

# termtalk

THE  
PRAMERICA  
SPIRIT OF  
COMMUNITY  
AWARDS

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# Registrar's Letter

Welcome to the summer edition of **termtalk** which contains a wide range of articles that I hope you will find both interesting and informative.

In early June the Council's Annual Lecture was delivered by Dr Seán Farren and he eloquently made the case for the importance of having an understanding of the history of education. For further details of the Lecture please see the article on pages 8-9.

The Council is very aware that it has been a very difficult and challenging year for teachers, schools and the wider education service. At a time of significant cuts in the education budget and concerns about pay, pensions and workload, teachers have continued to provide a very professional, high quality service to all the young people in their care.

The Council acknowledges this tremendous ongoing professional commitment and dedication.

In conclusion I hope you have had a professionally rewarding year and that the summer break will prove restful and restorative.

*Barney J. Ball*

**Barney Ball**  
Acting Registrar

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## Content highlights for summer 2012



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*By Prof John*

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General Teaching Council  
for Northern Ireland



As a follow up to the article in our last edition and as the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games fast approaches, *termtalk* reports back on the ROlympics event held on 30th of May.

# ROLYMPICS

**The morning of the event may have started out overcast but the arrival of the primary school children and sound of the samba drums soon got everyone into the carnival mood.**

After being presented with their ROlympics T-Shirts, the children and staff began the procession to the Limavady Borough Council 3G arena. In total there were 20 primary schools representing 34 nations from around the world and over 1000 children and adults involved in the event.

Once at the arena the countries competed with one another in a series of fun packed activities. The entire focus of the event was on fun and judging by the look on the children's faces the day had been a total success. Not only did the children have the opportunity to meet new friends and play sports but some also took the opportunity to have their faces painted.

When the games were finished the children assembled to take part in a huge dance led by Limavady High School Dance

teacher Charlene McLaughlin. To the sound of 'Party Rockers' all 1000 pupils and teachers danced, cheered and laughed together. It was a fantastic way to round off an unbelievable day for all those involved. (So good we did it twice).

As the children were presented with their gold ROlympics medals the same question was asked again and again, "When can we do this again?" All we can say is, "Watch this space."

Organisers of the community event, would like to thank all those who supported and sponsored the ROlympics spectacular. [gtcni](#)



# The Pramerica Spirit Of Commu

It is with great pleasure that the Council publishes these photographs of the recent Pramerica Spirit of Community Award Ceremony.

**This initiative was launched in 2006 to recognise post-primary students for volunteer work in their local communities.**

Sponsored by Pramerica Systems Ireland, the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals in the Republic of Ireland, the initiative seeks to encourage young people to be active citizens in their local communities.

This year the final judging panel was once again chaired by John Hume, Nobel Peace Laureate; Ivan Arbuthnot represented the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland and Donal O’Buachalla represented the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals. Pramerica Systems Ireland was represented by its Managing Director, Henry McGarvey.

At the final judging stage the standard of students’ voluntary work is, of course, exemplary. The level of selflessness and concern for other less fortunate people shown by the young people was inspirational.

At the Award Ceremony, held on the 28th March this year in the City Hotel, Derry, Co. Londonderry, Ivan Arbuthnot the Chair of GTCNI remarked:

“It has been a great honour to read about the voluntary work carried out by these young students. They have shown great initiative and leadership by undertaking a wide range of voluntary activities. These students are a credit to their parents, schools and teachers. They represent all that is good in young people and they are excellent role models for their peers. Volunteering and active citizenship are important practical dimensions of school



*L-R, back row, Henry McGarvey, Managing Director and Vice President, Operations and Systems, Pramerica Systems, Ireland; Ivan Arbuthnot, Chairperson GTCNI; Dónal O’Buachalla, President National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals. L-R, Front, Bonnie Shortall, St Louis High School, Rathmines; Mr John Hume, Noble Peace Laureate; Molly Gilmartin, Victoria College, Belfast.*

curricula both North and South and the Council is very pleased to be involved in this initiative with our colleagues in the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals. I was particularly pleased with the number of post-primary schools in Northern Ireland that submitted applications for both the junior and senior awards this year – they were truly inspirational.”

At the award ceremony, the guest of honour, John Loneran, who was Governor of Mountjoy Prison for over 22 years and Governor of the top security prison at Portlaoise for 4 years, congratulated all the young people for their leadership and concern for others. John emphasised that from his long experience working with people in difficult circumstances that he is convinced people change from the inside out. He suggested that the big task for all of us as human beings is to find the humanity in others and then to nurture it. He suggested that the more we are in



*Henry McGarvey, Managing Director and Vice President, Operations and Systems, Pramerica Systems, Ireland.*



*Guest speaker at the award ceremony John Loneran, former Governor of Mountjoy Prison and Portlaoise Top Security Prison.*

# Community Awards

The overall, All Ireland Award Winners, Molly Gilmartin, Victoria College, Belfast and Bonnie Shortall, St Louis High School, Rathmines.



The All Ireland Spirit of Community Award Winners

touch with our own humanity the more likely we are to treat others with respect and recognise the dignity of each individual person.

The young people throughout Ireland who took part in the Pramerica Spirit of Community Awards, whether finalists or not, truly exemplify the values that John referred to.

For its part, the Council will contact all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland in the autumn term to encourage them to enter pupils for this award scheme and the recognition that deservedly goes with it. 



Henry McGarvey, John Hume, Dónal Ó'Buachalla and Ivan Arbuthnot with Michelle Peacock, Downshire School, Carrickfergus and Shannon Stapleton, Scoil Ruain, Killenale, both junior award winners.

# Markethill Primary School - Ho

**Jim Richardson the Principal of Markethill Primary School, Co Armagh, describes his school's involvement in the Research Lesson Study (RLS) pilot project.**

**Our school's development plan has a strong focus on developing a deeper collaborative culture at all levels across the school with a focus on learning and teaching. In this respect, our aim to ensure that 'teacher and pupil voice' impacts more on the learning culture within our school.**

## Initial Preparation

In October 2011, Mrs Chapman, the vice principal and I attended a GTCNI/RTU seminar on RLS at which Dr. Pete Dudley, an acknowledged authority on the approach, presented a very informative introduction including written guidance and an instructional DVD. These were disseminated to the rest of the RLS group on our return to school.

A series of questions immediately presented themselves before we felt confident in progressing with RLS.

1. What is the history, background and rationale of RLS?
2. What did the research element in RLS involve – we defined it as the information that teachers gathered from the RLS experience and then used to improve our practice?
3. How to identify a lesson study area and actually go about the lesson planning?
4. How to develop a time frame for the lesson cycle?
5. What was the best format for data gathering during the lesson?
6. In what order would teachers teach and observe the various



- iterations of the lesson?
7. How would we identify specific groups/ individuals within the class to observe?
8. How would the data (research) from the lesson be analysed in preparation for the next step in the process?
9. What group(s) and classes in the improved iterations of the lessons would be taught and when?

## The Process of RLS

We agreed to use our School Development Plan focus on number and processes in mathematics as a source for our lesson cycle while the school's motto, 'Tomorrow's Success Begins Today' helped us generate an over-arching goal – 'Learning about Learning' i.e. to make progress in school we need to be reflective learners both as teachers and pupils. For the actual lesson topic we planned 2 cycles of 3 lessons each – both exploring the theme of Sequence and Pattern in Number and how from a knowledge of these, rules could be generated that could be used to accurately predict other terms in a sequence.

At this planning stage we made a number of key decisions:

- as a team, to prioritize an understanding the RLS process and to be prepared to make mistakes and experiment until we felt comfortable and confident with the process – this was in line with our over-arching goal;

- to emphasise to the teachers involved that RLS was NOT about teacher appraisal;
- in keeping with RLS practice, the observers would not engage in any way with the children or teacher during the lesson;
- although ideally the RLS lesson should be taught in increasingly evolved and improved forms to the same group of children, we decided to teach the second and third lessons in their developed forms to different classes in Key Stage 2. After we became more proficient, we would then focus on developing a lesson for the same class group;
- to explain the RLS rationale to the children involved in the study; and
- provide each member of the group with the opportunity to both teach and observe.

The lessons were then taught and immediately after each lesson it was discussed under the following headings:

- the group's appreciation of the teacher for undertaking the lesson;
- a report from the teacher on how she/he felt the lesson went;
- how effectively the learning intentions were achieved;
- how each target group of children responded;
- overall class responses;
- a constructive analysis of the teacher's management

# How we became involved in RLS



of the lesson; and

- overall reflections on how the lesson went.

In the light of these discussions the next lesson in the cycle was then planned. In all, 3 lessons were developed in the first cycle each one being adjusted in the light of the preceding lessons.

## Group Reflections on RLS

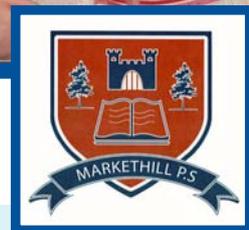
The teachers in our group relished the challenge of this 'new' approach to staff and curriculum development. All the teachers reported that they valued the opportunity to have space and time to discuss and address practical teaching matters. Post-lesson evaluation was extremely positive and the teachers involved were unanimously and wholeheartedly in favour of the RLS approach. Moreover, RLS was recognised as promoting teacher collaboration at the actual level of teaching and learning. The approach engendered a strong professional culture and dialogue on purely pedagogical matters. Crucially, RLS has the ability to 'slow down' the teaching situation to enable teachers to observe the complexity of the classroom that under normal circumstances could be ignored or overlooked. Furthermore, the professional learning during the RLS process could be then applied by teachers in other classroom situations i.e. the lessons and skills learned were transferable. This professional

learning could also be disseminated to all the teaching staff and used as an ideal and natural platform for whole-staff development.

## Conclusion

Speaking as a primary school principal, I would wholeheartedly endorse RLS. It is an ideal vehicle for introducing a higher degree of professional dialogue and reflection into educational practice which can only be healthy for both pupils and staff. Moreover, as a principal, I felt that RLS gave me the opportunity to engage in a meaningful way in the school's teaching and learning programme. Crucially, in a very short time a new sense of trust and understanding between each member of our RLS group was developed. This in turn is bound to have a positive effect on staff morale. Furthermore, the process itself provided a very natural avenue through which to implement the school development plan and, in the process, make this a truly practical 'hands on' document.

The RLS approach creates, in a natural and effortless way, high levels of personal and whole-school SELF-EVALUATION which must be at the centre of any school's core mission i.e. teaching and learning. It places 'teacher and pupil voice' at the centre of the learning process and engenders a strong sense of shared ownership and commitment during the learning process. For all these reasons, RLS can have a very positive impact



**Captions of staff pictured above from L-R across the spread**

1. Principal of Markethill Primary School, Mr Jim Richardson
2. Vice-Principal Mrs Roberta Chapman, P7 teacher
3. Mr Kenneth Qua P6 teacher
4. Mrs Pamela McCool P5 teacher
5. Mr Mark Patterson, Learning Support

on the ethos of any school and on a school's ability to provide teaching and learning experiences for the highest quality. **gtcni**

# GTCNI Annual Lecture

## Should we ignore our past? Reflections on the

The Council's Seventh Annual Lecture took place on the 7th June, in the Canada Room, Queens University Belfast. The Lecture was delivered by Dr Seán Farren, visiting professor at the School of Education, University of Ulster.

A distinguished audience, including the Minister of Education, John O'Dowd, were taken on an historic journey examining aspects of schooling and teacher education from the late eighteenth century to the present day.

Dr Farren started by quoting some lines from Oliver Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* describing a village schoolmaster of that period. He went on to provide a comprehensive overview of developments in the nineteenth century, including the establishment of 'model schools'. Moving on to the twentieth century, Dr Farren outlined key initiatives pre and post 'partition', and finished with an analysis of the issues facing Higher Education and Teacher Education today.

He concluded his lecture by saying: "As we have seen, until recent times, education was dominated by institutional controversies, with protecting territory rather than debating together what higher education and, in particular, what teacher education is about and how our different cultural traditions, including religious traditions, can contribute to the formation and experience of those whom we prepare to teach in our schools. That is the lesson I take from our past, a past which I don't think we can ignore, much as we might wish to leave large parts of it well behind us."

**The lecture was very well received and to download a digital brochure containing the full text of the lecture, please visit: [www.gtcni.org.uk](http://www.gtcni.org.uk)**



# 2012

delivered by Dr Seán Farren

## Development of Teacher Education in Ireland



# The Best Education S

Dr Paul Nolan, author of the Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report, looks at inequality in the education system.

**When Sir Robert Salisbury produced his report last year into literacy and numeracy in Northern Ireland's schools he could not resist the temptation to voice his exasperation at the way in which the education debate here proceeds with scant or no consideration for evidence of any kind.**

His main target was those who promote the 'enduring myth' that Northern Ireland has the best schools in the world – or, in the more modest version, the best education system in the UK. Salisbury's advice was to look at the results from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the standard barometer for measuring pupil attainment.

The survey involves 34 OECD countries and 41 partner countries, and is used by governments, corporations and international bodies as a guide to general levels of reading, writing and science ability. Northern Ireland used to perform above the average, but the most recent figures, issued in 2010 and based on a survey conducted in November 2009, show slippage, with Northern Ireland hovering around average scores on reading, writing and science.

As Sir Robert Salisbury notes: "Our performance in reading and maths lags behind that of the highest performing systems and the 2006 and 2009 results from Northern Ireland represent a

decline on other cycles of PISA." **For details see Table 1 opposite.**

If that places Northern Ireland in the 'unexceptional' category, there are other ways to analyse the PISA data that show we are in fact at the top of another chart, and that is the one that measures inequality. In the first iteration of his report, issued in 2009, Salisbury drew attention to the gap between the weakest and strongest achievers:

*"In Northern Ireland the gap...is larger than the average across OECD countries. It is also larger than the gap found in England, Scotland or Wales, and is considerably larger than the gap in the Republic. Relative to the situation in many other countries, 'weak' students fall further behind strong students in Northern Ireland." (Report of the Working Group on Literacy and Numeracy, 2009).*

The successes of the Northern Ireland system are to be found in the percentage of pupils achieving high grades at GCSE and at A-level. The 2011 results show that while the figures are identical for overall attainment across the A\*- G grades, Northern Ireland pupils score much higher in the top grades, with 8.9% securing A\*, against 7.8% for England, Wales and Northern Ireland combined. **See Table 2 opposite.**

The same is true at A-Level, where on average Northern Ireland pupils significantly outperform their comparators in Britain. Northern Ireland remains ahead of the aggregate scores for

England, Wales and Northern Ireland by a margin of 7.5% at grades A\* -A, 8% at grades A\*-C and 0.3% at grades A\*-E.

How is this discrepancy to be explained? If the GSSE and A-level scores show us to be outpacing our UK comparators, how come we are shown to be performing less well on the PISA indicators? The answer that is frequently given is that it is to do with our 'long tail of underachievement'.

This is not quite accurate as a formulation. Yes, it is the case that our results are weighted heavily at the bottom as well as the top of most tables, but the overall figures for underachievement in Northern Ireland are not significantly different from those in other parts of the UK. The agreed benchmark for success is to have 35% of pupils achieve 5 or more 'good' GCSEs at grades A\*-C (including English and Maths). In Northern Ireland and England the proportion achieving this level in 2011 was more or less identical – 58.3% in England and 58.2% in Northern Ireland.

The real difference lies in the distribution of scores across schools. An analysis by online magazine *The Detail* (7/2/12) shows that with a mixed intake only 3.2% of English schools fall below the benchmark, while in Northern Ireland the figure is 36% - that's 77 out of the 213 post-primary schools here. All of the 77 are non-grammar. The separation at eleven can be seen to have a massive impact upon the inequality figures in the school system.

The inequality that results in over one third of our schools failing to

# System in the World?

**Table 1: Northern Ireland in the PISA scores. Source: OECD, 2010**

	Northern Ireland	PISA average
Reading	499	493
Maths	492	496
Science	511	501

**Table 2: GCSE results in Northern Ireland, England & Wales 2011**

2011 GCSE results	Northern Ireland	Overall England, Wales & NI
% A*	8.5 (8.9)	7.8 (7.5)
% A* - A	27.6 (27.5)	23.2 (22.6)
% A* - C	74.8 (75.3)	69.8 (69.0)
% A* - G	98.7 (98.7)	98.8 (98.7)

meet the benchmark is only thrown into relief when set beside the figures for other parts of the UK, and we would do well to heed Sir Robert Salisbury's advice not to rely upon internal comparisons alone, but to look at attainment levels elsewhere. One useful place to start would be with the OECD report *Equity and Quality in Education*, issued in February 2012. This provided an analysis of successes and failures in education systems in 39 developed countries, and concluded that streaming pupils 'exacerbates inequalities'. Finland, the country that year on year

achieves the best results across a range of measures, never set out to top any league tables. Since the 1980s the main goal of its education system has been to even out social inequality and the examination successes have been a happy by-product of the school environments that grow out of this commitment.

There is much to be learned. Northern Ireland comes late to the table, having only very recently joined the Progress in International Reading Literacy Survey (PIRLS) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Taken

together with the PISA tables, and a large pinch of modesty, we may see that not only do we not have the best education system in the world, but a system that is too comfortable with inequality. 

*This is an abbreviated version of the chapter on education and inequality in the Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report. The full report can be accessed through the Community Relations Council website: [www.nicrc.org.uk](http://www.nicrc.org.uk)*

*In response to a reader's request, this term's Click looks at software for producing and editing digital video in schools. So, for expert advice, we turned to Peter Simpson, manager of neelb.tv and esags.tv in Antrim.*

For schools, Peter recommends iMovie for general use and Final Cut Pro for more advanced students. As an unrepentant Applephile he finds ease of use straight out of the box, reliability and cost the main factors in choice.

iMovie comes bundled with iLife and costs under £11. It's an HD (High Definition) editing package available on the IOS5 platform, so it can be used in the field on an iPhone or iPad. It's fine for non-specialist applications, producing excellent results.

For heavy duty work however, **neelb.tv** uses the 'big daddy' which is Final Cut Pro X (£199) together with Motion 5 (£35). Used together they offer full broadcast professional editing and graphics using layers like Photoshop. FCPX initial had some bad press but having used it for a few months they now could not do without it; a good student could get fabulous results with minimal learning.

Peter uses Keynote for presentations instead of PowerPoint: it's easier to import full-resolution full-frame at broadcast video standard.

For final production, BoinxTv (under £35) comes highly recommended: they regularly use it on a Mac laptop with a couple of webcams to produce fully professional television productions including graphics, chromakey and all the bells and whistles. The demo on their site is brilliant!

For those who don't know or view **neelb.tv** or **esags.tv** it's worth joining the over 70,000 views this year. Teachers and schools are using the many recorded educational programmes as an integral part of their continued professional development.



This year **neelb.tv** also featured live events including two interactive programmes with the Justice and Education Ministers interviewed by pupils in the Antrim studio. With **C2K**, programmes were made on topics such as the Titanic, on emigration and about sports, with interviews with elite athletes from the Sports Institute for Northern Ireland.

**neelb.tv** produced the *School Report* for BBC shown recently on **BBC Newsline**. Have a look at the roundup section on the BBC News

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schoolreport/17399821>

The team also covered the Olympic torch event in Magherafelt with a live programme webcast on 7th June from 12.30 to 2pm including the use of a helicopter platform. A live programme on renewable energy from a wind farm at Corkey is up-coming.

Meanwhile sister channel **esags.tv** has close to 40 school improvement documentary and news-style programmes with many new programmes being added monthly. Titles include Directing Thinking, The Science behind Science Provision, Analysing Data – Measuring Success, Raising Boys Attainment, Early Mathematics Experiences, Literacy in an Irish Medium School, Critical Incidents and Anti-Bullying.

The channel carries Ministerial messages and recently covered the BT Young Scientist competition in Dublin.

To find out more about these education web channels go to <http://www.neelbtv.org.uk>



If you'd like to share your favourite clicks on this educational topic or on any other, email [profjohn@gtni.org.uk](mailto:profjohn@gtni.org.uk)