

**Plus ca Change or Viva la Revolution?  
Irish Primary Teachers Perception of the new  
Primary Curriculum**

**Dr Andrew Loxley, Dr Damian Murchan,  
Mr Keith Johnston, MS Helen Fitzgerald  
and Ms Micheline Quinn**

**School of Education  
Trinity College Dublin  
Dublin 2  
Ireland**

**Paper prepared for the IPDA Conference 2007  
Belfast  
Northern Ireland**

**(Please note that this is a draft paper and not quite complete, but  
you are more than welcome to quote from it.)**

## **Introduction**

The incremental introduction of the 1999 Primary Curriculum in the Republic of Ireland represented the first major curricula development since 1971. As is now part of the received wisdom concerning curriculum development, change (no matter its scale or scope), can no longer be layered unproblematically by state agencies upon practising teachers. Rather as Spilane (2000) amongst others, argues change is a negotiated and interpretative process and not simply a function of being a direct translation from what is written in the published curriculum and to school and classroom practice. Drawing on mainly survey data gathered from the national evaluation of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) [which the authors undertook between 2004 and 2005], we will explore some of the ramifications of curriculum change from the perspective of the teachers. In particular we will focus on the mechanisms and processes applied by the Department of Education and Science (DES) to investigate large-scale change. More specifically however, we will consider this process in relation to four curriculum areas namely: English, Gailge, Visual Arts and Science.

## **The New Curriculum & The PCSP**

The *Primary School Curriculum* (Ireland: DES, 1999), developed by the Department of Education and Science's advisory body, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) was the culmination of several years planning and development in conjunction with those groups deemed to be the main stakeholders in education: representatives of parents, school managerial associations, teacher unions and others.<sup>1</sup> An overview of the structure of the curriculum is presented in Table I.

---

<sup>1</sup> An in-depth description and critique of the process of curriculum development is provided by Sugrue (2004).

**Table 1      Structure of the (1999) Primary School Curriculum**

<b>Curriculum Area<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Subjects</b>
Language	English Irish
Mathematics	Mathematics
Social, environmental and scientific education (SESE)	History Geography Science
Arts Education	Visual Arts Music Drama
Physical Education	Physical Education
Social personal and health education (SPHE)	Social personal and health education (SPHE)
Religious education	Religious education

Although the 1999 curriculum draws on its predecessor, *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (The Primary Curriculum) (Government of Ireland, Department of Education 1971), changes in emphasis were deemed so extensive, that it would not be desirable or possible to implement all 11 subjects simultaneously. Accordingly, after a range of alternatives was considered, a phased model of implementation was eventually agreed, as outlined in Table 2. There has been some adjustment to this timetable in recent years and this is reflected in the table.

---

<sup>2</sup> Responsibility for production of appropriate curricula for Religious education is vested in the various religious denominations. Depending on the ownership of schools, different religious education curricula are taught, or none at all.

**Table 2 Timetable for Phased Implementation of the Primary School Curriculum<sup>3</sup>**

<b>Proposed Implementation</b>	<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Revised Implementation</b>
2000–2001	English T1 <sup>a</sup> , Irish T1 <sup>b</sup>	2000-2001
2001-2002	English T2 <sup>c</sup> , Visual Arts	2001-2002
2002-2003	Gaeilge T2 <sup>d</sup> , Mathematics	2002-2003
2003-2004	Science, SPHE	2003-2004 <sup>e</sup>
2004-2005	PE, Music	2005-2006
2005-2006	History, Geography, Drama	2006-2007

*Professional Development for Teachers in Ireland: The Primary Curriculum Support Programme*

There was a view, commonly held across the main stakeholders and partners, that the implementation of this new curriculum would not occur either by legislative fiat or osmosis and therefore there was recognition from the outset of the critical need for professional development for teachers (Murchan et al., 2005; Murchan, et al. 2006; Loxley et al., 2007). It was also argued by some of the senior figures involved in the planning of the new curriculum that perceived ‘mistakes’ in relation to implementing the 1971 curriculum would not be re-visited. That is, professional development would form an integral and deliverable part of the 1999 curriculum and not an under-funded, unrealised aspiration *as per* the 1971 version. Accordingly, a national initiative, the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP), was established in 1998 to mediate the curriculum to teachers in order to enable them to implement it effectively. Activities provided by the PCSP have centered on two distinct but interconnected strands: (i) the provision of workshops and (ii) school-

<sup>3 a</sup> EnglishT1: English curriculum where the main language of instruction in the school is English

<sup>b</sup> Irish T 1: Irish curriculum where the main language of instruction in the school is Irish

<sup>c</sup> English T2: English curriculum where the main language of instruction in the school is Irish

<sup>d</sup> Irish T2: Irish curriculum where the main language of instruction in the school is English

<sup>e</sup> 2003-2004 was designated as a Review and Consolidation Year where the pace of curriculum implementation was slowed to enable teachers accommodate existing changes into their planning and practice.

based advice to teachers in addition to web-based support which is described in more detail below.

It is important to note, that professional development in Ireland prior to the establishment of the PCSP has not been part of a clearly articulated national strategy or at the very least provided centrally on a systematic basis. In the absence any form of central provision, a default policy of *laissez-faire* prevailed. As such, professional development tended to be decentralised and lacked strategic coherence at the system level. Professional development opportunities for teachers largely consisted of postgraduate diplomas and higher degrees offered by higher education institutes and shorter non-award bearing courses provided by local teacher education centres and a range of non-traditional providers (e.g. trade unions and professional associations). Thus any attempt at coherent matching of systemic (national or school level) requirements with individual needs beyond their pre-service teacher education, has been minimal, until the PCSP. However, it appears that the PCSP was not overtly planned to be the foundation of a long-term strategy of professional development; it was designed simply to support the implementation of the 1998 curriculum. As such its remit was tightly focused mainly on subject content and assessment, and its life-cycle tied to that of the curriculum implementation timetable.<sup>4</sup>

#### *The PCSP, Strand I: The Workshops<sup>5</sup>*

In the period 1999 to 2003, it is estimated that 15,000 workshops were held with teachers nationally, mainly across 6 subject areas following from an initial introductory two-day workshop that provided teachers with an overview of the curriculum. Subjects for which professional development was provided include

---

<sup>4</sup> Although this critical issue of professional development *per se* has started to be addressed via the setting up of a Teaching Council (Government of Ireland, 2001), it will probably take an number of years before this fissure between pre-service education and in-service practice is fully addressed beyond the usual rhetorical policy flourishes. An analysis of the extent to which the Act itself is sufficiently robust to promote best practice in relation to professional development is provided by Murchan et al., 2005.

<sup>5</sup> In the international literature, the term *workshop* is generally used to describe meetings of teachers, facilitated by external personnel, designed as part of a professional development programme. These gatherings were termed *Seminars* in the Irish context, 1999-2003. The two terms are interchangeable and the present paper uses the international term, *workshops*.

English, Irish, Visual Arts, Mathematics, SPHE and Science. Some provision was also provided in other aspects of the curriculum such as Learning Support and substance abuse. The subject-based workshops are conducted with groups of approximately 25 teachers (either from a single school or from clusters of small schools). The purpose of these workshops is to inform participants of the content and methodology of the different subjects. For most subjects, two days of workshop-based presentations and activities are provided, usually in an education centre<sup>6</sup>, hotel or other suitable venue. On such occasions, participating schools are closed (parents/guardians are notified in advance to make alternative arrangements for the care of their children) and teachers attend the workshops. In an attempt to counter variability in either content or presentational style and format, considerable standardisation of content, methodology and resources was undertaken, including the development of a structured “script” for most workshops that session leaders used in implementing the workshops.

In addition to the workshops, each subject was typically allocated a school-based planning day which usually takes place either between the two workshop days or after they have occurred. In terms of scheduling, the program was designed so that the workshops and planning days took place in the year before a given subject was due to be implemented in schools. This school-based day, along with the off-site workshop days, is reckoned by the Department of Education and Science to be part of the school year of 183 contact days.

#### *The PCSP, Strand 2: Follow-up Support*

The second strand of the program is the Regional Curriculum Support Service (RCSS), which was established to support teachers in their own schools. RCSS advisory teachers, attached to education centres, are invited by school principals to visit schools to give advice on the curriculum content, methodologies, planning and implementation for all subjects that are being implemented. Normally, provision of this form of support is scheduled in the weeks and months subsequent to the

---

<sup>6</sup> There is a national network of 21 full-time Education Centres in the Republic of Ireland. The remit of the centres is to provide a locus and forum for professional development and meetings of persons and groups involved in education.

workshops. The RCSS also holds drop-in clinics, workshops and information evenings after school hours in local education centres. A further support mechanism offered takes the form of a website<sup>7</sup> developed by the PCSP which contains workshop material and other information and resources for teachers to use in the course of their work. A helpline and periodic newsletter is also part of the PCSP initiative.

## **The Evaluation**

The evaluation from which the reported data came from, was a study commissioned by the DES and had as its remit three aims:

- relate the underlying approach to professional development implicit in the PCSP to the Primary School Curriculum and its phased implementation in schools
- investigate the development and ‘roll-out’ of the PCSP and explore factors that influence this process
- identify and investigate the value added to teachers’ existing knowledge and practice and children’s learning as a result of the professional development.

In translating these aims into more specific and interlinked objectives, the following acted as a framework for the evaluation:

- describe the formulation of the Primary School Curriculum phased implementation plan
- evaluate the implications of the Primary School Curriculum phased implementation plan for professional development generally and the PCSP in particular
- describe the underlying philosophy, remit and overall structure of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme in the context of the Primary School Curriculum

---

<sup>7</sup> [www.pcsp.ie](http://www.pcsp.ie)

- evaluate the underlying philosophy, remit and overall structure of the Primary Curriculum Support Programme in light of curriculum needs nationally and best practice internationally
- evaluate the role and effectiveness of enabling structures put in place to assist the PCSP fulfil its function
- evaluate the quality and effectiveness of curriculum supports provided by the PCSP from the perspective of participants and other interested parties
- evaluate participants' levels of attitude, knowledge, concepts and skills as a result of support provided by the PCSP
- relate the support provided by the PCSP to the application of new knowledge, concepts and skills at school level
- relate the support provided by the PCSP to the application of new knowledge, concepts and skills at classroom level
- what was the response, over time, of the PCSP to its ongoing work?

Given this extensive array of objectives, it would be somewhat of an understatement to say that several different data sources were utilised for the evaluation. The experiences and views of groups of individuals that are or were involved in the PCSP and the support programme were explored through the use of questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. Direct observation of a small number of workshops<sup>8</sup> and the work of advisory teachers was also undertaken by the research team. In addition official documentation associated with the project such as committee minutes, workshop materials and so on were analysed and the PCSP website was evaluated. As a way of managing, as well as conceptualising their roles within the programme, the evaluation participants were placed into one of three broad categories: either as programme planners, deliverers or receivers. As ever with such forms of categorisation they are never wholly exhaustive, as some participants inevitably

---

<sup>8</sup> The research team made site visits to a relatively small number of seminars: out of the almost identical 1,921 Science seminars offered that year, the evaluation team observed 5. An equally small number of Learning Support seminars was observed also. Although the observations and subsequent analysis were undertaken with exacting rigour, due to the limited number of observations made, care must be taken in generalising from the findings. However, reports from trainers and teachers indicate that these seminars were broadly typical of other seminars that they attended, making it possible to draw some useful inferences from the data.

'spilled' over into other categories. However, it nonetheless served as a useful device for organising this aspect of the evaluation.

247 primary schools participated in the study, with stratified random samples of teachers and principals teachers providing much useful numeric and qualitative survey-level data. In the case of the questionnaire for teachers, a random matrix sampling approach was employed to enable the researchers obtain detailed data in relation to each of 6 subjects plus Learning Support. Whereas all teachers surveyed responded to questionnaire items probing general issues in relation to professional development and the PCSP in particular, seven parallel versions of the questionnaire were developed in order to explore in detail the different curriculum areas. This resulted in an effective sample size of approximately 1,476 for general items and a sample size of approximately 200 for items that probed any given curriculum area in detail. Further detail on sampling and instrument development is provided in Murchan, Loxley, Johnston, Quinn and Fitzgerald, (2005).

Follow-up focus groups with samples of the research population provided rich interpretative depth to the survey findings. The evaluation was framed within a theoretical perspective that conceptualises change in teacher practice as but one interdependent element of more systemic change in curriculum. Rather than a traditional psychological perspective that views curricular change as being a function of teacher knowledge and skill, we argued that change is a more iterative, dialectical and longitudinal process influenced by:

- system-wide identification of priorities for reform;
- individual teacher readiness and responsiveness to reform ideas;
- school and peer-level support.

Investigating the latter of these three influences, namely school contextual influences on teachers' reactions to change and on change effected, is the focus of the present paper. A range of outcomes from the study pose interesting issues for policymakers and school practitioners alike. The study found, for example, that the programme of professional development was sufficiently differentiated to respond flexibly to a range of school contexts. Opting for a very large number of focused workshops that

targeted single large schools or clusters of small schools afforded the trainers the opportunity to engage individually within the specific school contexts. This was reinforced by a related initiative that provided site-based advice and support to schools that requested such assistance.

### **Sharing some Findings**

Within this section we will specifically focus on two main areas. Firstly, teachers' perception of the need to change the curriculum more generally and secondly, how the PCSP has supported this process in specific curriculum areas.

#### *The Questionnaire Respondents*

To some wider context, 2,680 questionnaires were administered by post of which 1,476 were returned; a 58% response rate (when adjustment was made for incorrect data about actual numbers of teachers in schools). 199 of the respondents classified themselves as males and 1,248 as females (29 respondents did not indicate their gender). This constitutes an 86% and 14% ratio of female to male teachers and is broadly representative of the gender ratio among primary teachers nationally. Additionally, 62% of respondents are class teachers, 7% are Learning Support teachers and 18% are other types of teacher. 76% received their teaching qualification before 1998 and 24% received it after 1998, with 89% having completed their professional training in the Republic of Ireland. Table 3 below shows the distribution of schools by size.

**Table 3      Size of school**

<b>Number of Teachers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>
1-4	115	47
5-7	57	21
8-10	29	12
11-16	27	11
17-24	19	8
25+	4	1

Total	247	100
-------	-----	-----

Source: School questionnaire

### The Need for Change?

This section considers the survey respondents perception as to the need to change the 1971 curriculum. Table 4 below set out their responses.

**Table 4 Responses (%) to the statement: ‘In your opinion to what extent did the subjects in the 1971 curriculum need revision?’**

Curriculum Area	No opinion	None/a little revision	Moderate revision	Significant revision
Gaeilge	1	7	25	67
English	1	10	59	30
Maths	1	15	57	28
Art & crafts	1	19	47	33
Social & Environmental studies	1	17	49	33
History	4	22	53	21
Civics	5	16	50	29
Geog	4	21	55	20
Music	3	17	46	34
PE	2	19	47	32
Religion	7	21	42	31

The first thing that is noticeable about the data in the above table, is that across most of the subjects there is a perception of the need for revision. When summing across the two response categories of ‘moderate’ and ‘significant revision’ the range the lowest proportions of 73% for ‘Religion’ and up to 92% for ‘Gailge’. It would be safe to assume that the majority of the respondents shared the need for revision. However, this is not to sideline the sizable minority who placed themselves in the ‘none/a little revision’ category particularly around ‘history’ (22%), ‘geography’ (21%) and ‘religion’ (21%).

The above is a useful indicator of all not being well with the 1971 curriculum, but it tells us very little about how the replacement is perceived. As a more generalised question to try and gain some purchase on teachers overall sense of the 1999 curriculum *per se*, we asked: ‘do you think that the 1999 Curriculum is an appropriate replacement for the 1971 Curriculum?’ Table 5 below sets of their responses.

**Table 5 Responses (%) to the question: ‘do you think that the 1999 Curriculum is an appropriate replacement for the 1971 Curriculum?’**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Not at all appropriate</b>	<b>Somewhat appropriate</b>	<b>Very appropriate</b>
Do you think the 1999 curriculum is an appropriate replacement?	2	47	50

From the above table there is a fairly noticeable split between those who view the 1990 Curriculum as ‘somewhat appropriate’ and those who see it as being ‘very appropriate’. Although not an outright endorsement by some 47% of respondents, it was not seen as being unwanted.<sup>9</sup>

#### *PCSP and Embedding of the 1999 Curriculum*

As a way of attaining a general sense of the extent in which teachers had begun adapting and adjusting their own practice in relation to the new curriculum, we presented them with the ‘Please rate your own attention to the following activities since the beginning of the PCSP in-service.’ Some of the ‘activities’ – as can be seen below – were subject focused, but others – not included below – covered areas such as re-designing timetable, involving parents and teaching & learning methodologies.

---

<sup>9</sup> When the sample is adjusted to take into account those teachers who qualified post-1998 (n=256), the distribution of responses across the three categories is much the same.

**Table 6 Teachers (%) response to the statement ‘Please rate your own attention to the following activities since the beginning of the PCSP in-service’.**

Area	none	slight	moderate	extensive
Implementation of English	1	2	36	61
Implementation of Gaeilge	7	5	35	53
Implementation of vis arts	4	8	43	46
Implementation of maths	2	3	41	55

In looking at Table 6, we get a sense that there is a small minority of teachers who had not (for whatever reason) begun the process of implementation across the above curriculum areas. There was a sizable minority who placed themselves in the ‘moderate’ response category’ and an interesting range of proportions who opted for the ‘extensive’ category. It is this latter one, which is worth focusing on, as it suggest (and not unexpectedly) that the ‘traditional’ curriculum subjects such as Gaeilge, English and Maths are the ones which received the most attention. They were also the ones which formed part of the early seminars (2000-2003) and so would have had more time to form part of teachers’ repertoire of curricula routines and structures. From a policy-makers perspective, the ‘moderates’ constitute a problematic ‘bloc’.<sup>10</sup> In areas such as science or even visual arts, this can be put down to ‘newness’. But with the traditional areas, there are a sizable proportion of teachers who have in their own opinion, only paid ‘moderate’ attention to implementation.

In moving on to look at some of these curriculum areas in more detail Part ‘B’ of the teacher questionnaire contained a number of statements, which had the intention of exploring the relationship between the PCSP – in this instance the seminars and the RCSS - but within a subject specific context. The first part of the questionnaire (unsurprisingly called ‘Part A’) performed a similar role but at a much more general level. As mentioned above, ‘Part B’ was aimed at a sub-sample of usually n=209 of

---

<sup>10</sup> A Chi square test of independence to see if the distribution across the categories is just a random ‘spread’, produces statistically significant results (at the  $p = > .05$  critical region) across the five items implying that there is a low probability is not due to chance. Hence if we were to extrapolate this data to the primary teaching population as a whole, the numbers involved are not inconsiderable.

the overall sample, to provide some depth around the various subject strands of the 1999 Curriculum. Below we will focus on English, Gaeilge, Visual Arts and Mathematics. The logic here is that 1) these curriculum areas were ‘rolled out’ between 2000-02 and 2) are pretty much staple parts of the curriculum prior to the 1999 revisions. Other areas, such as science or SPHE less so; in the case of the later it is a distinct construct emerging from the 1999 curriculum.

On the next Table below, there can be seen teachers’ responses to the statement about the influence that the PCSP seminars had had on the specific curriculum areas.

**Table 7 ‘The seminars improved my knowledge and understanding of [subject]’ % (n) response**

<b>The seminars improved my knowledge and understanding of:</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
The English curriculum	1 (2)	6 (12)	5 (10)	74 (155)	14 (30)
The Mathematics curriculum	0 (3)	7 (10)	5 (7)	71 (98)	15 (21)
The Gaeilge curriculum	-	5 (6)	6 (7)	74 (88)	15 (18)
The Visual Arts curriculum	1 (1)	3 (4)	9 (13)	79 (118)	9 (14)

It is fairly reasonable to assume from the above data, that across these subject areas the seminars were viewed as being useful in the case of developing the teachers’ subject specific knowledge and understanding. The ‘agree’ and ‘strongly’ agree response categories accrue, on average 90% of respondents, with the remaining being ether ‘unsure’ or opting to ‘disagree’ with the statement. Table 8 below, shows the teacher’s responses to the statement about the role of PCSP in implementing the specified curriculum area.

**Table 8 ‘The PCSP in-service is central to helping me implement [subject]’ % (n) response**

<b>The PCSP in-service is central to helping me implement:</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
The English curriculum	1 (3)	11 (22)	21 (44)	59 (122)	8 (17)
The Mathematics curriculum	1 (1)	20 (27)	12 (17)	56 (77)	12 (16)
The Gaeilge curriculum	-	15 (17)	17 (19)	58 (67)	10 (12)
The Visual Arts curriculum	2 (3)	11 (16)	12 (18)	64 (96)	11 (17)

In terms of implementation, there is a more interesting distribution of responses. Although the majority of respondents fall into the ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’, there is a minority who felt ‘unsure’ and a sizable minority who placed themselves in the ‘disagreement’ camp. If we take mathematics for example, 21% (n=28) were not enamoured by the PCSP in terms of implementation, 12% ‘unsure’ and 68% ‘agreeing’ or ‘strongly’ agreeing. A similar kind of distribution is discernable on the next table concerning familiarity with teaching methodologies.

**Table 9 Since the seminars I am more familiar with the methodologies of teaching [subject] % (n) response**

<b>Since the seminars I am more familiar with the methodologies of teaching:</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Unsure</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
The English curriculum	1(2)	10 (20)	19 (40)	64 (134)	6 (13)
The Mathematics curriculum	1 (1)	20 (27)	12 (17)	55 (77)	12 (16)
The Gaeilge curriculum	2 (2)	12 (14)	14 (16)	62 (73)	10 (12)
The Visual Arts curriculum	4 (5)	7 (10)	14 (21)	68 (103)	8 (12)

Again, as with Table 8, there is a reasonable level of agreement around their familiarity, but a good-sized minority place themselves into the ‘unsure’ and ‘disagree’ categories. What this seems to suggest – in the case of both ‘implementation’ and ‘familiarity’ that the majority of teachers were more

comfortable around the content dimension of the curriculum, but less so in relation to the PCSP providing a bridge into their classroom work. This in no way suggests that they are not implementing the curriculum. For example, in exploring the Mathematics sub-sample in slightly more detail. Their response to the statement about implementation (which we asked of the whole sample), when crosstabulated separately across the three statements looked at above, this provides another perspective which can be seen in Table 10 below. In that those who placed themselves in the

**Table 10 Crosstabulation of Implementation of maths by PCSP central to helping me implement maths curriculum (n)**

Implementation of maths	The PCSP in-service is central to helping me implement the maths curriculum					Total
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree	
None	0	1	1	2	0	4
Slight	0	1	1	2	0	4
Moderate	1	12	4	23	5	45
Extensive	0	8	8	39	10	65
Total	1	22	14	66	15	118

What is discernable from the above table is that those who responded positively to the general question about implementing maths in their work, also responded positively to the statement concerning the affect of the PCSP on this process. But, there are small numbers who viewed themselves as making ‘moderate’ or ‘extensive’ implementations, who did not see the PCSP as being helpful.

**Table 11 Self-reported description of implementation [subject] % (n) response**

Statement	English curriculum	Gaeilge curriculum	Visual Arts curriculum	Maths curriculum
Have not yet had the opp to plan or implement any of the curriculum	4 (8)	3 (4)	7 (11)	3 (5)
Engaged in planning and have gathered ideas and resources	23 (52)	24 (30)	20 (32)	24 (35)
Minor adjustments but continue in the main to use previous meths	19 (41)	15 (19)	17 (28)	17 (25)
Keep close to ideas and eggs from in-	20 (43)	37 (46)	19 (31)	19 (28)

service and curriculum doc				
Teaching now integrates easily with some other subjects	13 (29)	6 (8)	13 (22)	9 (13)
Revised my approach which has resulted in improvement	21 (46)	15 (19)	24 (40)	27 (40)

What appears to be occurring – and this is reflected in the wider literature (see Murchan et al 2006) – is that the teachers are responding positively to the content dimension of the new curriculum, but less so to the practice dimension. In other words the ‘knowing what’, has not yet translated into ‘knowing how’. As argued above, this will probably only occur over a longer timeframe. However, the next section which briefly looks at the work of the RCSS, was seen as helping teachers ‘bridge’ this distinction within the context of their own schools.

#### *Asking about the RCSS (the cuiditheoirí)*

In terms of both remit and role of *cuiditheoirí*, it was not clearly defined at the outset of the PCSP. However, a consensus existed amongst the system planners whom we interviewed that, subsequent to PCSP seminars, *cuiditheoirí* would work with teachers at a local level to support the planning and implementation of the revised curriculum in schools, as illustrated by the following comments by interviewees (who we classified in the study as PCSP deliverers) about the role of the *cuiditheoir*:

*...fine tuning or refining aspects that were presented during in-service...there was an idea that support would be available for teachers on their home territory via education centres.*

*...has a more meaningful stance...to help teachers on the ground in their own context.*

*...come to school and would leave it (school) better informed and better capable of continuing on their own.*

From this perspective, the role of the RCSS could be described as revisiting aspects of PCSP seminars from the context of individual school and teacher needs in such a way as to increase school and teacher capacity to implement the curriculum. In general, the RCSS was well received by schools. The findings of the teacher questionnaire show that 79% of teachers felt that *cuiditheoirí* are of help in planning the curriculum at school level, while 84% of respondents believe they have been of

help in planning at class level. However, this finding become slightly blurred when placed in the context of when (in the questionnaire) all teachers were asked to rate the extent they use various resources (e.g. text books, NCCA curriculum guidelines etc), to plan and implement the curriculum at school and class level, ideas and advice from *cuiditheoirí*, however, do not appear to be as important as the above-mentioned results would suggest.

In an attempt to tease out this role, during interviews with *cuiditheoirí* they expressed their objectives in relation to school support as to:

- meet teachers' identified needs
- give practical ideas to use in the classroom
- improve content knowledge
- convey key messages of curriculum
- improve planning
- access more teachers
- share ideas and experiences
- engage teachers.

This data and the work of the RCSS is explored in more detail by Johnston et al (2007), but for this paper we will consider the response of the sub-sample to their role as classroom teachers. It is probably best to take Tables 12 to 15 as a group, as they essentially report the same set of statements but adjusted for curriculum area.

**Table 12 RCSS in Relation to English (%) and (n) Teacher Responses**

Statement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Uncertain		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The cuiditheoireacht service is essential to help teachers implement English effectively	6	3	19	8	57	24	120	50	36	15
From now on the cuiditheoireacht service is more important than additional English seminars	12	5	38	16	82	34	80	33	30	12
Additional English seminars would be more helpful from now on than the <i>cuiditheoirí</i> service	16	7	71	30	86	37	46	20	16	7
The advice I received from the English <i>cuiditheoirí</i> was appropriate to my needs	6	3	12	7	37	20	112	61	16	9

**Table 13 RCSS in Relation to Maths (%) and (n) Teacher Responses**

Statement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Uncertain		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The cuiditheoireacht service is essential to help teachers implement maths effectively	1	1	24	15	35	22	73	46	27	17
From now on the cuiditheoireacht service is more important than additional maths seminars	3	2	34	21	46	29	54	34	22	14
Additional maths seminars would be more helpful from now on than the <i>cuiditheoirí</i> service	16	7	71	30	86	37	46	20	16	7
The advice I received from the maths <i>cuiditheoirí</i> was appropriate to my needs	1	1	4	4	13	14	55	60	19	21

**Table 14 RCSS in Relation to Gaeilge (%) and (n) Teacher Responses**

Statement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Uncertain		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The cuiditheoireacht service is essential to help teachers implement Gaeilge effectively	-	-	13	10	33	26	56	45	23	18
From now on the cuiditheoireacht service is more important than additional Gaeilge seminars	2	2	22	17	39	31	48	38	16	13
Additional Gaeilge seminars would be more helpful from now on than the service	6	5	40	34	44	37	21	18	8	7
The advice I received from the Gaeilge <i>cuiditheoirí</i> was appropriate to my needs	2	3	4	6	13	18	45	62	9	12

**Table 15 RCSS in Relation to Visual Arts (VA) (%) and (n) Teacher Responses**

Statement	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Uncertain		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The cuiditheoireacht service is essential to help teachers implement VA effectively	2	1	21	13	24	15	74	47	36	23
From now on the cuiditheoireacht service is more important than additional VA seminars	2	1	32	21	39	25	58	38	23	15
Additional va seminars would be more helpful from now on than the cuiditheoireacht service	9	6	54	37	42	27	36	25	6	4
The advice I received from the <i>cuiditheoirí</i> VA was appropriate to my needs	1	1	7	6	18	16	76	66	14	12

What can be seen across the above tables, is that the RCSS was viewed as a useful medium through which the teachers could begin to embed the curriculum and its associated methodologies into their classroom and schools. Across the above subjects there was some uncertainty (approx 35%) as to whether they needed additional seminars, but also not much support for additional seminars either.