



General Teaching Council  
for Northern Ireland

General Teaching Council for NI

# termtalk

The Official Newsletter of the General Teaching Council

November 09

## termtalk



As we rise to the challenges of yet another school year, I am conscious that many of the issues I reflected on in the introduction to the June 09 **termtalk**, have not been resolved. The 'politicisation'

of education in Northern Ireland has not been helpful and has resulted in a restricted and unproductive debate, characterised by a failure to reflect, in a rational manner, on the needs of children and society at large. At a time when newly qualified teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to find employment and public finances are likely to be further constrained, we need a new beginning and a new sense of common purpose and strategic direction. Hopefully the advent of the ESA will act as a catalyst for such change.

We as a profession are driven by a value system predicated on a belief in equality and excellence; and our curriculum, with its commitment to thinking skills and personal capacity building, is self-evidently in tune with the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century living. This edition of **termtalk** rightly celebrates these realities; and in keeping with our brief, we have included an article on how values relate to professional practice and a number of 'themed' articles on thinking skills and personal capabilities.

Last but not least, we celebrate a very local success and offer our congratulations to David Stinson, who will carry the flag for the profession in the world final of the 'Innovative Teacher' competition to be held in Brazil, in November. It is noteworthy that David's journey to success began with a GTCNI CPD bursary.

*Eddie McArdle*

Eddie McArdle  
Registrar, GTCNI

## Making the Profession's Voice Heard in the Policy Arena



**With the new school year now well underway the profession can be forgiven for experiencing some anxiety about what the future holds in terms of educational policy developments. There are many challenges ahead for teachers in all phases: pre-school; primary; and post-primary.**

However, with the publication of *Every School A Good School – A Policy For School Improvement*, the broad parameters within which teachers, schools and the education support services will be expected to work for the foreseeable have now been set out. During the development of this new school improvement policy the Council worked assiduously to ensure that the professionalism of teachers was fully recognised. Moreover, the Council lobbied hard to ensure that teachers' professional development was given the priority it deserves. It must also be acknowledged that the Northern Ireland Teacher Competences are now recognised as the basis for understanding the values, knowledge and professional skills that underpin teaching in Northern Ireland. The

Council regarded this recognition as of pre-eminent importance because, for the first time, the profession itself has defined what is meant by competent teaching.

What of the policy challenges ahead? The Department of Education has recently published, for consultation, its proposals on the way forward for special educational needs and inclusion. As all teachers will readily acknowledge, this is a very significant policy area that impacts, perhaps daily, on every member of the profession. The Council has considered the Department's proposals and will publish a detailed response on its website [www.gtcni.org.uk](http://www.gtcni.org.uk)

If we, as a profession, are to ensure that our collective voice is heard then schools and individuals should take the time to respond to this important consultation. Hopefully the Council's response will help inform your thinking and consideration of this proposed policy.

Remember silence will be construed as support – so make your voice heard. **GTC**

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**GTCNI – a new voice for teachers**

# GTCNI Notice Board

## The Inclusion and Diversity Service Northern Ireland

The Inclusion and Diversity Service (IDS) was set up in response to the rapid growth in the numbers of newcomer children entering our schools. The Association of Chief Executives brought the 'English as an Additional Language' services together into one regional organisation with Mary Yarr as regional adviser. There are four assistant advisory officers allocated to specific areas of Northern Ireland and twelve coordinators working with schools.

The IDS mission statement is, 'to meet the needs of our school community by providing high quality and valuable services that promote inclusion and diversity.'

IDS began its task of building capacity in schools to support newcomer pupils in schools throughout Northern Ireland, in September 2007 and in January 2008 the coordinators were brought into the service to begin work in allocated clusters of schools. There are now 7000 newcomer pupils in schools across Northern Ireland.

### Toolkit

In response to the increasing numbers of pupils whose first language is neither English nor Irish, education authorities, principals and teachers, North and South have put together a Toolkit for Diversity.

This book and accompanying CD consists of guidelines and practical materials to support newcomer pupils of migrant origins.



## Education support website

In 2007, the Education Support for Northern Ireland website originally created for parent use, was launched by Caitriona Ruane (Minister for Education) at St Mary's High School, Newry.

The IDS continues to develop the website which offers further potential to support teachers and newcomer families. The IDS webpages are currently located at [www.education-support.org.uk/ids](http://www.education-support.org.uk/ids)

## Intercultural events

Many schools have held exciting and successful events to celebrate Inclusion and Diversity with more and more of the recent newcomer pupils taking part and sharing and experiencing the variety of cultures we now have in Northern Ireland. IDS held an event in December 2008 that saw over 80 schools contributing displays, performing dances or sharing music from various parts of the world. A CD has been made of the event, which celebrated 2008 being the year of Intercultural Dialogue.

## The Future

IDS intend to develop support tools for Early Years, Special Needs and Post-Primary. The work on these projects has already begun.

For further information contact:

Inclusion & Diversity Service  
Antrim Board Centre, 17 Lough Road  
Antrim, BT41 4DH  
T: 02894482210  
E: [ids@neelb.org.uk](mailto:ids@neelb.org.uk)

## GTCNI Student Teacher Award Winners 08/09



Sara Lindsay was awarded the Student Teacher Award 2008/09 at the Stranmillis University College, by Eddie McArdle (Registrar, GTCNI) and Dr Anne Heaslett (Principal, Stranmillis University College) July 2009



Emma Lutton was presented with the Student Teacher Award 2008/09 at The Queen's University Belfast by Sally McKee (Chair, GTCNI) and Billy McClune (Director, Initial Teacher Education, QUB) September 2009

# GTCNI Notice Board

## Calling all BTs and EPD1 teachers in 'Special' settings.

Are you working in a special school or unit?

The **Regional Induction for Special Educational Needs (RISEN) group** promotes the GTCNI Charter for Education:

*"We recognise the right of all engaged in the process of education to ongoing professional development appropriate to their needs."*

RISEN offers courses addressing the GTCNI competences to support your early professional development. RISEN represents ELBs, special school principals, teachers, C2k, GTCNI and ETI and is chaired by Dr Brenda Montgomery, Adviser – Special Education, SEELB.

**Beginning Teachers** are offered 6 full day courses to address specific and diverse needs in special settings e.g. effectively managing the classroom, behaviour and speech and language. The programme also reflects on the self-evaluative process. For more details of the courses offered in 2009/2010:

[http://www.gtcni.org.uk/userfiles/file/BTs%202009-10\(5\).pdf](http://www.gtcni.org.uk/userfiles/file/BTs%202009-10(5).pdf)

*"The content was excellent and very relevant."*

*"... very well structured with a good variety of areas to think about and develop."*

**EPD1 Teachers** in special settings are invited to sign up for a blended course (3 days face-to-face and 7 weeks online) promoting ICT to enhance learning and teaching i.e. sharing classroom strategies using

the LNI courseroom and creating an interactive electronic resource. Previous excellent examples can be found in LNI /library/Staff/Inclusion SEN.

*"I feel much more confident about using both PowerPoint and LNI."*

*"I found the interactive discussions very useful and it was helpful to discuss problems and solutions with other teachers."*

For more details of the next course starting in January 2010: link to <http://www.gtcni.org.uk/userfiles/file/Special%20Ed%20Needs%20and%20EPD1%20teachers.pdf>

All courses address the GTCNI Core Values of the Teaching Profession and focus on a variety of teacher competences to address professional values, practice, knowledge, understanding, skills and application.



'Special' EPD1 Teachers 2009 celebrating achievements

## To all Beginning and Newly Qualified Teachers

Whether you are in full-time/part-time employment, principal release, or long-term or day-to-day substitute teaching in Northern Ireland, as a newly qualified teacher you are required to register with your local Education and Library Board so that you can receive support and guidance on the Induction Programme. You do not need to be in full-time employment to undertake Induction in Northern Ireland as you may be able to complete the programme while working in more than one school within any area.

Induction courses are available to all registered beginning teachers and will provide an opportunity for professional development in the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

For further information please contact:

Elaine Caldwell	(BELB)	028 90 564 214
Jayne Murdoch	(NEELB)	028 94 482 264
Alison Magill	(SELB)	028 38 310 920
Samantha Hegarty	(SEELB)	02890 566 424
Diane Stevenson	(WELB)	028 82 411 298

# Reflective Profession

**The Council, as the independent, professional body for teachers in Northern Ireland, will soon be assuming its full regulatory powers. These powers will give the Council a remit relating to teachers' professional conduct and competence. The GTCNI *Code of Values and Professional Practice*, outlines the general expectations that the Council seeks to uphold for the profession and society as a whole. In preparation for the assumption of this regulatory remit, *termtalk* asked Dr Margaret Reynolds, formerly of St Mary's University College, to consider the link between competent teaching and professional values and action.**

In the Autumn 2008 issue of *termtalk* I discussed the ethical foundation of professional practice. In that article, I put forward the view that the ethics of practice are linked to the typical patterns of decision-making and actions that can be anticipated from competent teachers. I touched on how values have recognisable forms of expression and that the values associated with professional practice

are reflected in the GTCNI's Code. I also indicated that we cannot simply take for granted that teachers, on graduation to the profession, will subscribe to these values but that associated values have to be nurtured and reflected on, in the promotion and display of competent professional performance.

In this current piece, I will look more closely at the links between values and action, especially competent professional performance. In addition, I will explore the links between the moral dimension to professional practice and what might be called 'personal' or preferred values. Finally, I will link these to the ways in which values are displayed in the decisions and actions that teachers make.

It is a truism to say that any professional activity is necessarily grounded in reflection on the part of the professional. None of us would like to be treated by a health professional who didn't think first before acting. In fact, we would probably question the competence of that person! In a similar way, what we

do from day-to-day with the children we teach is grounded in careful thought processes and decision-making. Some of this thinking might be fairly procedural, for example how to manage textbooks to conserve resources. At the other end of the scale, we have to think some things through very carefully; for example, how to cater for the additional needs of a particular child. Thinking or reflecting is, therefore, closely associated with competent performance.

The teacher who consistently strives to do his/her best by the pupils, makes decisions and undertakes actions that are crucially informed by a set of enduring values. These values inform the framework for decision-making and patterns of professional action. Essentially, values influence whether teachers give 50% to the job or put their hearts and souls into it. It is subscription to values that transforms the ability to teach competently into the intentional desire to keep at it,



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# The Values Framework of Professional Practice

day after day, for the good of the pupil.

What can be said about the values that underpin day-to-day professional practice? Firstly, there are different kinds of values that come into operation in the classroom. Some of those values are moral in nature, as specified in the GTCNI's list of core values, for example honesty, respect, fairness, equality. These values inform the foundation for action; they form imperatives and from these flow the commitment to learners, the commitment to colleagues and others and the commitment to the profession as explained in the GTCNI's *Code of Values and Professional Practice*. However, many other values operate in professional practice. These values, like moral values, are normative in nature but they are not of the same kind as moral values. They could be called educational values and they are linked to the central aims of education. Say, for example, that one of the aims of education is the promotion of independence or autonomy. This could lead to a child-centred approach in the classroom, where the teacher allows the children, as far as possible, to make decisions about their learning. Alternatively it could lead to the teacher making all the decisions about the learning process. In the first approach, freedom for children is a preferred value while, in the second approach, tradition or authority could be a preferred value. Both

approaches may be informed by the same educational goal but preferred values influence the way in which the means to achieve that end are chosen. There are many preferred values in education that are associated with what teachers judge to be for the good. This makes the evaluative foundation to teaching highly complex and points clearly to the complexity also of decision-making that leads to action. Insofar as the actions of the teacher refer to the core of moral values his/her actions can be interpreted as right or wrong. In relation to preferred values, however, there is room for debate and discussion. These values have special reference to how the teacher interprets the goals of education and the ways in which they strive to meet educational standards.

The sets of values that inform professional practice map out the framework of effective freedom for a professional. By that I mean that absolute freedom of action exists in terms of professional practice only as a theoretical concept. A doctor, for example, has the absolute freedom to choose to either kill or cure his/her patients. But effectively he/she works within an evaluative framework that seeks only to do good; we expect him/her to practice within this framework of values. In a similar way, teachers operate within a framework that reflects a number of moral values, such as equality, and also the aims

and goals of education, such as the personal development of the pupil. Also, the preferred values of the teacher influence how they go about teaching: it is a truism to say that teachers teach in different ways to reach the same goals.

In conclusion, one could say that teachers have the freedom to teach as they see fit. However, their professional practice, like a doctor's, is interpreted within a recognised framework of effective freedom of action. The limits of this framework are, in effect, determined by the values that are commonly held to be appropriate. Teachers have the responsibility to act within this framework as professionals who aim ultimately for the good of their pupils. The fact that teachers tacitly recognise and act on this responsibility is seen everyday in operation in the best practice in our schools. The overt reference to values, that is crucial to recognition of competent professional practice, would suggest that the values that frame teaching should be a focus for discussion at each stage of teacher education. **GTC**



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# Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

At the heart of the Northern Ireland Curriculum there is now an explicit emphasis on the development of skills and personal capabilities for life-long learning.



These whole-curriculum skills and capabilities consist of the Cross-Curricular Skills and Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities. They are embedded and infused throughout the curriculum at each key stage and pupils should have opportunities to acquire, develop and demonstrate these skills in their learning.

The articles that follow relate specifically to this area of the curriculum. In the first article, **Professor Carol McGuinness** of **Queen's University, Belfast** provides a rationale for teaching thinking skills as part of a modern curriculum. **Mick Davies** then provides a **CCEA** perspective on the place of thinking skills and personal capabilities within in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. This is followed by an article written by **Rhonda Moles** and **Leanne Smyth** who outline the approach to thinking skills and personal capabilities taken in **Cumran Primary School**. The final article, by **Richard Mason**, outlines an approach to thinking skills taken at **Portora Royal School**. This section of **termtalk** concludes with our usual 'Prof John's Websights', signposting teachers to useful web-based resources relating to this area of the curriculum.

## Teaching Thinking – Learning *How* to Think

In 2005, an influential OECD report pointed to the need for educational systems across the world to move beyond taught knowledge and skills. The report argued that "*cop*

*ing with today's challenges calls for better development of individuals' abilities to tackle complex mental tasks, going well beyond the basic reproduction of accumulated knowledge. Key competencies involve a mobilisation of cognitive and practical skills, creative abilities and other psychosocial resources such as attitudes, motivation and values."*<sup>1</sup>

The idea of teaching thinking is not new. It has always been a central aim for education, though it has remained at the level of an aspiration rather than a reality in most classrooms. With the new emphasis on 21st century skills, we recognise that students cannot become better thinkers solely by being immersed in a content-based curriculum. We must be clear what is meant by these better forms of thinking and set out to teach them more deliberately than we normally do in classrooms. And the evidence base is accumulating to show that it can be done.<sup>2</sup>

When first confronted with the idea of 'teaching pupils to think', teachers are sometimes sceptical. They believe that pupils – especially younger ones – learn to think 'naturally' and that there is no need to teach them how to think. Undoubtedly, thinking is developed informally through pupils' interactions with the world, as they engage in everyday activities as well as in classrooms. But when we set 'thinking' as a specific educational goal, we are trying to design learning environments that shape students' thinking and learning in specific ways. The intention is to enable learners to think more skilfully than they would do spontaneously, to shift their thinking to a higher level – generally to engage them in 'higher-order' thinking. By that we normally mean to help pupils to go beyond a superficial or surface recall of information, in the directions outlined in the OECD quotation; to help them gain a deep understanding of what they encounter at school and beyond; to



# Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

reason logically and systematically; to think flexibly and innovatively; to problem solve and make decisions in considered ways; to communicate their thinking clearly, and so on. Essentially, learning to think more skilfully is necessary and is possible.

Various approaches can be used to guide teaching in this area. A core distinction is between 'enrichment' and 'infusion'. Enrichment approaches generally draw on a specific cognitive theory. Lessons are pre-designed and are taught in parallel with existing ones (e.g. Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education, CASE). In contrast, infusion approaches place thinking in the context of normal curriculum topics so that topic understanding and thinking can be taught simultaneously. Infusion can be subject-specific (e.g. science, mathematics, history) or can be cross-curricular. Infusion across-the-curriculum is a good strategy for developing 'intelligent' novices who can recognise and use common patterns of thinking, deepen their understanding of curriculum topics, make connections between them, and be well-positioned to capitalise on new learning opportunities. For these reasons, the infusion approach underpins the Northern Ireland Framework for Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities.

Despite the differences between approaches, there is general agreement among researchers and practitioners that developing thinking (and related capabilities) requires a different approach to teaching, compared to traditional didactic methods. Thinking is normally 'hidden from view' and goes on 'inside the head'; it can be difficult for students to grasp what to do to improve it. Making thinking more external and bringing it into view can help. For example, from our research with teachers who participated in the

ACTS project in Northern Ireland<sup>3</sup>, we found that they created strategies to make the thinking more visible for the pupils. They gave the pupils tasks that were cognitively demanding to provoke their thinking, and arranged their classrooms in ways that supported pupils' dialogue and discussion about their work. They developed a consistent vocabulary with the pupils for talking about thinking and used visual tools such as diagrams and wall charts to aid the pupils' thinking as well as to help them to think about their thinking. As a consequence of their new teaching approaches, the teachers reported substantial changes in the quantity and quality of groupwork, increases in pupils' talking and listening skills, in the quality of their questioning and, overall, more pupil involvement and independence. They also reported significant changes in their images of themselves as teachers, with an increased awareness of the importance and value of teaching

thinking, being more open to alternative approaches and allowing children to be more independent in their learning.

To teach thinking successfully demands more than having it as an educational aspiration. Making it a reality in classrooms is like solving a difficult puzzle. Different pieces have to be in place at the same time: (1) a framework to help teachers and pupils gain a deeper understanding of different forms of thinking; (2) a method for designing thinking lessons; (3) a pedagogical approach to develop thinking in the classroom; (4) teachers' professional development and school leadership to support developments; and (5) an educational policy direction that values thinking as a curriculum goal. Across the UK and in other parts of the world, educational policy makers, curriculum planners, schools and teachers are moving in this direction.

Professor Carol McGuinness **GTC**

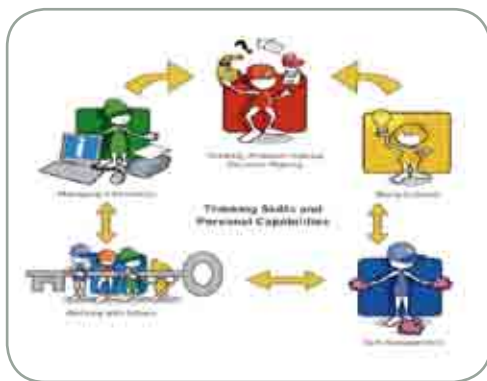
## References

- <sup>1</sup> The DeSeCo Project, *Executive Summary*, 30 June, 2005  
[www.oecd.org/edu/statistics/deseco](http://www.oecd.org/edu/statistics/deseco)
- <sup>2</sup> Higgins, S., Hall, E., Baumfield, V., & Moseley, D. (2005). *A meta-analysis of the impact of the implementation of thinking skills approaches on pupils*. In Research Evidence in Education Library. London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education.  
  
Shayer, M. & Adey, P. (Eds), *Learning intelligence: Cognitive acceleration across the curriculum from 5 to 15 years*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- <sup>3</sup> McGuinness, C. (2006). *Building thinking skills in thinking classrooms: ACTS (Activating Children's Thinking Skills) in Northern Ireland*. TLRP Research Briefing, No. 18.

# Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

The quality of pupils' thinking has always formed part of any well planned learning experience. The Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities framework is there to make this aspect of learning more explicit. If we want pupils to move beyond recall and regurgitation they must become progressively more independent as learners. A Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities approach begins by considering what type of thinking pupils will be doing, in order to help them get better at it. For example, it's one thing to stimulate thinking; it's another then to lead the direction of the thinking towards greater effectiveness.

The Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities Framework within the NI Curriculum brings together the five interlinked strands of *Being Creative; Thinking, Problem-Solving and Decision-Making; Managing Information; Self-Management; and Working with Others*. Although the five strands are separated for the purposes of describing them, most activities that have a Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities focus will feature aspects of several of the strands.



## The Infusion Approach

Teachers in Northern Ireland have been encouraged to use an *infusion* approach to Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities. Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities are not

taught as a set of skills separate to subject knowledge; instead, they are acquired and developed through day-to-day classroom activities. Planning for *infusion* involves identifying the opportunities within the curriculum and within subjects to include an explicit focus on Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities. Using Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities in this way can be a means to scaffold learning, leading to improved understanding, transferability of knowledge and skills as well as increased independence.

Just as we cannot assume that pupils will automatically know how to function as a group, we should not assume that pupils will instinctively know how to use thinking processes; they need to be given opportunities to do so, and the thinking needs to be modelled for them so they can see how it works. For example, if we want pupils to 'be more analytical' then they need to be introduced to what is involved in analysing rather than merely describing what they have seen and done.

Sometimes an activity will lead the pupil to a point where a strategy that has worked before is no longer useful. This is part of the learning process; as pupils acquire higher order skills, they need the confidence to confront the difficulties and setbacks that are part of developing mastery in a skill.

## Make Thinking Explicit

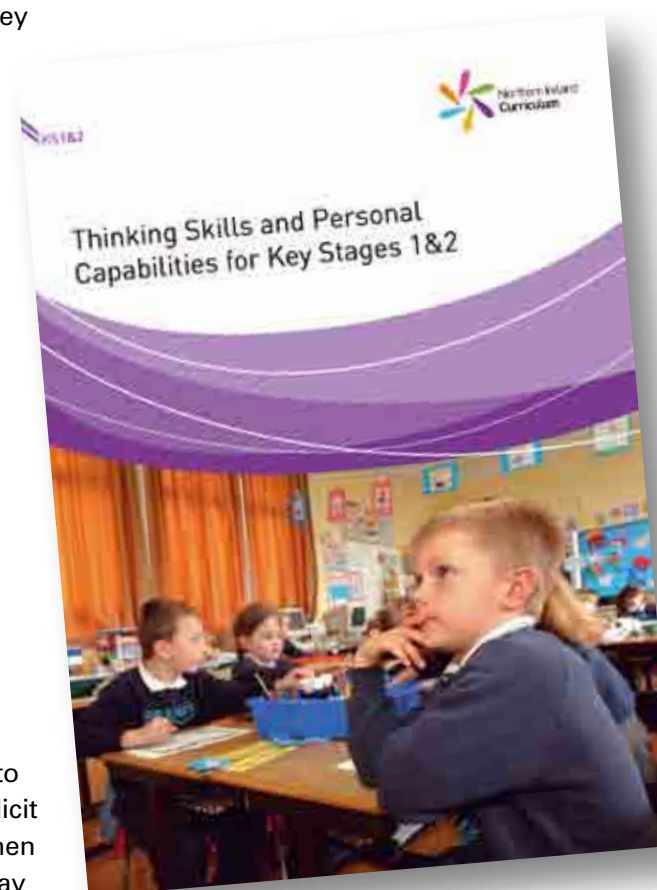
As adults we can sometimes forget that pupils have not yet embedded the habits of mind that we take for granted. Even when we try to explain our thinking, it can remain unclear to them unless we also make explicit the stages we work through when processing information. One way

of doing so is to provide explicit instructions in how to apply a particular thinking approach in the context of the planned work. For example, you can use a visible structure such as a 'thinking frame' to set out the stages to be worked through to make a decision or arrive at a conclusion.

## Not all the Time

It is not necessary to have an infusion focus within every lesson; it is more effective to decide when it is most appropriate to focus on infusion, and build in time for reflection. Choosing the right time to intervene prevents the experience from becoming stale and repetitive.

You can find a detailed explanation on the infusion approach and other strategies in the booklets *Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities for Key Stages 1&2 and Key Stage 3*

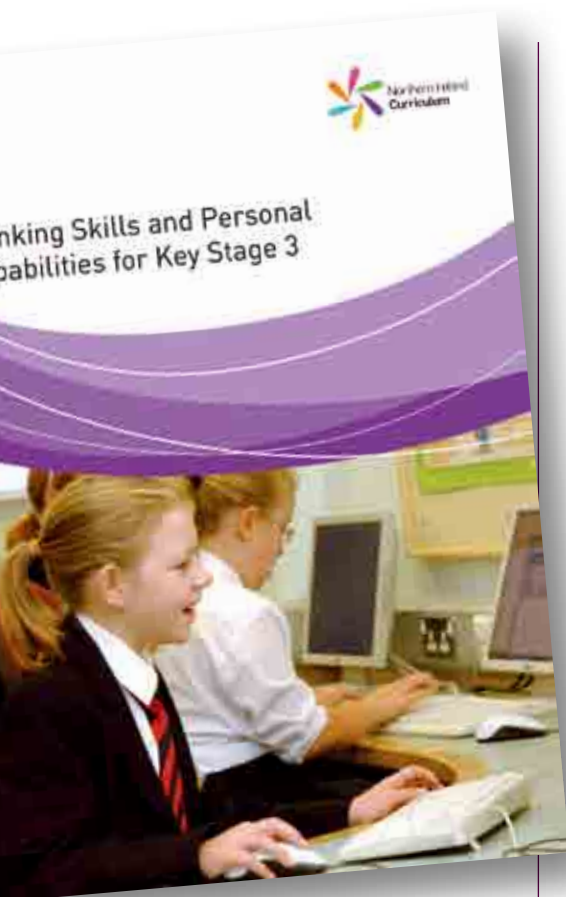




# within the NI Curriculum



Rewarding Learning



Stage will be available later in this school year.

At Key Stage Three, the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities are clearly expressed in the statement of minimum content in the Learning Outcomes for each Area of Learning and subject strands. The subject specific Progression Maps (available in hardcopy or online) can also assist in providing language to use when evaluating and reporting on pupils' achievements.

You should be aware, however, that progression in Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities is not necessarily going to be smooth, forward progress, and any individual is likely to have a 'spiky

profile' in terms of their level of mastery across the various strands.

## Further Reading

For further ideas, you may want to check out EPPI (2009) *Thinking skills approaches to effective teaching and learning: what is the evidence for impact on learners?*

Available at <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=335>

For further information, please contact **Mick Davies** at [mdavies@ccea.org.uk](mailto:mdavies@ccea.org.uk)

*Mick Davies* **GTC**

in the Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 Curriculum Support and Implementation Boxes or online at: <http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk>.

## Support Available

There is a range of support materials available to you, both in school and online at [www.nicurriculum.org.uk](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk).

For the Primary Curriculum, the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities are detailed in *The Northern Ireland Curriculum Primary* (CCEA, 2007) and are referenced in the *Ideas for Connecting Learning (ICLs)*. In addition, each of the Primary Thematic Units focuses on one strand of the Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities framework. There are also five stimulating stories in the "Wise Up and Th!nk!" series of books for Key Stage One. A similar series of books for use in the Foundation



# Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities in Cumran Primary School

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities (TSPC) are at the heart of the Northern Ireland Curriculum and are to be developed within each class and across all areas of learning. Our school began with a staff audit in which teachers identified TSPC as an area to develop further as a major focus of our School Development Plan.

In the curriculum TSPC is divided into five main strands:

1. Thinking, Problem-Solving and Decision Making
2. Self-Management
3. Working with others
4. Managing Information
5. Being Creative

The main challenge for us has been infusing TSPC throughout all areas of learning. Initially, as a staff, we focused on infusing TSPC into Literacy, Numeracy and WAU, followed by Music, Drama, P.E. and PDMU. To develop these areas in all year groups, we had two days where staff observed each other to promote the dissemination of good practice. Teachers chose the areas of learning in which they wanted to improve TSPC. In addition, staff meetings have been vital for professional development in this whole area.

Owing to the introduction of TSPC, the dynamics of all the classes have changed. It is clear from classroom observations that the children are now more active learners. At the beginning



Year one pupils and parents

of lessons the TSPC focus is shared as part of the learning intention. A 'How will I best think and learn today board' is used in class where the children place a star on the skills that will be used during the lesson and they return to this in the plenary to self and peer evaluate. Each class has interactive posters highlighting the vocabulary which we are focusing on within each strand of TSPC. Every year group also focuses on the use of 'thinking time' and all the children are taught what to do during thinking time and are given opportunities to create their own wall displays which they can refer to in class. Think-Pair-Share and Study Buddies are excellent tools that the children enjoy using in class.

Last year we held a 'Come and See US Think Day', when the parents came into their children's classes and actively participated in the lessons. This was a highly valuable experience as it gave the parents a great insight in to how their children think and learn in school and how teaching methods have changed. Moreover, a follow-up parent

questionnaire revealed how much the children use their thinking skills at home too.

We are now reflecting on our work to date in TSPC, highlighting strengths and areas for development in order to help us plan for TSPC in this school year. Last year was a real voyage of discovery with teachers, parents and children learning together. As one parent stated: "It's a wonderful system. I want to come back to school!"

*Rhonda Moles and  
Leanne Smyth GTC*



Year three pupils and parent



Year six parents and pupils

# Thinking Skills in Portora Royal School

**As in many other schools, Thinking Skills (TS) are taking a central role in the development of classroom teaching at Portora. That is not to say that we think we have it 'sorted' or that the pupil experience has been so revolutionised that the curriculum is unrecognisable to what existed previously; but the changes that have been put in place are bringing welcome responses from teachers and pupils alike.**

Portora has specialist school status in the Performing Arts; consequently, the school has some strict and challenging targets to meet. Thinking skills are now become embedded in the school development plan and are also a core element of PRSD and EPD. Since 2007 PRSD Objective 1 and core EPD Objectives have focused on TS; this will remain the case until the end of 2009/2010 when progress will be reviewed.

The staff have been afforded the opportunities to gain professional development in the field of TS. I attended RTU Training in August 2008 in Belfast; this has encouraged the promotion of 5 CoRT (Cognitive Research Trust) Thinking Strategies at Portora. We have started small but all classrooms have these strategies advertised clearly in poster form and the pupils are being asked to use the strategies increasingly in their learning at all levels from Year 8 to

14. The strategies are Plus, Minus and Interesting (PMI); useful for evaluation, Consequence and Sequel (C&S); for use with cause and effect, Consider All Factors (CAF) and First Important Priorities (FIP); useful initial thinking strategies with FIP a refinement of the initial ideas, and finally Other People's Views (OPV); particularly useful when encouraging empathy. There is no doubt, in our experience that the emphasis of learning is transferred from the teacher to the pupil when employing these simple strategies. Further information on these and more strategies is available online or from The Edward de Bono Foundation.

Inspired by the RTU INSET and with the aid of a GTCNI bursary, I was able

to travel to a conference on TS in London, whilst others have received training on "de Bono's Thinking Hats" and related TS Strategies through RTU courses and privately presented CPD events. These have been hugely beneficial events that have culminated in the school being in the infancy of developing a mentoring scheme on TS. It is hoped that this will rapidly develop into a forum for accelerated sharing of good practice and thus any concept of any one person being the TS 'Guru' will vanish as the levels of awareness, competence and enthusiasm increase.

*Richard Mason* **GTC**



*A regular feature book-marking educational resource and information websites: this term offers a thinking person's review of Thinking Skills websites.*

Carol McGuinness's widely appreciated research on thinking skills (see page 6 in this **termtalk**) is the basis of many curriculum applications in the UK. Her TLRP site: [tinyurl.com/neavwd](http://tinyurl.com/neavwd) gives a general overview of the better known programmes. She recognises three different approaches, including those that:

- target thinking skills as a discrete entity;
- explore thinking skills in a subject context; and
- aim to infuse thinking skills in a generic way across all lessons.



Very valuable for staff development sessions, Learning Teaching Scotland provides nine short 'perspective' videos on her thinking - as well as those of Edward De Bono and Dylan William. Check out also the Thinking videos under the 'informative' and 'illustrative' buttons:

[tinyurl.com/lby3j4](http://tinyurl.com/lby3j4)



Referencing the work of Carol McGuinness, and that of the University of Newcastle Research Centre for Learning and Teaching: [tinyurl.com/qhpwmy](http://tinyurl.com/qhpwmy) the DCSF's old Standards Site:

<http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/thinkingskills/>

contains a potted rationale of approaches to teaching thinking and a database of primary resources, guidance and case studies organized around cognitive, brain-based and philosophical approaches.



Linked to the University of Newcastle, Northumberland's Thinking for Learning Centre's site, contains a brief flavour of their approach:

<http://www.thinkingforlearning.com/home/home.htm>

The purpose of many Thinking Skills websites is to market consultancy; a few also contain some good teaching ideas. Mike Fleetham's is an example, featuring practical applications containing free resources, a smart thinking tool (connecting ideas through 'marble thinking' - visualize marbles on a tray) and a monthly e-newsletter:

<http://www.thinkingclassroom.co.uk>



Previously, I have recommended Chris Smith's excellent international catalogue of resources on almost any aspect of the curriculum. It does not disappoint on thinking skills: [tinyurl.com/n9kyjj](http://tinyurl.com/n9kyjj)

The Exploratree web resource was developed by Futurelab out of their work on the Enquiring Minds project. It offers 25 free web resources to download and 'make your own interactive thinking guides', to support independent and group enquiry research projects. The frameworks are organized around 'map your ideas', 'explore', 'solve problems', 'analyse' and 'examine different perspectives':

<http://www.exploratree.org.uk>



Within the UK, the National Education Network links to those regional networks which support higher order thinking skills through digital resources:

[tinyurl.com/mdwdbw](http://tinyurl.com/mdwdbw)

One of the most creative educators on thinking skills, John Davitt offers "New Tools - where accelerated learning meets ICT":

[tinyurl.com/6c2gzd](http://tinyurl.com/6c2gzd)

Try out his random learning event generator to spike your students' class and homework with fresh challenges:

[tinyurl.com/n9n35j](http://tinyurl.com/n9n35j)

And while exploring John's site, check out his new aid to planning multimedia lessons, published with Tribal: download a free trial:

<http://www.learningscore.org/demo>



If you would like to share your favourite website, on any educational theme, please email your links and comments to [profjohn@gtni.org.uk](mailto:profjohn@gtni.org.uk)

# Registration News

## 'My GTCNI'

The Registration Team is pleased to announce the launch of 'My GTCNI'.

Located within the Council's website [www.gtcni.org.uk](http://www.gtcni.org.uk) 'My GTCNI' offers registered teachers online access to their personal details as held on the 'Register of Teachers'.

By enrolling online and creating a unique password, teachers can now view their details within the secure 'My GTCNI' environment and submit a request for any necessary amendments.

The Registration Team hopes that by offering each teacher secure online access we will make it easier for teachers to maintain their own personal information and thereby ensuring the continued high quality of data held within the 'Register of Teachers'.

In addition to offering online access to the 'Register of Teachers', 'My GTCNI' also offers online credit or debit card payment facilities.

To view your own details within the 'Register of Teachers' simply visit

the Council's website [www.gtcni.org.uk](http://www.gtcni.org.uk) and click once on the 'My GTCNI' tab or the 'My GTCNI' icon.



To date, some 492 teachers have enrolled on 'My GTCNI', 112 of whom have requested minor changes to their record.

The Fitzwilliam Hotel have kindly offered a fantastic prize for the

**1000th** registrant enrolled on 'My GTCNI'.

Stephanie Sheerin, Sales Manager, Fitzwilliam Hotel, comments: "We are delighted to offer one lucky teacher the chance to enjoy a much deserved sumptuous overnight stay for two in an executive guestroom with a full Irish Breakfast and Dinner in our restaurant Menu by Kevin Thornton to excite and delight your palate with cuisine created by our gifted expert chefs." To enter for this amazing prize please visit [www.gtcni.org.uk](http://www.gtcni.org.uk) now and go to 'My GTCNI' for the chance of winning a memorable Fitzwilliam experience.



## School List

The Registration Team are currently asking schools to confirm the contact details for teachers currently in their employment. If you have recently moved house and/or changed your name, now would be a good time to ensure the correct details are held by both your school and the Council.

## 2009 Graduate Enrolments

682 newly qualified teachers have successfully graduated from the local Initial Teacher Education providers, and details of their qualifications have now been added to the 'Register of Teachers'. 578 of these graduates have subsequently registered with the Council.

## The 2009/10 Registration Fee

The 2009/10 Registration fee has now been collected: 24,276 fees were deducted from salaries and 1,599 were paid by cheque with 1,319 teachers making use of the new Credit/Debit Card payment facilities. 1,005 paid by Credit/Debit Card over the phone and 314 have already paid by Credit/Debit Card online via 'My GTCNI'.

# Microsoft® European Innovative Teacher

**In March, David Stinson from Sullivan Upper School, represented Northern Ireland in the European Innovative Teachers' Forum held in Vienna. David was one of two national winners from Northern Ireland who attended this prestigious event which was sponsored by Microsoft. The setting was in the famous Hofburg Palace with over 250 delegates in attendance. Eighty five national winners, representing forty two countries, from across Europe competed for a place in the World Innovative Teachers' Final, to be held in Brazil this November. The week-long event required competitors to engage in a taxing array of workshops, brainstorming sessions, interviews and presentations.**

David, who has been developing various e-learning initiatives over the past few years had chosen to display pioneering work he had undertaken in e-portfolios.

As Northern Ireland is such a small area in Europe, David had little expectation of achieving success. However during the final Award Ceremony at the Gala Dinner held in the Rooftop Plaza in the Palace he was in for a surprise. With James Bernard, the Microsoft Worldwide Partners in Learning Director, presenting the awards David achieved 2nd place for 'Innovation in Content' and 3rd place in the 'Educators Choice Award'. This achievement entitles David to go to the World Final in Salvador, Brazil. With around 100,000 entries worldwide for this competition each year this is not only an achievement for David but is a clear sign of the quality of work undertaken locally in ICT.

David is keen to stress the significance of a GTCNI Bursary he was awarded for his e-learning work three years ago. He emphasised, "In a time of schools increasingly tightening their fiscal budgets the bursary gave me much needed

freedom to explore new ideas." Not resting on his laurels David is currently further developing his work on e-portfolios for Brazil.

An e-portfolio typically incorporates a range of modern technologies and software to develop an interactive evolving picture of a pupil's potential. Moreover, e-portfolios capture pupils' learning in a much more dynamic way than traditional paper based approaches. Pupils can choose to express themselves and their ideas in a format which may suit them better than what would traditionally have been done through writing or drawing. Pupils

who have special educational needs can, for example, talk about their work in audio or video files giving a much clearer picture of what is in their mind. Effectively and efficiently capturing what is in the mind is a key goal of an e-portfolio as many pupils have difficulty expressing themselves on paper. David has been exploring a range of new approaches for capturing thoughts including the use of a Nintendo DSi with children as young as six years of age.

Capturing information is only one aspect of an e-portfolio as probably the main benefit may



Participants in the Grand Hall of the Hofburg Palace



James Bernard the Microsoft Worldwide Partners in Learning Director presenting the award to David

# Award: A local teacher's success

lie in the inherent reflective processes which stimulate cognitive development. A learning method which encourages self-reflection has many potential benefits for pupils in developing a greater impression of self, understanding how they are perceived by others, personalising their learning and equipping themselves as independent learners.

David explains that e-portfolios encourage pupils to take ownership of their work which tends to foster individuality and creativity. Pupils in Sullivan have been developing all sorts of novel approaches to their work including the use of a wide range of cutting edge available software. For example, one group has researched and developed the use of 'Blue Screen' giving them the ability to superimpose themselves on their work just as weather forecasters give the appearance of being in front of the weather maps. As part of their work exploring ethical issues in technology, this group has designed a concert to promote an animal charity including the stage, promotional materials and performers. Their e-portfolio shows them taking a virtual tour of the stage including comprehensive video and audio diaries discussing all aspects of their work.

This group like many others have used e-portfolios to fully incorporate ICT as an integral part of their work and have persevered to develop in-depth understanding of a range of software. It is also interesting to see how pupils can push the limits of commonly used software such as PowerPoint and produce very exciting results through e-portfolios.

One challenge for this innovative approach to learning is that teachers can often find themselves understanding less about a package than some of their pupils. David believes that our job as educators is not to limit our pupils to what we know but to be prepared to

enter uneasy territory and take risks occasionally to learn together.

In addition, e-portfolios have potential benefits for the 'other side' of the classroom as David has been piloting work on PRSD and the PQH. Teachers can electronically record lessons or meetings at a time of their choosing. This can relieve much of the current strain caused by having to cover teachers to observe their colleagues. Good practice in the classroom can also be shared with all staff more easily. This approach could provide an opportunity for teachers to develop a library of sample lessons for them to reflect on and archive successes.

Technological advances are continually providing us with different ways to communicate with each other. Children tend to be at the leading edge of any new technology as they have an innate desire to explore and an unclouded ability to embrace change; e-Portfolios can tap into this interest and bring it into the classroom integrating it at the heart of school work. David contends that e-portfolios in some form are the logical and natural progression from traditional handwriting or word processing. We wish David good luck in the world final in November. We are not Brazil we are Northern Ireland! **GTC**



Keynote speakers discussing innovation in education



David outside the Hofburg Palace

# A Vision for the Future

In the article that follows, Council member Charlie Glenn describes his own class-based Comenius project, *Colour My Rainbow* which featured at the recent celebration, 'A Vision of the Future' event held at the International Convention Centre in Birmingham.

2009 is the European Year of Creativity and Innovation and the bodies concerned with the Lifelong Learning programmes, such as Erasmus and Comenius, decided to mark this with A Vision of the Future, an event at the International Convention Centre in Birmingham on 14th July. The purpose of this event was to honour and celebrate the finest examples of creativity and innovation funded by the various programmes and I was surprised and delighted to find that my Comenius project, *Colour My Rainbow* had been chosen to be part of this key event.

*Colour My Rainbow* was a Comenius school partnership between Steelstown Primary School in Derry; De Ganzenveer in Bruges, Belgium; Vuosaaren Peruskoulu in Helsinki, Finland; Anne Frank Schule in Lüneburg, Germany; Szkola Podstowowa in Warsaw, Poland; and initially, Stragowna Primary School, Fermanagh which sadly then closed. At the early planning stage the partners agreed that while ICT had its place, we were wary of its overuse in projects of this sort. We decided therefore to focus initially on the production of artefacts which the pupils would exchange and display.

The timetable of the project suggested we begin with Christmas decorations.

This proved to be an inspired choice because our partners retained a rich tradition of Christmas customs and handicrafts. We continued with the greetings theme in the spring with the production

of leaves in various materials inscribed with good wishes from the children to their European friends. These leaves were exchanged and displayed on 'Wish Trees' in our schools. Our work in Steelstown was facilitated by the presence of a German language assistant funded under another Comenius programme.

In the second year, each school focused on its locality and on our individual journeys to school each day by foot, bike, bus, car or metro. We in Steelstown decided to concentrate on walking to school and therefore prepared gift shoes for our partners by taking cheap black plimsolls and richly decorating these on various themes such as Ireland, Sport, Flags of the World and so on. These were much sought after to the extent that, sadly, no examples remain here!

In the final year of the project we returned to shared cultural themes by working on Fairy Tales; initially identifying common elements such as characters, settings, use of magic and so on. Our final work was truly collaborative as it consisted of Fairy Tales written by the Steelstown pupils, bound in books with covers produced in Belgium and illustrated by Polish pupils. One of the tales was then turned into a musical play script for production in Anne Frank Schule with music and sound effects by our Finnish partners.

In summary, I would count this project as one of the most significant events of my 34 year teaching career. It was undoubtedly very hard work at times however the inspiration provided by the interaction with very gifted and highly motivated colleagues, in other European countries, is something I would recommend to all teachers. **GTC**

