
- The presentation and language of the outcomes in the language curricula should **ensure that progression across is clear** as this enables teachers to assess children's progress and support it through differentiated instruction.
- Presenting the curriculum content for T1 and T2 schools in one document, ***Curaclam na Gaeilge*** (DES, 1999) has added to the sense of overload. Therefore, the online context provides opportunities to streamline content based on users' preferences—it should be possible for users to navigate all content and to access the content they need.

8.3 Integrated nature of language

The new integrated language curriculum should address the three dimensions of integration: integration within the teaching of a specific language, integration across languages, and integration across the curriculum.

Integration with the teaching of a specific language

Highlighting the links across the strands of the language curriculum is essential to ensure that teachers can identify linkages. Further investigation is required to identify how the links across learning outcomes can be supported in the online environment without unnecessary duplication of content across the strands.

Integration across languages

Identifying and highlighting integration in English and Gaeilge is an essential part of the new language curriculum as it ensures children's language learning is not compartmentalised. Connections between the two languages should be explicit and tangible and should support teachers to teach for transfer across languages. Further investigation is required to identify how integration can be illustrated and how the different contexts (English medium and Irish medium) can be catered for in the new integrated language curriculum. The initial step in this process is to ensure the structure of the English and Gaeilge curricula, and in particular the strands, are consistent across languages.

Integration across the curriculum

Communication is one of four themes in *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009), one of six priorities for primary education (NCCA, 2012) and a key skill of Junior Cycle (NCCA, 2010a). The degree of integration with other curriculum subjects indicates the cross-curricular nature of language and literacy. Showing the cross-curricular nature of language and literacy learning in the new language curriculum, by using examples of practice, could support teachers in more effective cross-curricular language and literacy teaching, and improve learning. Evidence shows that language learning is more effective when it is combined with content learning in other subjects, i.e., in another subject other than the language being learned (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011, p 14). This audit has highlighted the ambition for language use across the 1999 curriculum and the need for greater support for teachers in planning and teaching for integration,

e.g., the integration of Gaeilge with other subjects such as *Drámaíocht* (Drama), *Ceol* (Music), *Ealaín* (Visual Arts) and *OSPS* (SPHE).

Given the dependence on language to achieve content objectives across a range of curriculum subjects, the importance of developing language and especially oral language skills across the curriculum is particularly significant. However, the issue of varied language endowment raises challenges for the new language curriculum to truly support progression for all children.

8.4 Conclusion

These audits of the *English Curriculum* (DES, 1999), *Curaclam na Gaeilge* (DES, 1999), the *Drama Curriculum* (DES, 1999), the *Social Personal and Health Education Curriculum* (DES, 1999), language across the curriculum and *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009) all provide a valuable starting point for the development of the new language curriculum. The findings and implications from this piece of work represent a point of departure for the new language curriculum and also a reference point for connections between the new curriculum and the language area in the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999).

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