

Access and
Participation in
Adult Literacy
Schemes

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Introduction

Context and Aims of the Project

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is the co-ordinating, training and campaigning body for all those involved in adult literacy in Ireland. Members include individual students, tutors and organisers as well as voluntary groups, Vocational Education Committees (VECs), Libraries, Trade Unions, Training Workshops and Centres for the Unemployed.

Literacy tuition is provided in local literacy schemes, co-ordinated by Adult Literacy Organisers and resourced by the VEC's through funding from the Adult Literacy and Community Education (ALCE) Budget. The Adult Education Organisers (AEO's) play a key role in establishing literacy tuition as an integral part of general adult education provision and in ensuring that the needs of adults with reading and writing problems are met.

Literacy tuition also takes place within a number of adult education programmes which target particular groups e.g. Youthreach, Travellers' Centres, Centres for the Unemployed, Prisons, Community Training Centres. There are, however, increasing numbers of adult education programmes where the need for literacy tuition has been identified, but there is still no recognition at policy level which ensures that adults who have literacy difficulties are provided with a coherent, integrated continuum of education provision.

Until the publication of *Education 2000* (1997) NALA relied on estimates which suggested that between 5% and 16% of the adult population experienced some degree of literacy difficulty. (1) The method used to compute these estimates was based on the traditional approach to defining 'being literate' i.e. in the Irish context, the completion of sixth class in primary school (Du Vivier, 1991). (2) Recent researchers, however, have favoured a different approach to quantifying the problem in western industrialised countries (OECD, 1995). (3) Rather than dividing a given population crudely into 'the literate' and 'the illiterate', the OECD International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) sought to identify five levels of literacy to cover demands at home, at work and in the community.

The Irish results of the survey show that approximately 25% of the adult population (between the ages of 16 and 64) were not able to get beyond level 1 when tested (*Education 2000*, 1997). (4) 'People who score at this level are able to perform at best, only the simplest of tasks, typically those that require the reader to locate a single piece of information in a text, when there is no distracting information and when the structure of the text assists the search'. (5) This percentage amounts to approximately 500,000 people. A further 30% of the population could not get

beyond level 2, which required survey participants to locate, comprehend and integrate two or more pieces of information in a piece of text which one might reasonably expect to encounter in everyday life. Level 3 is considered the minimum desirable threshold in most industrialised countries. (6)

The need for literacy must be seen in the context of the culture and society in which we live. Rapidly changing economies require ever higher levels of literacy if people are to adapt and participate fully in society. Some of the findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) are significant in this regard:

- there is a strong association between unemployment and low literacy levels in Ireland;
- at level 1, there are four times as many people in the lowest income group as in the highest income group;
- more than 60% of those who left school at or before Junior Certificate score at level 1;
- only 10% of those at level 1 had participated in education or training programmes in the previous year;
- 20% of people never read a book and a greater percentage of people never write anything substantial;
- literacy activity and competence are associated with a richer and fuller involvement in social and cultural life. (7)

A NALA survey for the year 1994 -1995, which yielded returns from 72 adult literacy schemes, indicated that 4,346 students were participating in literacy tuition. (8) When the NALA/INTEGRA project commenced in late 1995 we thought that this figure represented less than 5% of those with severe difficulties. We were, therefore, concerned about the low levels of participation in basic education programmes. Now, however, in 1998 we know it represents less than 1% of adults with literacy difficulties which affect them in their everyday lives.

Understandably our concern is all the greater.

While NALA recognises that not all adults with literacy difficulties may actually wish to come forward for tuition, one of our most important activities is raising public awareness about the literacy problem in order to facilitate access to literacy provision for those adults who do want help. *Charting Our Education Future* (1995) recognises that “a sustaining philosophy should seek to promote equality of access, participation and benefit for all in accordance with their needs and abilities”. (9) Furthermore the National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS, 1997) document points to the fact that “investing in education at all levels, to ensure equal access and opportunity for all...to achieve their educational potential” is a key priority in creating an inclusive society. (10)

In light, therefore, of the above figures which suggest that the majority of adults with severe literacy difficulties are not receiving tuition, NALA undertook this project with the specific aim of promoting the adult basic education service for adults with low literacy skills. The specific objectives of the project were:

- (a) to investigate the problem of non-participation;
- (b) to identify effective strategies which could be used by literacy providers to recruit potential students;
- (c) to improve awareness of the literacy issue at local, regional and national level;
- (d) to provide media and communications skills training with accreditation for literacy workers;
- (e) to impact policy makers so that existing education and training programmes are more accessible to people with reading and writing difficulties.

The project was made up of five components: Consortium, Development, Research, Training and Transnationality. All were crucial in achieving the aim of increasing access to, and participation in, adult literacy schemes.

The Process

At the planning stage discussions were held among NALA personnel as to the most effective way of conducting the project and in particular the research project, in the light of the time and resources available. We decided to draw on the experience and insights of students currently participating in adult literacy schemes throughout Ireland. Some had been non-participants for long periods in spite of having had severe difficulties; others had been involved in informal recruitment networks and had encouraged new students to come forward. Involvement in the research project would afford them the opportunity to reflect critically on their experience, to share valuable insights and thus to add to the existing body of knowledge. This bottom-up approach to the research process is in accordance with NALA's belief in the value of participatory research. (11)

Over 100 adult literacy schemes were invited, by letter, to participate in the project. Sixteen literacy organisers responded indicating that students from their schemes would be prepared to participate in a national survey (see Appendix A). Project staff then visited each of the schemes, where they conducted an information session and met the organiser, tutors and in some instances, students.

The participating schemes were asked to prepare students for involvement in the research work. In addition schemes agreed to test a range of recruitment strategies, participate in research sessions which explored access and progression issues, and take part in Media and Public Relations training.

Chapter 1 – 4 outlines the research project, chapter 5 details practical activities carried out by the project, chapter 6 summarises the evaluation report of the project and chapter 7 draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

Methodology

The descriptive method used in this study is known as causal/comparative research. It was adopted by Aslanian and Brickell (1980), when researching the reasons for adult participation in education. (12) This causal/comparative method attempts to explain events that have already taken place by drawing attention to the degree to which selected independent variables (e.g. age, gender, level of self-esteem, employment status, prior educational attainment etc.) correspond with the dependent variable being studied – participation in literacy tuition. Within this framework, a qualitative approach to data collection has been adopted in order to ensure that the key issues of non-participation, access, and recruitment strategies are explored from the students' point of view.

Research Sample

159 students from sixteen schemes throughout Ireland, volunteered to take part in the national survey. Although this was not a random sample of the population being studied i.e. the total number of students on roll in the sixteen schemes, it nevertheless represented a fair cross section of the population in terms of age, gender, marital status, employment status and length of time attending the scheme. Thirteen students, from the A.B.L.E. scheme in Blanchardstown, took part in the pilot study. The remaining 146 students formed the research sample. The term 'adult student' for the purposes of the survey, refers to people of 18 years or older.

Data Collection Techniques

The most common technique used for gathering data in descriptive research is the survey (Merriam and Simpson, 1984) and where special populations e.g. literacy students are concerned, the orally administered survey is considered more appropriate. (13) In February 1996, project staff drew up an interview schedule, comprising of both quantitative and qualitative questions. Semi-structured, face-to-face, taped interviews were conducted with thirteen students in Blanchardstown during the pilot study. From these interviews certain questions were omitted or changed and others were included. It was also decided, at this stage, that the answers to the quantitative questions should be noted on a questionnaire, by the researcher, during the recorded interview. This was to allow for more speedy analysis of the quantitative data when the interviews were completed. The qualitative questions, however, which gave the students scope to elaborate on their own issues, still remained the central focus of the interview.

During the main study, researchers, experienced in adult literacy work, travelled to the fifteen participating schemes and conducted the interviews with 146 students. This research took place between March and June 1996. Strict confidentiality was guaranteed to all interviewees.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed the quantitative data was entered onto a computerised data base and processed. An interim report, *Access and Participation in Adult Literacy Schemes* (1996), published the findings which included:

- a profile of the survey participants;
- participants' experiences of identifying and confronting their literacy problem;
- participants experiences of attending a literacy scheme;
- participants' views on recruitment;
- patterns and trends suggesting the degree to which selected variables influence participation. (14)

The next stage of the project involved analysing the qualitative data contained in the taped interviews. The material was transcribed and the data was then coded under a number of headings: barriers to participation (four sub headings), recruitment (four subheadings), motivation behind returning to education, benefits derived from participation in basic education programmes, and a catch-all category, "other", which included any particularly striking or insightful statements which did not pertain to the earlier codes. The categories were reviewed after ten tapes had been coded and a few minor modifications were made to the subheadings. The category 'other' was found to be generating rich data. This material was then analysed and further sub headings began to emerge.

Once sufficient taped interviews had been transcribed i.e. when further interviews were no longer producing new data, all of the transcribed material was analysed and coded. There followed a period of working with the material which produced a synthesis of the qualitative data. Following Patton (1990) the guiding principle in this work was an effort to understand the world of the survey participants. "The qualitative researcher's passion is understanding the world in all its complexity – not proving something, not advocating, not advancing personal agendas, but understanding". (15)

This report is an interweaving of the quantitative and qualitative data and aims to give the reader an insight into the world of the survey participants. In line with Patton's (1990) recommendations it includes numerous quotations, short and long, from the participants themselves, together with analysis and commentary. "Description and quotation are the essential ingredients of qualitative inquiry. Sufficient description and direct quotations should be included to allow the reader to enter into the situation and thoughts of the people represented in the report...the description must not be so 'thin' as to remove context or meaning. Qualitative analysis presents 'thick' description". (16)

Profile of Survey Participants

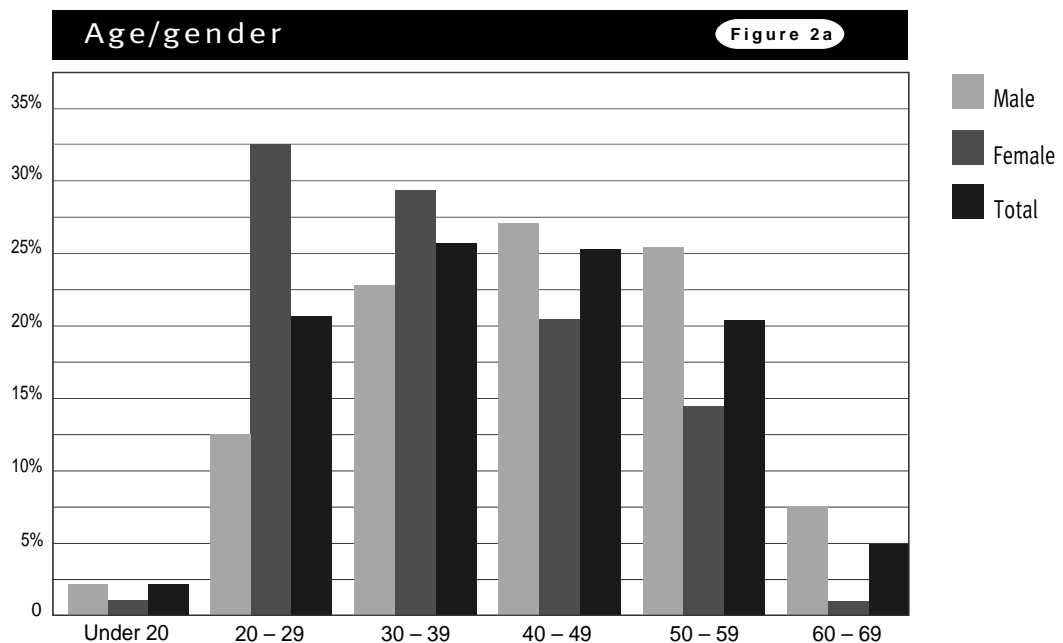
Introduction

Researchers, both in the United States and in the UK, have devoted a great deal of time and effort to examining the factors which influence adults to participate in non-compulsory education or training. However, as McGivney (1990) points out, it is a complex field of enquiry and ‘there is no single theory that can satisfactorily explain participation or non-participation’. (17)

Adults with reading and writing difficulties are not a homogeneous group; their age, their gender, their family circumstances, where they live, their employment status and their educational biographies are all potentially significant factors in relation to their willingness to return to education. This chapter, which draws on both quantitative and qualitative data, gives a profile of the adult learners we surveyed, together with their perceptions of some of the causes and effects of literacy difficulties.

Personal Details

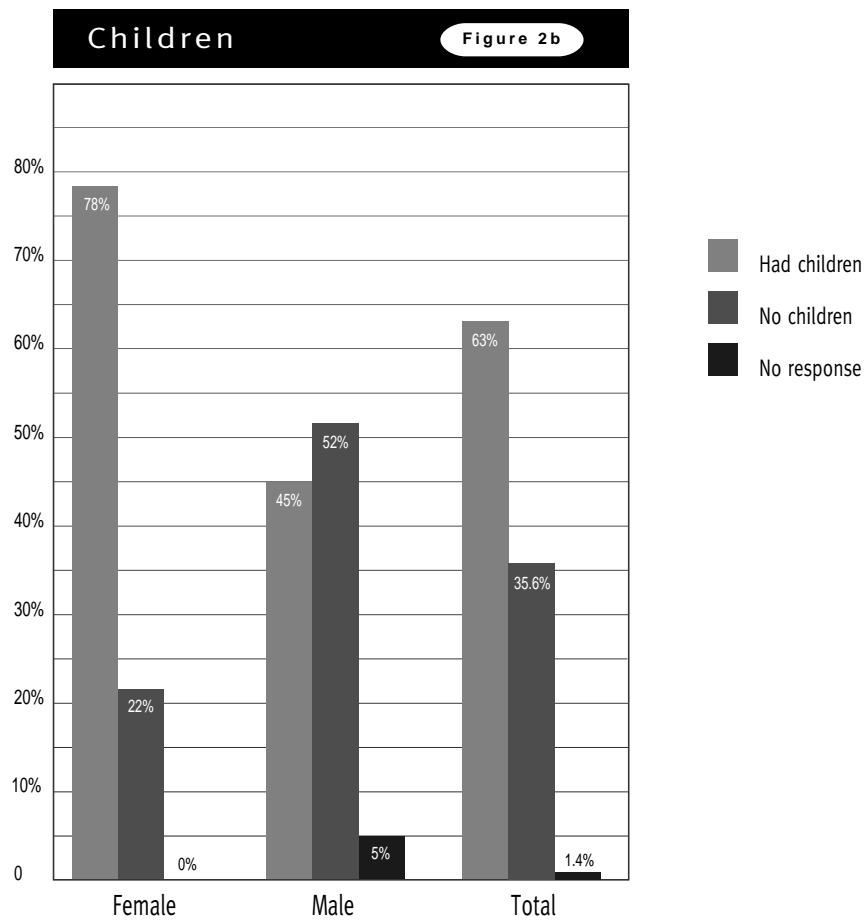
Over half of our interviewees were in the 30-49 age group, while just under a quarter were aged between 18-29. The remainder were aged 50 or over, and of this latter group, only 4.8% were over the age of 59. Of those interviewed, 55.5% were female and 44.5% male.



When age and gender were correlated, we discovered a higher ratio of men in the under 40 age group. This trend was particularly pronounced among participants under the age of 30. In the 39+ age group, however, the pattern changed, with a significantly higher ratio of women to men. This was most striking among those aged 59 and over, where of the 7 students interviewed, only 1 was male while 6 were female. Figure 2a shows the age/gender correlation of the sample.

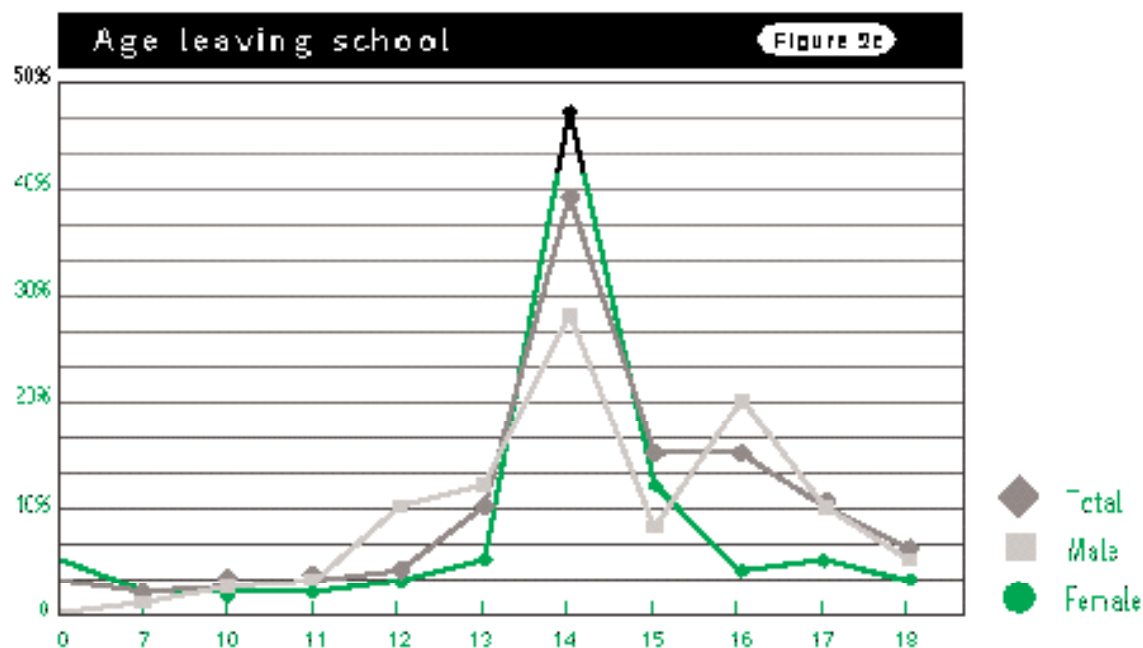
Almost two thirds of those who were interviewed were living in urban areas (cities and towns) while the remainder were from villages or rural areas. When location was correlated with gender, we discovered that in cities, towns and villages the ratio of women to men was significantly higher. In rural areas, however, almost two thirds of those attending were men.

Over two thirds of survey participants were married or in a relationship. Just over a quarter were single while the remainder were separated or widowed. Almost two thirds of the sample had children. When being a parent was correlated with gender it emerged that a significantly higher proportion of the women sampled had children. Figure 2b shows the correlation between gender and parenthood.



Educational History

More than half of the sample had either never attended school (four students, all of whom were female) or had left before the age of fifteen. Over a quarter left between the ages of fifteen and sixteen while the remainder attended beyond the age of sixteen. When school-leaving age was correlated with gender, it emerged that two thirds of women interviewed had left by the age of fifteen, while less than half of the men had done so. Figure 2c shows the correlation between gender and school leaving age.

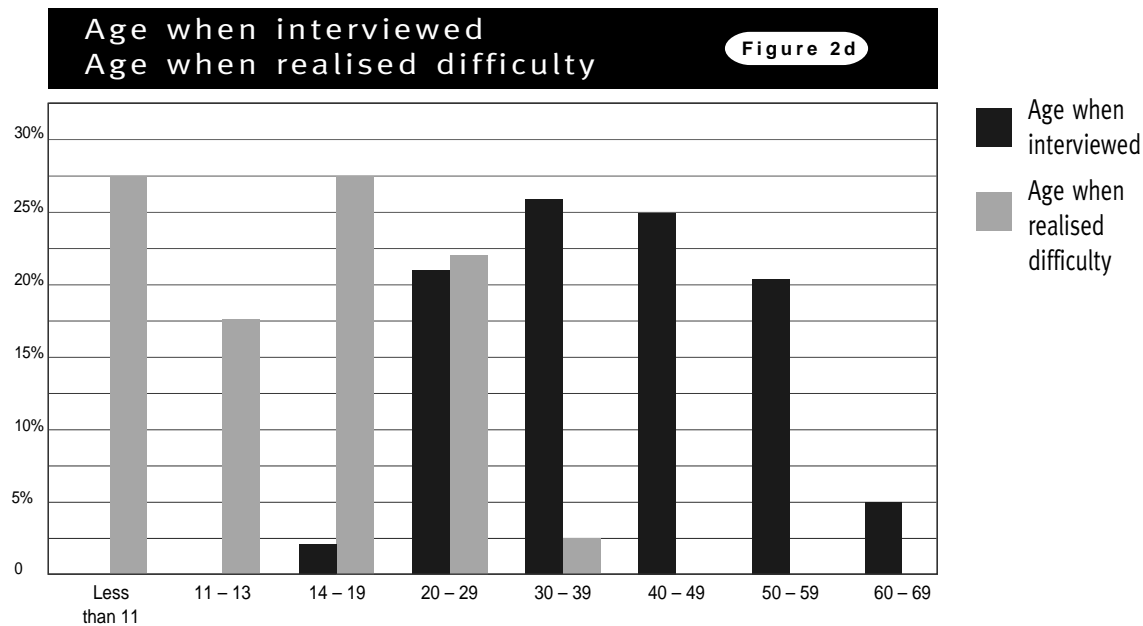


Almost half of those interviewed attended primary school only; a significant proportion of these left before reaching sixth class. Of those who completed sixth class prior to the abolition of the Primary Certificate in 1967, a considerable number were not entered for the examination. Those who were entered, with one or two notable exceptions did not pass the examination.

Slightly more than half attended a post-primary school; over two thirds of these left within the first three years of second level schooling. Of those we interviewed just over eight out of ten had no qualification when they left school and almost six out of ten had not participated in any form of education or training since.

Memories of School

The majority of people interviewed did not express happy memories of their time in school. They remembered being 'shouted at', being 'beaten something brutal', having 'fear instilled' into them, being told that they were 'stupid' or 'thick' or 'not bright'. They described large classes, overcrowded classrooms, severe corporal punishment when homework was either not done or was incorrect, being allowed to sit at the back of the class knitting or sewing while other children were doing written work, or being sent out to clean the toilets.



Almost half of the research participants knew by the age of thirteen that they had difficulties with reading and writing that would affect them in their everyday lives. (See Figure 2d) They felt there was nothing they could do about it, however, so they simply left school knowing that they were embarking on adult life with a considerable disability - a disability, moreover, which would have to be concealed from as many people as possible.

We were the group she used to pick on...we were the stupid ones. We were put at the back...she should have had us at the front rather than at the back.

(Woman in her forties)

If I had only had it when I was young. If only someone had picked me up and given me a bit of time, what would I be doing now?... I have a lad at home and he's mildly retarded and he has to be looked after. He's a big lad, a smasher, and he doesn't look handicapped. If they were classifying me when I left school, I would have been classified like that.

(Woman in her fifties)

School was on the edge of the graveyard. That's where we used to play, in the graveyard. Schoolmasters were very violent those times. It didn't bother me, it was just part of life at that time.

(Man in his fifties)

I was good at the sewing. In my time needlework was very important to the nuns...I used to love sewing and I suppose that's why they just kept me at it. I was making communion dresses, little embroidered petticoats and stuff like that. But I never learned to read and write. When I left Ireland at the age of fifteen I couldn't write my own name so I was lying everywhere I went.

(Woman in her fifties)

And you were constantly told you were stupid...when they asked us was there anybody who would clean the toilets, we'd put up our hands, just to get out of the class. About four of us who were pals. It was pointless trying to teach us, the teachers said. And it wasn't pointless.

(Woman in her forties)

Poverty

One of the most striking features of the qualitative research findings was the extent to which the adult learners were convinced that their experience of childhood poverty contributed to their literacy difficulty. Although they were not actually asked about the circumstances of their family of origin because we felt that such a question might be perceived as insensitive or intrusive, a large proportion of the sample chose to speak at length about the economic circumstances of their childhood. As children they knew that they were poor and that others were well-off, and they felt that the treatment meted out by teachers was often based on the socio-economic status of their families. This was the perception of research participants in both urban and rural areas and across the age ranges.

You had to be somebody...My father worked all his life but we were classed as low class in school. The people that had property, their children were somebody. So we knew who we were because there were eight of us who lived in our estate and we were all on the one side and the rest were big farmers' children and teachers' children and solicitors' children and people that had money with shops and supermarkets. So there we were and we knew where we came from. We knew who we were, we were made to feel that the whole time by lay teachers and nuns.

(Woman in her thirties)

I suppose I couldn't have got more help in school because the teacher – the postman's daughter – was all for the big fellows that time. She looked after them, their fathers all had good jobs. All the good ones got it but there were a good few of us in the back of the class who were never asked anything and got plenty of stick.

(Man in his fifties)

There was twelve of us and my father and mother was always in business...we didn't go hungry and we were well fed and had good shoes going to school and good

clothes – you know, heavy clothes...In my class there was very, very poor children, very poor, and they got a harder time than I did because I had parents who would talk up to them, and then one of our shops was just down the road so they knew we weren't poor.

(Woman in her sixties)

There was another teacher, she was a terrifying figure and she didn't have much time for you at all if you weren't well off. At Christmas, Easter and holiday times some of them, the ones who could afford it, brought her in presents. They used to get more attention because they were well known in the town...She gave them more confidence, where the rest of us got no encouragement at all.

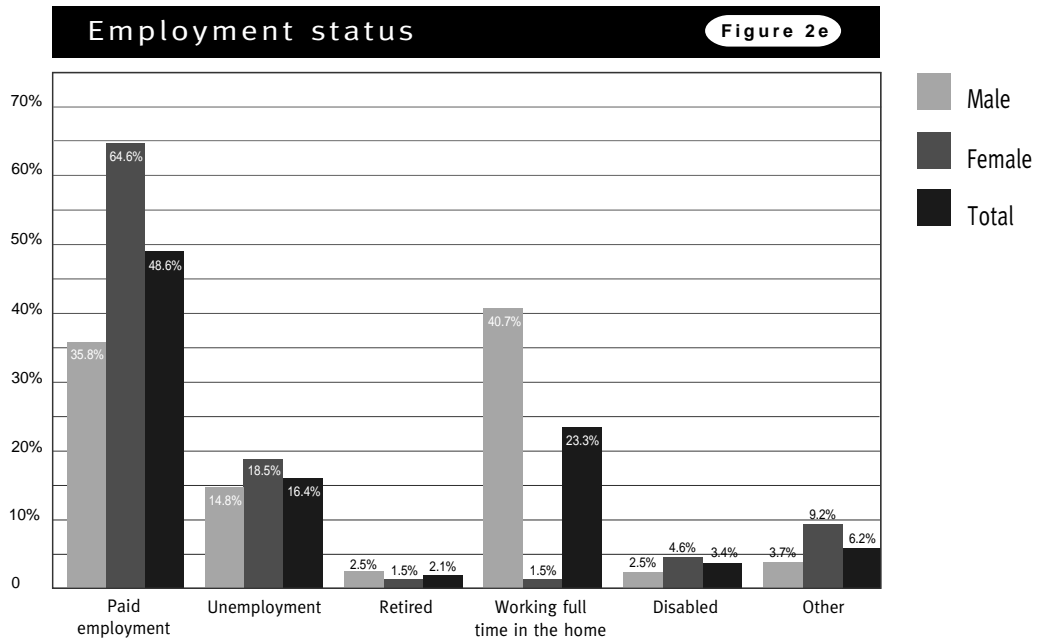
(Man in his forties)

I always felt that – well we just came from a working class family and I always thought that the girls from the main street were in the front row and they were always kept there even from class to class.

(Woman in her fifties)

Employment History

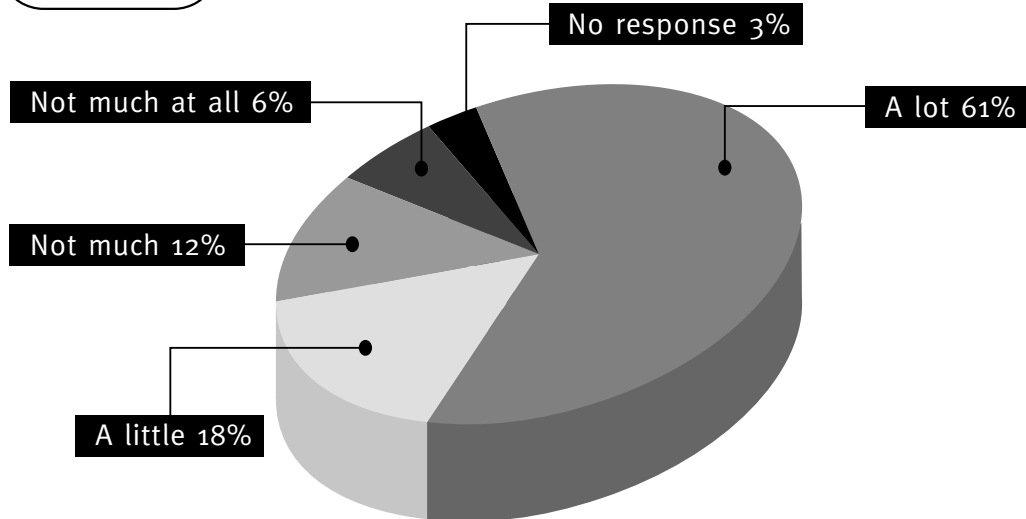
Almost half of the research participants had paid work while a significant number of those who were not in employment were working full-time in the home. Of the 71 interviewees who had paid work just under seven out of ten had been in their jobs for more than 3 years while approximately two out of ten had held their current job for less than a year. When paid employment was correlated with gender it was discovered that almost two thirds of the males sampled were employed as against just over one third of the females. Figure 2e shows the correlation between gender and employment.



In the course of the interviews we were struck by the low number of unemployed people attending the literacy schemes. While we are aware that some of this target group are accessing literacy tuition in centres for the unemployed it is, nevertheless, a cause for concern that so few of them are participating in basic education programmes. The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) which is specifically geared towards the long term unemployed is not, in many instances, a suitable programme for adults with severe literacy difficulties because it necessitates a return to full-time education and requires that students work in groups of twenty. The literacy schemes, on the other hand, are characterised by a high degree of flexibility and provide non-formal, one-to-one and small group tuition.

It is interesting to note that once learners participate in basic education programmes they begin to perceive a link between literacy skills and job prospects. This does not appear to be the case, however, for non-participants: learners coming into schemes do not usually cite employment prospects as their primary reason for attending. The research findings suggest, that literacy tuition should be positively promoted as a service which can benefit those seeking both paid employment and/or further education and training. Eight out of ten interviewees expressed an interest in progressing to some form of further education. Figure 2f shows the improvement in

Figure 2f



job prospects, after a period of tuition, as perceived by the research participants.

Those in paid employment included those in full-time work, those in part-time work and those who were self-employed. Men were more likely to be in full-time employment while the majority of the women, who worked outside the home, had part-time jobs. Participants spoke at some length about their work, often expressing both regret and frustration. They were conscious that their low level of educational attainment had meant little choice when it came to applying for work. Many found their jobs dull, repetitive, unfulfilling and physically tiring and they felt that they were sometimes considered as lesser people because of the work they did. A considerable number pointed out that they had been forced to turn down promotional opportunities because of their lack of skill or confidence in their reading and writing. They spoke about shame and embarrassment in this regard, together with the fear that their employers would

I'd like to go driving a truck. There's a written test going for it. I don't know how severe it is...I was working in another engineering factory and they asked me would I go into the store and I knew it was a load of paper work and...Then again I might have survived it. If I was able to do that it would have been an experience for me and I could probably be in some other job now.

(Man in his thirties)

Well my working life consisted of packing soup. I worked in a factory from the age of fourteen. I learned to know things by the pictures, the different types of soup or whatever...I suppose it hasn't made much difference to me in one way. But in another way I feel if I was educated I could have done something that I really wanted to do.

(Woman in her thirties)

I can only get night work - security work. I would prefer to work during the day, maybe in a supermarket...I am very involved in a local group called Network. I've always wanted to work at something like that or to work with children. I've always wanted to look after children who maybe were in the same predicament as myself, had a bad time in school.

(Man in his thirties)

Straight away when I left school I went into a sewing factory. I like to sew but I didn't like the factory. I didn't like being on the assembly line...I find that when somebody is over you they don't have respect for you as a human being. You are just a machine and you have to get so much in to get wages...Then I worked in a heritage centre as a cleaner. I couldn't cope with that, couldn't cope with the people there because they assumed that's all I had the brain for...If I had the chance I would really like to work in an office, to work in reception at the heritage centre. I feel that I have an ease with people, am on their level...The difficulty with reading and writing has affected my working life because I have to accept what's given to me instead of what I want to do.

(Woman in her thirties)

When I have my education bettered I would like to go self-employed. That's what I'm going to aim for like..What I'd like to take up down the road is driving an articulated truck...I always said that would be my goal if you like, do something for the country and not be working for £10.00 like I've been doing for the last twelve years on FAS courses. And 't isn't my choice. If you are in that system you've got no choice in the matter, you know.

(Man in his forties)

I think people, even in my work, all the time they make you feel inadequate...It's terrible the system they have in there. From management, even the management, the way they treat the class of workers that I'm classed as – an unskilled worker as I've been told time and time again...We're not graded. We're treated like real scum and it's very demoralising.

(Woman in her forties)

The reason why I didn't apply for the job is because I thought I wouldn't be able to do it – the bookwork you know, like writing stuff down and I was too nervous to do it...I think the only thing I ever could do, except FAS courses, would be to run my own garden centre.

(Man in his forties)

I have a lad at home and he's mildly retarded. He can read and write...he has more ability now, of reading, than I had going out of school. And there was nothing wrong with me. So what would I have achieved? I could have been a doctor, a teacher, do you know what I mean? It's such a missed opportunity and there's loads of us out there like that.

(Woman in her fifties)

I wasn't able to do anything else except cleaning. If I had been able I would have done shop work but I was always afraid of the orders not being able to spell. But I went out to work, I needed to go out, we needed the money.

(Woman in her fifties)

find out about their difficulty. [REDACTED]

The adult learners we interviewed were not a homogenous group. They ranged in age from those still in their teens to those over the age of sixty. They lived in both urban and rural areas. The sample included both men and women, married and single, with and without children, in paid employment, unemployed, and those working full-time in the home. Some had left school before the official school leaving age while others attended until the age of eighteen: almost all, however, had unhappy memories of their schooldays. The vast majority chose to speak at some length about the economic circumstances of their childhood. Poverty, in their view, had contributed to their literacy difficulties, which in turn, had a negative impact on their life chances, particularly in relation to employment prospects.

The profile of our research participants shows that certain groups are underrepresented in the literacy schemes. These include: the unemployed; women under the age of 30; women living in rural areas; men over the age of 50; older people i.e. both men and women over the age of sixty. The NALA/INTEGRA research project had a dual focus: on the one hand, we were interested in finding out why those who had returned to adult basic education had decided to do so; on the other hand we were keen to examine the factors which might be hindering other adults – up to 99% of those with literacy or numeracy difficulties - from availing of the service. Chapters 3 and 4 will examine both the factors which motivated the research participants to participate in basic education programmes and the barriers which may be preventing others, particularly the under-represented groups, from doing so.

Access to Adult Basic Education: Factors Influencing Participation & Non-participation (1)

CHAPTER

3

Introduction

If we want to increase access to, and participation in, adult basic education programmes we must first identify the barriers that adults with literacy difficulties are likely to encounter if they wish to access tuition. Researchers both in United States (Cross, 1981) and in the UK (McGivney, 1990) tend to classify barriers to participation under four broad headings: informational, situational, institutional, and dispositional. (18) (19) When coding and analysing the transcripts of the research interviews, we used these categories.

Any reference to difficulties in accessing or understanding information about literacy tuition was categorised as an informational barrier. A situational barrier was interpreted as any aspect of a person's actual life situation which would make it difficult for them to avail of literacy tuition. Institutional barriers referred to the inflexible or unresponsive nature of the education system itself, which can deter learners from enrolling, or continuing to participate, in education programmes. The fourth category, dispositional barrier, included references to anything in a person's thoughts, feelings, attitudes or perceptions that would impact negatively on their motivation to return to education.

This chapter describes how participants heard about the literacy service, the personal circumstances that motivated them to return to education and the informational and situational barriers they encountered when they attempted to do so.

Informational Barriers

A significant number of research participants thought that there was not enough information available. Phrases such as 'almost non-existent', 'I never knew it was there', 'should be highlighted more on radio and TV', 'should be included on church notices', 'not enough awareness on FAS courses or VTOS', 'not enough information about progression routes', 'I had to write to the Department of Education' give a flavour of people's views.

It is interesting to note that slightly more than half of the sample were actively seeking information about literacy tuition. When this was correlated with age we discovered that in all age categories, with the single exception of those over 59, more than half of those interviewed were looking for the information. This pattern held true also in correlations with location, educational attainment and employment status. When correlated with gender, we found that a slightly higher ratio of men were actively seeking the information.

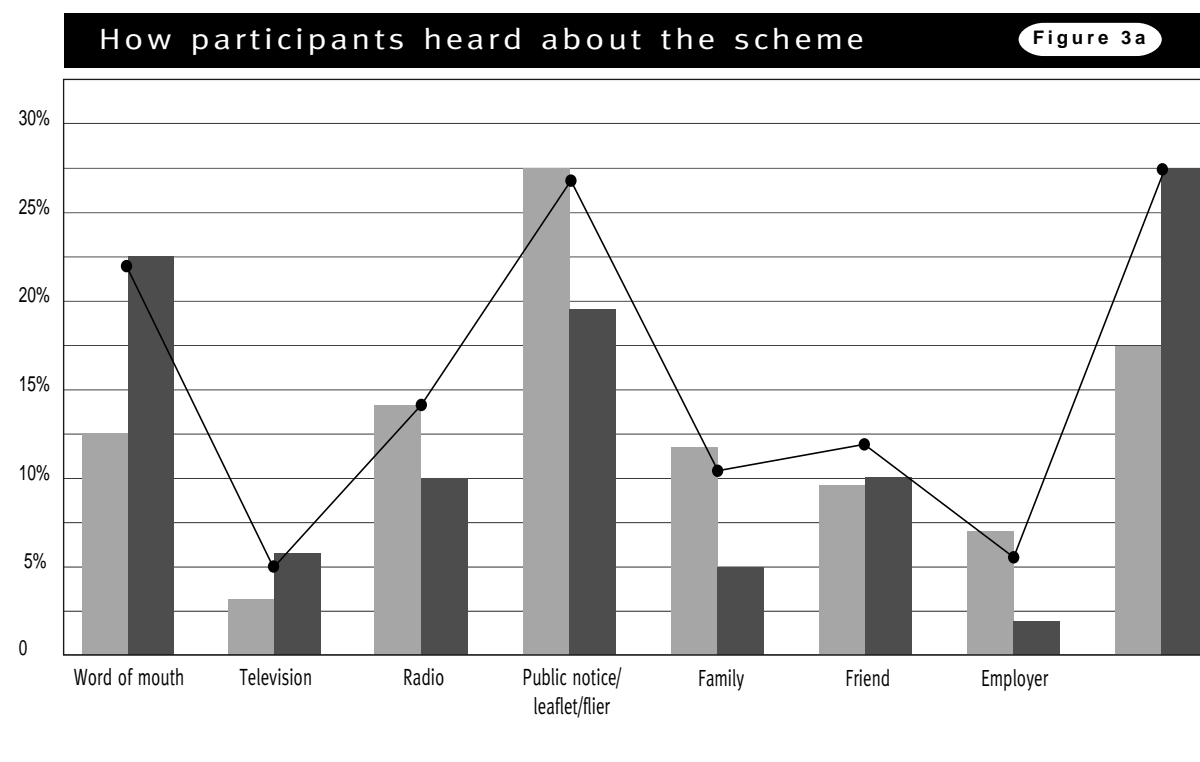
Almost half of the survey participants, however, were not actually seeking information about basic education. The fact that they came forward for tuition once they heard about the service suggests that:

- (a) people may not know that literacy tuition is available,
- (b) people may not realise that such provision could meet their needs, or
- (c) people may never have consciously identified their own needs in this regard.

It would appear that there is an urgent need for more readily available information about tuition, together with a sharper media focus on literacy issues both in public discussion and dramatic presentations e.g. Glenroe, Fair City.

Hearing about the Scheme

Almost a quarter of the sample heard about the scheme by means of a public notice, leaflet or flier, with a significantly higher proportion of men receiving the information in this manner. People from both urban and rural areas responded well to this type of advertising. Prior educational attainment proved to be significant in this regard with those who had progressed to second level schools almost twice as likely to have heard about literacy tuition by this means. It is not surprising that this should be one of the two most frequently cited categories, as most of the resources, both nationally and locally, are channelled into this type of publicity. Figure 3a shows how the research participants heard about their local literacy schemes.



Word of mouth was an effective source of information particularly for those who never attended a second level school. Women, too, responded well to this type of information. When responses from the category 'other' were analysed most of them also turned out to be word of mouth referrals, as of course were those under the headings of 'family', 'friend', and 'employer'. The personal encouragement element is certainly a factor here as it helps to counter both the shame about low educational attainment, and the fear about returning to education, reported by so many of the research participants.

It is interesting to note that in spite of the fact that half of those interviewed were in paid employment, very few (3.4%) had received information about basic education programmes from their employers. Adults with literacy difficulties tend to conceal their problem from as many people as possible, particularly before they enrol for tuition. Almost a quarter of those we interviewed had only confided in one or two people, usually a partner, a grown-up child, a parent, or a friend. They are, understandably, reluctant to confide in employers because of the stigma attached to literacy difficulties.

Referral by a family member, when correlated with employment status and educational attainment, produced a definite pattern. Those in paid employment were twice as likely to receive the information from a family member as their unemployed counterparts. Those who had progressed to second level schooling were more than twice as likely to hear from a family member as those who had not. And those with qualifications (less than 20% of our sample) were almost six times as likely to be referred by a family member as those who had none. These figures suggest that positive attitudes to education are more likely in families where children stay at school, achieve a qualification, and are successful in getting work. A French study on participation, conducted by Jacques Hedoux, implied a "dynamic of cultural development within families which reinforces the positive thrust toward education". (20)

Some Thoughts on Parents

Many of the adult learners we interviewed commented on the attitudes of their parents to education and on the role played by parents and home atmosphere in their subsequent difficulties. They expressed a range of emotions in this regard – sadness, regret, sympathy, understanding, bitterness, resentment and incomprehension.

I didn't really go to school very much at all because I was sick as a child. I was one of a very large family and one of us not going to school did not seem very much at the time. So I had very little school – from the age of six or seven virtually none at all.

(Woman in her sixties)

I would blame the teacher, but the parents would have to show an interest...My father was well educated. I am very disappointed with my father because he was well educated...My family still don't know, even to this day, that I am not able to read and write.

(Man in his forties)

I was the oldest of five children. My mother was never a well woman and I was kept home because I was the eldest...it was go today and miss two days. Parents then, I don't think they seen the wrong side of it. They didn't think that the children was missing anything because I think back then – I was born in 1943 – the way they looked at it was that I'd just get married and be at the kitchen sink...I missed out.

(Woman in her fifties)

Trouble at home – my father may have caused the difficulty. He drank a lot. The problem really, I think, was that I'd go home to do me homework and my mother wasn't really able to help that much...When my father came in I wasn't allowed to talk.

He wanted to watch the telly so I had to have me homework done by then, If you couldn't do it in a room on your own it wasn't done.

(Man in his thirties)

My mother and father were very intelligent but they hadn't learned how important education was for the world...School wasn't a bad experience for me personally. But I saw it around me. It was for others...My mother always did my homework with me – later on my father did the maths...but there was no encouragement given to me to go to secondary school.

(Woman in her forties)

Recent research (McSorley, 1997) on school absenteeism in the Clondalkin area of Dublin shows that children are still missing out on crucial educational opportunities at key moments in their development; consequently their literacy skills suffer. Children continue to miss school, with their parents' knowledge, on a regular basis for a variety of reasons: minding younger siblings, doing the shopping, being unwilling to attend because they haven't got their homework done, being afraid to go in late because no-one in the house has woken up in time, being allowed to stay out for long periods (three to four weeks) because of a stomach ache or headache. The author concludes that 'the ease and frequency with which parents write notes to excuse their children from school may denote an underlying belief on the part of the parents and indeed the children that the educational system has very little to offer them'. (21)

It is interesting to note however, that the adult learners we interviewed who were parents had a strong sense of responsibility towards their own children's education. Having been failed by the system themselves, they were determined that their children would not suffer in a similar fashion. Many were convinced that parents should actively support and encourage their children's learning while others underlined the importance of acting as watchdogs and advocates on behalf of their children within the school system. Many of those interviewed reported that having returned to education themselves had helped them to fight their children's battles.

I watch my own children now and they are so happy...we bought books then, so much a month, it cost £230.00. But I'd do anything for education and I said there's no way it's going to happen to my children. I got a raw deal going through

the sick school system but there's no way it's going to happen to my children. I have put a stop to it there. I suppose that's one good thing out of it.

(Man in his thirties)

Well, I was very conscious of having books and reading him stories, and having him interested in reading you know – even at a young age.

(Woman in her forties)

The reason why I left school was because my father died a long time ago when I was fourteen. My mother needed the money so of course I was delighted...but then as time went on I was sorry. Now, my own children, if they wanted to leave school I wouldn't let them, I'd push them...Even though I couldn't help them I'd get someone else to help them. I'd make sure they'd get

through...Even the youngest one, she can read and write...I make sure then that none of them has fallen through the net.

(Woman in her forties)

I had eight children and I never let them miss a day at school and I left them in school until they were twenty-one, some of them. I educated them very well. I feel that I deserve a clap on the back. They have all done very well and it wasn't easy you know.

(Woman in her fifties)

Situational Barriers

Lack of time is the most commonly cited situational barrier for both men and women. Many of the men we interviewed were either in full-time employment or self-employed. They tended to work long hours, doing overtime, putting in extra hours in their own businesses, or doing farming chores throughout the daylight hours during spring, summer and early autumn. Women spoke about the time consuming nature of their home duties: caring for children, the disabled, or the elderly. Younger women, in particular, are less likely to come forward for tuition because of home duties and the lack of child-care facilities. Some of those we interviewed spoke about having tried it when they were younger; they discovered that it was 'the wrong time' for them.

Well she says that I'm making out well like but I don't know. I haven't time to put much into it like...working six days a week and some Sundays.

(Man in his fifties)

Yes, I'd like to come more often - in the winter. The summer months, now, I'd be too busy on the farm all the daylight hours.

(Man in his forties)

I went years ago just for a little while, but this time it's different. It probably wasn't the time for me to go then...I was really

going against things, if you understand, my family was still young – but I wanted to learn.

(Woman in her forties)

A good few years ago, I suppose about ten years ago or more, I tried with another woman that I knew. I used to meet her in the local town but I think because my kids were so small – at the time they were only five and six – I found it very hard...you see you can pick the wrong time like I did ten years ago.

(Woman in her thirties)

The longing to do something was there for years and each time the children would be going through their Inter Cert. and their Leaving Cert. I'd say, 'Well, one of these days I'll go through this, I'll do this myself,

I really will', and then I'd always think I was too busy, which I was, or I never made the time for myself.

(Woman in her forties)

Almost two thirds of those interviewed were living in urban areas (cities and towns) while the remainder were from villages or rural areas. When location was correlated with gender, we discovered that in cities, towns and villages the ratio of women to men was significantly higher. In rural areas, however, almost two thirds of those attending were men. Women in rural areas cited lack of transport as a barrier to access, together with other situational barriers such as time consuming farm duties. Distance and lack of time were also cited by men in rural areas as a barrier. In some cases learners had to drive for up to an hour each way, after a long day at work, in order to access two hours tuition.

I suppose a crèche for local people is a great thing but for me travelling is a problem – the public transport in this area isn't much use.

(Woman in her forties - rural)

At the moment I couldn't attend any oftener, in the winter time maybe a bit oftener. In the summer time there's always someone to be brought somewhere or the car is needed.

(Woman in her fifties - rural)

Having to get in the car and come over, the journey is time consuming – four hours between travel and class time. It is tiring after a day's work but then you will only get out of anything what you put into it. I have to look at things like that...Transport is a problem, sure I've had to thumb in all weathers when the car wouldn't start.

(Man in his forties - rural)

Confidentiality is a particular problem in small towns, villages and rural areas. Adult learners who live in small, closely knit communities do not want to be identified by friends, neighbours, acquaintances or employers as having a literacy difficulty. If literacy tuition is located in premises where no other activities or courses take place, then basic education students find themselves in a vulnerable position and the research findings suggest that a considerable number of potential students are consequently deterred from participation. For this reason many adults prefer to attend literacy schemes in areas other than where they live; in cities, where there is a reasonable public transport system, this does not pose a major problem; in more rural areas, however, the issue of transport is highly problematic.

Other situational barriers mentioned included: classes taking place at unsuitable times - only in the mornings or only on one evening a week; age – some people felt that they, or others they knew, were too old to learn; lack of accessible premises for those with a physical disability; and lack of childcare facilities within the literacy schemes for young mothers.

Motivation for Returning to Education

Situational factors, such as age, gender, employment status, or availability of leisure time, also played a positive role in motivating some of our interviewees to return to basic education. The findings suggest that young men are more likely to come forward for tuition than young women, who may encounter a variety of situational barriers or simply have a perception that basic education does not have a relevance either to their immediate circumstances or their life-plans.

A considerable number of the younger men, on the other hand, talked about the relevance of literacy and numeracy skills to their life plans, whether in terms of further education and training or improved employment prospects. The findings also highlight the fact that men in rural areas many of whom would have left or been encouraged to leave school early, when there was little emphasis on reading and writing in the context of farming or labouring work, are now seeking tuition because of the contemporary emphasis on form-filling and record-keeping.

Well these years now it did begin to affect the work a little bit, because there's more bookwork to farming now than ever. There was no bookwork in the old days but there's a lot of form filling now. A lot of the forms that come nowadays, there's not that much filling – like the form you have there yourself now, it's only tick this and tick the other. But I needed the classes definitely.

(Man in his thirties)

My long-term goal is to be a Social Worker. So by getting good grades in my Leaving Cert hopefully it will get me into College...Yes that's what took me back. I came to adult literacy to get the confidence in myself so that I can be as good as anyone else in education...I always wanted to work in the area of youth.

(Man in his twenties)

You are going nowhere kind of thing, like you can't fill out a form...as regards going for jobs, as I have proven in the hotel - I couldn't go for the hall porter's job because there would be a lot of writing that you would have to just do straight away kind of thing, you couldn't think about it. I would have liked to have gone for that job...so I decided to do something about it.

(Man in his thirties)

I was interested in doing the course in the RTC in Galway – think it was a mechanical course at the time. I always loved working with my hands. Then I seen an ad for helping to read and write...now I didn't know what it was but I says, 'even if it costs money, if this course is to help with reading and writing I know I have to do it 'cause I'll not get a better job if I don't better myself'.

(Man in his twenties)

Women, particularly those over the age of forty, appear to have benefited enormously from the growth of community-based education groups with their emphasis on personal development and lifelong learning. Many of those we spoke to had begun with classes that did not involve much reading and writing - assertiveness, confidence-building, art, crafts, cookery, yoga. Gradually they became aware of the literacy tuition which was available locally and decided to 'give it a go'. They spoke about their children leaving home and the fact that they now had time for themselves and could concentrate more on their own needs and interests.

I was involved in adult education classes – organising them – all sorts of different ones like badminton. I used to go to those classes myself...then we applied for funding to the VEC and in order to get the money we had to advertise adult literacy classes. I started thinking then that I could do with that myself.

(Woman in her forties)

It was really when I went to assertiveness and I was talking to this girl and she was telling me about it. I don't know whether she could read or write or not. Anyway I promised myself that after I left the assertiveness I was going to come back and tackle this, learn to read and write. And then I went on the one-to-one basis. That interested me. That was very important.

(Woman in her sixties)

Even though I'm fifty I said, 'I'm determined'. It was art therapy, it was that that kind of made me...I was putting my feelings down on paper. One of the weeks she (the tutor) said to me, 'Draw whatever you want'. I drew the school...Then I said, 'I'm going to do it', and I made the decision to come back. It was that made me do it, that and the self-esteem classes made me say, 'I can do it'.

(Woman in her fifties)

The facilitator of the personal development course asked me what I would like to do for me and it was probably the first time I thought about it because when you have children you are constantly looking at their

needs. So this was an opportunity for me to see what I wanted. And when I said I'd love to go back to education, straight away she had the information to give me....she gave me the name of the person and the phone number and it was a pleasure for me to make that phone call, it was a very friendly, informal phone call.

(Woman in her forties)

It was through the personal development course that I heard about it. There was ladies in the class talking about being in the reading and writing scheme. They were lovely people and I said, 'God, maybe I'll have a go at that'. So that's what started me.

(Woman in her fifties)

Once the children had left school, had gone on to third level, I decided then that I had more time and I would do something I had always wanted to do.

(Woman in her fifties)

It wasn't really that I decided I wanted to do something about it. It was more that now that the children is grown up, I have time on my hands. I haven't got the confidence to work, to go out and get a job, so why not go back to education.

(Woman in her fifties)

A considerable number of interviewees, both men and women, spoke about the illness or death of their partners, who had done all the reading and writing tasks in the home, as a precipitating factor motivating them to return to education.

The reason I got interested was because my husband got ill and all of a sudden I felt, I just assumed, that he was going to die. If he did and my kids went away, what was I going to do to contact them? How would I write to them? When you are my age you need something strong to move you on.

(Woman in her sixties)

Well, I said, if something happened in the morning, something happened to my wife...the two youngsters are there, someone would have to guide them. It was time now to sort something out.

(Man in his thirties)

Summary

If we want to increase participation in adult basic education then the barriers to access must be addressed. Research participants reported a range of barriers which they had encountered. There does not appear to be enough information available about literacy and basic education courses. Word of mouth is a very effective means of communicating the information in a user-friendly way, particularly among those who are most educationally and economically disadvantaged.

The main situational barrier cited is lack of time for both men and women. Distance and lack of transport are issues in rural areas where confidentiality is also a major issue. In terms of factors which motivated participants to return to education there was a difference between men and women. Men, in particular those under thirty, were more likely to return because they wanted to improve their employment prospects or progress to further education or training. Women, particularly those over forty, were more interested in the personal development aspect of adult basic education and they tended to return when they had more time at their disposal.

This chapter has introduced the access and participation story by concentrating on the themes of information and situational constraints. Chapter 4 will develop the narrative by describing some of the fears and perceptions that can deter adults from returning to formal education together with the experiences of the survey participants when they returned to the literacy service.

Access to Adult Basic Education: Factors Influencing Participation & Non-participation (2)

CHAPTER

4

Introduction

McGivney (1990) argues that one of the principal reasons for non-participation in adult education is the unresponsive nature of the education system itself. Those working within the system often operate on the assumption that all adults are self-directed and in circumstances that favour participation; consequently they tend to regard non-participants as ‘the problem’. Research (Kenny, 1983; OECD, 1997) shows that, in Ireland as elsewhere, there is a strong relationship between prior educational attainment and participation in adult education programmes. (22) (23)

The Kenny (1983) Report showed, furthermore, that not only prior educational attainment but also happy memories of school were powerful determinants in influencing participation in adult education and training programmes. Adults who left school at an early age, with unhappy memories and a strong sense of being a failure, in educational terms at least, are often reluctant to voluntarily participate in formal education provision. Kenny pointed out that while many adults felt that education was a good thing it was ‘not for them’.

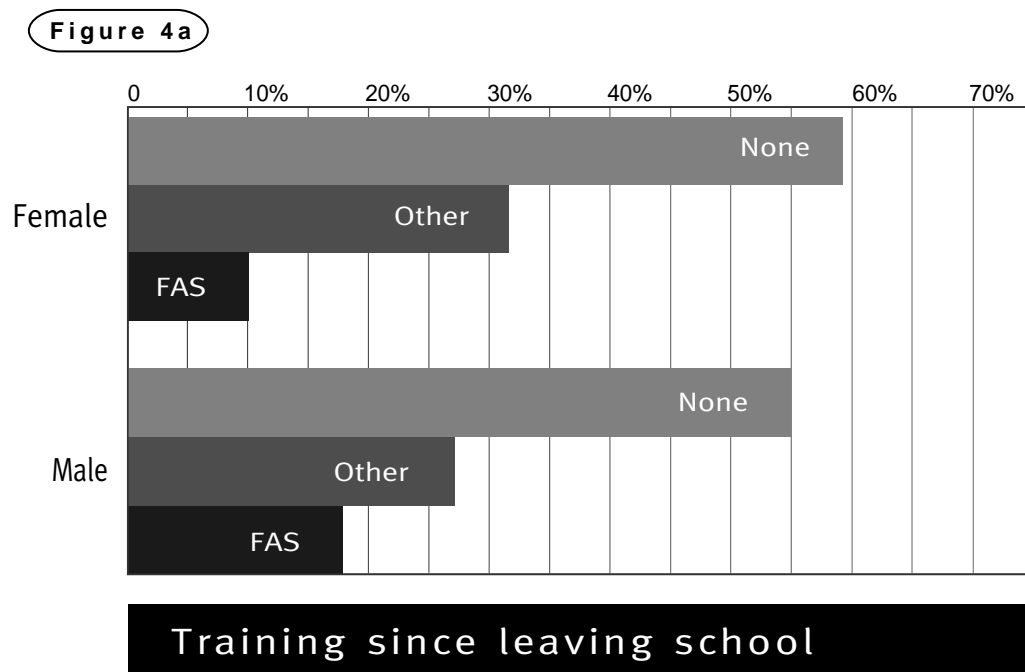
This chapter describes both the institutional and dispositional barriers encountered by the research participants when they considered returning to education as adults, together with consideration of the most intractable barriers affecting the group of adults referred to in the literature as ‘traditional non-participants’. It also gives an insight into an alternative model of education provision - the non-formal approach which is a feature of adult basic education as it operates in the literacy schemes throughout Ireland.

Institutional/Pedagogical Barriers

Our findings suggest that a considerable number of adult learners with basic education needs are deterred by the formal nature of some of the education provision available. Many are wary of school buildings, of formal enrolment procedures which involve queuing and form-filling, of the traditional classroom setting, of the traditional teacher student relationship, of being treated ‘like children’, of being asked to read aloud, of being labelled, of ‘being made to feel silly or stupid in a group’, or of being expected to learn too much too quickly.

It is interesting, in this regard, to note that approximately six out of ten of the research participants had not participated in any form of post school training until they returned to the

literacy scheme. Of those who did participate the men were more likely to have attended FAS courses, while the women often chose night classes in their local vocational or community schools. Figure 4a shows the correlation between gender and attendance at post school training courses.



Some participants commented on the fact that when ‘Basic English’ night classes or VTOS ‘Foundation’ courses were advertised, there appeared to be confusion on the part of the providers as to what exactly these terms meant in a concrete sense. Other learners spoke about their experiences of previous attempts to address their difficulty, particularly during the late seventies and early eighties. Some of the men we interviewed spoke about the lack of awareness and/or sensitivity among FAS trainers.

No this was not the first class I went to, I went to another one when I was about seventeen. I wasn't able for it. I didn't like the way they taught. They taught me like as if I was a child. At that stage (20 years ago) although I was only a teenager, I was working and bringing in a wage. You went into a school then and they showed up 'A' and they showed up 'B'. I stuck it for 4 weeks and I said, 'That's it. I know I've a problem but I don't need this'. Nobody said

to me, 'What do you want?' They were too into the teacher and pupil thing.

(Woman in her thirties)

I went one morning. I thought it was a bit too like school, sitting in desks. That put me off, sitting in desks. That kind of gave me a school feeling and I didn't really like that. I just left. I never thought no more about it for years and years.

(Woman in her fifties)

Your man asked me to spell and I just, you know, I just got stumped. I did go back, but I had to write on a copybook like for an exercise. It was just like school. I just froze when he corrected me and I never went back after that.

(Man in his forties)

We had a bad start now because we didn't have a very good teacher. She almost put us off again but I was so determined. She was asking us to read out in front of people which we found very difficult our first time in the class...And then she was missing for two nights and we had another teacher and she was just brilliant - she gave us great confidence...Teaching adults, they have to treat you like adults whereas the first teacher was treating us like children.

(Woman in her forties)

I wanted to go and I remember being in the group, and I don't know, we had to fill out a form, I know we were all sitting around. I didn't feel comfortable now, but I

stayed until Christmas. I was holding on in there because I was so keen on learning. But I gave up.

(Woman in her fifties)

FAS brought us in above in the factory for three weeks. You were asked to write about yourself. This wasn't a literacy class, more a kind of spot check. I just put down my name, barely my name and I said I could do no more...I told the instructor the truth like and he was kind of stunned...there was seven more of them after me and they all had the same complaint.

(Man in his forties)

The people that's running the FAS schemes I think they certainly could help an awful lot. They certainly know the problem is there because they're coming up against it every day and they just laugh at us, ninety percent of them.

(Man in his thirties)

Parents and Institutional Barriers

McSorley's (1997) research in the Clondalkin area shows that parents' educational history can influence their attitude towards education. (24) A significant number of the parents she interviewed spoke with regret about their schooldays and said that they had 'never really got to grips with reading and writing'. Furthermore while some of the parents who admitted to having literacy problems were addressing the issue, the majority felt that it was 'too late' or they were 'not clever enough' to do anything about it. School personnel who were interviewed concluded that the parents of the chronic absentees had 'very little confidence and very poor coping skills'. They tended to find schools threatening and often lacked the confidence to talk to the teachers.

These findings are noteworthy in the light of Ryan's (1995) evaluation of the impact on parents of the Home-School-Community Liaison (HSCL) scheme. (25) In both primary and post-primary schools involved in the scheme it was found that a core group of mothers became involved; generally speaking they were not the mothers that teachers deemed to be 'most in need' - those with social and economic difficulties, those with literacy problems, those who lacked confidence in themselves, or those with troublesome children. A survey, which divided mothers into three

categories – those involved, those not involved but not needing help, and those not involved but needing help – revealed that the uninvolved mothers, described as needing help, were less likely to have read to their child when younger and were less likely to engage in reading activities themselves.

It would seem reasonable to suggest, therefore, particularly in the light of the Irish findings of the IALS (1997), that many parents have literacy difficulties that affect them in their everyday lives. (26) It is important, however, to be aware that holding adult education classes in formal school premises can be off-putting for many adults. Once they have entered the building the painful memories come flooding back. This problem may be further compounded if the classes are located in the schools their own children attend.

Many of the adult learners we spoke to commented on these issues. Unpleasant and often humiliating memories of their schooldays were still fresh in their minds. They were reluctant to undertake anything which would be a repeat performance of their previous educational experience. Some were unfortunate in their initial attempt to seek tuition as adults – classes which were labelled as basic turned out not to be really student-centred. They had to recover from this experience before attempting again. Adults spoke of the fear of not being able to keep up, or of anything that might give them that ‘school feeling’. In small towns and villages students were worried about confidentiality. They didn’t want to be labelled, and certainly not by teachers who were dealing with their own children.

Attending a Literacy Scheme: Experiences of Survey Participants

When adult students attend a literacy scheme initially, they tend to be shy, embarrassed and nervous. Their greatest fear is that literacy tuition will be a repeat performance of previous educational experience. They wonder if they will be able to “keep up” with other students, and hope that they will not be labelled as “stupid” or “a dunce” or “a failure”. When they discover that tuition begins with their personal needs, that they can choose the type of tuition, e.g. one-to-one, group, group working towards accreditation etc. that suits them, that they can easily approach the organiser if they have a problem, and that they are praised and constantly encouraged, then they begin to relax and discover themselves anew as learners with potential. As a result their attitudes to education begin to change.

The length of attendance at a literacy scheme of those interviewed was divided into four categories: approximately four out of ten had been attending for between one and three years while one third of the sample had been attending for less than a year; approximately two out of ten had been attending for between three and six years while a small percentage (6.2%) had been attending for more than six years.

Three quarters of the sample had received one-to-one tuition at some stage, while slightly over half had availed of small group tuition. Other types of provision in which students had participated included: City and Guilds accredited courses (11.6%), N.C.V.A. accredited courses (9.6%), Junior Certificate programmes (9.6%) and Leaving Certificate programmes (1.4%).

Almost two thirds of those interviewed had chosen the type of tuition they required. The remaining 35% had, for the most part, received one-to-one tuition in the less developed schemes where no group work was actually available. In some cases students were simply happy to take the literacy organiser's advice on the type of tuition that would best meet their needs.

The vast majority of survey participants (85%) attended tuition once a week for two hours. Approximately one out of ten attended twice a week while a tiny percentage (4.1%) attended more frequently than twice a week. Of those who attended once a week, just over five out of ten would have liked to attend more frequently, while almost half of those who attended twice weekly would have preferred more frequent tuition. These figures highlight the need for increased provision for highly motivated students who have time at their disposal. A considerable number of participants felt that they could not progress at the rate they would wish with just one two-hour session per week available to them.

The experience of some students attending the literacy schemes was in sharp contrast to their attempt to access formal education provision.

The group was geared towards Junior Cert. but there were problems with it. It went on down in the secondary school and I really didn't know what to expect...there were three men and I was the only female the first night. The teacher asked me to read aloud soon after I got there. It was a school situation - desks and she sat at the top. I could read. I was lucky. The next night then there was an extra student, a woman. I found the class difficult that night as well...we weren't enjoying it...by this time all the men had left. It all changed after Christmas. We came in here (into the literacy scheme premises) as a group with a

different teacher. It was amazing. I did the exam in June and did very well.

(Woman in her forties)

I think when you are in a relaxed atmosphere and you are feeling comfortable with the people around you, that's how you learn. And when you are allowed to make mistakes...I have done a lot of courses. I would be very aware of tutors, people who facilitate courses, and I feel that the tutor can learn from the student. If the tutor realises they don't know it all, they can learn from the student.

(Man in his forties)

Research participants were quite clear, and in general agreement, about key aspects of education provision: tutors must be specially trained to teach adults; they must be able to encourage the learners and build their self esteem; and they must listen to the learners' needs and be flexible enough to respond to them. 'Kindness is vital' we were told on several occasions, as is the behaviour and attitude of the tutor. Anything that gives that 'school feeling' is simply not acceptable.

Dispositional/Psychosocial Barriers

This fourth and arguably most significant type of deterrent is not unconnected with the institutional barriers just discussed. McGivney (1990) argues that reluctance to engage in adult education may have as much to do with the memories, fears, attitudes, perceptions and expectations of potential participants as with any practical barriers. (27) A number of research studies suggest that many adults have a stereotyped view of learning dating from their school experience. Our study confirmed this view. Before attending the literacy schemes many of our research participants reported negative views of themselves as learners, acute embarrassment and shame about their low level of educational attainment, and crippling memories of their schooldays. They remembered being 'shouted at', being 'beaten something brutal', having 'fear instilled into them', being told that they were 'stupid', or 'thick', or 'not bright'.

Many had learned at a young age that they must hide their difficulty if they wished to be treated as normal. As a result they learned to avoid situations where their reading, writing or spelling difficulties might be discovered. In a very real sense many found themselves in a position of leading a double life because of the societal stigma attached to those with literacy difficulties; they dreaded negative labelling; 'illiterate' was a term which, in their minds, often carried the same moral and emotional overtones as 'illegitimate'.

And you were constantly told you were stupid...when they asked us was there anybody who would clean the toilets, we'd put up our hands, just to get out of the class. About four of us who were pals. It was pointless trying to teach us, the teachers said. And it wasn't pointless.

(Woman in her forties)

I never achieved any success in school. I was never praised. I don't think it gives you any self esteem.

(Woman in her fifties)

If you put up your hand to answer a question and you were wrong you were just belted. So you just sat in a corner and let them get on with it. You were too frightened... You were spoken down to. You were never asked your opinion. You just did what they wanted you to do. If you tried to do something else and it was good

you were slapped because you didn't do it their way.

(Man in his forties)

When I left Ireland at the age of fifteen I couldn't write my own name so I was lying everywhere I went...You've got two lives, you are trying hard to have a normal life and then there's this other thing you're lying about...I don't know how I survived to tell you the truth. I mean it's bad enough having to leave Ireland normal at the age of fifteen, but to have this sack on your back you know...

(Woman in her fifties)

The shame will always be there because you feel inadequate, and you feel half a person. You don't feel complete. It's like you are developing one side of you but not the other.

(Man in his thirties)

You can sense people with a higher education, especially if they are not friendly. Sometimes they can be ignorant and cast you aside. They mightn't even look at you when you are speaking...Not being educated narrows your whole life.

(Woman in her forties)

You'd feel you wouldn't be as educated as other people and you'd be shying away from getting into a conversation. I was always looking at courses but being that I knew that I had difficulty with spelling I never went into any course that involved writing.

(Man in his twenties)

I always had a thing that I hadn't done my Inter Cert. and my Leaving Cert. I would have had low self esteem in England with people when I would be with people that I felt were better educated than I was, even though I read a lot. Looking back on it I

feel I wasted a lot of years. I did some courses...craft courses and different things...more social rather than academic. If I went into a class, say an English class, I would feel that my standard was so low that I wouldn't be able to compete with people in the class. Construction in writing would have been my problem – stringing good paragraphs together and that kind of thing.

(Woman in her forties)

Well to be honest I don't even try to tell my friends. I wouldn't even tell my next door neighbours that I'm coming here. There was a chap from our road here and when I seen him first I wanted to hide, like I felt ashamed. I had a chat with him, and he said he wouldn't breathe a word. You just feel that people might look down on you.

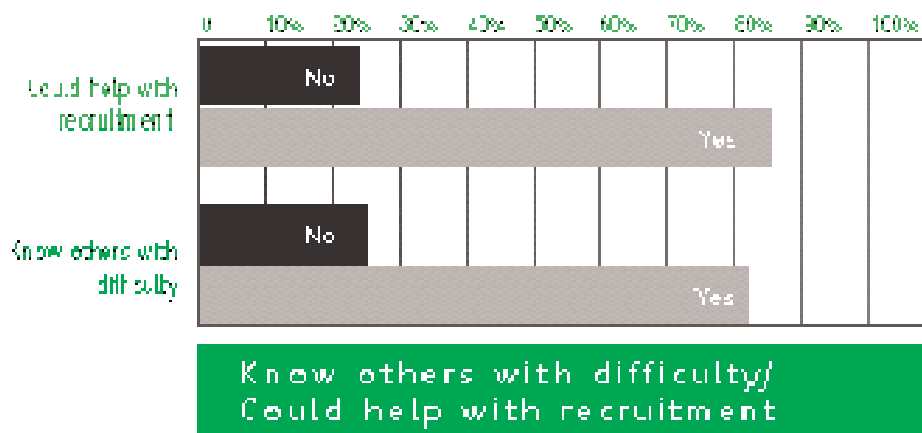
(Man in his thirties)

Dispositional Barriers and Recruitment

Adult literacy students often know others who experience the same difficulty as themselves - family members, friends, neighbours, or colleagues at work. Sometimes when they encourage others to get help they are not successful. But they do get an insight into how non-participants feel and what is stopping them from coming forward. Often, however, they are successful in their recruitment efforts; prospective students trust them and identify with them whereas they might shy away from an intervention made by a tutor or organiser. Involving students in recruitment and training them in various forms of outreach work, appears to be one of the most effective methods of increasing participation. Such a strategy could be of particular relevance when attempting to address the dispositional barriers which account for such high levels of non-participation (McGivney, 1990) (28).

Over three quarters of the research participants knew other adults with literacy problems. When asked if they would be prepared to help with recruitment, eight out of ten answered positively, with the ratio of women to men being slightly higher. Men, however, were twice as likely to have said they could not help with recruitment. This may be due to lack of time as more men than

FIGURE 4b



women, in the sample, had full-time employment. Figure 4b shows the correlation between those who knew others with literacy difficulties, and those who could help with recruitment.

We asked the research participants to give their views on why adults with reading and writing difficulties do not come forward for tuition. Embarrassment and a sense of stigma (a composite category in the questionnaire) was the most frequently cited reason. Allowing for slight variations, this result remained constant across all categories i.e. age, gender, location, educational attainment, employment status.

The people not coming back to classes feel ashamed and embarrassed. I mean I can understand them, I really can. It's a dreadful thing. I mean I would rather have, probably, a diseased skin and come out and let people see it but this reading and writing – it's a terrible cross for anybody to carry.

(Woman in her fifties)

Down the Day-care Centre you had to go up the stairs and on the left of you was the Alcoholics Anonymous and then the people to learn to read and write on the other side. At that stage I wished I was an alcoholic because it would have been easy for somebody to accept me as an alcoholic than as somebody that couldn't read and write. I don't think anybody can

understand why a person can't read and write. They really think that we're stupid.

(Woman in her thirties)

The only way of getting out of the shame is coming forward...I was very ashamed myself because I was terrified of anybody finding out that I couldn't read and write...But now that I have come forward and got help I don't feel so ashamed.

(Man in his thirties)

When reviewing the literature on non-participation in adult basic education, Veronica McGivney also highlights this issue. She points out that Beder and Valentine, who conducted a survey of basic education students in Iowa, recommended that this problem should be dealt with by “the use of positive promotional strategies which raise the self-concept of individuals, rather than negative ones which imply that students in need of basic education are ‘deficient’. This requires careful and tactful use of language in initial publicity”. (29)

Fear of the unknown was perceived by almost four out of ten survey participants as a reason for non-participation. The rate of women to men was higher in this instance, as was that of urban to rural dwellers, and that of those in paid employment to their non-paid employment counterparts. When one considers that more than 80% of the sample left school with no qualification, it is not surprising that fear of the unknown should be cited so frequently. It may simply reflect the kind of fear felt by those who were labelled “failures” in relation to any kind of academic enterprise.

I did night classes but never on the educational side...flower arranging, gardening...I was always afraid to go into the other classes...I always felt insecure and afraid of what was inside the door.

(Woman in her fifties)

Most people are frightened of being found out...they are afraid...if you can get them to come forward, it's very hard to get people to come forward.

(Woman in her forties)

Yes, I do know others. They're scared. They think someone's going to say 'You're a thick clown', or something like that - 'You're stupid or thick', or something like that.

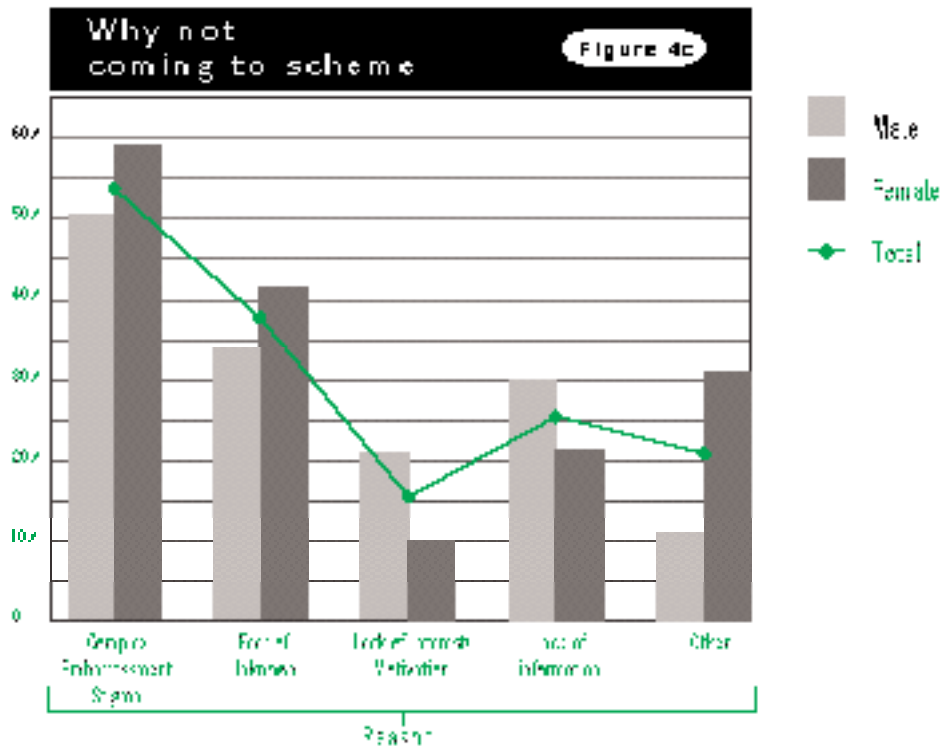
(Man in his thirties)

That bit of fear was probably going into the class with older people. They might look at me and say, 'He should know all this because he's coming from a different generation'...The main fear is around men. Women just get stuck into it whereas men might feel right dunces. Once a man is involved in something, it doesn't seem to be as hard for him to get involved in something else. It's just breaking that barrier.

(Man in his twenties)

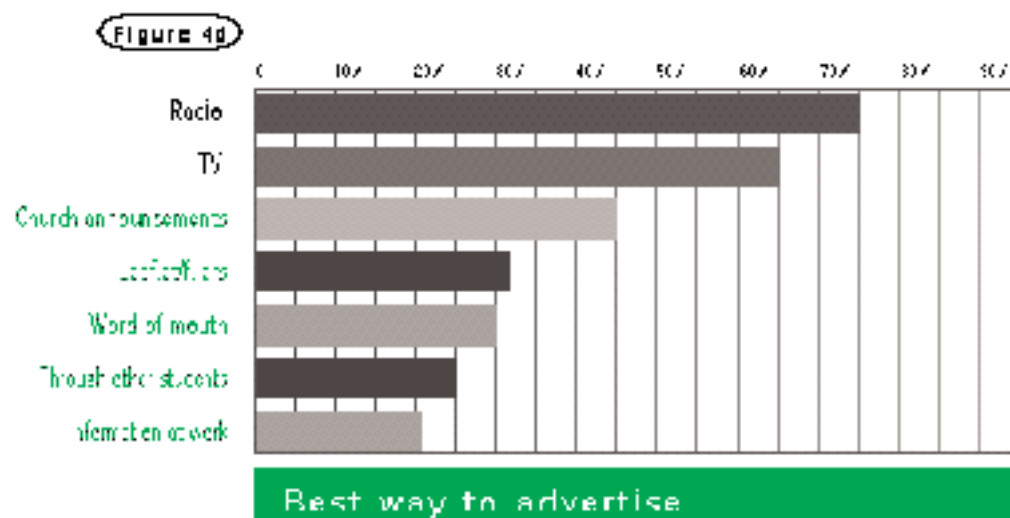
The category “other” was cited by just over two out of ten survey participants. When these responses were analysed, time constraints, lack of perceived relevance, and fears about age and confidentiality accounted for most of them.

Approximately one sixth of survey participants cited lack of interest and/or motivation as a reason for non-participation. The ratio of men to women was higher here. The ratio of rural to urban dwellers was significantly higher as was that of those in paid employment to those not in paid employment, and that of those who attended second-level schooling to those who did not.

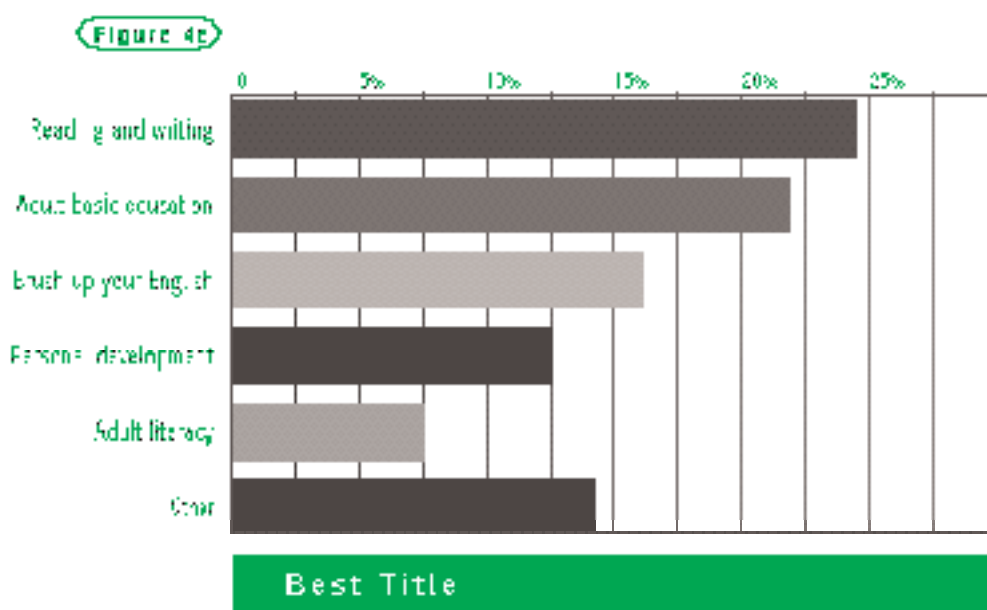


This latter trend suggests those with work and with more education may perceive non-participants in a less favourable light i.e. they lack motivation rather than are afraid or ashamed. Figure 4c shows the correlation between gender and participants' views of why others with the difficulty are not accessing tuition.

Lack of information was cited by almost a quarter of survey participants as a barrier to participation. The ratio of men to women was slightly higher, as was that of rural to urban dwellers and that of those who had progressed to second level schooling as opposed to those who had not. Those in paid employment, however, were almost twice as likely to cite lack of information as a barrier as their non-paid employment counterparts. This suggests the need for greater awareness on the part of employers and more information should be available in the workplace. Suggestions were made, too, by survey participants that Trade Unions should be more actively involved in the recruitment of students. Figure 4d shows the way in which research participants ranked the various forms of advertising/recruitment strategies.



Almost a quarter of those interviewed favoured the title ‘Reading and Writing’ for the service while just over two out of ten opted for ‘Adult Basic Education’. Approximately one sixth of survey participants liked ‘Brush up your English’ while 14.4% chose the category “other”, while ‘Personal Development’ appealed to 13% of those interviewed. Only 7.5% favoured the title ‘Adult Literacy’. The word ‘literacy’ is linked in many people’s minds with ‘illiteracy’ and such a title appears to reinforce the sense of embarrassment and stigma cited by so many respondents as a barrier to participation. Figure 4e shows the order in which the interviewees ranked the various titles.



‘Adult Basic Education’ and ‘Reading and Writing’ were the preference of a significant proportion of older people, those not in paid employment and those with no qualifications. ‘Brush up your English’ and ‘Personal Development’ appear to appeal to younger people, those in paid employment and those with qualifications. ‘Adult Basic Education’ and ‘Reading and Writing’ were joint first, however, with both rural and urban dwellers.

Benefits of Tuition

Research participants reported a variety of benefits as a result of attending the literacy schemes. Many spoke about a growth in confidence. They were now prepared to attend other types of classes, to participate or participate more fully, in voluntary and community activities, or to apply for promotional opportunities as they arose. It is interesting to note that once learners participate in adult basic education, they begin to perceive a link between literacy skills and job prospects.

Some interviewees spoke about the sheer pleasure of being able to read a newspaper or a book or an advertisement for a film: others about the letters they were writing to their sons and daughters living abroad, about creative writing and the excitement of having their poems and stories in print, about preparing for certificate courses in Communications and English and Maths. A few learners spoke about improved mental health - depressions they had been prone too just mysteriously disappearing, or no longer feeling isolated or stigmatised because there was support and encouragement available. In general it would be fair to say that their lives had changed very much for the better.

I'm learning things that I thought were difficult and they're not difficult at all.

(Woman in her forties)

I am doing a Community Development Leadership course which I absolutely love. There are eight modules involved - psychology, counselling, personal development, social studies, computer work, drama and art.

(Woman in her forties)

It has changed me. I can actually read now and I know a little bit more, I have a little bit more knowledge...One of my goals is to learn to drive. I had my first lesson last week and I bought the rules of the road and my tutor is going through that now with me.

(Woman in her thirties)

I never went out the door unless I was with my husband. Now I am going out myself and I think it's an awful lot off him because I must have been a terrible weight on him...I am beginning to talk more to the people I work for and life is getting more interesting...I've got loads of confidence now.

(Woman in her fifties)

Working in the group I realised that I had a lot of general knowledge that I never gave myself credit for...As time went on I was encouraged to take a place on the NALA committee. I stood for election. I've changed so much it's unbelievable.

(Woman in her sixties)

Well, I can pick up the paper now, read bits...If I get a cheque I can put in my name and address. I'm not embarrassed now if people see me writing

(Man in his forties)

It means that I'm coming on in life. If I'm going out to get a job, I'm able to fill out the forms. Before I couldn't do it. That's what used to frighten me.

(Man in his thirties)

I'm getting more confident week by week...Getting the skills in literacy encouraged me to go back and try my Leaving Cert. on VTOS. I am able to sit an exam like anybody else. I enjoy getting up in the morning now. I left school in 1990 but I knew sooner or later that I would be going back. I always wanted to get an education for myself.

(Man in his twenties)

Yes, it has definitely changed my life. I'm in the army and I have just finished the NCO's course. That was the real reason I started because I hadn't enough education behind me. And I went on a life saving course, I did a fork lift course as well and then I did a computer course...it has made a big, big difference to me.

(Man in his forties)

I know I can go out now and I can mix...It is so important because you can talk to people, that's the thing. You don't feel you have nothing to say. I always knew I had something to say but I hadn't the confidence.

(Woman in her fifties)

I feel I am developing now in a way I never thought I could develop. It has enhanced my life in many ways...Areas have changed that I never thought would change...I have become a chatter-box!

(Woman in her fifties)

Summary

Among the most powerful deterrents to returning to education are those rooted in the memories, perceptions and attitudes of potential adult students. Many of these are closely related to both memories of school and parental attitudes to education. Thus we often find, in the minds of educationally disadvantaged adults, a deeply rooted distrust of anything pertaining to formal education institutions, anything that gives 'that school feeling'.

An unresponsive system, provision that is not learner-centred and consequently not meeting their real needs, lack of awareness and/or insensitivity on the part of some teachers and instructors, inappropriate teaching methods; were some of the institutional barriers most frequently cited by survey participants. In contrast, students were generally positive about their experience in literacy schemes; they appreciated the relaxed, non-formal learner-centred approach. Many, however, felt that the current provision of two hours tuition per week was inadequate to their needs.

Poor self-esteem which manifested itself as shame and embarrassment about their low level of educational attainment was the most frequently cited dispositional barrier. This was closely followed by fear of the unknown. In general, it appears, the traditional non-participants have negative self-images of themselves as learners together with a fear that they may encounter the same kind of sarcasm and labelling as they did in school. In recruitment terms, then, such perceptions must be counteracted. A gentle, careful and tactful approach to both conventional publicity and outreach work is required. Adult students themselves are willing to help with outreach work.

On a more positive note, the research participants reported a variety of benefits as a result of returning to basic education. A growth in confidence, an ability to take up much coveted promotional opportunities, a willingness to participate in community and voluntary activities,

success in various accredited courses, the ability to engage in leisure activities, improved mental health; these were the changes that research participants spoke most about.

When students are treated as equal and knowledgeable partners in the learning process, when their talents are praised and nurtured, when their individual needs are recognised and addressed, when their dreams and aspirations are encouraged and supported, then they rediscover themselves as capable and intelligent human beings. They develop a more confident sense of themselves and learn to speak with their own voices, realising that their perspective on issues is both valid and important. Thus they become people for whom as Paulo Freire puts it, “looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future. (30)

Increasing access and participation in adult literacy schemes in Ireland

CHAPTER

5

The project concentrated on increasing access to and participation in adult literacy schemes throughout Ireland with a view to providing opportunities for adults with reading and writing difficulties to progress to community programmes, employment and further education. Development work carried out during the lifespan of the project included devising appropriate recruitment strategies targeted at traditional non-participants in adult basic education. This work was informed and enhanced by our ongoing research work.

Working with a Consortium and 16 local literacy schemes, the project piloted a range of initiatives to increase access and participation in literacy schemes.

Consortium

The purpose of the Consortium was not to act as an advisory group to the project, nor to simply inform agencies of the actions of the project but rather to be an action in itself. Its aim was to strive towards changing policy and practice within the member agencies in such a way that the literacy problem was recognised as a problem for everyone and therefore needed to be addressed if the agencies' principal objectives with their client group were to be achieved.

Membership of the Consortium consisted of Area Development Management (ADM), Cavan VEC, Combat Poverty Agency (CPA), the Department of Education, the Department of Social Welfare, FAS, North Tipperary VEC, RTE, Teagasc and Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT).

As a result of the work of the Consortium, a recommended literacy policy framework has been developed and has received a broad commitment from the participating agencies. (See Appendix B)

Through their participation in the Consortium, representatives recognised a need for literacy awareness training for staff dealing with clients. It was felt that a literacy awareness training programme could alert agency staff to the problem in a sensitive manner, and help them to refer a client for literacy tuition. (See Appendix C)

The project responded by piloting a training programme within the following agencies –

- Local Employment Services (LES) and FAS staff
- Partnership staff co-ordinated by ADM
- Department of Social Welfare Job Facilitators
- Combat Poverty - head office staff
- Teagasc regional Education Officers

TV Advertisements

RTE, one of the Consortium members, provided us with a 30 second advertisement which was broadcast on television three times daily at peak times for three weeks starting in National Literacy Awareness Week 1997. The advertisements featured adult learners giving an account of their experiences of returning to basic education, the benefits they had received and the opportunities it had given them.

Press Launches in Local Literacy Schemes

As word of mouth was highlighted as one of the most effective means of recruitment, the Project facilitated a number of schemes in bringing together key players from the local community. Personnel from the Area Based Partnerships, the Local Employment Services, FAS, Teagasc, the Public Libraries, the Health Boards, the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs etc. were invited to attend a press launch.

The objectives of the launch were:

- to raise awareness among the key players in the community;
- to provide a forum for local networking;
- to give an insight into the nature and scale of the issue, nationally and internationally;
- to promote the local literacy service and encourage structured referral;
- to encourage the media to report positively on literacy issues and thus combat stigma;
- to develop a structured two way referral between the local literacy service and other community services.

New Posters

Two new posters highlighting the literacy service were commissioned by NALA in 1997. The poster designs were based on recommendations from the research findings, emphasising the positive benefits of literacy tuition. 4000 posters were produced and distributed to every literacy scheme, FAS Offices, Social Welfare Offices, Youthreach centres, Traveller Training Workshops and Libraries during National Literacy Awareness Week 1997.

Other Promotional Material

A bookmark, newsflash page and wooden penholders with the Agency's logo and phone number, were produced. This material was distributed through the Consortium members, participating schemes and during special publicity events to other organisations and groups dealing with the public.

A booklet of poems and short stories was produced for the Transnational Seminar incorporating the work of many authors and learners who came together in support of the literacy issue. Through the insights of the writers who contributed to this booklet it was hoped to raise awareness about literacy, challenge attitudes and assumptions and encourage more people with reading and writing difficulties to explore the option of returning to learning. Literacy Class, South Inner City, 1987, a poem written by Paula Meehan and commissioned by the Integra project for the seminar, was also featured on the Poems on the DART series. (See Appendix D)

Guidelines for Learners and Tutors concerning Recruitment

The following guidelines were prepared to encourage both learners and tutors to promote the scheme i.e. to encourage members to talk about the service and the benefits of participating in basic education tuition. This could be the focus of a student/ tutor meeting.

Learners

Learners who are comfortable with the idea should be encouraged to see themselves as a resource in terms of recruitment i.e. outreach work at a local level. If learners know, or are friendly with, adults who have literacy difficulties they could try some of the following ideas:

- Encourage them in a gentle, tactful manner, to open up about it.
- Tell them about their own experience before and after accessing tuition.
- Reassure them about the informal, relaxed and non-competitive nature of literacy tuition.
- Suggest that they might like to meet the literacy organiser.
- If necessary, make the appointment and/or accompany them on the first visit to the scheme.
- If they appear reluctant to take action, the student should not push them. But make it clear that if they do, at a later stage, want to take action that information and support is available.

Tutors

- The above points are also relevant to tutors, although they may have to be even more careful about raising the issue in the first place. It is crucial not to appear bossy, pushy or judgmental.

Identification of key personnel in the community and use of existing networks

Examples of key personnel include the following: Social Worker, Community Welfare Officer, Home School Liaison Officer, Public Health Nurse, Youth Officer, Garda, Parish Priest, GPs, those involved in voluntary groups, Agricultural Advisor and Education Officer (Teagasc),

CE Supervisors and other FAS office staff, Local Employment Service Mediators and/or Co-ordinators.

It is important that these people know about the local literacy service. The local Adult Literacy Organiser can organise to meet with some of them or send on information about the local scheme.

Identification of Target Groups

Research your own records to see if any of these groups are not participating in your scheme. Think about why this is the case. What state agency or department would have contact with these people already? Groups underrepresented in your scheme may include unemployed people, young mothers, Travellers, early school leavers and people with a disability. For example, to reach young mothers the key contact could be the Public Health Nurse.

Communications strategy

Create a positive image of the service. Be clear about the following: what the message is; how you will get it across; who will do this work; whom are you aiming your publicity; how you will maximise the effects of your efforts by careful timing. For example ask the local supermarket to announce details about the local literacy service over their public announcement system or ask at the local video shop if you can put an information flier in their video boxes.

Transnationality

Transnationality is a core element in European projects as it encourages networking, learning and the creation of partnerships throughout the European States. Its active and effective formation is an essential criterion for funding and aims to facilitate the transfer of expertise and dissemination of good practice between partners in different member states. Our transnational project worked on developing a model of good practice in relation to recruitment to the literacy service as shown below.

Recruitment Strategy Principles – A Model of Good Practice

- Define a marketing goal. Define the target groups and why they were chosen. Set measurable goals: e.g., how many people of a specific target group you want to reach in a certain period.
- Start thinking about the evaluation from the start. Define evaluation criteria and plan the evaluation activities from the beginning.
- Develop your knowledge of the target groups in terms of needs, motivations, attitudes, barriers to participation and in terms of objective criteria like age, gender, family and work situation. Describe your target groups in these terms.
- Plan your recruitment efforts towards particular target groups. Make choices.
- Know that recruitment efforts are always multiple. They have different interacting goals: a) to make yourself known to the general public; b) to address a specific target group with a specific offer, to inform people about your offer; and c) to encourage people to participate. Note: all other criteria refer to (some of) these 3 efforts.

- Develop a communications strategy: what is your message; how can you maximise the effects of your efforts; who will do the work.
- Build up relationships with the media.
- Create a positive image.
- Involve adult learners and tutors in designing publicity materials and outreach work.
- Develop a structured referral line and draw up guidelines for informal recruitment.
- Enlist the co-operation of members of the local business community.

The Transnational Seminar

The Transnational Seminar – Making Connections...Literacy Begins the Spiral of Social Inclusion – was organised to further the exchange of information between the transnational partners, as well as allowing for more detailed research, debate and analysis of specific concerns i.e. recruitment strategies, reception skills, individual learning techniques, political lobbying, progression options for students into education, training or employment and literacy awareness campaigning.

The need to recognise literacy as a basic human right featured very strongly in the seminar, as did the need to recognise that the literacy levels demanded by society are rising all the time – people now require higher literacy skills for work, in their personal lives and recreational pursuits. (See Appendix E)

The empowerment of learners and the need for learners themselves to come together in solidarity to engage in active lobbying, with the support of the various agencies, was perceived as being the most effective means of influencing the political agenda.

Media and Communications Skills Training

A planned innovative action of the project was the provision of training in media and communication skills to 16 Scheme Organisers. This module is part of an N.C.E.A. Certificate for Literacy Organisers developed by NALA in conjunction with the WIT. It is the first time that a specific qualification has been developed for Irish literacy workers.

Evaluation of the NALA Integra Project – a Summary

CHAPTER

6

In line with NALA practice and European funding requirements, the Integra project contracted two Evaluators to carry out an evaluation of the project. Outlined below are some of the main findings from the Evaluation Report. (31)

Impact on Schemes (The Evaluators tested the impact of the project on the original 16 schemes that were involved in the project from early 1996).

- 14 out of 15 participating scheme organisers interviewed agreed that awareness of the scheme within their community had increased over the last two years. Evidence indicating this increase in awareness came from:
 - informal personal contacts the organiser had with community representatives; and
 - the fact that a greater variety of organisations were making contact with the scheme.
- According to one third of those interviewed there was now a greater recognition of the existence of the problem and a reduction in the sense of stigma associated with it.
- Scheme organisers interviewed in the telephone survey, who conducted press launches, reported that the events were successful in achieving greater recognition of the problem among key personnel from community and statutory organisations.
- A higher degree of networking on the part of the scheme organiser was identified most often as the reason why referrals to the scheme were increasing or coming from a wider range of agencies.
- 13 out of 15 interviewees reported that there had been a change in the way people had come to hear of the scheme. In one third of the schemes researched as part of the survey, this increase in referral was identified as coming from local community representatives.
- 14 out of 15 scheme organisers interviewed had tried at least one of the recruitment strategies suggested by NALA.
- When asked which of the suggested recruitment strategies sent to the schemes by NALA were the most successful in terms of leading to increased participation rates, they responded:
 - (i) identifying key personnel in the community and using existing networks; and
 - (ii) building up contacts with the local media.

This indicates that the opinions of scheme organisers as to the most effective strategies were consistent with the main findings emerging from the research.

- Of the 72 tutors and organisers who completed an evaluation questionnaire following sessions were they were asked to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats in relation to their schemes, 58 reported that their awareness of the issues concerning literacy had increased as a result of participation. (See Appendix F)
- The majority of participating scheme organisers had adopted the main findings from the research in developing recruitment strategies for their scheme.
- Two thirds of interviewees attributed increased participation in their schemes to more activity (both publicity and networking) at a local and national level.
- Increased networking by the Scheme Organisers had resulted in an increased referrals to their scheme from agencies/community organisations, according to one third of interviewees.
- Two thirds of Scheme Organisers reported that they now used a greater variety of approaches to attract different groups.
- One third of interviewees reported that the main benefit of the Horizon/Integra project to their scheme was that students, having participated in the research, had gained confidence and wanted to be involved in promoting the service.
- Prior to the 1997 Budget students involved in the research project from the Kildare schemes were encouraged to write to their local TD (Minister for Finance), urging an increase in the A.L.C.E. budget. The scheme organisers in Kildare attributed the high level of participation from students in this local campaign to the fact that the group were already empowered as a result of participating in the research project.
- A number of students who participated in the research were involved in national campaigning events – i.e. made presentations at the NALA transnational seminar, participated in the TV advertisement campaign and in Literacy Awareness Training.

Impact of Media and Communications Skills Training

- According to the majority of scheme organisers who completed evaluation forms during the course, the main benefits of the module had been:
 - to give literacy organisers greater confidence in organising media events locally;
 - to encourage better planning for local campaigning;
 - increased commitment among scheme organisers to improve their strategy for the promotion of their scheme, based on new ideas and strategies gained by completing the course;
 - application of new promotional strategies by scheme organisers.
- More than half of those who completed the course reported that they had begun to apply new promotional strategies as a direct result of completing the course.

Impact on Funding

The following Government spending estimates illustrates the changes in Government expenditure on Adult Literacy during the life of the project.

A.L.C.E. Budget (£)	
1996:	1.995 million
1997:	2.315 million
1998:	4.165 million

The Department of Education's representative on the consortium, stressed that the identified project outputs which involved briefing government Ministers and officials on the actions of the project, significantly contributed to the campaign to increase budgetary allocations.

Impact of Consortium

Initially there was a poor attendance at Consortium meetings. Project staff responded by holding one to one consultations with Consortium members which encouraged more active participation. By the end of 1996 the agencies had reaffirmed their commitment to the aims of the project.

Knowledge among Consortium members of the services provided by NALA and the local literacy schemes varied considerably. Some members were well informed but others knew very little about the work of NALA and literacy schemes. As a result of participation in the Consortium, members felt their knowledge of the existing services had increased.

- Literacy Awareness Training sessions were conducted in the following organisations :

Department of Social Welfare
Combat Poverty Agency
Teagasc
FAS – Local Employment Services
ADM – Dublin and Drogheda Partnerships

- Following Literacy Awareness Training, front line staff in participating organisations, reported that they had become much better informed about the extent and nature of the literacy problem.
- One third of literacy organisers in participant schemes interviewed reported an increase in referral from Community Employment Supervisors.
- Four out of five organisers interviewed noticed a change in attitudes among statutory agencies towards their scheme. According to more than half of those interviewed evidence of this change in attitudes came in the form of greater recognition of the problem and more awareness and support for the local scheme.
- Literacy Awareness Training given to the following agencies represented on the consortium,

resulted in systems for staff referring people with reading and writing difficulties to local schemes being established:

- Teagasc
- Combat Poverty Agency
- Social Welfare
- FAS Local Employment Service
- Area Development Management - local Partnerships

Staff were trained in techniques for identifying the target group and referring them sensitively to the local scheme. Information was disseminated within these agencies as to the contact point for local schemes. The decision to allocate resources for training and provide referral information to staff was attributed by interviewees to have arisen as a result of proposals from NALA during the course of participating on the Consortium.

- Two agencies on the Consortium were considering the development of programmes to cater specifically for people with reading and writing difficulties:

a) Teagasc staff have encountered a number of students entering their programmes who were in need of basic education. The staff member represented on the Consortium was convinced that their involvement on the Consortium had resulted in significant progression with this proposal.

b) The Department of Social Welfare undertook a pilot programme which – involved formalising a referral link between one Dublin Social Welfare office and its local literacy scheme. A commitment to this pilot programme had been made by the Department prior to its involvement on the Consortium. However the participating staff member from the Department of Social Welfare reported that being a member of the Consortium had greatly facilitated consultation with other agencies regarding the potential for this pilot programme to be extended.

- A number of interviewees (representing CPA, FAS, ADM, Department of Social Welfare and Teagasc) felt that participation on the Consortium had contributed to a shift in attitudes among themselves and consequently within their agency concerning the remit of their agency with respect to literacy provision. There was a recognition of the link between provision of basic education and the development of a person's capacity to return to the workforce, training or education, with further support from each of these agencies.

- Consortium members promoted the literacy issue and the work of NALA and the schemes within their organisation. This promotion had taken the form of awareness raising of the issue within internal structures and inviting NALA staff to brief their key personnel. In particular the Combat Poverty Agency undertook a number of actions including:

- disseminating information within their programmes,
- raising the issue on various governmental committees on which they were represented,
- supporting the NALA submission to the National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS).

- Commencing on the 27th of September, 1997 for a period of three weeks, a television commercial highlighting the literacy service was broadcast three times daily on RTE 1 and Network 2. During this period enquiries to the NALA office were three times the normal enquiry

rate at this time of year. Almost one third of participant scheme organisers reported an increase in the number of people joining their scheme from September 1997 and attributed this increase to national publicity.

Impact of Transnational Activity

As part of the transnational conference, workshops were held on the topics of recruitment strategies, progression routes and reception skills. Staff from each of the transnational partners facilitated these sessions, providing input on the differing approaches in other countries.

Reports from these workshops were sent to all transnational partners and were made available on request to those who attended the conference.

Through study visits, meetings and the final transnational conference held in Dublin, project staff gained considerable insight into approaches to literacy provision in Belgium, France and the UK. Any new or relevant information gained was documented and disseminated within the organisation.

Achievements in the Wider Social, Economic and Policy Context

The overall aim of the NALA-Integra project was to promote adult basic education service and the following chart illustrates the increase in numbers of adults receiving literacy tuition in the 16 participating schemes.

December 1995	December 1996	December 1997
1, 072	1, 214	1, 368

Scheme organisers interviewed during the evaluation attributed the increase in participation rates to a number of factors – some as a result of project actions already identified and others as a result of wider changes in the social and economic context.

1. Improvements in the economic climate in Ireland resulted in higher levels of motivation among adults seeking to improve their education and to benefit from the wider range of employment opportunities available to them.

For example scheme organisers reported that adults with higher levels of literacy were coming forward for tuition recognising they had a need for further education. There was also a small increase in the number of learners who wished to pursue progression opportunities in the form of further education having improved their literacy skills.

2. A decrease in the stigma associated with low literacy levels.

Scheme organisers attributed some diminishment in the stigma and secrecy associated with literacy difficulties to a greater public awareness and national debate about the issue.

Despite these improvements in the background context of basic education provision, the underlying problem of under-resourcing of the service remains the biggest barrier to increasing access and participation in literacy schemes.

- The majority of schemes can only offer a limited service for a small number of hours per week.
- It takes a period of one year for the average learner to receive 60 hours tuition.
- The majority of participating rural schemes cannot offer any formal progression opportunities to students.
- The venues where literacy tuition takes place are often inappropriate (e.g. in a school classroom), inadequate for one to one and group tuition and cramped. This problem applies to larger schemes in Dublin as well as smaller schemes in rural locations.
- The lack of full-time literacy organiser and group tutor positions prevents schemes from offering more classes and spending the necessary time required to recruit more students.

This under-resourcing of schemes needs to be highlighted to put in context the capacity of the project to have a major impact on numbers participating even within the limited sample of 16 schemes. Some scheme organisers reported they simply could not apply the actions recommended by NALA (such as implementing new recruitment strategies or engaging in more publicity) because they would not be able to cope with any further increase in numbers.

In November 1997, with the publication of the International Adult Literacy Survey: Results for Ireland, the literacy issue received greater national publicity than ever before in Ireland. Media reports highlighted the contradictory images of Irish society having a young well educated workforce whilst having a large underclass among which there are still high numbers of adults with low literacy skills (as presented in the OECD report). The contrast between the investment announced in technological education (£250 million) on the same day on which the transnational conference considered the OECD report provoked a public debate about literacy.

The rationale behind the project's approach to tackling the issue of increasing access and participation in literacy education could be summarised as follows:

- to conduct a piece of action research in order to identify the barriers which are impeding access and participation at scheme level,
- to use the findings from the research to:
 - (i) implement a set of recruitment strategies developed from the research findings at scheme level and document the effects
 - a bottom up approach
 - (ii) use the research findings as a tool with which to campaign at a national level for an increase in resources for literacy work
 - a top down approach

In a sense NALA was presented with a “chicken and egg dilemma”. Should the focus be on campaigning for more resources (a top down approach) which could then be used by the schemes to increase access and participation or should the agency focus on promoting the schemes so that an increase in demand on the existing services create pressures which would build upward resulting in increased allocation of resources? In reality the project attempted to straddle both approaches.

Justification for the bottom-up approach was further supported by the commitment in the White paper on Education to meet any increase in demand on the services should it arise. However this approach met with resistance from the participating schemes who were reluctant to promote their schemes without the resources to match the demand. The overall effectiveness of the bottom up approach cannot be judged fairly since recruitment strategies were only beginning to be implemented in the project's last quarter.

The project developed a greater emphasis on top down approaches soon after it commenced. These included the establishment of the consortium and an effective publicity campaign designed to exert pressure at Governmental level to increase resources. These actions have proven not only to have been highly effective but also to have produced a speedy response.

Conclusions and Recommendations

CHAPTER

7

Significant changes have occurred since the beginning of this project, which make the results of the Integra project even more timely. The mention of adult literacy in the political manifestos of all major political parties during the pre-election campaign of 1997, the subsequent appointment of the first Minister for State with responsibility for adult education, forthcoming first Green Paper on Adult Education, the doubling of the ALCE Budget for 1998, the publication of the Irish results of the International Adult Literacy Survey, and the greater partnership between relevant voluntary and statutory agencies have all come about in a very short period of time after a long campaign to see adult literacy fully recognised at policy level in this country. It is hoped the findings of the Integra project will enhance the development of a National Adult Literacy Policy.

It is hoped that this report will also prove helpful to literacy providers in the course of their ongoing recruitment, validating as it does successful activities to date, while also suggesting innovative measures. In addition, the findings and recruitment indicators have a wider application to those working in other areas of adult and community education including those providing other services to people with literacy difficulties.

Validation of Literacy Scheme Provision

Learners interviewed provided ample evidence that non-formal adult basic education is having a profoundly positive outcome on those who would have been regarded as traditional non-participants. For almost 60% of those interviewed, joining the literacy scheme was their first experience of any form of education or training since leaving compulsory schooling. Over half of those surveyed said they would like to attend the scheme for tuition more often, in order to increase their rate of progress. It can only be assumed that the lack of resources to provide more intensive tuition has a negative effect on both current and potential participants.

In a recent study concerning participation in adult education in Britain, 81% of people who have engaged in no formal learning since completing full-time education say they are unlikely to return to education in the future. In addition, the study found recent experience of learning is a powerful influence on whether adults expect to study in the future. (32) Research into participation in adult education, reviewed by project staff, describes people with literacy difficulties as “traditional non-participants” and hard to reach. While the learners surveyed provide evidence that literacy personnel are succeeding in reaching some people with the recruitment strategies currently employed, there are, however, many more to be reached and new methods of doing this need to be implemented.

One interesting finding of the survey was the number of people who at an early age recognised their difficulty with reading and writing, yet despite this recognition no appropriate action was taken to deal with this problem at the time nor were provisions made for the person to access help in the future.

The majority of people interviewed summed up their previous educational experience, both compulsory schooling and some of the other education and training they received, in negative terms. In contrast, their experience of literacy tuition has renewed their faith in education and inspired them to seek further education and training opportunities.

The majority of the sample stated their literacy difficulty affected them most in relation to work. However these people in general did not join literacy schemes for employment related reasons. Only after participating in literacy classes were they conscious of how their improved basic skills had also enhanced their job prospects. The IALS Results for Ireland show that the overall number of participants who considered that their basic skills were limiting their job opportunities is rather low. (33)

The ways in which people heard about the scheme can be divided between conventional publicity (e.g., fliers, notices, TV and radio), informal oral communication (e.g., word of mouth, professionals working in the community) and formal oral communication (e.g., education and training institutions and state agencies with a specific interest in referral). Oral communication, informal and formal, was significantly more effective in recruiting those who had not attended post-primary education as well as those with no qualifications. This may suggest that person to person contact is more effective with this group.

Summary of the Findings on Barriers to Participation

There is a perception that people do not come to literacy schemes because they simply do not know about the service. This is not always the case as reasons for non participation are complex and varied. In terms of recruitment and access, the problem of limited participation is sometimes seen as an external one, i.e., the person and their situation is the problem. However, it may be that some of the barriers to participation lie within the boundaries of the education provider and these also need to be examined and evaluated.

According to the IALS close to 30% of respondents had availed of some form of education and training in the previous year. Marginally more women than men had been involved in such courses. Most participants were motivated in terms of career advancement, with most participants paying their own fees and employers the next main source of financial assistance, particularly for men. (34) Traditional classroom instruction was found to be the dominant form of education and training.

When our sample was asked why people were not coming forward, there was a general view that non-participation is due to embarrassment and fear of the unknown. Women, in particular those in paid employment, focused on these areas. Men tended to focus more on lack of interest, motivation and lack of information as factors against participation.

The barriers experienced and identified by those in our sample fell unevenly between tangible barriers and barriers to do with attitudes and perceptions. Learners detailed a multiplicity of barriers experienced as opposed to just one. For the purposes of this part of the report, barriers are divided into two sections: tangible (situational, informational, institutional) and intangible (dispositional). In relation to tangible barriers, the survey highlighted time constraints as the difficulty affecting most “participants” of adult literacy schemes. Lack of time usually resulted from home or work commitments, combined with the limited availability of tuition. In the IALS over 25% of individuals who were unable to undertake a course said they were too busy and a further 10% were unable to do so because of work demands. (35) It suggests that literacy schemes need to offer flexible learning programmes where possible. Many of the learners interviewed found it very difficult to return to the class if they missed more than one session. Special provision needs to be organised to combat this problem.

Other possible tangible barriers included lack of finance, transport and a crèche facility. In our survey these did not appear to be significant factors for current “participants”, which would confirm other research into this area. However, they play a more vital role for non-participants. The IALS showed that family responsibilities restricted 25% of adults from participation in adult education. Only 10% of homemakers were found to be involved in adult education during the previous year. (36)

Women in rural areas require specific provision to help overcome their lack of participation. Tuition in the local community, combined with tuition in the home and/or provision of transport may go some way to alleviate some barriers evident in rural areas. In most rural areas, these barriers stop many who wish to participate in any form of adult education.

The majority of those not in paid employment according to the survey, were women working in the home. In comparison, the overall number of the sample surveyed who described themselves as unemployed, was quite small. An examination of participation in adult education courses by employment status indicates that people who are employed are twice as likely to participate in adult education/training as people who are unemployed (37). Learning to read and write is generally not promoted as employment enhancing and this may be partly the reason why few people who are unemployed are found to be participating. Research into participation in adult education has shown that unemployed adults want educational activities that will enhance their employment prospects. (38) Special attention is needed to attract more unemployed people, perhaps in the form of specific publicity and outreach work.

An overwhelming majority of people not in paid employment said they would consider applying for a job. A lot of these learners felt their chances of gaining employment had increased as a result of attending literacy classes, although in most cases, it was not stated as the reason for joining adult basic education.

Barriers concerned with attitudes and perceptions to education generally permeated the interviews. Previous educational experiences for most of those interviewed had left them with a sense of alienation towards education, in short, education was not for them. They tended not to believe in their own ability to learn and also expected adult basic education to mirror their previous educational experiences, despite reassurance from the literacy organiser. For non-participants one must assume therefore, similar perceptions and attitudes prevail.

Conversations with learners revealed, their expectations about the nature of literacy tuition were greatly altered after participation in classes. In addition, their own attitudes to education also changed significantly, as is evidenced by the high percentage of students wishing to progress to further education or training.

With the exception of Poland, Ireland has the lowest participation rate at all literacy levels and most notably a 10% participation rate in adult education at Level 1 (39). This suggests that many adults do not see the relevance of education and training in their lives and are sometimes not aware of their own learning needs. In our survey, adults realised their difficulty with reading and writing at different stages in their lives but in all cases action to overcome these difficulties did not occur until several years later.

When interviewees were asked to state aspects of their lives which were most affected by their literacy difficulty, work was identified as an important concern. If this is representative of people with literacy problems generally, then it is important that schemes clearly present an image that literacy difficulties in a work context can and are being catered for.

According to the OECD, “the quiet contributions that literacy makes to the economy are not fully appreciated. These can take the form of higher worker productivity, income and government revenues; a better quality of life in terms of reduced poverty, unemployment, crime and public assistance; and improved health and child rearing...”. (40) Therefore, the benefits of literacy are many and it is important to display them through promotional material such as posters and fliers, as well as through the various ‘mouth pieces’ available to the scheme.

A large percentage of those interviewed during the survey were not actively seeking information regarding literacy scheme provision. If one assumes the same percentage level of non-participants are also not looking for information about getting help with reading and writing then it is imperative that information is actively delivered to them. Over half of current learners think there is not enough help and advice about learning. (41) According to the results of our survey, informal and to a lesser extent, formal oral communication were the most effective means of reaching people and combating their fears and perceptions of adult basic education. Engaging in conversation with potential learners creates the opportunity for providers to listen to what people want, help people identify their needs where necessary. This demands a commitment to ensuring that the service can accommodate the needs of the learner first.

Word of mouth alone accounted for nearly 18% of people hearing about literacy schemes. People who have experienced literacy provision may possess an advantage in recruitment over most people working in the area. Firstly, they share similarities with people with literacy difficulties and secondly they are not perceived as having an agenda. In short, they are credible sources of information. A lot of people interviewed showed an interest in getting involved in the recruitment of literacy students. Therefore students could play an active role in a person to person recruitment strategy. The first step would be that learners and literacy workers should draw up guidelines for those involved in informal recruitment and awareness raising. A structured training programme for students interested in being part of the NALA Literacy Awareness Training programme began in June 1998.

Establishing relationships between potential learners and literacy organisers is a lengthy process. Such relationships may already have been established in the community between community development workers and those literacy organisers may wish to target. If this is the case, it is important for literacy organisers to make contact with community workers and other key individuals to establish links, ways of co-operating with each other and a line of referral. Literacy students, if provided with specific training, could also carry out this work.

It is important to note that different age groups gain information about learning from different places. The workplace was the source of information for only 3.4% of participants aged between 25-54. (42) In general contacts, networking and building of relationships in the local community are integral in reaching non-participants.

Implications for Resourcing

If innovative measures to attract additional students into basic education are to be put in place, then necessary funding and co-operation from relevant government and state bodies will be required. During our talks with literacy organisers and tutors it was apparent that existing funding and heavy reliance on voluntary workers was causing concern. It is encouraging therefore that the Department of Education have given a commitment to significantly increase funding to the adult literacy service over the next two years.

Better co-ordination between Government departments and statutory bodies tackling the literacy problem is required as well as a need for greater awareness of the diversity of literacy scheme provision throughout the country. In addition, it is necessary to establish how these departments and bodies can work with and be supportive to, local literacy service providers. It is also important to note that resources are required to successfully tackle, in the long-term, the problem of reaching the hard to reach.

Recommendations for National Policy

“Due to its multifaceted nature and the multiple policy domains implicated, a national, regional or local literacy policy cannot be effective if it deals with one dimension only. The development, enhancement and maintenance of literacy skills must also be seen as an integral concern of other public policies. Only if social, economic and education policies converge in their attention to literacy issues will countries be able to develop true cultures of lifelong learning for all”.

On the whole the IALS findings suggest that “literacy acquisition and population skill profiles are sensitive to policy interventions”. (43) There is a need for a national policy with respect to literacy tuition in Ireland. Clear policy should be formulated which outlines -

- Governmental objectives;
- the national quality service to be provided;
- the resources necessary;
- the strategy to be employed;
- the body responsible for the service.

These initiatives would result in an increase in the number of adults with reading and writing difficulties which the literacy service was able to reach.

These steps would enable NALA to more readily meet the “need for sustained and focused partnerships between providers, local authorities, business interests and communities themselves”. (44)

The funding of services in different parts of the country is dependent on the decisions made by individual VEC boards. This research highlights difficulties arising from this arrangement and recommends that new structures be created to co-ordinate literacy tuition at a national level.

The success of the non-formal approach to literacy tuition in Ireland should be both recognised and properly resourced by the State. Project staff have learned that the non-formal approach helps greatly to attract students to the service. The research findings indicated that many students, who had a poor experience of education in the formal system found the informal methodology used in literacy tuition invaluable in helping them gain confidence in their ability to learn. There is a danger that future efforts to harmonise basic education services with mainstream education could result in abandoning the non-formal methodology and ethos.

Literacy tuition urgently needs increased resources based on a commitment at national policy level to basic education as a fundamental human right. NALA has been encouraged by recent developments indicating increased governmental commitment to the issue, and the potential of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy and the Strategic Management Initiative to bring together all the necessary parties in tackling the adult literacy problem.

Work based literacy programmes are in evidence in most European countries, resourced by employers and the state and supported by the trade unions. These programmes significantly decrease barriers to participation in adult basic education as they are job related and take place during work time. Such programmes need to be established in Ireland, co-ordinated by local literacy services.

In addition, there is an urgent need for a guidance service for adults with reading and writing difficulties. In Northern Ireland, the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) have established an Adult Basic Education Support Service, which will track the progress and experience of referred clients. A similar type of service is required in the Republic of Ireland.

Targeted literacy awareness campaigns which highlight basic skills development as enhancing employment prospects are also required. Information should be made more readily available to all primary and secondary schools, workplaces and community centres. Outreach workers, in particular trained literacy students would play an integral part in these campaigns, presenting positive images of the benefits accrued from learning.

The literacy service needs to be in a position to provide flexible learning programmes, crèche facilities, travel and subsistence money to create the widest possible access to adults with reading and writing difficulties.

Recommendations for other organisations

Other organisations must recognise that literacy is an important factor in the development of policy in their domains. Greater awareness of the extent of the literacy problem within their client groups is necessary, along with increased sensitivity in guiding individuals towards literacy tuition.

Many organisations such as FAS, Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and the local Partnerships, come into contact with individuals who have reading and writing difficulties. Through their participation on the Consortium, representatives of these organisations have become more aware of this and of how their agencies can help people with literacy difficulties to come forward for tuition. The proposal to introduce Literacy Awareness Training for front line staff is a recognition of the important role of statutory agencies in the promotion of the literacy services.

Project staff have also become more informed of the programmes within organisations represented on the Consortium which could be used to promote literacy and basic education development. The integration of basic skills development within existing training programmes targeted at disadvantaged groups is both highly beneficial to the participant but also essential in widening access to such programmes. (45)

Recommendations for European Policy

The project identifies the potential for EU policy to become more proactive in guiding national policy. For example there is a need for more research into literacy provision in different countries with a view to developing best practice models to guide national policy. The issue of quality standards in adult basic education is being debated across the EU and it is imperative that adult literacy and basic education policy makers and practitioners in Ireland contribute to this debate which will no doubt have an important impact on the sector in the future.

As part of the European Year of Lifelong Learning, conferences on lifelong learning have been held and discussion documents produced on approaches to basic education. However the EU debate around the issue of literacy has focused almost exclusively on the economic benefits resulting from a workforce with good literacy skills. As research has shown, improved literacy usually does have long term economic benefits but the project recommends that the principle of providing literacy tuition as a right for every citizen should be adopted irrespective of whether economic benefits can be identified. This would have special relevance for Ireland where basic education should be provided to all citizens, even those who are unlikely to find employment.

“The IALS findings underline the importance of literacy for the economic success of individuals and in aggregate, for countries. Obviously then, there are implications for human resources, labour market, employment and education and training policies, which governments, the private sector, communities and non-governmental organisations need to identify”. (46)

A p p e n d i x A

A.B.L.E., Brace Centre, Blanchardstown, Dublin, 15.

Cavan Literacy Scheme, Youth Information Centre, Dublin Road, Cavan.

Clare Reading and Writing Scheme, Clonroad Business Park, Ennis, Co. Clare.

Crumlin College Literacy Group, Crumlin Road, Dublin, 12.

Dublin Adult Learning Centre, 3, Mountjoy Square, Dublin, 1.

Galway Adult Literacy Scheme, Prospect Hill, Galway.

Kildare Learning Unit, Abbeyview House, Kildare.

Kinsale Adult Literacy Scheme, Bandon Road, Kinsale, Co. Cork.

KLEAR Reading & Writing Scheme, Swansnest Road, Kilbarrack, Dublin, 5.

Mallow Adult Literacy Association, Bank Place, Mallow, Co. Cork.

Mayfield (Write-On) Adult Literacy Scheme, Old Youghal Road, Cork.

Naas Adult English, Clarendon House, Limerick Road, Naas, Co. Kildare.

Co. Limerick Adult Literacy Scheme, Lower Mallow Street, Limerick.

SIPTU Basic English Scheme, Liberty Hall, Dublin, 1.

Tipperary North Riding Adult Literacy Scheme, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary.

Youghal Literacy Group, League of the Cross Hall, Youghal, Co. Cork.

A p p e n d i x B

POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR CONSORTIUM MEMBERS

Commitment to adult literacy and basic education in the context of educational disadvantage.

Access to existing education and training programmes for adults with reading and writing difficulties.

Literacy proofing i.e. all information distributed by the organisation – use of plain English.

Referral to the local literacy service – availability of information on service.

Literacy Awareness Training for personnel meeting with the public.

Exploring other organisations position to resource adult literacy and basic education and developing guidelines around this.

Continuation of the partnership between member organisations and NALA in order to build on the above measures and ensure access and support to adult learners.

A p p e n d i x C

Literacy Awareness Training Sample Programme

- Aims and objectives
- Definition of Literacy
- Background of the literacy problem in Ireland and Western Industrialised countries
- Context of NALA/Integra Project - increasing access and participation
- Experiencing a reading and/or writing difficulty - practical activities
- Adult literacy students talk of their experiences
- Appropriate responses - some practical strategies
- Towards a co-ordinated approach at local and national level
- Evaluation.

A p p e n d i x D

Literacy Class, South Inner City, 1987 – Paula Meehan

One remembers welts festering on her palm.
She'd spelt "sacrament" wrong. Seven years of age,
preparing for Holy Communion. Another is calm
describing the exact humiliation, forty years on, the rage

at wearing her knickers on her head one interminable day
for the crime of wetting herself. Another swears she was punch drunk
most her schooldays - clattered about the ears, made to say
I am stupid. My head's a sieve. I don't know how to think.
I don't deserve to live.

Late November, the dark
chill of the room, Christmas looming and none of us well fixed.
We bend each evening in scarves and coats to the work
of mending what is broken in us. Without tricks,

without wiles, with no time to waste now, we plant
words on these blank fields. It's an unmapped world
and we are pioneering agronomists launched onto this strange planet,
the sad flag of the home place newly unfurled.

A p p e n d i x E

NALA/ Integra Transnational Seminar Programme Royal Hospital Kilmainham 6th November 1997

Making Connections...Literacy Begins the Spiral of Social Inclusion

10am

- Welcome – Michael Toomey, Chairperson, NALA
- Adult Literacy in an Irish & OECD Context – Inez Bailey, A/Director, NALA
- Opening – Michel Martin, T.D. Minister for Education.
- Personal Reflections – Sam McAughtry, Broadcaster & former Senator.
- Access & Participation in Literacy Schemes – Noreen FitzPatrick, Project Manager, NALA/Integra.
- An Overview of the Qualitative Findings of the Research carried out in 16 Literacy Schemes – Ursula Coleman, Integra Researcher, and adult learners.
- Performance created by David Collins & Helena Walsh.
- Literacy within an Equality Framework – Dr. Kathleen Lynch, Co-ordinator of Equality Studies Centre, UCD.
- Open forum chaired by Inez Bailey, A/Director, NALA.
- Literacy Class, South Inners City, 1987, read by Paula Meehan, Poet.

1pm Lunch

2pm

Workshops:

1) Recruitment Strategies – A Model of Good Practice

Gerda D’Hertefelt & Marthe Rombouds, VOEB,
Belgium & Noreen FitzPatrick, NALA/Integra.

2) Reception Skills – A Model of Good Practice

Jeanne Breheret, IFAD, France.

3) Individual Learning – A Model of Good Practice

Anne Loontjens & Frederick Maes,
Collectif d’Alphabetisation, Belgium.

4) Literacy Awareness Training

Rosamond Phillips & Carrie Walsh, NALA.

5) Dreams

Liz Murphy & Ray O’Donnchada,
Jungian Psychotherapists.

6) Education Guidance & Progression Routes

Anne O’Keeffe, VTOS Co-ordinator, Co. Laois VEC.

7) Political Lobbying

Clare Watson, Author.

5pm

Closing address – Mary Banotti, MEP.

Literacy Workers Views on Access and Participation

S.W.O.T. Analysis

Literacy workers in a facilitated session were asked to identify, in relation to their schemes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and the necessary actions to be taken in relation to: access to literacy schemes; methods of recruitment; and progression routes for learners. Outlined below are the results from these sessions.

- **Access to literacy schemes**

Strengths: Free, confidential, learner-centred, flexible, crèche, effective advertising, lack of bureaucracy, central location, friendly staff.

Weaknesses: Stigma, location i.e. lack of wheelchair access and general lack of access in rural areas, premises are not user-friendly, limited facilities, shortage of tutors, no crèche facilities, lack of funding, waiting lists, lack of flexibility e.g. day time courses, limited information available on progression routes.

Opportunities: Increased funding from a variety of sources, subsidised transport, premises allocated specifically for literacy classes, funding for audio visual aids, crèche facilities, disability access, in-service training for tutors, flexibility in tuition availability, development of distance learning materials, positive image to be established or portrayed when dealing with adult education.

Threats: Negative attitudes and perceptions to literacy, stigma, shortage of tutors, limited funding available at present, lack of transport in rural areas, lack of personal support from family members or friends due to stigma and the element of secrecy attached, over dependence on the voluntary sector, structure becoming more formalised thus threatening anonymity.

Actions: Access additional sources of funding, improve marketing strategy, campaign for individual premises for classes, provide crèche facility and develop tailor-made courses, create greater flexibility in tuition hours, improve communications network e.g. free phone at a national level.

- **Recruitment methods for literacy schemes**

Strengths: Rigorous advertising at both a local and national level, diverse background of the tutors allows for greater network and areas of interest, support from schools and libraries, good use of appropriate language, incorporated into general information concerning availability of evening classes, listing in telephone directory.

Weaknesses: Sporadic advertising, language on posters not targeted at specific groups, lack of community awareness concerning literacy services, part-time organisers hence restricted time for potential learners to access information, limited resources thus capacity of the scheme is limited, branded “illiterate”, profile too low at a local level, little, if any, audio visual information available.

Opportunities: More frequent and simplified advertisements, link up with existing community groups i.e. increase network and referral possibilities, reinforce privacy element, family literacy classes, liaise with remedial teachers, specific targeting i.e. employee development programmes, freephone, recognise learners recruitment potential.

Threats: Ethos of the scheme lost should it become more formalised in structure i.e. if attached to the wider educational system, stretched budgets, lack of motivation in potential learners, language used may deter potential learners.

Actions: Local advertising e.g. church announcements and newsletter, networking, targeted publicity strategy, research, outreach, drop in centres.

- **Progression routes for learners**

Strengths: Group work due to increased confidence, knowledge of personal limitations, improved access to further education, training and employment possibilities, better participation level in social and community life.

Weaknesses: Lack of information, limited access to formal courses, lack of funding, lack of support during the transition period, absence of long term planning, lack of bridging courses.

Opportunities: Child minding facilities, grants to be made available, adult education guidance service on offer, increase employment possibilities, participation in children’s education i.e. intergenerational equity, concessions for literacy learners when doing state exams.

Threats: Limited availability, no funds available, lack of appropriate follow on courses, mainstream educational demands possibly reinstating negative images to learning, fear of not meeting one’s expectations.

Actions: Tailor-made routes i.e. individual pathways specific to the individuals needs, build on increasing awareness, encourage self empowerment and complementary learning, provide an adequate guidance and counselling service.

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