

Travelling Culture & History with Irish Curriculum

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There are a number of things which we as children grow up both knowing and not knowing. It is in our control to become more educated on situations we know less about and have less exposure to. It is important that the environments in which we grow up are progressive, and will allow us to learn about anything - especially the things around us: The cultures, the traditions, the way in which different people choose to live. We have looked at both the Junior and Senior cycles in school and explored the ways in which the curriculum and schools have gone about breaking stereotypes and giving students the correct tools to be accepting, understanding and open minded towards the huge variety of other people and students. In this case, specifically the Traveller community.



i Heather Buckley, 'A Brief History of Irish Travellers, Ireland's Only Indigenous Minority', 2017.

Over the years, there have been a number of meetings and conversations where the desired outcome was to find ways to make the junior and senior cycles more inclusive and a more encouraging place for all students. A few examples would be:

- "the place of traveller culture and history in the existing curriculum, from early childhood to senior cycle"
- "the current intercultural education guidelines and other resources for schools in relation to Travellers"
- "the opportunities for teaching about Traveller culture and history and how it is incorporated into existing curricular subjects (Ministers letter, 2018)".



ii Derek Speirs, Traveller women protest in November 1988 at being forced to use a segregated social welfare office on Castle Street

There is a hopeful intention that in primary schools, students will be given opportunities to explore and be exposed to more Traveller Culture and History.

The large number of studies done in relation to teacher attitudes towards Travellers in the UK has demonstrated that the teachers view the students in a more negative light, and have noticeably low expectations for them (Derrington, 2007; Bhopal, 2010). This is

concerning because whether we are aware of it or not, how a teacher views a student can impact their education hugely, creating 'self-fulfilling prophecies of failure' (Hernstein and Murray, 1994). Similarly, according to a number of sources, including Cooper 179, Muller et al 1999, and Bak ari 2003: the expectations teachers have of a student will be internalised, and they will most likely only live up to that expectation - this can then have a negative effect on the student and their educational engagement.

Common Ancestry, description from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) website, "A person is born a Traveller. Usually, to be described as a Traveller an individual must have direct Traveller heritage, identify themselves as a Traveller and be identified as a Traveller by other Travellers." NCCA, 2019. When describing the Travellers way as Nomadic, there is emphasis on the practice of some Travellers to travel from place to place. They do this for many purposes, both commercial and cultural, including activities such as going to markets, fairs, to buy and sell goods, and engage in new spaces. According to the Census of the Population 2016, Travellers account for 0.7% nationally. It also told us that about 70% of Travellers have only experienced primary education. Just 13.3% of females attended secondary school and/or above while 57.2% of males have at most received a primary level of education. The Census also revealed "167 Irish Travellers held a third level qualification in 2016, albeit up from 89 in 2011." NCCA, 2019. Consequentially, there is a high level of unemployment within the Travelling community because of poor education.



iii Jo Winrow 'A T&A archive photograph of the gipsy and travelling community' published 2009

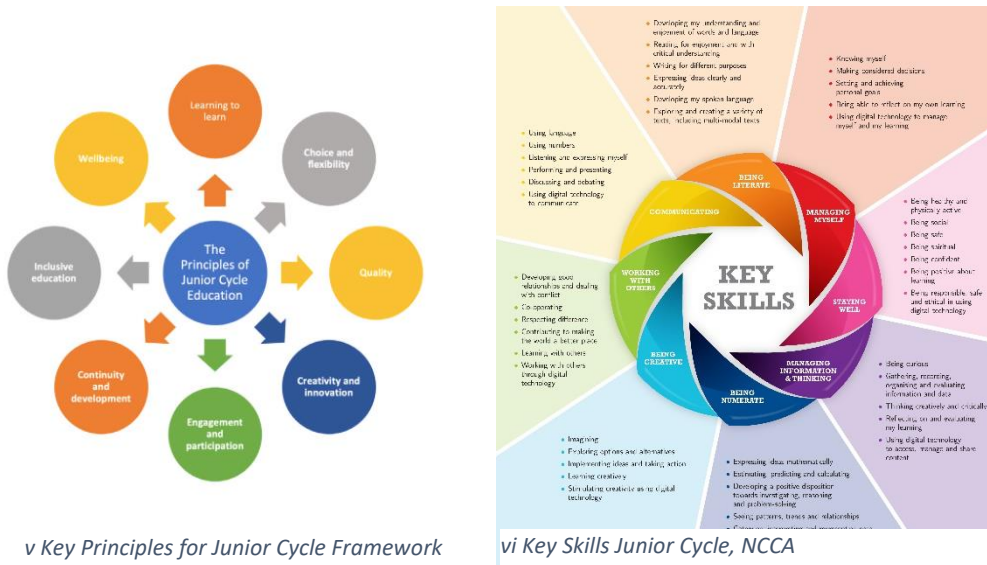


iv Jamie Johnson 'Jamie Johnson Photographed The Irish Travellers At The Ballinasloe Horse Fair And Festival' 2017. 2017

Irish travellers have lived on the outskirts of society for at least 350 years. Since then, they have also been known as 'tinkers', linked to traditions with tin smithing. Terms such as 'pavee' and 'mincéir' were also used as names for travellers in their traditional language. Traditionally travellers have been constantly on the move throughout the country and living in horse-drawn carriages as nomads. They made a living by trading hand-made items and doing work for famers. By moving from place to place, travellers played traditional Irish music and told folk stories that spread around Ireland and filtered down through generations. Irish travellers have similar traits to Roma gypsies, but genetic studies have shown that they are not related. Living the nomadic life had been quite common in Ireland until the mid-1900s when the state declared it a problem. In 1963 the government created

their first policy on the travelling community called the ‘Report of the Commission on Itinerancy’. At this time, the government stated that travellers “do not constitute a separate ethnic group” (Government of Ireland, 1963). It was the state’s intention to force travellers to settle in council housing and to solve the problem of nomad ways. After protests and organisations in 1995, the government worked alongside activists to establish a new policy that would benefit the travelling community. In 2000 the ‘Equal Status Act’ was published which made discrimination against Travellers illegal.

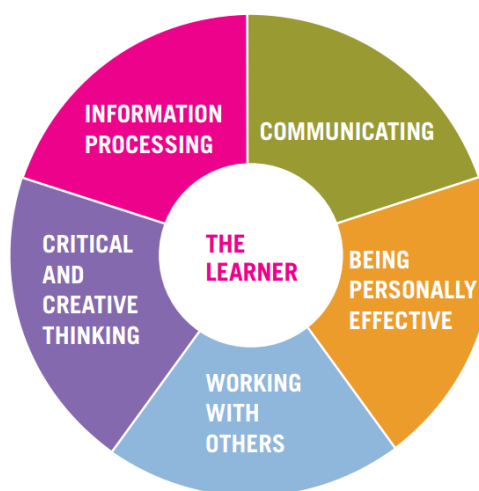
The Junior Certificate framework describes how Teaching, Learning and assessment



practices should develop over time to better fit the needs of the Junior cycle students. There are a number of key principles for the Junior Cert, these are: learning to learn, choice and flexibility, quality, creativity and innovation, engagement and participation, continuity and development, inclusive education and wellbeing.

Certain subjects in the Junior Cycle are designed to heighten these Principles. Students are encouraged to engage and participate in more inclusive activities. By engaging with curricular activities students learn how to apply these disciplinary skills to real life situations, giving them the right idea on how to take part in outside activities. They are taught about Inclusive education, which highlights the importance of equal opportunities, equal attention, participation and outcomes for all students. Another principle being brought to attention is called ‘Learning to learn’, where the quality of curriculum, assessment and level of teaching will be high quality to support the students to the richest of abilities and provide them with the tools for beneficial independent learning. Finally, there is a lot of attention being drawn to the availability of choice and flexibility amongst the curriculum. The junior cycle is made to have such a wide range of choice in subjects and extra curricular activities that students are being exposed to a number of experiences - which is very important to give students the chance to try things they might not have tried before, or thought that they would find interesting.

The Senior Cycle curriculum follows the Junior Cycle curriculum in second level education. It is built to support young people to become resourceful, confident, engaged and active. Incorporated into the curriculum are the five key skills. This is a set of skills that the NCCA intend for young people to acquire and improve on to the best of their ability. The five key skills are: Information processing, communicating, being personally effective, working with others, and critical and creative thinking. These skills are incorporated into units of learning. New subjects that utilise these skills are: Politics and Society, Computer Science, Physical Education, Economics, Agricultural Science, Applied Mathematics and Art. Older learning objectives would have less flexibility, making it more difficult to engage with aspects of Traveller culture and history in the classroom.



vii *The Five Senior Cycle Key Skills, NCCA*

In Senior Cycle, there are different routes that can be taken. Transition year (TY) is the first of the three-year cycle and is an opportunity for students to transition from junior cycle into senior cycle. During their fifth and sixth years at school, students can receive the leaving certificate programme by three different routes. The first and most common is the Leaving Certificate Established which enable students to receive a broad and balanced curriculum as well as specialising in a specific area to practice in the working world. The second is the Leaving Certificate Applied programme which focuses mainly on vocational work, preparing students for the working world. The third is the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme which focuses on enterprise education and the world of work.

It is very clear that adaptations have been made to the education system in order to encourage members of the Travelling community to remain in school. The curriculum has been made in consideration of the student's wellbeing as much as possible. This allows flexibility in the classroom and new methods of learning for pupils. In Senior Cycle, students have the opportunity to complete their leaving certificate through different routes that suit their ability. Traditionally Travellers are craftspeople and hold a lot of vocational skills which can now be explored further in education. Students have the opportunity to continue on to do apprenticeships in areas of craft or vocational work after the Leaving Certificate if they wish. It is believed that the opportunity to take part in more 'hands on' work may encourage members of the travelling community to remain in education. In relation to this, Travellers will be integrated more in schools and in turn, society. It is a widespread hope and intention that with more integration in schools, less prejudice and discrimination will occur towards the travelling community.

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