

Literacy *Matters*

Keeping you up to date with literacy
news in Ireland and informing you of
the work NALA is doing

In this issue



Lights, action, camera!

Students in filming of new
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Low skilled most at risk in current economic climate



Editor's Comment

Welcome to NALA's second edition of Literacy Matters, this continues to keep you posted about literacy matters in Ireland and up to date about NALA's news, upcoming events and ongoing work. We hope that you find the articles interesting, informative and thought provoking. Since the last edition of Literacy Matters, we have had an exciting time at NALA, with new websites being launched, Written Off? being aired and getting rave reviews, taking NALAW to the National Ploughing Championships in Kilkenny and the launch of a new informational DVD.

As always we would be delighted to hear about any ideas or topics which you think would interest our readers. We will also consider including any articles that you may want to submit for our next edition which will be published in the Spring of 2009.

We hope that you enjoy this magazine and we'd also like to take this opportunity to wish you an enjoyable festive season.



Emma Ramsey,



Inez Bailey.
Director, NALA,
at the launch of
NALAW

'In the last few decades, Ireland has positioned itself as a high skilled, knowledge based economy. Its investment in up-skilling has benefited those at a higher level of educational attainment. However, without policy change there will be surpluses at lower educational levels, with a large number of low-skilled individuals unemployed or inactive. The National Skills Strategy has identified that this could have a seriously detrimental effect on Ireland's plans to remain economically competitive. Now more than ever there needs to be a concerted effort to address those with low or no qualifications. This responsibility rests jointly with the government, employers and the individual.'

'Unfortunately Ireland's participation rate in continuing education is relatively poor. Work is needed to build a culture of adult learning throughout life in Ireland and recognise the limitations of school based learning. This exists in many of our neighboring countries and as far afield as India,' she said.

'If you are working in a low skilled job you should consider retraining as a matter of urgency. Similarly, if you feel you need help with reading, writing, spelling or maths you should try to improve these skills so that you can diversify into different work if the need arises. There are lots of learning options available these days – it's not all about classrooms and blackboards anymore.

For example, there are lots of brain training games on the market that strengthen literacy and numeracy skills. Or you can teach yourself over the internet, sign-up with a distance education tutor over the phone or do one-to-one tuition. It's really up to the individual how they want to direct their own learning. These skills also need to be embedded into all public education and training provision in so far as possible.'



The Blarney Cornerstone Experience – Skilled to work

The Blarney Golf Resort Hotel is a 4* hotel and golf course situated on 170 acres of the Shounagh Valley just outside Blarney town in County Cork. It boasts a Spa and Health Club, along with a championship golf course designed by John Daly. The facility employs over one hundred members of staff ranging from housekeeping/leisure centre, green keepers, food and beverage staff. They comprise of a mix of local people coupled with many Europeans.

“People on the ground are the life-blood of the hospitality sector. The Skills for Work programme creates an inclusive environment which is very important in our business – in fact, it’s vital to any business.”

Breda Murray who took part in the computer module

“Our approach is: Start with what you know and build on what you have.”

Anne O Donovan

“Everything improves; including customer care as the staff have more confidence engaging with guests. They even start making suggestions about how they can contribute to improving standards.”

Eugene Higgins

Participant Perspectives

The Programme Trendsetter:

Breda Murray who is currently Blarney Golf Resort Accommodation Services Manager is no stranger to FÁS Skills for Work. She was previously involved in running very successful Skills for Work programme in the Silver Springs Moran Hotel, Cork during the pilot phase. Breda felt so confident about the benefits of the programme that she was not hesitant in recommending such a concept to the Blarney Golf Resort management. She went on to say “I have always found support from NALA/FÁS very encouraging and was delighted to share my experiences as an employer at the official launch of the NALA resources for Skills for work in 2006.”

“Currently in Blarney, we have 22 staff members with varied educational backgrounds attending the computer literacy and communications modules every Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons in the Hotel conference room. It’s great to see individuals growing in confidence as they progress each week. The VEC is also providing one to one sessions for some staff members that necessitates additional supports”.

Breda went on to say “in my opinion support from the hotel management and departmental heads is vital for the success of any FÁS skills for work programme to ensure the easy scheduling of the availability of staff to take part in the learning experience, which I am very confident will lead to future progression for each and every person involved”.

“Attendance is very good overall which shows that the staff is enjoying the experience. I joined the computer classes as I needed to fine tune my own skills and it also gives encouragement to the staff when they see me in the class”.

The FÁS Regional Co-Ordinator

Speaking on the benefits of the FÁS Skills for Work programme, Eugene Higgins said “Skills for work is an opportunity for all employees to update their educational and life skills in an informal way, and encourages a lifelong learning culture in the workplace.

Many are early school leavers, or left education after sitting the Junior Certificate. They’re often reluctant to apply for promotion or to put themselves forward in any way. The nature of work has changed dramatically and so, from an employer’s point of view, it helps staff to cope more easily with changing work practices, improves their confidence and motivation while giving them recognised qualifications. All this adds to improving standards in the workplace and helps maintain a positive work life balance. ”

County Cork VEC:

Representing County Cork VEC, Anne O’Donovan and Dymphna Duddy met individually with all those who expressed an interest at the Blarney Golf Resort. Participants were introduced to the importance of lifelong

learning and the type of upskilling available in areas of reading, writing, spelling, maths, and computers, personal and interpersonal skills. Once information was gathered on individual needs, the programme was set up with help from Breda Murray and the other managers. Expert tutors in the areas required were then found to teach the modules, which range from Personal Development and Customer Relations, to Computers and Money Management.

The Adult Literacy Organiser:

Anne O'Donovan speaks highly of the benefit of such a programme to employees. "The advantage of this FÁS Skills for Work programme is that it takes place in the workplace and is available to everyday working people who have gaps in their learning for whatever reason and are now in a position to up-skill. It also introduces the idea of fundamental knowledge which raises one's self-esteem and self-worth thus affording people an increased sense of empowerment. For employees to realise that the company is investing in their personal improvement is very positive. In this particular case it was heartening to me to find an employer so committed and dedicated to the concept of improving the educational growth of its employees."

The Course Co-Ordinator:

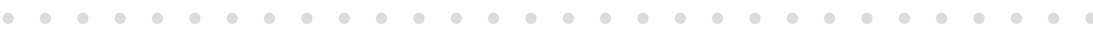
Dympna Duddy, Kinsale Adult basic Education Service, said "awareness of multiple intelligences is a vital support to self-esteem thus ensuring that one is receptive to lifelong learning. Those with poor education or skills gaps often have low self-esteem and this can be a major obstacle to learning and affects people's interpersonal skills. The curriculum not only offers FETAC level learning; it also offers life skills that are beneficial outside the workplace." Dympna went on to explain that "the programme devised was learner-centred, of 14-weeks duration and is being delivered by expert tutors."

The Course Tutor:

An experienced VEC adult basic education tutor for over ten years, Phil Mortell refers to his involvement of the programme by stating that "we all need reading and writing to survive socially. If you can't read a notice that's been posted; or if you can't leave a note to a colleague, you are not as socially alive as you should be. In the preliminary interviews we are looking out for those with some level of difficulty so that we can tailor the programme to their needs be it writing notes, accident report forms, or money management."

The Hotel General Manager:

Mr. Conor O'Toole, Blarney Golf Resort General Manager is satisfied with the benefits of the programme and articulated that "we are delighted by the programme and would recommend it. We've felt the benefits throughout our staff. We've seen the boundaries between departments and people whittle away. There is a greater awareness of customer care and a greater awareness of the role each employee plays in the success of the hotel. Anyone can build a hotel, but it's the staff that makes it a success. We've noticed it already in the customer comment cards since the programme began. We're getting more compliments about how staff has handled problems.



Contacts:
FÁS Skills for Work.
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Mid-Cork Adult Basic Education Service.
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What is FÁS Skills for Work?

This is a national initiative introduced under the FÁS One Step Up programme aimed at helping employers to improve the skills of their workforce by giving them easy access to a range of learning initiatives. The programmes are funded by FÁS, and encourages learners to build on their success and continue the process which can lead to Fetac qualifications if required.

Skills for Work was piloted from May 2005 - November 2007 through NALA and FÁS Services to business. Eugene Higgins {NALA/ FÁS Co-ordinator for the South West Region}, contacted employers and worked with them to identify employees with literacy and numeracy needs. Courses were then developed which helped to address these needs in a work context. In 2007 over 2,000 employees participated in programmes nationally.

The pilot has now been mainstreamed into FÁS services to business as part of the "One Step up" improving workplace skills programme.

"The programme is now running for the past four weeks and both management and staff have felt the benefit almost immediately citing increased confidence, self-worth and a sense of belonging to a team, as the most immediately apparent changes,"
Dympna Duddy

National Adult Literacy Agency signs collaborative partnership with Northern Ireland's Learning and Skills Development Agency

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has signed a memorandum of understanding to collaborate with the Learning and Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland (LSDA NI). The memorandum outlines an agreement between the two agencies to enhance opportunities for people with literacy needs across the island of Ireland. The cooperation of NALA and LSDA NI highlights the importance on both sides of the border of tackling the significant literacy issue and providing opportunities to progress for the low skilled.

Speaking at the announcement during the launch of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week, Mr John Stewart, National Adult Literacy Coordinator, NALA, said: 'Literacy and basic skills development are integral to socio-economic development. The scale and importance of the challenge in supporting literacy development is similar in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. NALA is very pleased to work together with LSDA NI in the future. This cross border collaboration will enable both agencies to share experience to better serve people with literacy difficulties throughout the island.'

LSDA NI Assistant Director, Marie Thompson said: 'LSDA NI is delighted to collaborate with NALA in organising a joint conference called 'Making it work – integrating literacy and essential skills into training and further education'. This conference will be held on 26 November in the Ballymascanlon House Hotel in Dundalk. Keynote speakers include Dr. Rosie Wickert from Australia, Dr. Ursula Howard, University of London and Pat McCartan from Belfast Health and Social Care Trust. This memorandum of understanding holds the promise that this conference is only the first of many opportunities for our two organisations to work together.'



Making it work

Integrating Essential Skills
and Literacy into training
and further education

Wednesday 26th November 2008
9:30am – 3:00pm
Ballymascanlon House Hotel,
Dundalk, Co. Louth



The premier cross-border event for
employers and key stakeholders in
education and training for 2008

Conference aims

Identify the benefits of integrating literacy into all education and training programmes to public, education and business leaders.

Raise awareness of the value of a 'Whole Organisation Approach' to literacy/numeracy and other basic skills
Support and advance national policy and developments in relation to the achievement of integrated literacy

Identify good practice examples, models and champions, particularly in the workplace context
To support, advance and inform policy development.

Target audience

- Policy makers
- Decision makers
- Researchers

from government, statutory and development agencies, employers, unions and social partners, training agencies, further education, education and advocacy organisations.



www.lsdani.org.uk

www.nala.ie

An Post continues to support adult literacy



Picture
Barney Whelan, An Post being awarded the Chambers Ireland Special President’s Award for Literacy Related Programmes



Pictured:
Inez Bailey, Director, National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), Barney Whelan, Director of Communications and Corporate Affairs, An Post, Kevin O’Connor, volunteer literacy tutor from Fairview and Carolyn Roche, student and star of RTE’s TV series ‘Written Off?’ from Tallaght.

Volunteer literacy tutors wanted!

After receiving over 7,000 calls to its freephone support line, the National Adult Literacy Agency and An Post are today calling for people all over the country to volunteer to become literacy tutors. The increase in adults participating in literacy courses comes a year after An Post sponsored and launched a major TV, radio and cinema public awareness campaign called ‘Take the first step’. The advertisements profile three individuals who have overcome their difficulties with reading, writing and working with numbers and were intended to encourage people with literacy difficulties to make contact with service providers by ringing the NALA’s freephone 1800 20 20 65. The campaign has been such a huge success that An Post has agreed to broadcast the adverts for another year. Only last month An Post was awarded the Chambers Ireland Special President’s Award for Literacy Related Programmes, specifically for this work.

Since the An Post developed and sponsored tv and radio adverts started airing, many Adult Literacy Organisers (ALOs) around the country have noticed an increase in what they would define as ‘hard to reach’ adults and early school leavers. More young men are coming forward with clearly defined goals – for example, wanting to complete the Junior and Leaving Certificate, and possibly enrol in 3rd level education. Several ALOs said the advertising campaign has helped reduce the stigma and embarrassment associated with low literacy skills. Recently the motivation for people returning to education is mostly work related as writing difficulties are stopping them for applying for promotion, job training or changing jobs. One ALO cited a case where a young woman enrolled in a literacy course having lost her job because she had spelling difficulties.

Ms Inez Bailey, Director, National Adult Literacy Agency, said, ‘In the last year NALA has received a record amount of calls to our freephone from adults who want help with

reading, writing and numeracy. Now more than ever we need volunteer literacy tutors to help with this demand. I recently heard that a literacy service had just enrolled an 83 year old student in one-to-one literacy tuition. Fortunately they were able to match the new student with a 72 year old volunteer tutor – it just shows you that you are never too old to learn or tutor!’

An Post Chief Executive, Donal Connell said that the campaign is all about helping people of all ages to reach their full potential by overcoming their difficulties with letters and numbers:

“We put the time and resources into working with NALA to get these ads right. It’s so rewarding to see the results. But literacy programmes also need volunteer tutors and many of our An Post staff have signed up to train as tutors in their own areas. We work every day at the very heart of Irish communities, and we know the importance of helping people through their literacy difficulties and the difference it makes to men and women of all ages and their families. I encourage everyone to get involved in what is worthwhile, satisfying and enjoyable work that makes a real difference to the community.”

Grundtvig: Promoting innovation in Adult Education

“Nothing About Us Without Us” - A Grundtvig experience



In 2004, the National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID), Trinity College, Dublin was opened with a vision of promoting inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities through education research and advocacy. A major objective in launching the NIID was to develop a Certificate course for students with intellectual disabilities. Trinity College supported this development and a two-year full-time course was approved by the Trinity Council in 2006 (see photograph above of the students standing on the Trinity steps on the day of their Awards Ceremony, February 2008). As part of this Certificate course, students are encouraged to become involved in research projects as co-researchers and to grow and develop as self advocates. With this background, the students and staff of the NIID looked for ways in which they could meet and learn from other groups of people who were involved both in advocacy and research. In searching out such opportunities staff from the NIID got in touch with Léargas to find out more about Grundtvig.

The NIID successfully applied for funding with similar groups from University of Ghent, Belgium; University of Iceland; and the Open University, UK. The aim was to learn from each other’s experiences associated with becoming empowered as people with intellectual disabilities.

In all, 24 people--staff and learners--took part. Each partner hosted one of the four meetings held over the two-year period. Each partner shared information about how their group was involved in promoting the rights of people with intellectual disabilities in their country through, for example, writing their life stories; running disability awareness workshops; managing an independent advocacy office supported by university students and staff; and doing survey work about what it meant to be a student with intellectual disabilities within a third level setting.

Early on it was decided that a major outcome of the project would be the development of a Resource Kit where each country would present materials that other groups of people with intellectual disabilities and their supporters could use to run workshops on how to promote advocacy and do inclusive research. The catch phrase, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, underlined the approach that all the groups took associated with their reported research and advocacy activities.

The NIID students' contribution to the Kit is based on a technique called *photo voice*. Each student had a digital camera for a day and then decided which photos best illustrated a day in their life as a student at Trinity. As a group they then choose the common themes to be included in the overall written and pictorial story about being a student undertaking the Certificate in Contemporary Living.

A major outcome for the NIID students and staff of participating in the Grundtvig project was that it provided the group with a cross-cultural learning journey which allowed them to promote the value of third level education for students with intellectual disabilities. At the same time their eyes were opened to a whole new world of issues that other people with intellectual disabilities were experiencing across Europe. For example: in the UK, people with intellectual disabilities were funded by government to run independent self-advocacy offices; in Belgium, people with intellectual disabilities were producing an accessible advocacy newssheet; while from Iceland the issue of people with intellectual disabilities becoming parents and then having children removed from their care led to much discussion.

Trinity hosted the last meeting of the project where a draft of the Resource Kit was approved for further development. But just as important as this practical outcome of the Grundtvig partnership was the growth and development for the participants and the friendships and support networks that have developed across international boundaries.

Grundtvig Learning Partnerships

Grundtvig is the European Programme for Adult Education and Lifelong Learning. It invites those working in any institution or organisation--from community groups to universities--to get involved in its exciting range of European projects, professional development opportunities and networks. Grundtvig Learning Partnership Projects are process-driven, locally based projects formed to share experience and expertise. Each project involves at least three partner organisations in three European countries developing a project on a particular theme. Projects are funded for two years.

Many organisations that have taken part in Grundtvig Learning Partnership Projects agree that they have provided important innovative space for people working in adult and community education through sharing ideas, best practice and new ways of addressing challenges. This has been particularly important for some of Ireland's Grundtvig Projects addressing issues of importance for those working and participating in adult education. The following case study is the story of a Grundtvig Learning Partnership Project based in the National Institute for Intellectual Disability, Trinity College, Dublin.

For more information on the funding available through the Grundtvig Adult Education Programme, please contact Denise Shannon, Grundtvig Project Officer, Léargas at (01) 873 1411 or check out the website at www.leargas.ie

The next deadline for Grundtvig Learning Partnership Project Applications is 20th February 2009



Grundtvig Contact Seminars in Europe – 2007/08

If you are interested in becoming involved in a Grundtvig project, contact seminars are one of the most successful and enjoyable means of sourcing European partners. Opportunities are now available for those working in the area of adult education and lifelong learning to attend seminars across the participating countries on a variety of themes including, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, inclusion of adults with disabilities to name but

a few. Participation in these seminars is fully funded by the Education Service of Léargas. Details on upcoming contact seminars are on our website www.Léargas.ie/education. Application forms for participation in a contact seminar can also be downloaded from the website. Alternatively contact Kathleen Carey at Léargas directly at (01)8731411.

Grundtvig In-Service Training – professional development of adult education staff

Kerstin Walsh a social care worker from Wellsprings in Cork City works with young women around learning to live independently. She attended a course ‘Becoming Fluent in Creative Writing & Multimedia’ in Italy. This course enabled her to look at creative approaches to facilitate people to use writing as a creative form of expression.

Her thoughts on her European experience; ‘My skills improved but what had greater impact was the idea that I am on the right track with my work. Meeting people from other countries showed me where we are in Ireland in terms of working creatively and I found that there is much work to be done. My own experiences were also interesting for the colleagues on the course. I now have the tools with which to work and literature and experiences to support these. I hope that these will help me to change ideas around creativity in my organisation and in social work’.

An on-line database of training activities is available to help applicants identify training which best meets their needs:
<http://ec.europa.eu/education/trainingdatabase/>

You may also source a suitable course outside this course database.

- The deadlines for 2009:**
- 16th January for activities starting on or after the 1st April 2009
 - 30th April for training activities starting on or after the 1st September 2009
 - 15th Sept for training activities starting on or after the 1st January 2010

For further information on deadlines and the Grundtvig In-Service Training action please consult the Education Service website <http://www.leargas.ie/education/grundtvig/action3.html> or contact May Diamond at (01)8731411 or email mdiamond@leargas.ie

Lights, action, camera!



Students in filming of new DVD *Take on learning. Take on life.*

Given the fears and apprehension adults with literacy difficulties have about attending a literacy course, NALA decided to produce a DVD outlining what’s involved in adult education that could be posted to anyone who rings the NALA freephone. “Every day we get calls from people with literacy difficulties asking about how they can improve their reading and writing. They are often very nervous about attending a course so we decided that we should produce a DVD that showed a number of literacy students talking about their reasons for attending a course, their fears and expectations and their experience since starting a course,” said Clare McNally, Public Relations Officer, NALA.

Filming took place over two days in Dublin with Michael Power, Tipperary, Kevin O’Duffy, Offaly, Olive Phelan, Tallaght, Mandy Kennedy, Donaghmeade and Keith O’Connor, Cork all taking part. On the first day filming took place in Animo studios in Windmill Lane in Dublin. It was a new experience for everyone and nobody realised just how much work goes into recording only a few seconds of interviews. The second day was spent filming classroom and one-to-one tuition footage in the Dublin Adult Learning Centre in Mountjoy Square. While it was hard work everyone really enjoyed the day. “By profiling literacy students of different ages and backgrounds we hope that a wide range of viewers will be able to relate to the students. We also hope that the DVD will demystify many preconceptions adults have about attending a literacy course and answer the most frequently asked questions we receive on the freephone,” said Clare.

The new DVD was launched as part of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week. The overall aim of the DVD is to highlight the benefits there are to improving reading and writing skills and motivate adults to take the next step and enroll in a literacy course. It is packaged with a handy map of Ireland with every literacy provider and contact number marked on it.

Reflections on the Philosophy of Adult Basic Education

By Maura Mc Namara

At various times over the years I have reflected on my role as an adult learning tutor and trainer. Recently, after a discussion with a colleague, I decided that now was a time to repeat the exercise as we seem to be in a continuous time of change and development, e.g. the expansion of group tuition, accreditation and partnership with other organisations. Has this made a difference to the philosophies and principles underpinning adult literacy work? So I start my journey!

One definition of philosophy is the system of values by which to live. I have long understood this but never really articulated my values. I never saw the need as I believed that they were obvious in the way I live. In any case as I am surrounded by likeminded people, I saw it as unnecessary. Working in Adult Basic Education, I realise that **my philosophy can both influence and be influenced, by others.** According to James Draper in *Voices from the Field* philosophy encompasses the principles, values and attitudes that structure our beliefs and guide our behaviour, in our work as well as in the whole of our lives.

In Ireland our philosophy for adult learning has many aspects, but is primarily concerned with the learner being central to the learning process and that learning takes place using their life’s experience. Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers and Jack Mezirow have had a great influence on the development of literacy work in Ireland.

Paulo Freire believes that the teacher must learn about (and from) their learner, so that the learning is meaningful. “The relationship between the learner and tutor is central, to creating an environment in which social changes become possible” (Reading the Word and the World (Freire and Macedo 1987). In my experience the learner and tutor communicating, listening and working together on real life topics is very important. It places the learning in the “real” world, provides material to work on, builds the relationship and is also a motivating factor. Good practice starts with the needs and interests of the learner and building their confidence. This is what Freire calls the “Wealth” model, one which encourages learners to realise their own strengths and knowledge.

Carl Rogers a humanistic psychologist had as a general principle “we cannot teach another person directly: we can only facilitate their learning”. He saw himself as a facilitator, one who created an environment for engagement. He did this by giving a short input which was often controversial. This is followed by a discussion. Many tutors use this method to great effect, particularly with learning groups.

Jack Mezirow is a retired professor of Adult and Continuing Education at Columbia University. His research is very much concerned with how adults learn and how their perceptions are transformed by learning. He analyses how adults make meaning of the learning experience and how their lives can be transformed by it. I have observed this transformation on many occasions with learners. In the safe environment created by the tutor they are able to critically reflect on their assumptions and ideas, many of which are formed in childhood, and so, often find new ways of defining their worlds. This can result in the learner becoming more confident and involved with their families and communities.

“The only person who is educated is the (person) who has learned how **to adapt and change;** the (person) who has realised that no knowledge is secure, that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security. (Carl Rogers: The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning) Since I began tutoring I have seen many changes of focus in adult learning, and at times have struggled to understand and accept some of these changes. From my experience the values and principles of adult learning are what guide us in our decisions and behaviour. Philosophers tell us that a **principle** is the beginning of an action. As we begin the action, be it designing a course, tutoring adult learners whether one to one or in groups, we make informed decisions as to what will work for our learners. We do this by going back to our agreed principles for good adult literacy tuition. I believe in these principles. They have been proven to work, sometimes in difficult circumstances. They apply across cultures and this is very important to us in the 21st century when we have such a diversity of cultures.



Principle 1 *Adult literacy work is based on a philosophy of adult education which is concerned with personal development and social action.*

“Principles are the simplicity on the far side of complexity.”(Stephen Covey) Literacy in the the 21st century faces new challenges and that is that learners must be able to use their literacy skills in the “real” and complex world of home, work and society. In order to be successful at this we as tutors need to help them with their personal development e.g. adult learning doesn’t stop when the skills are learned. Learners in the schemes often think that learning the skills will solve all their difficulties. Adult learning students are not just people with learning difficulties, so if life’s experiences still cause restrictions and prevents them moving on we as adult educators need to be able to help them. Consider the learner who has quite good skills and still has difficulties transferring them to the “real” world. Example; the learner can fill a form perfectly in class but cannot do it in a public office. Often the skill is not the problem, lack of confidence is.

Principle 3 *Adult literacy work respects different beliefs, cultures and ways of being. An ethical code of confidentiality underpins all aspects of the work.*

Confidentiality and respect must be established from the very beginning in order for learners to feel they belong. Learning difficulties are not something to be kept hidden. Learners need to know that most of us have difficulties with some aspect of our learning.

Principle 5 *Adults learn best when the decision to return to learning is their own and the environment is supportive, relaxed and friendly.*

Schemes have observed that learners are more likely to attend on a regular basis if they have made the decision to attend themselves, their needs, interests and goals are important and good tutoring and resources are available.

Principle 2 *Adult learning is an active and expressive process. Learners have the right to explore their needs and interests, a set their own goals and decide how they wish to learn.*

According to Carl Rogers the teaching or imparting of knowledge, makes sense in an **unchanging environment**, and that is why it was an unquestioned function for centuries. I agree with Rogers that as we now live in a constantly changing environment, “in such an environment the goal of education, if we are to survive, is the facilitation of change and learning” In my experience the first thing we must do as tutors is listen and encourage the learner to express their needs and interests, to be active in their own learning. When we have identified the learners’ needs together, the learner, with the help of the tutor, will be able to set long term and short term goals to achieve their goal. The learner should be encouraged to be involved in the *how* of learning. This is empowering learners, not giving power, but created within the new confidence.

Principle 4 *Learners’ knowledge and skills are vital for the effective organisation of adult literacy work. Learners should have the opportunity to be involved in all aspects of provision.*

It seems logical to me that learners be involved in all parts of the organisation if they want to. I remember one of the first things I heard at training, **“the scheme is there for the learner, not the learner for the scheme”**. They have many issues that are important to them and have much knowledge and experience. We need to hear their voice particularly when working on the quality standards. If in doubt ask the learner.

I have come to the end of my journey for now, having reflected on the philosophy and principles of good adult literacy tuition. I like the idea that a principle is the beginning of an action because **we have something to measure all our adult learning actions against**. We do have agreed principles of Good Adult Literacy Tuition. Organisers, tutors and students have reflected on them and presented them to us as good practice. As tutors we need to articulate and share them more so that our practice is ordered and has a purpose. As a result of my reflections I realise that we need to revisit our principles particularly in a time of change and critically reflect on them. In doing so we must not to limit our perceptions.

Be adaptable but don’t forget your principles. They are the compass that guides.



A healthy respect for literacy

Doctoral Study in Health Literacy

By Geraldine Doyle

UCD Schools of Business has received sponsorship from Merck Sharp and Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Limited to fund a doctoral study in health literacy.

Several definitions of health literacy exist within the literature (Kickbusch et al., 2006; Selden et al., 2000; American Medical Association, 1999; Parker et al., 1995). The more recent definitions adopt a broader perspective by emphasising not only the understanding of health information but also the use of health information by citizens in their decision-making surrounding their health matters. This includes the ability to understand, assess and act upon health information such as, a doctor’s diagnosis, treatment options, appointment slips, notes on prescription bottles or dosage calculations. Health literacy is much more than simply the ability to read. In addition to reading, it also includes listening, comprehension, analytical and decision making skills. Health literacy therefore is about patient safety and quality of care. It concerns all citizens.

Therefore both reading skills and decision making skills are central to health literacy. Kickbusch et al. (2006) defines health literacy as ‘the ability to make sound health decisions in the context of everyday life – at home, in the community, at the workplace, in the healthcare system, the marketplace and the political arena’. This definition highlights the shared responsibility for health literacy in our society. This is further developed by Anderson (2006) who argues that the skills of the health professionals are of equal importance to the skills of adults in society in determining health literacy levels.

This highlights the shared responsibility for health literacy in our society. The onus is on the health care professional (doctor/nurse) to communicate clearly, using plain English, with their patient. Recent research carried out in Ireland, found that 1 in 5 people do not understand their GP and only 50% of patients ask for clarification, about their health, before leaving the doctor’s surgery. Patients need to be supported to build the skills necessary to firstly understand health information and secondly to learn how to ask questions of their health professional, with confidence and with dignity.

While much work has been done in defining health literacy in the North America and Canada, less work has been performed in measuring health literacy. In North America the measures of health literacy (Rapid Estimate of Adult Literacy Measure, the Test of Functional Health Literacy in Adults and the Health Activities Literacy Scale (Rudd et al., 2004)) measure a limited dimension of health literacy, basic health-related reading (Lynch, 2007). However, in Europe the first steps towards developing an instrument which specifically measures competencies for health literacy have been made by a Swiss team (Wang and Schmid, 2007) who performed a health literacy survey across Switzerland. The survey identified thirty core competencies for health relevant to all citizens, which are measurable. This instrument for measuring health literacy will now be applied and developed across other

European countries through an EU funded European Health Literacy Survey.

Health Literacy is important for three reasons:

- 1. Equity and Access to Health Services**
Equal access to information implies equal access to health services.

If general literacy levels are low, it is probable that health literacy levels are even lower, given the added complication of medical language and terminology, that may not be understood by the ordinary person.

Low health literacy means that patients do not have the confidence to make correct health decisions on a daily basis. Evidence suggests that patients with limited literacy skills tend to present to their doctor in the later stages of disease, are more likely to be hospitalised, have a poorer understanding of treatment options and have lower adherence rates. Therefore, citizens with limited health literacy have greater severity of illness and use the health services more frequently, which in turn costs the State more.
- 2. Economic Reasons**
Health economists in the United States estimate that the cost of low health literacy to the US economy is in the range \$106 billion to \$238 billion per annum (Vernon et al., 2007).
- 3. Patient Empowerment to self-manage**
Strong health literacy skills are crucial for chronic disease self-management. With our ageing population and increased prevalence of chronic conditions such as Type II diabetes and chronic rheumatoid arthritis, patients need to manage their health. In order to do so they need to have the skills and competencies to make the right health decisions on a daily basis.

All of this means that citizens need to be health-literate. Health literacy concerns quality information and improved communication that will lead to greater empowerment of the patient. Patient empowerment is essential in order to achieve improved quality of care and improved health outcomes, leading to a better quality of life for citizens.

The European Context

The European Union’s clear obligation under Treaty Article 152 is that ‘*all Community actions and activities shall contribute towards a high level of health protection*’. In working to ensure a high level of health protection and given the relevance of the issue of health literacy, the European Commission has agreed to finance a project that will provide a comprehensive snapshot of the present situation in the Member States. The project

aims to develop a European Health Literacy Survey and has been selected for funding under the Public Health Programme in 2007. It will contribute to elaborate on the concept of health literacy, looking at health literacy in various European regions and cultures, the related policy strategies and working structures, and the overall social, economic and political impact. It will contribute to increase the evidence available for policy makers to support action. In Ireland, the study of health literacy is in its infancy (Lehane et al., 2007, Donohoe, C.P., 2005) and, as a consequence, the proposed study will make a significant contribution to the literature and to public debate in this area.

The Proposed Study

The doctoral study will draw upon the existing body of knowledge in health literacy and will further contribute to the literature by:

1. Seeking to measure health literacy in Ireland by rigorously evaluating and employing the measurement instrument developed by Wang and Schmid (2007) in an Irish context;
2. Assessing the impact of culture and the impact of language on health literacy. Given the increasing number of migrants living in Ireland today, culture and language may be important factors in influencing health literacy levels;
3. Developing an instrument for measuring the economic implications of health literacy.

Dissemination of the research findings

The findings of the doctoral study will be disseminated through workshops and conferences within UCD, Ireland and internationally and published in international peer reviewed journals. In addition, it is envisaged that on completion of the PhD study, policy-relevant findings will be presented at national level to the Department of Health and Children (Health Promotion Policy Unit) and at European level, as an extension of the European Health Literacy Study, in order to inform and influence policy makers and public debate more generally.

Askme3 questions

A new national health literacy campaign, the MSD/NALA Health Literacy Initiative, was launched in October - World Health Literacy month. The Initiative urges patients to ask three questions of their healthcare professional so they clearly understand their problem and what they should do about it.

The Askme3 questions, What is my problem? What do I need to do? and Why is it important for me to do this?, were developed by an international health literacy organisation and have been adopted by the Irish health literacy initiative which is led by healthcare company, Merck Sharp & Dohme Ireland (Human Health) Ltd (MSD) and the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA).

Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards 2009

The Crystal Clear MSD Health Literacy Awards 2009 will recognise people working in the healthcare arena who are making efforts to ensure their communications with the public are 'crystal clear' and easy to understand.

2009's entrants may apply online at www.healthliteracy.ie and submissions must be received by Friday 30th January 2009.

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Kildare Youth Training and Development Centre – an ACE project!

Applying NALA’s “Integrating Literacy Guidelines”¹ in a youth training and development programme

Last year the The Youth Training and Development Centre (YDTC) received a grant of €10,000 through the 2007 ACE Awards. Here they are to tell you how they used the grant

The Youth Training and Development Centre in Newbridge, Co. Kildare provides a range of education, training and development programmes for young people. We have a policy of integrating literacy across the curriculum and through all activities in the centre, including sport.

The practice of integrating literacy and numeracy into vocational skill training is not new. Sometimes learners can have difficulty with the literacy and numeracy involved in particular vocational activities. It could be argued that it is not possible to separate basic reading, writing and understanding of numeracy from learning a vocational skill. However, the teacher might be tempted to over-simplify the literacy content or to avoid it altogether and use only alternative methods of teaching. For instance a catering instructor might be tempted to use cups to measure flour in a recipe rather than using the weighing scale. Other instances include avoiding the written word entirely, and solely relying on spoken lessons to teach.

In order to improve the literacy provision to learners NALA together with FAS and the Department of Education and Science produced guidelines for integrating literacy for further education and training centres. The ‘Integrating Literacy Guidelines’ document supports trainers and educators to meet the needs of learners with literacy difficulties. The Youth Training and Development Centre adopted these guidelines when they were published in 2002, as a framework for planning our literacy strategy. We have built on them over the years.

The development of oral language is a very important aspect of the work in the centre. We do this through the interaction of staff and learners. The young learners have conversations with adults in the centre on a social level and this assists in their communication skills.

We have saturated the centre with materials for integrating literacy. For instance each piece of equipment in the catering area has a large printed label on it - freezer, bain marie, fridge etc. Each training area has a glossary of terms for that particular vocational area available to the learners. This attitude of providing real-

life literacy at every opportunity exposes the learners to relevant written information constantly, and staff are trained in how to use this to help develop reading and writing skills.

All our written materials – for example, application forms, information sheets - are literacy proofed.

The entire ethos of the centre is learner centred: the needs of learners must come first. The YTDC has a number of systems in place to help us work as an effective learner-centered team generally, and to help us integrate literacy development into everything we do. We have a ‘key worker’ system, with a staff member responsible for working closely with a number of learners. The key workers act as mentors to the learners, offering positive feedback and support and challenging as appropriate. We use a ‘web profiling’ system that helps us and the learners to review overall progress; and we use ‘Mapping the Learning Journey’ to review progress in literacy and numeracy. Each learner has a negotiated individual learning plan.

We have special monthly staff meetings called ‘case conferences’. These focus on the individual learners’ needs and progress. The key worker outlines the progress the learner has made in the previous month, or the obstacles which are preventing progress. The other team members give their input on how to help the learner progress in each area. Literacy and numeracy is specifically discussed and ‘mapped’ through this process. Following this, each key worker meets each learner individually, informs them of the outcome of the case conference, and discusses learning plans for the next month.

As part of the normal functioning of the centre literacy integration is discussed at the normal monthly staff meetings. Tutors discuss their practice in relation to integrating literacy. They offer each other advice on approaches that have worked either with a particular learner or in a similar situation previously-

In the whole-centre approach we use, it is not just the teaching staff who need to be literacy aware, but all staff. For example, the learners interact with the administrator regularly, so it is important that she too works in a literacy aware way.

Footnotes

1 Ní Chinnéide, B. Integrating Literacy NALA Guidelines for Further Education. And Training Centres, NALA.
2 A Different Kind of Teacher, Humphreys (1996)

2008 ACE Awards - Closing date now passed



Exploring informal learning in the home and in communities

The awards, now in their fourth year, have once again been given a generous donation of €20,000 in research grants by the EBS Building Society. The aim of these awards is to identify and support research into innovative and high quality learning opportunities for adults. This year we are focusing on informal learning in the home and in communities. This presents a fantastic opportunity to evaluate and examine some of the incredible and innovative work that is going on around the country.

The Award’s funding will be granted to those involved in adult and family literacy education. It will be used to help develop new methods and to share good practice among literacy providers in Ireland.

This year’s theme is: Literacy and numeracy development in the home and in communities: Capturing informal literacy learning

This year the ACE awards aim to capture the experience of learners in adult, community and family literacy settings throughout the country. We are particularly interested in discovering more about how learners use and develop literacy and numeracy skills, knowledge and understanding in their everyday lives.

To find out more the ACE Awards please contact Emma Ramsey at eramsey@nala.ie or check out the information on our website www.nala.ie under the News and Events tab.

Timescale

The 2008 ACE Awards are structured in the following way:

Phase 1

Applications have been received

Phase 2

5 x €2000 grants will be allocated to shortlisted nominees on 17 November 2008.

Initial research will be completed by 16 February 2009 and submitted for judging.

Phase 3

Award’s celebration event will take place on 6 March 2009, where one overall winner will be selected from the five shortlisted. The five projects get to showcase their work.

Winner will receive a €10,000 grant to develop and publish the research.

In order to be flexible and respond to learners’ needs in a centre such as ours, there must be support from the team. Having colleagues to rely on is very important to us. The discussions at case conferencing and other staff meetings where tutors put forward ideas to solve specific teaching and learning problems is acknowledged as helpful by all of the tutors.

In his book *A Different Kind of Teacher*, Tony Humphreys (1996)² describes the ideal relationship between teacher and learner; he says it must be empathic. Each learner is valued and affirmed for her/his uniqueness. Differences are respected and appreciated. Tutors in the centre recognise that having patience with learners is vital; allowing them to take their own time. In some cases this might mean doing the practical part of the work and then learning the theory afterwards. Changing the way you teach, and having variety in it, is important, because everyone learns in different ways. We observe and discuss with the learner and adapt to suit their needs.

Dr. Thomas Sticht an international consultant in adult education with over 30 years research and experience in integrating literacy spoke at a NALA-NUI Maynooth seminar in 2007. He outlined the value of teaching literacy in a context that is meaningful to the learner. The learners should use materials that will be of use to them outside of the literacy class, and that have relevance in the real world. He places great emphasis on placing the learning in terms of the learners’ prior knowledge. Dr Sticht outlined four principles of his ‘functional context approach’ to literacy education:

1. Instruction should be as meaningful as possible to the learner in terms of the learners’ prior knowledge.
2. Use material and equipment the learner will actually use after training.
3. Literacy can be improved in the context of improving content knowledge, information processing skills or involving learners in the design of the learning materials.
4. Valid assessment of learning is specific to the context and to the content.

In YTDC, we use a range of content areas, and of contexts, to help learners develop literacy and numeracy. One example is the use of computers and the internet. Websites such as www.literacytools.ie and www.writeon.ie allow learners to use information technology to develop literacy skills. We also use sport and leisure activities as opportunities to use numeracy skills such as measurement, estimation, time etc.

When tutors are properly trained in integrating literacy they recognise opportunities everywhere! Our integration of literacy and numeracy has been based on the NALA guidelines and on our training in the NALA-NUIM Certificate Course in Integrating Literacy. It has enabled YTDC to develop a whole-organisation approach to integrating literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.



National adult literacy awareness week focuses on the benefits of returning to learning

National Adult Literacy Awareness Week was celebrated nationwide from Monday 22nd to Friday 26th of September. As always the aim of the week was to raise awareness of the literacy issue in Ireland and inform individuals about the benefits of brushing up on their reading, writing and maths skills. We would like to thank all the adult literacy services around the country that contributed to NALAW by holding open days, drafting press releases and getting regional radio and newspaper coverage. NALAW 2008 would not have been as successful as it was without the support of our members and stakeholders.



Pictured at the launch of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week, Mr Sean Haughey, T.D., Minister of State with special responsibility for lifelong learning and Inez Bailey, unveils NALA's new information DVD for prospective literacy students and NALA's new websites.

Ploughing through literacy

NALA at the National Ploughing Championships, Kilkenny

September 2008 was the first time that NALA had a stand at the National Ploughing Championships in Cuffesgrange just outside Kilkenny city. After a summer of rain and dark clouds, 3 days of glorious sunshine was welcomed by all who attended.

Although Kevin O'Duffy and Michael Power are seasoned Championship goers, first-time NALA staff were (for once) left speechless at the sheer scale of the event and the range of activities taking place. We all agreed that arriving at the main gates of the Championships was like arriving at a medieval pageant such was the total number of tents, marquees, and pavilions that stretched out before us as far as the eye could see. Eight foot singing robots, a sky full of helicopters, exotic goats, a lesson in how to colour code bees and Charlie Bird strolling around made for 3 very interesting days indeed. The NALA stand was very busy for the 3 days and this was very encouraging. We put stickers on almost everyone who walked past our stand! I reckon 1 in 4 Irish households now has either a NALA canvas bag, mouse mat, pen or writing pad!

Kevin O'Duffy, who is a farmer with literacy difficulties talked to a lot of people who opened up to him about their experiences with adult literacy difficulties. Here are just 2 of the stories that Kevin heard.

As a farmer and an adult with literacy difficulties, I was asked to help out at the NALA stand at the ploughing championships.

In the course of my three days on the stand I came across a lot of people with difficulties with their reading and writing. Sometimes it was a friend or a family member that had trouble. There was some heart wrenching stories, like the young boy that approached the stand on the second day.

He was a lad of about fourteen or fifteen years of age and he asked me for a pen which I gave him. I also gave him a sticker as well. I asked him did he know what NALA stood for and he said he never heard of it. I explained that NALA works with adults with learning difficulties such as reading and spelling. Then he said that his mother used to attend classes and as I spoke to him about it I could see tears starting to well up in his eyes. I asked him if he was ok. He said his mother could not read or write and that she stopped going to the classes and that he and the rest of the family would like to see her go back to classes.

I showed him the NALA freephone telephone number and explained that the person on the other end would be able to give him some help as to get help for his mother. As the tears continued to well up in his eyes my heart went out to him. He said they had tried everything to get her to go back to the classes. As I continued to talk with him about his mother he said he just wants his mother to be able to read stories to them like other mothers. My God it almost brought a tear to my eyes as well. It took a lot to hold them back because I really felt so sorry for that little boy.

Later on that same day a young girl came to the stand and I gave her a pen. I spoke to her about the work NALA does with adults she said she would love to get help for her favorite uncle who could not read or write. I pointed to the freephone number and told her that when she got home she should get an adult to ring the number and she could get some help for her uncle.

Kevin O'Duffy is a farmer living in Co. Offaly. Kevin is an adult literacy student and a member of the NALA Executive committee.

NALA's presence at the championships was very important for those two young people who are indirectly being affected by close relatives who themselves have literacy difficulties.

Thousands of other people also approached us at the stand and took information about our freephone service because they knew someone that it might help.

NALA certainly hopes to be back at the Championships in Athy next year.

Gerry Ryan talks literacy with student Mandy Kennedy



Mandy Kennedy from Donaghmeade at the launch of the new DVD 'Take on learning. Take on life.'

To celebrate the first day of National Adult Literacy Awareness Week, Mandy spoke live on *The Gerry Ryan Show* about her own literacy difficulties and how she went back to education so that she could help her kids with their homework. "I fell through the cracks in regards to my education but there's no way that my kids will fall through the same cracks," she says. Mandy says she used to cheat in school exams by writing the answers on her leg and pulling her skirt up as she needed the information. Since going back to education she says she doesn't need to cheat in anything these days and is now very involved with her children's education. This year she took on the task of training a guide dog for the blind. "Even he comes with a training manual!" she jokes. "Ten years ago he would have been sent back with the manual but I'm getting through it now" she says.

Martina gets to become a TV star on the afternoon show



Martina outside RTÉ studios in September

Laois student Martina Lawlor became a star for the day when she appeared on RTÉ1 *The Afternoon Show* in September. She was there to promote National Adult Literacy Awareness Week and to encourage other people in the same position as her to go back to education. According to Martina, who lives in Portarlington, returning to education was one of the best decisions she ever made. Through her hard work, Martina has come a long way and hopes to do junior cert English next year.

My journey in family learning

Lorraine Lynch, Bray, Co Wicklow

I'd like to tell you about my experiences as an adult learner, especially regarding family learning. I left school after doing my Junior Cert. and didn't return to learning until my eldest child started school, when I did a parenting course.

This is demanding but I really love it. It is a challenge to be organised on the home front and to complete assignments on time. There is never enough time to do all the things I would like to do.

Children too are proud when they see their parents learning and my daughter, my younger son and I do our homework together, which they think is great.

I was nervous about doing that so I went with another mother for moral support. We thought at least we would have each other to talk to, because we mistakenly thought everyone else would know each other and we would feel intimidated. Of course we didn't and people were friendly and interested.

That was the start of my learning journey. I learned some very good ideas from that course which I still use today. It gave me the chance to meet other parents and share tips and helpful suggestions.

Other courses followed which I did for interest or personal development. These included Sign Language, Flower Arranging, personal development, an introduction to pottery, coping with A.D.H.D. children and challenging behaviour in children.

Around that time, I began helping out in my son's class as a volunteer classroom assistant for one day each week. I found that although I really enjoyed it I needed to learn more and get a qualification.

This led me to doing a Return to Learning course because I felt I lacked confidence with my academic ability. This course showed me that I am a visual learner and learn best by seeing something demonstrated rather than being told how to do it. I was encouraged to think about my attitude and opinions towards learning and also it gave me the challenge of thinking about writing.

That summer my children joined me on a Family Learning Summer Project where parents and children learned through creative art and language activities and had fun together. The following Christmas I helped at a Floral Christmas Decoration session, which has become an annual event.

Then it was back to school for me. I did Maths and Communications for almost two years. The Maths gave me the skills to support my son who was by now starting Secondary school

From Communications I learned about different ways of approaching writing. I even wrote a poem, something I never thought I could do. The course included a treat of a 'Colour me Beautiful' session and a workshop from an author, which was inspiring.

It also introduced me to technology and I developed some computer skills. Meeting deadlines for assignments became important, too.

Now I felt ready to tackle a course that would give me a qualification, but I still had to bring along a friend to accompany me on the course, so I still had some way to go in the confidence department

We completed the Classroom Assistant course and did very well.

As so often happens, one thing leads to another and while on the Classroom Assistant course I was offered the opportunity to do an evening Art class - something I had wanted to do for years but had never had the confidence to.

On the Art course I met someone who was doing Porcelain Painting so I gave that a go as well and found I was good at Art. This surprised me because at

school I had been told I was ‘rubbish at Art’ and not to take it up as a career.

I continued doing art and craft leisure courses, followed by a Nutrition and Leadership course and then back to where I started - another Parenting course.

I became the helper to the art and craft teacher and enjoyed helping her and was asked to step in when she left during the year and by then I had the confidence to do so.

In the mean time I decided to do a Special Needs Assistants course and was considering it as a career because it would fit in well with my role as a parent and I enjoyed the work.

When I visited the Adult Career Guidance Counsellor, for advice on my C.V., I was persuaded to fill out a personal profile and this pointed the way towards Art. Coincidentally the Open Day for the Bray Institute of Further Education was on the following day so I went along and I liked what I saw.

I applied for a place on the Art and Ceramics course. I am now back in full time education.

This is demanding but I really love it. It is a challenge to be organised on the home front and to complete assignments on time. There is never enough time to do all the things I would like to do.

From being afraid to attend a course on my own I’ve now attended courses in most of the Adult Education facilities in Bray. On my day off I now teach Art and Craft to parents on the school completion programme, which is very enjoyable. This is an opportunity to give something back to other parents and hopefully start them on their road back to education. I hope they get as much enjoyment as I do.

I feel I have come full circle. It was a natural progression from doing the Art and Craft course, then helping the tutor, then becoming the tutor and now going to college to study Art.

By becoming involved yourself as a parent you get your child involved. My eldest son is now a helper on the Summer Camp. It is great to see young people having the interest in helping younger ones.

Children too are proud when they see their parents learning and my daughter, my younger son and I do our homework together, which they think is great.

The whole family benefits from your interest in learning. It is a way to meet other parents and make new friends, so I urge parents go take the first step. It will lead to many more.

Family and Active Citizenship Education, an Integrated Training - FACE IT!

The FACE IT! project is a two year, European funded partnership to develop a training strategy that integrates Family Learning and Active Citizenship. NALA and the Clare Family Learning Project were the two Irish partners involved on the project. Linking family learning and active citizenship is an exciting and creative development in the field of Family Learning. Family Learning is a powerful tool to encourage interest in learning among family members. The integrated training element of the FACE IT! project has enabled established teachers, tutors and trainers to learn new skills in this area.

Joan Butler

FACE IT! handbook

The **FACE IT! Handbook – How to Develop a Family Learning Approach to Active Citizenship** was recently published and launched in July at a three day conference in Iasi, Romania.

The handbook is based on the interesting and innovative training course that was developed through the FACE IT partnership. The aim is to develop Active Citizenship programmes based on a family learning approach. Mary Flanagan and Amanda O’Connor of the Clare Family Learning Project (www.clarefamilylearning.org) guided much of the training course design.

FACE IT! training

The first international FACE IT! training courses took place in November 2007 in Ennis and in Marseilles. Participants with a range of backgrounds from six countries attended the course in Ennis. Further FACE IT courses were held in Italy and Romania.

Following the international training, Clare Family Learning Project ran training for providers in Ireland in February 2008. This training was then cascaded by the participants in their own settings to other trainers/facilitators. Courses are now being run with families in many local areas.

The FACE IT! handbook is available from NALA and from the FACE IT! website. www.faceitproject.org

- The FACE IT! Partnership, a 2-year European Commission funded Socrates project (Grundtvig 1)
- Made up of ten organisations from five different countries, England, France, Ireland, Italy and Romania
- The partnership was led by EuroEd in Romania
- NALA and the Clare Family Learning Project were the two Irish partners
- 75 people from 8 different countries (Bulgaria, England, France, Italy, Ireland, Norway, Romania and Scotland) attended the conference in Iasi, Romania from July 2nd – 4th 2008



NALA's Executive

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is an independent membership organisation. NALA membership is open to all people and organisations interested and involved in adult literacy development.

The NALA Executive Committee is essential to the Agency's work ensuring that our strategic objectives are put into practice. Members of the Executive Committee are drawn from all walks of life and bring a unique set of skills, life histories and experience to NALA's work. The current Executive committee includes literacy students and tutors, Adult Literacy Organisers and others involved in adult and further education and training as well as people who get actively involved in their communities' development. Executive Committee members govern the Agency and help strengthen NALA's ability to campaign and carry out its work.

What is the role of the Executive Committee?

- To further the aim and objectives of NALA (as outlined in NALA's Constitution)
- To carry out decisions taken and act on Resolutions passed at the Agency's Annual General Meetings
- To oversee the smooth running of the Agency for example, its finances and staffing
- To oversee the implementation of NALA's Strategic Plans.

What do you need to become involved in the Executive Committee?

- Interest and experience of adult literacy – as a learner, volunteer, practitioner, manager
- or
- Interest and experience of organisations – financial management, staff development

NALA organises an induction / training day for all new Executive Committee members.

How much time is involved?

- Up to 8 meetings a year in Dublin. Meetings last 2 hours for ordinary members with an additional 2 hours for Officers - Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Honorary Secretary, Honorary Treasurer.
- Attendance at some major functions like the Annual General Meeting and seminars.
- Working groups – involvement is at the discretion of members. There are usually 6 meetings a year, 2 hours per meeting.
- Some time needs to be given to preparing for meetings - about 2 hours per meeting.



Michael Power, NALA Chairperson and student

Every two years the following vacancies occur on the Executive Committee:

- Chairperson
- Vice-chairperson
- Honorary Secretary
- 3 Ordinary member positions

Please note that:

1. only current members of NALA can be elected to the Executive Committee;
2. those going forward for election must be nominated and seconded by two current members of NALA;
3. if there are more nominations than places available on the Executive Committee, an election will take place at the AGM.

In order to vote at the AGM, go forward for election or send in resolutions and/or amendments, you must be a current member of NALA. Group membership entitles an organisation to send two voting delegates to the meeting.

4.2 of the NALA Constitution states that *"Only those members of NALA whose names appear on the register of current members one month prior to the day of a general meeting may vote in that general meeting."*

NALA values its members:

- Members play a crucial role in governing the Agency through the Executive Committee and the AGM
- NALA consults its members on key policy areas
- Members strengthen NALA's ability to campaign and carry out its work.

To become a member you can pay online or download a membership form at www.nala.ie or you can call our freephone number **1800 20 20 65** for details.

NALA's next AGM will take place on 28 March 2009



National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh



AONTAS Adult Learners' Festival 2009

The third annual nationwide Adult Learners Festival will take place from 2 – 6 February 2009!

The Adult Learners Festival is about

- **Celebrating** adult learning and the achievements of adult learners
- **Showcasing** the work of adult education providers
- **Promoting** the work of AONTAS and the adult education sector
- **Ensuring** that adult education is placed firmly on the political agenda

AONTAS believe that adult learning has a hugely important role to play in the economic and social future of Ireland. We know that adult learners and adult learning centres do vital work on a daily basis. We hope to showcase this work through the Adult Learners Festival, but we need your help...

You can

- Organise an Adult Learners Festival event. Celebrate learning with a taster class, a learning bus, a lifelong learning fair and much more!
- Liaise with local media and public representatives to highlight your valuable work as we approach the Local and European Elections.

If your organisation would like to become involved in the 2009 festival, please contact AONTAS on **01-4068220** or E-mail: **mail@aontas.com**



Nationwide search for participants to take part in new TV series

After the huge success of the fly-on-the-wall documentary *Written-off?* the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is now looking for adults to take part in the next series that will be filmed in early 2009. Earlier in the year, *Written Off?* followed the lives of 11 Irish adults as they came together to attend a unique course. While all the participants came from different parts of the country, very different backgrounds and ranged in age from 17 to mid-50's, they all had difficulties with reading and writing. This new television series, the first of its kind in Ireland, let them tell their own stories in their own words, and also covered all the highs and lows as they went on a journey that transformed their lives.

NALA and RTÉ are now looking for adults to take part in the next series of *Written Off?* Over a number of weekends in the New Year, a group of 10 people will get the once off chance to take part in an intensive basic education course tailored specifically for them. This will be a positive experience that will transform their lives and the TV series will follow the journey over each weekend.

For more information call NALA's freephone number on 1800 20 20 65



National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Litearthachta do Aosaigh



An Roinn Fiontar, Trádála agus Fostaíochta
Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment



Sound & Vision
Broadcasting Funding Scheme

Written Off? – The Tutors’ Views

NALA’s latest TV series, Written Off? followed the lives of 11 learners taking part in an 8-weekend intensive learning course towards the end of 2007. This 8-part series was shown on RTÉ One at 7.30pm on Monday evenings in May and June 2008 and attracted very high ratings.

NALA’s Distance Education Co-Ordinator, Tom O’ Mara talked to the course tutors, Robert (Bobby) Borwick and Kathleen Bennett about their experience during and after filming of this series.

TOM: How did tutoring on the Written Off? course differ from what you normally do?

RB: There was no real difference - we treated the course like a classroom with cameras. We talked about this before the course and decided to do this from day one. The unique aspect for me was the two of us working together. Having two paid tutors in a room at the same time was a great advantage and allowed for one to one and group interventions.

KB: One difference was there were so many different activities outside the classroom. Having the TV cameras around and having the students taking part in so many activities helped to boost confidence earlier on. The fact that the course was organized on an intensive weekend basis also allowed students to build on what they’d learned and this helped to increase their confidence further.

TOM: How well did the finished programmes reflect what happened on each weekend?

RB: I was worried about this but Animo [TV production company] did a great job and the programmes are a true reflection of what happened. I think they also struck a good balance between negative and positive aspects of the weekends.

KB: It worked out really well. The series gives an accurate and fair picture of the course and students. We understood that the TV company would have to show drama to keep ‘non-literacy people’ interested. The entertainment factor was good and didn’t portray anyone unfairly, which was important.

TOM: Which teaching methods worked best in your opinion?

KB: All of the group work was successful. Dividing people into twos and threes worked well, especially where we used ‘non word materials’ such as pictures and drawings to report back. For example, the Multiple Intelligences session involved students picking pictures to reflect themselves. Having two tutors, as Bobby said, was great as well, because it meant we could provide one-to-one classes where individual students needed to focus on their own needs.

RB: I agree, but I also think that everything else worked as well! Because we treated the classes like a regular classroom, we used those methods we know and have been proven to work. The groups worked well, with a nice balance of facilitation and interaction. Certainly the feedback from students was positive around this. But we also did some teaching from the front when it was needed, for example when a student asked for something in particular. In general, having someone else being able to walk around supporting people was good. I think the programmes show very clearly that the adult literacy class is nothing like school, that creativity is encouraged, that the tutors walk around and chat to students rather than just teach.

TOM: Would you have done anything differently now that it’s over? What?

RB: Yes, I think there is always room for improvement. It would have been nice to have more time for preparation and to work more closely with the Course Co-ordinator.

KB: Yes, we were also probably too ambitious, wanting to do too much. We may have overtaxed students some weekends, so if I could do it again, I would allow for more time out and time for students to reflect. For example, when people went for a walk on weekend 3, this led to very creative and productive content. Sometimes students left on a Sunday exhausted. We ended up under pressure to cover material. I would also use the non-classroom activities more – for example, the dinner guests could have activities built around and be better integrated. We did use them for some activities, but this could have been better.

TOM: Did you notice a difference in progress between the different students?

RB: Absolutely. Some people showed more progression than others. In many cases, this may be because some of the learning goals were more achievable. We have been in touch with all the students since the course ended and all have done well. If you look at the DVD of the series, it’s very obvious that the people on the last weekend were very different people to the people who started the course.



KB: I agree with all of that. Another factor for some people making more progress than other was that these people worked on their skills at home during the week. Some had family members able to support them in doing this. Others had a lot going on in their lives outside of the course and were unable to do work outside of the weekends.

TOM: Do you feel there was a tension between the needs of the learner and the entertainment agenda?

KB: Yes, but everyone was new to this. If this series had been left to literacy practitioners without any ‘TV people’, it would have been ‘too nice’ and wouldn’t have appealed to a larger audience.

RB: At times, yes. Some people were taken out of their comfort zone to get content for TV – but this was generally done in a positive manner and the students were always supported. It was important to have tutors involved as well so that the students could see a link between what went on inside and outside the classroom. In the end, of course there were some elements that were unnecessary for learning and were there for TV alone, but we realised we were trying to make a prime time TV series and I think it works well.

TOM: How do you feel about the TV series now?

RB: It worked. It appealed to today’s TV audience, as shown by the high viewing figures, averaging 210,000 people per week. The different types of people involved as students maximized the appeal to the general population. I enjoyed it and thought it was a good learning experience for me as a tutor.

KB: I’m very positive about what we did. It wasn’t sensationalist as some people originally feared. The students and tutors enjoyed the weekends and learned a lot. People have told me they initially watched because they were prompted by friends and family members to do so, but once they started watching, they kept on watching because it was compelling TV.

TOM: Do you see any implications for current adult literacy practice?

RB: Possibly. The intensive model seemed to work and could be used in centres around the country. This approach allows for a better focus on particular learning needs. It’s also fun! Some tutors told me they got ideas from seeing course on TV – for example, using the high ropes course to address the idea of fear was excellent, and the idea of two tutors working together in the same classroom was also mentioned a few times. The programmes also showed 11 eager students, a very positive portrayal of what happens in learning centres.

KB: I feel it is important to paint a picture of what literacy is about for the wider public and Written Off? did this well. The range of learners showed that literacy is not a class specific problem and can affect people from different backgrounds and places. Hopefully, the series will help to ‘destigmatise’ literacy and encourage people to go back to education. One thing that came across from this as well was students are the best way to promote literacy awareness and seeing the participants on Written Off? definitely encouraged other adults to get in touch with NALA about their own needs.

TOM: What sort of reaction have you got from colleagues and friends since the show?

KB: It’s all been very positive. Some friends outside literacy were shocked at the fact that people left school without being able to read and write. People told me it was good to see different types of literacy learners and to see the progress that can be made.

RB: I’ve gotten very positive feedback from other tutors I know. Many question me on where the students are and it’s great to be able to say they’ve all continued on with other options. Members of the public have even recognised me on the train and told me they thought the series was brilliant! Some people told me they cried to see the 11 students complete the course and get their certificates from the President. Other people who know what I do but aren’t involved in literacy said they got a better feel for literacy – ‘ah now I understand what you do and what’s involved’.

For more information on Written Off?, check out www.writtenoff.ie.

Can't Read, Can't Write?

By Helen Ryan in conversation with Phil Beadle

Some information taken from the website: <http://www.channel4.com/health/microsites/R/reading/index.html>

Can't Read Can't Write was a new Channel 4 television series broadcast in July 2008. The series was hailed by Channel 4 as 'a shocking and moving Channel 4 series which reveals the hidden realities of Britain's adult literacy crisis'. It followed nine adults on a six-month reading course. The class included a whole range of people who left school unable to read: a businessman, a plumber, a single mum and an unemployed 21-year-old.

'to have three people that had never read anything before in their lives being able to write really quite well at the end of the 6 months was astonishing but they were the ones that got, that had some kind of support.'

Phil Beadle, the teacher/presenter of the series, spoke to Helen Ryan over the phone recently and answered some questions about the development of *Can't Read Can't Write* and his thoughts on adult literacy in the UK.

Phil is a secondary school teacher and won an award for Channel 4's *Unteachables*, where he remotivated reluctant secondary kids to enjoy Shakespeare. Phil is daunted by the prospect of teaching such adults who are literally putting their dreams in his hands: 'I've never taught adults before, I've never taught anyone to read before, not even my own children, I was never particularly good with those who are lower-attaining, and I've got just six months to do it. It just can't be done' says Phil.

In taking on this role, he worked with 2 adult literacy mentors and learnt on the job. Phil designed the course and felt that phonics worked better than the whole word strategies. Phil explained that he 'had a look at the adult literacy learning materials that are produced, realised that there was no structural logic behind them, that they were relentlessly downbeat and dull and would patronise all the learners and just reached for a fairly simple primary school learning-to-read thing and went through that.' Phil felt that 'kids materials don't patronise adults, it's actually not teaching them anything ... in order to acquire new knowledge, new knowledge has to be introduced.'

As the classes start – two sessions a week for 3 hours each – Phil's finds that he's not only teaching his class their letter sounds, but he's dealing with the raw emotions that have dogged these people all their lives. Linda finds the lessons almost unbearable, while James is so upset by confronting his inability to read again, that he's taking days off work. But Phil takes heart in the fact that 58-year old Teresa, who burst into tears when faced with a reading test in her first lesson, is able to grapple with reading a children's book after just three weeks of lessons.

As part of the learning course each person was asked to spend 10 minutes per day using Toe by Toe (A highly structured multi-sensory reading manual for teachers and parents). This one-to-one session was with a family member and aimed to keep them topped up during classes. Phil says 'I think that was key actually ... those people that progressed - three of them can now read perfectly adequately - had one-to-one support on a daily basis. The guy that didn't progress as well, his mother was barely literate herself and so consequently I went round to his employees, to his mates to see if anybody would make a commitment just to do 10 mins with him every day and he wasn't able to find anybody who would do that for him.' Because of this support Phil feels the results were remarkable – 'to have three people that had never read anything before in their lives being able to write really quite well at the end of the 6 months was astonishing but they were the ones that got, that had some kind of support.'

Over the three programmes, we see the intense struggles faced by Phil's class as they struggle to learn to read and write. But the goal is clear throughout: this is their last chance to gain the skills which will quite literally transform their lives. At the end of the course, Phil is determined that his class will take the government-approved Adult Literacy exams which will overturn his pupils' view of themselves. Not a single one of them has ever passed an academic exam. The final episode shows their progress where they complete and pass exams.

After Phil spent six months working as an adult literacy teacher, he concluded that the Government's adult literacy materials are 'worse than useless'. Describing Government provision as a 'national scandal', he believes it deliberately makes no attempt to teach illiterate people to read and is targeted towards giving certificates to people who can already read; and that the claims that a higher level qualification is equivalent to a GCSE A-C grade are 'farcical'. 'Had I used the government's materials,' says Phil, 'many of my class would still be faced with the daily burden and barrier of complete illiteracy.'

Reaction from the public was mixed and many adult literacy practitioners were very angry about the series and its approach. Criticisms ranged from presenting students with a pen and paper test at the beginning of the course to defining people by 'reading age' and using materials and methods designed for children. The portrayal of people was also criticised and the possible over-dramatised nature of some elements. A positive element noted by one practitioner was showing the kinaesthetic methods of learning. Of particular benefit was the awareness raising of the adult literacy issue and creating a debate between education practitioners.

Finally on asking Phil how did he feel about the series now, he is proud of it. 'I think it was very brave of Channel 4 to take on something that's obviously not going to be a ratings winner. All my work is about having working class people seen for the intelligent human beings they are and I felt that the programme betrayed illiterate working class people as being very intelligent so I'm therefore very proud of that'.

For more information on *Can't Read Can't Write* see their webpage:
<http://www.channel4.com/health/microsites/R/reading/index.html>

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**Come
 join us...**

NALA is an independent, member-based organisation committed to making sure people with literacy difficulties can fully take part in society and have access to learning opportunities that meet their needs.



Members are encouraged to:

- Be a part of NALA's campaign to ensure people with literacy and numeracy difficulties can fully take part in society and access learning opportunities that meet their needs
- Make and vote on suggestions about NALA's work and direction (at NALA's Annual General Meeting)
- Send two delegates (group membership) or an individual to vote in person at general meetings (associate and overseas group members do not have this entitlement)
- Vote new members onto NALA's Executive Committee and have the opportunity to put forward a representative for election on to NALA's Executive Committee.

Members are entitled to:

- Hear first about events, new publications and be given first preference with bookings
- Receive discounts for NALA publications, conferences and events
- Be sent a complimentary copy of certain NALA resources
- Be kept up to date on key policy decisions relating to the direction and work of NALA
- Receive NALA's Annual Report, Journal and Newsletter and information on developments in literacy.

Members also have access to an exclusive member's area on www.nala.ie. Here members are able to:

- Access member-only information and news
- Discuss literacy issues with other members in a private forum
- Take part in member-only online surveys and polls
- Book events online before the general public and benefit from a 50% discount
- Take advantage of exclusive member discounts on specific resources
- Gain access to and share literacy resources with other members.

For more information about becoming a member of NALA call our freephone 1800 20 20 65 or log onto www.nala.ie

