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Views

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Contents

Page No. Contents

- 2 Three practical examples of Family Literacy Programmes

 An insight into family literacy programmes in action
- 7 Family Literacy and Parenting courses: What are the differences?

 An attempt to tease out an answer to this question
- 10 Launching Literacy and Technology

 For some who use technology, it's full sail ahead; For others, it's like sailing by ash breeze
- 15 Integrating Literacy and Numeracy
 An effective way of developing confidence and skills
- My experience before and after Integrating Literacy Course at Bonnybrook Youthreach

 An example of integrating literacy into other areas of training
- **20** Integrating Literacy and Sport
 A project to promote sport and literacy in an integrated way
- 22 The NALA Health Pack for Tutors

 New NALA health and literacy tuition resource pack out soon
- 25 NALA learners' regional forums preliminary report
 What took place at various NALA learner foras
- 29 Monaghan take a SMART approach to Workplace Basic Education A workplace basic education model for small and medium enterprises
- New awards will create new opportunities for adult learners
 The work of NALA representatives on a FETAC Working Group
- **A Milestone in the Development of Numeracy Provision**A strategy for the further development of Adult Numeracy
- 42 ESOL: The Big Picture

 A new English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) literacy tuition resources pack will be available in the autumn
- 46 Developing a broad curriculum in Adult Basic Education: the prison education experience

 How has Adult Basic Education developed over the years in prison
- 50 An investigation of the Return to Learning Workplace Literacy Initiative 2002-2003

 Return to Learning Workplace Literacy Initiative reviewed
- 55 NALA announces financial literacy campaign supported by the EBS Building Society

 Describing plans for a three year financial literacy campaign
- **Framework for literacy and numeracy**...and an update on the framework
- Your Quality Framework three years down the line Looking broadly at the Quality Framework to date
- 67 NALA Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

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Three Practical Examples of Family Literacy Programmes

I. Storysacks in Bray

Family Learning in Bray

The Bray Adult Learning Centre uses several approaches in its Family Learning Programme. One of the most popular has been 'Storysacks'. UK expert Neil Griffiths first introduced this concept to a NALA audience at International Literacy Day in September 2001. His vision was to make children and their parents excited by books and reading. The approach is one that invites participation, interaction and fun, as his audience on the day will testify. His dynamic address and subsequent workshop provided the inspiration to bring it into a local setting.

When the Bray Adult Learning Centre piloted Storysacks at a local library for five storytime sessions, it proved so popular with parents and children that sessions continued for six months. It was also offered as a Family Learning course to local groups and a Home School Liaison teacher invited us to hold the first of several courses for a group of parents - but first the facilitator had to produce a Storysack.

What is a Storysack?

So what is a Storysack? The sack is a colourful cloth bag with the name of the story appliquéd on the front

It contains:

- A good quality children's storybook;
- Props, i.e., soft toys and accessories, which are used to bring the story to life;
- A backdrop of painted scenery;
- A game related to the story to encourage interaction;
- An audio-tape of the story, for parents who may lack confidence in their reading skills;
- A non-fiction book, which ties in with some aspect of the story, to extend the reading and language possibilities for the family.



Margaret Keating, Family Learning Co-ordinator, Bray Adult Learning Centre.

'The sessions are structured but informal and are great fun'



Family literacy in action

A list of follow-up activities is suggested for parents and children. These may include rhymes, games or interactive leisure activities.

Family Learning course based on Storysacks

The making and filling of the sack becomes the foundation for the Family Learning course that follows.

Sessions include:

- What is a good book?
- Choosing and sharing books;
- Storytelling skills;
- Designing maths and word games;
- Painting and craft sessions;
- Follow-up activities for parents and children.

Although Storysacks are now available commercially, the advantage of producing them in a parent group is that it fulfils the goal of family learning as a literacy intervention with an intergenerational focus:

- It involves parents in education and supports the family, while promoting literacy skills;
- It allows parents to share ideas and concerns about their child's learning and development;
- It also subscribes to the idea of themselves as lifelong learners.

The sessions are structured but informal and are great fun and have become an integral part of Family Learning in Bray.

2. Lads and Dads Programme in Co. Offaly

A seminar on family literacy, organized by NALA, provided all who attended with some fresh and innovative ideas for working on this very important issue. One of the speakers on the day was Julie Bowman from Northumberland, England, who outlined a programme at her school, "Lads & Dads Learning Literacy Together". Later that day she facilitated a workshop for those interested.

The programme, I felt, was exciting and a novel one in the area of family learning. It was worth pursuing though modifications were necessary for local use given the limited Information Technology facilities available.

Having adapted the English model, sanction from the CEO of Co. Offaly V.E.C. was obtained for a six-week pilot programme.

Aim

The aim of the programme was twofold:

- 1. To promote male role models, change the male culture and show that fathers have an important role to play in their children's education.
- 2. To introduce the participants to Information Technology (IT) and improve their social and writing skills.

Background

The Adult Learning Centre contacted a national school where links were already established and held a meeting with the Principal and the Home-School Liaison Officer.



Maire Dolan, Development Worker, Co. Offaly Adult Literacy Service

'Although Storysacks are now available commercially, the advantage of producing them in a parent group is that it fulfils the goal of family learning, as a literacy intervention with an intergenerational focus'

School details:

- Disadvantaged status;
- Mixed school from junior infants to second class, including a special class and a junior speech and language class;
- Total enrolment 300;
- Staff 22;
- Children attending are from a wide area and mixed class. However, a very high percentage comes from local authority housing, single/lone parents, high unemployment, low income;
- School Completion Programme in place (feeder school to postprimary where early school leaving exists);
- Through observation, there is evidence that the majority of children have limited prereading and language skills on entry to the school.

It was agreed at the meeting that the class would be held in the Adult Learning Centre one evening a week and the programme would be promoted through the school. Funding was obtained through the School Completion Programme.

Promotion & Publicity

The Adult Learning Centre produced a flyer that was distributed through the school to fathers of boys in the second class year.

The principal encouraged participation and targeted the individuals whom she felt needed the help most. Applications were returned to the school and verified before forwarding to the Adult Learning Centre.

The Programme

Eight boys and eight adults attended and two tutors facilitated the programme. At all times during the programme the adult and child worked together as a pair to achieve their goals.

The programme put emphasis on the importance of conversation to develop vocabulary for social skills:

- Hobbies and interests were the basis for conversations and this in turn led to writing and computer-based (IT) activities;
- Formal introductions were also linked with social skills:
- On the final night of the programme each pair made a small presentation to the group and guests.

Conclusion

The evaluation demonstrated that both participants and providers were satisfied with the outcome of the programme.

I felt that the programme was successful and achieved its aim:

- There was evidence of increased confidence in both the adults and children;
- Social skills improved, especially in the children;
- The rapport between adult and child developed and
- Three of the adults moved on to a basic computer class in the centre.

'Hobbies and interests were the basis for conversations and this in turn led to writing and computer-based (IT) activities.'

3. Family Literacy in Finglas

Family Literacy Programmes based in Primary schools

The current academic year saw the launch of family literacy programmes in primary schools in the Finglas area. The initiative was the result of collaboration between the Finglas Adult Reading and Writing Scheme and the local Home School Community Liaison Teachers (HSCL).

Initially the local Adult Literacy Organiser (ALO) attended the start-of-year cluster meeting of the HSCL teachers and outlined possible areas of collaboration between the key providers of adult education in the schools.

The initiative developed from a recognition that family literacy programmes provided an ideal opportunity to encourage the parents of young children in the local schools to actively participate in the early education of their children. A further objective of the programme was to create a positive learning environment for the parents and to encourage them into basic education classes.

Aims of the project

The educational providers recognised that a contributing factor to educational disadvantage is the alienation of some parents from the schools in which their children are educated. As a result they do not take an active role in the children's education or involvement in school activities. Sometimes this lack of involvement is a result of negative experiences of school and the parents may have their

own difficulties with reading and writing. The family literacy programmes were designed with this group in mind. The programmes were preventative in intention.

The aims of the project are:

- To encourage parents to support their own children's early learning:
 - by improving their knowledge of their child's learning experience and
 - by improving their own literacy skills.
- To create and improve links with the HSCL teachers in the area

Timing and structure of courses

To date the course has been offered and completed in three primary schools in the area. Two of the groups were parents of children in the 'Early Start' programme, and the other group was made up of parents of 2nd, 3rd and 4th class children.

The courses ran for 8 weeks and all participants were presented with certificates at the conclusion of the course.

A fourth programme is currently running with the parents of 'Early Start' children.

All the classes were timetabled to run concurrently with the children's school activities and were held on the same premises as the children's classes. Parents took the young children to school and proceeded straight to their own class. Their class concluded at the same time as the children's. This arrangement contributed to extremely good attendance rates.



Celia Rafferty, Adult Literacy Organiser, Finglas Adult Literacy Service.

'The courses for the parents of the 'Early Start' children were art-based and culminated in the production of a hand-made book about the family.'

Content

1. 'MAKE A BOOK'

The courses for the parents of the 'Early Start' children were art based and culminated in the production of a hand-made book about the family.

The books varied in style and included themed pages on family occasions like christenings, Halloween, Christmas and birthdays. Many of the parents dedicated the books to their children

The process of creating the book allowed parents an opportunity to develop new skills and build on existing knowledge, which in turn helped them in communicating with their children and in supporting their learning.

The experience of creating the book was a valuable learning experience in handling books for some parents. For others it paved the way to reading aloud to their children

2. DEVELOPING FAMILY LEARNING

The course for parents of older children covered such areas as:

- Playing educational games with your child;
- Pre-reading activities;
- Telling and reading stories;
- Helping children with homework;
- Confidence and
- A visit to the library.

The overall aims of the family learning programmes were to:

 Help parents support children in their literacy and language development;

- Establish inter-generational learning;
- Improve parents' basic skills;
- Improve parents' and children's oral communication skills;
- Raise parents' self-esteem and confidence;
- Improve relations between home and school;
- Acknowledge that parents are primary educators of their children.

Students' views of the course

Overall students enjoyed the courses and found it to be a positive experience.

Some participants' comments on the courses were:

"I really enjoyed the course

- raging that it's finished and
would definitely love to do
another one"

"I got confidence with helping [my child]. You find out from other mothers and we're all in the one boat."

"I learned the importance of patience and spending time with my child"

"the course made a difference to the way I speak to my children – at the "I really enjoyed the course – raging that it's finished and would definitely love to do another one"



Family Literacy Summer Project.

kitchen table everyone talks and says their bit."

Plans for the future

The success of the programme is such that there are already plans to run three more programmes in different primary schools in the new academic year.

It is also hoped to develop the programmes and make them suitable for the parents of secondary school children.

Working in partnership

A major advantage of the collaborative approach to these programmes was that the HSCL teachers were perfectly placed in order to target and recruit the most suitable parents for the course. Their unique knowledge and understanding of the individual family circumstances as well as their relationship with the families allowed for a highly sophisticated recruitment strategy.

Participation in the programmes paid high dividends for all concerned:

- The course participants enjoyed the course and found it of practical use;
- The school benefited from the increased participation of the parents in the school related activities and
- The Finglas adult literacy service was able to meet the needs of a target group that would have been difficult to reach without the support of the school.

The project has hopefully paved the way for increased collaboration and co-operation between service providers in the future.

Family Literacy and Parenting courses: What are the Differences?

The question

As interest in family literacy programmes within the adult literacy service continues to grow a question frequently arises:

• What is the difference between a family literacy programme and a parenting programme?

There is certainly common ground between the two programmes, but there are also key differences.

The following paragraphs will attempt to tease out an answer to this question by broadly considering programme aims, content, methodologies, and anticipated outcomes.

Background and purpose

First, consider the background and purpose of each family-centred programme.

Parenting programmes became popular in Ireland in the 1980s. They aimed to help parents



Janet Webb, Family Learning Co-ordinator, Co. Clare Family Learning Project



Moira Green, Adult Literacy Organiser, Co. Clare Adult Literacy Scheme

'Each
programme
focuses on
different aspects
of the child's
growth and
development.'

become more confident and competent in nurturing their children's development and, in particular, to offer advice on a number of parenting 'problems' around children's behavioural and emotional development.

Various organisations were involved in offering parenting programmes including:

- Local VECs:
- Health boards;
- Social services and
- Voluntary groups.

Family literacy programmes

were first piloted in Ireland in the 1990s in response to parents' requests to help their children to learn successfully, especially to learn to read. These requests came initially from parents who were attending classes with voluntary adult literacy schemes. Since then, most of the developmental work in family literacy has continued to be in the adult education sector, in particular, in adult literacy schemes.

Parenting and family literacy share common ground in that both programmes aim to develop parents' confidence, attitudes and skills to support their children on their journey through life.

However, each programme focuses on different aspects of the child's growth and development:

- Parenting could be said to focus on emotional and behavioural issues;
- Family literacy focuses more on cognitive development.

In other words, the programmes can be distinguished by their objectives.

Content and methodology

Next, look at the content and methodology of family literacy and parenting programmes.

Consider for a moment any two adult education classes, for example, a course in horticulture and a course in computers.

Both would be likely to use adult learning methodologies that take into account the participants' prior experience with gardening and/or computers. Both would encourage group participation, aim to boost learning confidence as well as skills, and be highly interactive with a lot of 'hands on' experience.

However, while there may be many similarities in their approach to the learning process and in the methodologies used, the courses are clearly distinguished by their content. The programmes share a similar target group and use some common methodologies, but the actual course content is different.

SIMIL ARITIES

Likewise, parenting and family literacy share some common ground regarding target group, process and methodologies. However, the content of these two courses is quite distinct.

'Family literacy focuses on those interactions between parent and child which promote the development of literacy and numeracy skills.'



Parents, children and a tutor take part in family literacy work

For example, both courses:

- Discuss and role-play various forms of parent-child social interaction;
- Emphasise how children are socialised into all kinds of human communication patterns through interaction with their parents and other family members;
- Aim to help parents to become more aware of how they can and do scaffold and model types of knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours for their children.

DIFFERENCES

However, family literacy focuses specifically on those interactions between parent and child that promote the development of literacy and numeracy skills, for instance:

- Question-answer exchange;
- Descriptive language;
- Rephrasing information;
- Acquiring 'book talk' (front/ back cover, title, turn the page) or
- 'Story talk' (once upon a time, what happened next, how does the story end?);
- Counting;
- Recognising patterns;
- Sequence and order.

Family literacy may also cover forms of communication that could be considered part of social behaviour, such as taking turns, not interrupting, following directions, but again these are considered with the context of 'learning situations.'

Parenting programmes perhaps could be said to cover a wider range of parent-child communications and social interactions.

Outcomes

In addition, with each course having a distinct perspective on parent-child interactions, consider the likely outcomes.

PARENTING COURSES

Having just completed a parenting course Parent A enters the supermarket with his child. He now feels more confident about how to deal with the child's choice of snack foods and, if necessary, how to handle the tantrum that follows not being allowed to purchase a large box of sugar laden cereal.

FAMILY LITERACY COURSE

On the other hand, Parent B has just completed a family literacy course. She sees the shopping trip as an ideal opportunity to explore environmental print. She may enter the supermarket with the idea of encouraging the child to look for favourite items such as cereal, juice or tinned beans. Both courses suggest ideas for positive parent-child interaction in the 'supermarket environment', but the content of these interactions is different.

PROGRESSION

Finally, differences between these two programmes are suggested by the anticipated progression routes for the parents.

In family literacy, it is implicit in the goals of the programme that participation will lead to further involvement in lifelong learning and especially in improving literacy skills.

Factors in family literacy participation that seem to motivate parents to participate in further adult education classes include: 'In family
literacy, it is
implicit in the
goals of the
programme that
participation will
lead to further
involvement in
lifelong learning
and especially
in improving
literacy skills.'

- Having a greater awareness of the parents' role in promoting their child's literacy development;
- A clearer understanding of the literacy skills that enhance their performance in this role;
- A greater sense of confidence in their ability to improve their own skills; and
- Having had a positive and enjoyable adult learning experience.

It is not clear that progression into further areas of learning is as much a part of the programme goals in parenting courses, but if so, it would seem that the direction would be in the area of lifestyle change, family health and wellbeing.

Both programmes provide valuable learning opportunities for parents. They should be seen as complements for one another, not competitors. They should also be respected for their differences.

Launching Literacy and Technology

For some who use technology, it's full sail ahead; For others, it's like sailing by ash breeze

In this article we'll look at why and how tutors and learners use technology in adult literacy, basic skills and English language learning. You'll find tips on how to get started using technology with learners, how to keep going, and leads for further exploration. We'll also look at progress in the U.S. on narrowing the digital divide.



David J. Rosen, Ed.D., Senior Associate, Newsome Associates, Boston, Massachusetts



NALA literacy learning and tuition www.literacytools.ie

Sailing by Ash Breeze refers to a nineteenth century American practice of moving a becalmed ship by towing it slowly forward from row boats or long boats. The wooden oars were generally made of ash, hence "ash breeze."

ICT, particularly digital multimedia technology (computers, the Internet, television, personal data assistants, telephony, videoconferencing, and others) is a technology speedboat. We can try to sail along with it, but we can't keep up for long before it will pass us by. So what's the point of trying to keep up? Tutors and learners have so many other important and demanding things to do; why add technology to our "to learn" and "to do" lists?

Six Good Reasons to Use ICT

- 1. Computers and the Internet are useful in our personal lives and in our learners' lives, for example, for:
 - Communicating: e-mail, key pals, electronic lists, digital telephony, electronic chatting with family, friends and colleagues in distant places;
 - Shopping: airline tickets, books, CD's, computers, cars;
 - Information searching: "Googling," finding lost friends, reading newspapers, finding directions;
 - Managing personal finances: paying bills, banking online;
 - Entertainment: home movies, baby book Web pages for relatives afar, video games, music, ordering DVD movies.
- 2. Computers and the Internet provide useful tools for tutors and learners to accomplish learning tasks:
 - Word processing: writing in class and homework;

- **PowerPoint presentations**: by tutors and learners;
- Spreadsheets for financial literacy: planning and monitoring one's personal spending;
- Information searching:
 CD ROM and Webbased references such
 as encyclopaedias and
 dictionaries, using search
 engines to find information
 on Web pages or in Web
 databases.
- 3. Computer software, Web pages, TV broadcasts and videotapes are a source of direct instruction.
 - Computer-assisted instruction (CAI) or computer-assisted language learning (CALL) for English Language learning;
 - On-line and CD-ROMbased courses;
 - Instructional Web pages;
 - Television series such as NALA's Read Write Now, or the U.S. TV411, Crossroads Cafe, or Workplace Essential Skills offer learners organized instruction for independent learning, and extensions of tuition;
 - Online lessons and whole courses can be designed by tutors for their students, and can track learner progress;
 See, for example, http://www.thestudyplace.org
 - Online simulations, for example, basic skills in the workplace simulations, can be used independently by learners or with a tutor or in small groups; See, for example, http://www.

... digital multimedia technology is a technology speedboat.



Two learners using a PC.

workingsimulations.com/ theOffice.html

- 4. Technology provides new opportunities for professional development such as:
 - Electronic lists or forums for adult literacy and ESOL/ESL tutors; See http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/discussions
 - Special collections of full-document (downloadable) materials in areas such as family literacy, ESOL, workplace education, technology, assessment, health and literacy, learning disabilities, and others; See http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/collections.html or http://www.nald.ca/
 - Online professional development courses, resource books, guides, and manuals for adult education tutors. See http://www.alri.org/harness/harnesscolleague.html
- 5. Technology offers excellent tools for project-based learning
 - Tutors can add projectbased learning to their classes (in addition to skillsbased and content-based learning). Technology is useful when adult learners need to:
 - search for information (CD-ROMS, Web page and online database searches)
 - investigate jobs and job preparation, family health issues, childcare, public schools, higher education, home buying assistance and other

- community services. See http://alri.org/esquare/
- record findings (word processing, note taking using portable keyboard personal data assistants or laptops, audio taping and videotaping, photographing with digital cameras)
- word process reports
- publish or present their projects (using desktop publishing, Web pages, or PowerPoint)
- 6. Technology can help learners who have physical or learning disabilities (or differences) through the use of assistive technology and universal design. For examples, see:
 - http://www.cast.org/
 - http://www.nifl.gov/cgibin/lincs/search/resource/ teacher.cgi?special_ collection=learning_ disabilities

E-inclusion/Access to Technology/Closing the Digital Divide

In 1995, in its ground-breaking study, *Universal Access to E-mail*, the Rand Corporation² identified a problem and coined the term "the Digital Divide," to describe it. The problem was the huge gap between the well-educated and well-to-do, who had access to the Internet, and the great majority of Americans, especially the poor and poorly educated, who did not. That study urged that everyone in the U.S. should have e-mail within a decade, unbelievable at the time, closer to reality now, but still far from being achieved.

One likely outcome, if growth of Internet access continues, is access to online learning for adult literacy.

Source: http://www.rand.org/publications/ MR/MR650/

WHERE ARE WE NOW, ALMOST NINE YEARS LATER?

A late 2003 Internet use study by the Pew Foundation found that 63% of Americans use the Internet at home now. This is a huge increase over the fewer than 5% of Americans who used the Internet in 1993. The rate of growth, however, has plateau'ed in the past two years.³

One likely outcome, if growth of Internet access continues, is access to online learning for adult literacy, basic skills, and secondary level skills. This might enable us to serve more people, or serve those who attend classes with a more intensive service plan of both class and online instruction.

But growth in Internet access for low-income adults will depend on continued government support to libraries and community technology centres to support their access and use of the Web for learning.

Resources for tutors who are new to the Web

What's "out there" that's good? Where can I start as a beginner?

- The Literacy List http://www.alri.org/literacylist.html
- Harnessing Technology to serve Adult Literacy http://www.alri.org/harness.html
- LINCS http://www.nifl.gov/ lincs
 In the U.S., LINCS is the adult literacy community's gateway to the world of adult education and literacy resources on the Internet. LINCS features multimedia curricula developed by practitioners,

special collections on major literacy topics, the latest literacy-related research and statistics, and opportunities for communication with colleagues directly and through online discussion.

- LINCS Special Collections_ <u>http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/</u> <u>collections/collections.html</u>
- LINCS Discussion Lists_ http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/ discussions/discussions.html

Resources for low-literate Adult Learners

What are some good examples of Web-based reading, writing and numeracy instruction for low-literate adults?

• Rebecca's EZ Pages http://www.alri.org/ltc/ezpage/
One of the exercises, "What the Landlord Must Do," teaches students basic terminology about housing and landlord responsibilities. Then, it provides a written exercise in which the student explains the responsibilities and also



David Rosen, Jenny Lynch, NALA Development Worker, and Dr Danny O'Hare, Chairperson, Information Society Commission at the launch of www.literacytools.ie

³ Source: Pew *Internet & American Life Study* http://www.pewinternet.org/

describes the functions of certain parts of the house. The Web site gives the student a list of words that link to pictures about parts of a house. Or the user can click on different parts of a sketch of a house, which then show the appropriate word. The interaction between text and pictures, along with the written exercise, allows students to go back and forth between the pictures and the words as much as needed to succeed at the tasks.

• E-square http://www.alri.org/ esquare

An "electronic square" or village designed for adult learners with low basic literacy skills. There are a number of storefronts (health center, jobs center, library, family center, computer center, early childhood center, community arts center, and homebuying and rentals center) with high-interest, low-literacy content inside, much of it written by adult new readers and writers.

- Mathgoodies http://www.mathgoodies.com/
- The Office http://www.workingsimulations.com/
 theOffice.html
 An interactive, Web-based prototype of a workplace-oriented simulation for learning literacy, numeracy and office skills simultaneously.
- The Learning Edge http://www.thewclc.ca/edge
 An interactive, on-line newspaper for adult literacy students. It is produced by the Wellington County Learning Center, in Arthur, Ontario Its interesting, topical stories are plainly written for a range of learners. Each story is read

out loud slowly by a man with a pleasant voice, and is accompanied by learning activities such as games, puzzles, interactive quizzes and writing contests. At least one of the stories, which supports both literacy and numeracy, deals with the low wages of workers in Indonesia who make expensive shoes for North Americans. *The Learning Edge* also has student writings

• The Northern Edge http://www.nwt.literacy.ca/ northernedge/NEIssue3/Index. html

A follow-on to the Learning Edge by the same authors.

• The Learning Ladder http:// www.learningladder.org An online, intermediate level, 60-hour literacy curriculum for early childhood educators written in the context of early childhood education work. This is designed to help workers in child care centres brush up on reading and writing before entering community college certification courses in early childhood education. Participants meet with a tutor once a week and use the online curriculum 2-6 hours per week.

Resources for Project-based Learning and the Web

- Virtual Visits http://alri.org/visits/vv.html
- The International Classroom Virtual Visit Project http://www.otan.us/webfarm/emailproject/school.htm
- WebQuests http://www.youthbuild.org/learningnetwork/webquests.html
- Inquiry Maps http://alri.org/pubs/im.html

Integrating literacy and numeracy

Over the past number of years, NALA has supported an integrated approach to literacy and numeracy. This means that in addition to providing direct tuition, literacy and numeracy is built into other activities. If people are engaged in cookery, or engineering, or art, or childcare, the language, literacy and numeracy of those activities can be a very effective way of developing confidence and skill around literacy generally.

In a training centre or a further education centre, the integrated approach means building literacy into each subject, as well as having whole-centre policies, partnerships and activites to promote literacy development.

The publication, *Integrating Literacy: NALA Guidelines for Further Education and Training*,
outlines the key elements of the
integrated, whole-centre approach.

Training programme

As part of this work, NALA has developed a training programme in partnership with NUI Maynooth (NUIM) and with Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). The NUIM Certificate Course in Integrating Literacy is for vocational trainers and Further Education teachers. It aims develop their ability to build literacy into their programmes. The WIT module on Integrating

Literacy is for literacy tutors who work as part of a multi-disciplinary team in education and training centres. It aims to help them relate their literacy work more effectively with what the learner is doing in other subjects and programmes. It also aims to help them be literacy 'facilitators', able to support and advise their colleagues, and able to encourage a whole-centre approach to literacy and numeracy development.

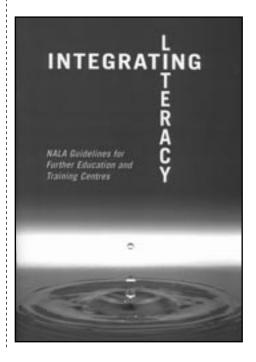
Based on the project work done by participants on the NUIM course, a literacy resource pack was published in 2003.

Inter-agency partnership

The work also involves partnership between NALA and a range of agencies involved in training and education in Ireland, including VECs, FAS, and Teagasc. To date, trainers and tutors from FAS Community Training Centres, Teagasc, VEC Youthreach Centres and Senior Traveller Training Centres, have taken part in the NUIM and WIT training programmes. In particular,



Blaithnead Ní Chinnéide





Using Skillwords' literacy integration pack during a hairdressing class at Newbridge Community Training Centre

FAS Community Services has contributed to the project since 2000, by funding development work and a series of staff training courses.

Some examples

The following two articles are by people involved in the practical work of promoting literacy development as an integral part of other activities and programmes.

Fiachra O Mathuna is

Coordinator of Fingal Sports
Partnership. He tells us about
a project to promote sports and
literacy in an integrated way.

Nuala O Gorman's article is
about the experience of integrating
literacy in Bonnybrook Youthreach
Centre.

Integrating Literacy – my experience at Bonnybrook Youthreach

I started the NALA Integrating Literacy Course in September 2002 not knowing what it was about, and I thought I would pick up some tips on literacy. Before the course I had thought that my skills as a tutor were helpful to all my students but found out they didn't suit everyone. I learnt many new ways of involving people with different learning styles and how to help students overcome literacy and numeracy barriers that they face every day.

I work in Bonnybrook Youthreach, for the City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee (CDVEC), as a catering and office procedures instructor. Youthreach is part of a national programme of second chance education and training in Ireland. The Youthreach Programme follows a holistic approach to education. Personal development is very important. Vocational skills, literacy, numeracy, outdoor pursuits, work



Nuala O'Gorman, Manager, Bonnybrook Youthreach Centre

experience and psychological services are offered to participants. For many participants, Youthreach gives the option to pursue areas that seemed unobtainable, or that they might have been unaware of before, in a safe and friendly environment.

The wake up call

It was a typical day in Bonnybrook Youthreach. The students were going into their groups when the co-ordinator noticed one student hovering in the hall. This particular student 'hovered' everyday, delaying going into the session. The coordinator became annoyed and said, "What's your problem? Get into class!" "I don't know what group I am in", the student said. "Read the timetable!" the coordinator shouted. "I can't read it".

The coordinator was taken aback and really embarrassed for her outburst.

Another incident occurred in the kitchen where I teach. A student asked, "Where are the tea towels?" "Look, they're in the press that says 'tea towels'", I replied. To my embarrassment and horror the penny dropped. I realized the student couldn't read the sign. These incidents and others helped us realize the extent of problems with literacy amongst the students. We have some students who cannot write their name and address. while others have completed Level 2 in FETAC Communications. Together with my participation on the NALA/NUI Maynooth Integrating Literacy Course, incidents like these were what triggered Bonnybrook Youthreach to look at ways to make the centre more literacy friendly.

Before this course, I and the other tutors were not aware how profoundly literacy problems affected our students' lives. As a catering tutor, I started looking around my teaching area, the kitchen, to see what would hinder any of my students who had literacy difficulties. What would block their learning, or what might get in the way of their safety in the kitchen? I had to look at things with a critical eye from the literacy perspective.

I looked at the signs that I had in the kitchen. They were all text, with few visuals. I realised that for some students I might as well have written the signs in Spanish, as some of the students had not a clue what the signs meant.

After looking at the kitchen area, I started seeing problems in other areas in the centre. I was looking at things in a new way. I realised that if a person with literacy difficulties came into the centre they would



Reading a recipe is just one literacy skill need for a catering course

not know where to go for particular subjects or classes. Every door had a text-only sign on it. If you can't read, this is a real problem. Safety signs in the main area were not literacy-friendly either. The timetable for classes was on the wall, but students who had serious literacy problems could not read it in order to find out which class they were to attend. In fact some students would just follow the rest of their group.

Literacy in centre after course

WHOLE CENTRE APPROACH

There is now a huge awareness by staff and students in our centre since I started the course, as our centre is very open to change. People say it is my enthusiasm, but I have to say everyone has worked very hard to integrate literacy into Bonnybrook Youthreach. At first, tutors and students asked why I wanted to put graphics with the text in the centre. When I explained that I wanted to integrate literacy in all areas, they said they are very impressed and became enthusiastic. Some have come up with many more ideas and suggestions, which I have used in different areas. This approach has been of great benefit to me as a tutor and it has made a great difference to my place of work, as it includes rather than excludes students.

SIGNAGE AND TIMETABLES

The timetable has been altered; it is now more literacy-friendly. We have colour coded it for each class and subject. Each class is illustrated by a graphic or icon, and the text is colour coded.

We have also put up graphics

alongside the text sign on each door. The doors are also colour coded to match the timetable. These changes make sure all students can understand the timetable and find their way around. They are also useful in helping students learn to read. If they can recognise the key words on the signs and timetable, this can be used as a basis for extending reading skills.

The woodwork and art tutors with the help of the students have done all of the work involving the signs on the doors

Inclusion

Another way I now have of helping to include students with poor literacy skills is to use more discussion in the group. We



Measuring, calculating and reading drawings are just some of the literacy skills needed for a woodwork course

discuss topics and tasks before reading and writing work. When doing worksheets, I start by verbally asking the questions in the worksheets. I explain the meaning of any words or phrases that students are having problems with. By having a relaxed, easy going atmosphere and encouraging every one to participate, the students feel able to give me the answers to the questions on the worksheet. I write these on the board. This gives students with poor writing skills a chance to practise writing and includes them in the session without fear of failure.

in regards to literacy. As a person and as a tutor, I would like to think that now I can help reduce some of the hurt and embarrassment surrounding literacy problems for all those involved.

Future innovations in integrating literacy in the centre

TWO-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

The focus in our two-year strategic plan is literacy. We have agreed as a team to coordinate our skills to improve literacy in all areas. For example, all policy documents, contracts and induction materials in the centre will be updated to make them more readable and user-friendly.

SPORTS PROGRAM

The centre is involved in a joint project with NALA, the Fingal Sports Partnership, and other learning centres. The project aims to incorporate literacy and numeracy into sport. We aim to do two things at the same time: encourage learners to have an active, healthy lifestyle, and use their involvement in the sports activities to help develop literacy and numeracy.

Thank you NALA and Maynooth College for the Integrating Literacy training – and to FAS Community Services, who funded the course. It has opened up my whole world

By having a relaxed, easy going atmosphere and encouraging every one to participate, the students feel able to give me the answers to the questions on the worksheet.

Integrating Literacy and Sport

European Year of Education through **Sport**

This year has been designated the European Year of Education through Sport (EYES-2004) by the European Commission. The main objective of the year is to develop greater linkages between sport and education in mutually beneficial ways. It is hoped that the positive attributes of sport will be used as a tool to teach in a variety of settings. There are many possibilities to use sport to teach in formal and non-formal settings. Some of these are being explored through projects such as LEAPS and EduSport, to name but two.

Sport as an educational tool

The use of sport as an educational tool is believed to have benefits, particularly in the area of personal development. The ability to work as part of a team and co-operate with others, are examples often cited as resulting from involvement in team sports. Another is character building, usually understood as coping with adversity and dealing with decision-making under pressure. There are many sports with varying demands, both physical and mental, on the individual and each is of benefit to those who participate in them. The most important thing for all involved is that they enjoy it.

The value of sport as an educational tool is that it is popular and easily accessible. It is particularly helpful in engaging groups or individuals who are difficult to access.

The primary school experience

As an individual working to promote greater participation in sport I regularly come across teaching aids, coaching manuals and resource cards that are used to explain training drills, games, or sport-specific skills. The teaching aids for coaches tend to be very clear, well thought out and simple to use. The ability to explain complex team moves or physical movements in a concise and easily understood way with graphics, using pictures and diagrams, led me to think that this method of instruction using sport could be applied to other situations. This approach is used in everything from manuals for microwaves to children's storybooks.

A specific example of a clear, concise, well presented, and easy to use set of resources is the Buntus programme for primary school teachers. This is made up of equipment, resource cards and a practical training session. The strength of the programme is it assumes no knowledge of sport and after three hours' instruction with the cards and equipment enables individuals to lead games and develop skills through PE classes.

I felt that perhaps this approach, using a highly visual presentation of material with sport as the content, could be used in other learning environments. The thought occurred that perhaps literacy might be one potential



Fiachra Ó Mathúna, Co-ordinator, Fingal Sports Partnership.

The use of sport as an educational tool is believed to have benefits, particularly in the area of personal development.

area so I contacted NALA. The response was very positive.

The Literacy and Sport Working Group

As a result of discussions with NALA, we set up a working group. The aim is to develop a project that will integrate literacy and numeracy development with sports and fitness, and produce a sports - based literacy development resource. This could for example be an addition to the 'Skillwords' pack.

We invited representatives from adult and youth learning centres to attend an inaugural meeting chaired jointly by the Fingal Sports Partnership and NALA. The meeting was so productive that those attending have been to all subsequent meetings and a few additions came on board along the way. Members of the working group are literacy tutors and sports instructors who work with young adults in vocational training centres. These include staff from Blanchardstown Youthreach, Bonnybrook Youthreach, Carlow Community Training Centre, North Centre City Community Action Project, and Transition Youthreach.

After setting terms of reference for ourselves we set about the task in earnest. We discussed questions such as:

- What are the learning objectives?
- How will the learning be done in practice?
- What can be taught using sport (including which sports should be used in the centres)?
- How may the sports be adapted to suit the learning environment?

• What will the outcomes be?

Scope for learning through sport

The scope for learning through sport is broad. Some of the areas listed by the working group are:

- Communication and social skills (team-work, respect, anger management),
- Discipline/rules (fair-play, cheating),
- Healthy living (nutrition, substance abuse, performance enhancing/recreational drugs),
- Literacy and Numeracy (timing, scoring, key terms and concepts, record-keeping),
- Planning (tactics, strategy, organisational skills).

The next phase is to run pilot projects in the participating centres from September 2004 through April 2005. Staff and learners in the centres will carry out 'action research' on how to integrate sport and literacy development. We will evaluate the success of the project from the perspective of tutors and



Get down to the real action of a sports training project.

learners developing useful literacy material related to the practical sports activities. Based on this work we will publish a report and guidelines for people working in the area of sports and literacy. We will also publish a literacy skills pack or manual with suggested activities and learning objectives.

From my perspective, having had an idea I'm delighted to see the interest and commitment from so many working in the field to make it a reality. I look forward to with a great sense of anticipation to completing this project successfully.

The NALA Health Pack for Tutors

Those of us who can read perfectly well find it difficult enough to find our way in hospitals. It is stressful for those people who can follow the indicators but imagine the difficulties of finding one's way through a maze of corridors without being able to read any of the signs. A great danger arises from the embarrassment that can prevent people with literacy difficulties from seeking the treatment they need.

Literacy tutors and learners took part in the NALA Health and Literacy Survey that was carried out in 2002. The survey confirmed the sense of powerlessness that people with literacy difficulties or low self esteem experience with the health system. From this the idea of a health pack evolved.

The NALA Health Pack forms the second part of the NALA Health Literacy project and was funded by the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health and Science. It is proposed that both literacy tutors and health promotion officers in the community will use it.

You don't need to be an expert in the field of health and adult literacy to use this pack. What is needed is to motivate people to take an active role in their health. Health promotion relies heavily on the written word, in leaflets, in newspapers and on posters so an



Mary Love, Adult Literacy Organiser and Health Steering Committee member.



The new NALA Health Pack to support literacy learning and tuition.

adult literacy scheme is an ideal setting for a health project. It is hoped that by using the pack the tutors will develop learners' literacy skills in the following:

- Communication skills;
- Decision making;
- Lifelong learning;
- Interpersonal skills.

The Health Pack contains four chapters:

- 1. Being healthy
- 2. Taking medication
- 3. Filling out medical forms
- 4. Healthcare setting

As each of the four sections are separate entities, depending on what is wanted, selection of one or other can be made. The content is designed to give background information and ideas for use. The activities suggested in the pack can be replaced or enlarged upon if this is more suitable to the group involved.

Outside speakers could be invited to talk on subjects in which the groups are interested.

Being healthy

This chapter has the potential to generate a lot of discussion and debate. It encourages people to look at their own lifestyle as well as giving factual information on determinants of health. It also looks at the responsibility of adults for the health and well-being of their children through food and lifestyle, stress and lifestyle and dental health. It includes a list of words that may be heard in dental health. There are lots of pages that can be photocopied and that can be used to improve writing skills.

Taking medication

As literacy practitioners we are all aware of the OECD findings where the example of understanding the taking of medication is given, to determine literacy level one.

Studies have shown that as many as half of the people on medication don't take it in the prescribed way. This chapter hopes to help people distinguish between the various types of medications, to recognise key words associated with medication and to feel more confident in talking to the doctor or chemist about medication.

Again there are ample explanations of the common terminology used in taking medication. In the discussion of selected words it is highlighted that the group will probably know a lot of the words already but some may need to be checked out by going to a chemist. This is particularly useful for a learner building up a communications portfolio. The medicine table quiz included could be used as a fun ending to any group work.

Studies have shown that as many as half of the people on medication don't take it in the prescribed way.



Even pharmacy shop fronts can be confusing to somebody with low literacy levels.

Filling out medical forms

The objectives of this chapter are to know where and how to apply for health services and to recognise key information being requested. To practice filling out forms and to raise awareness of patients rights and access to information.

Discussion and role-play can be very effectively used to explore this chapter. This again could be a valuable asset in FETAC (NCVA) portfolios at foundation level.

The sample of standard features on forms is a useful aid to tutors. There is also a list of services and information on the service that they provide. Tips for both tutor and learner are an interesting addition.

Healthcare setting

The aim of this chapter is to have an understanding of the health system and develop skills that increase confidence in communicating with healthcare staff. Although healthcare staff play a key role in creating an environment where patients feel comfortable communicating, as literacy practitioners we have a role to play in helping students anticipate what the experience might involve. Role-play and discussion are very appropriate ways to practice communication within a health setting.

Included also is an idea to create a directory of local health services. This would make a very interesting project at many different literacy levels. It could develop skills in using the telephone directory, as well as communication skills, group skills and possibly accessing the local library and health clinic.

The section on finding your way in a hospital will be a useful tool for us all!

The activities for understanding hospital signage and medical jargon could be made into fun activities such as crosswords and word sleuths.

Medical words are often incomprehensible to the lay person, so having the everyday word and example will be of enormous value in explaining the terms. This also applies to the interesting page on a special area of medicine (ology) pronunciation, name of specialist (ologist) and example of illness (itis) and parts of the body.

The Health Pack is designed to give ideas and suggestions on how to develop skills which people will find useful in matters relating to everyday health issues. It is not an A to Z book on illness and cures! The sample worksheets are easily adaptable. It acknowledges prior knowledge and informs tutors as to the level of knowledge and

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Tackling printed instructions on a medicine pack

understanding of the learner. In its open-ended approach it gives scope for development. It is intended that other material will be used so a list of resource material on health information, websites and workbooks is included at the end of each section. As medical forms and entitlements are often changed in the December budget it is essential that materials to hand are relevant and up to date.

It is hoped to adapt the Health Pack so that elements can be used on the website <u>www.literacytools.</u> ie

This is a welcome addition to the Irish resource materials for working in adult literacy and credit is due to the writer Janet Kehelly and NALA Health Project Coordinator Jennifer Lynch.

Look out for free copies! These will be sent to each VEC scheme and other basic education settings next autumn.

Learners' Regional Forums – preliminary report

Introduction

2004 was the third year that NALA organised Regional Learners' Forums. In total four Forums took place this year with one more due to take place on May 29th in Dublin.

Venue and Dates of the Regional Learners' Forums 2004

Mullingar	Saturday 6 th March
Cork	Saturday 27 th March
Galway	Saturday 24 th April
Kilkenny	Saturday 15 th May
Dublin	Saturday 29 th May

Objectives of the Regional Learners' Forums

The Forums offer a safe space for learners to meet and hear what is happening in other schemes as well as to hear about what is happening at national level. This year Margaret Murray and Peter Kiernan, the two Regional Development Workers in NALA facilitated the Forums. We, Peter and I, emphasised participation and empowerment throughout the facilitation process for the Forums. Following de-briefing and an



Margaret Murray, NALA Regional Development Worker, Southern Region

The Forums
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analysis of lessons learned from each Learners' Forum, we found it rewarding to be able to refine our presentations and approach in the subsequent Forum.

What makes the Forums a safe space for learners?

We used the following approaches to ensure the Forums were a 'safe space' for learners:

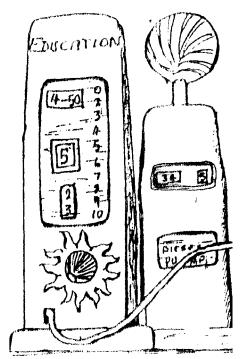
- Welcoming learners personally on arrival;
- Tea and coffee to break the ice:
- A detailed introduction to the day – We outlined that the Forum is a place to talk and tease out ideas about what is important to learners at that time;
- Acknowledging that learners have different needs. For example some people might have difficulties with spelling while others might have difficulties reading, others again might not have English as a first language;
- Emphasising that learners participating in the forums have all taken a positive step to improve their skills;
- Highlighting that there are no right or wrong answers;
- Giving people the opportunity and space to speak. However, learners did not have to speak if they did not wish (and no pressure was put on them to speak, instead plenty of opportunities were provided for them to speak if they wished to);
- Asking people to participate in the way they wished. We said for example "If you feel you need to go for a walk or anything, just do that"
- Using small group discussions

- as well as feedback in larger groups;
- Using pictures to stimulate discussion

Where do the Regional Learners' Forums fit into the overall work of NALA?

1. Responding to NALA'S STRATEGIC PLAN

Step 4.3 of NALA's Strategic Plan 2002-2006 states that NALA will provide training to adult literacy organisers, tutors (paid and volunteer) and learners. While the Regional Learners' Forums are not strictly training events, learners are able to identify training and other needs they have through these Forums. Learners are involved in many ways with NALA - see Learner Development Policy (NALA, 2004). The Forums can encourage learners to take part and articulate their needs. They also provide NALA staff and Executive with an opportunity to inform learners and get learners' input into what is planned for the future, taking learners' needs into account. The Forums can encourage learners to take part and articulate their needs.





2. Responding to NALA's definition of LITERACY

Our definition of literacy states:

"Literacy involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and numeracy. It also encompasses aspects of personal development – social, economic, emotional - and is concerned with improving self-esteem and building confidence. It goes far beyond the mere technical skills of communication. The underlying aim of good literacy practice is to enable people to understand and reflect critically on their life circumstances with a view to exploring new possibilities and initiating constructive change."

This NALA definition of literacy is broad. It goes beyond reading and writing. The Regional Learners' Forums are one way of contributing to literacy work in this broad sense. NALA is interested in learners having a chance to analyse their personal experiences, gain confidence and put suggestions forward to bring about change. Adult Literacy Organisers and tutors already play an active role with learners in one to one and group tuition. Through the Forums we offer learners another opportunity to reflect on their experience of adult education and also to learn new things about themselves and others around them.

3. ENCOURAGING LEARNERS TO BECOME INVOLVED IN BROADER ISSUES

NALA is also interested in learners becoming more active citizens,

having an opportunity to discuss issues in wider society. The Forums provided learners with an opportunity to discuss some common issues or concerns and provide a voice for learners to lobby for positive change. At the local level, learners can organise together and perhaps participate in the Quality Framework. At Regional Learners' Forums, learners can share what is working well and consider improvements or issues for NALA to work on in the future. The Regional Learners' Forums are one way in which we can support learners to reflect critically on their life circumstances

The three themes of this year's Regional Learners' Forum

The Forums were divided into three sections with three themes.

These themes were:

- 1. NALA and learners;
- 2. What it means to be learner-centred:
- 3. Future activities for learners.

In the first section entitled "NALA and learners" many learners were not aware of (and were pleasantly surprised by) all the different ways learners can at present be involved in NALA. The lack of awareness among learners raises questions about the best ways for NALA to communicate with learners. A combination of approaches is likely to be the most suitable. Improving the channels of communication to learners is a key issue that requires further discussion. The NALA Learners' Development Policy has already outlined some possible ways to approach communication with

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Learners get down to some serious literacy work.

learners, but we would welcome further suggestions particularly for innovative communication methods. In addition to the overhead presentation about NALA and learners, Mr. Kevin O'Duffy and Mr. Michael O'Toole spoke to the participants at the Learners' Forum as members of NALA's Executive Staff. Their speeches gave a good insight to those present at the Forums about what getting involved at a national level can be like.

The second section was concerned with asking learners their opinion about "What it means to be learner centred?" We felt that it was important that learners would have the opportunity to discuss "learner-centred", a phrase that is central to the ethos of adult literacy in Ireland.

Some of the learners' replies:

"Centre of attention of the tutor"

"Better than school"

"Teacher's Personality"

"On the same level"

"Learn what you want to learn"

"Commitment getting up in the morning"

"How the learner wants to learn is important"

"Saying not happy about something to the tutor"

"You're telling the tutor what you want to do".

We gave an overhead presentation on what it means to be learnercentred echoing much of what was raised by learners themselves. As part of this section the following picture was used to stimulate discussion.

The third (afternoon) section covered the theme "Future activities for learners". Through this session we had the opportunity to find out what learners thought of the future activities that will be included in the proposed Learners' Development Plan.

Some suggestions for learners included:

- Activities that would share further information about what is already happening for learners around the country. This was strongly supported by learners. Any ideas of how NALA staff could best link with learners would be greatly appreciated;
- Bringing back writing weekends was also a popular activity that learners were interested in.

Additional ideas put forward by learners included:

- Developing more materials geared towards young people;
- An assertiveness course for learners;
- Hearing about how students have progressed after adult literacy;
- Organising regional meetings every six months.

Evaluation

We asked people how they found the day and the following were some of the comments we received:

"It was easy to speak up"

"Accessibility important"

"Only meeting where I was not watching the clock"

...we would welcome further suggestions particularly for innovate communication methods.

"Good not to sign in straight away"

"Hope word will come out and people can come"

"Talking and explaining of words was good."

We hope that the Learners who came this year will spread the word about how accessible the Regional Learners' Forums are to learners.

NALA will consider all the ideas that were raised at the Regional Learners' Forums. A more thorough report summarising all the Forums will be prepared following the Dublin Regional Learners' Forum, which will take place on May 29th.

We would welcome any comments or ideas about the Regional Learners' Forums. Please contact Margaret Murray mmurray@nala.
ie or telephone 021 4317011.

Monaghan take a SMART approach to Workplace Basic Education

In 2003, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment accepted a proposal from NALA, under the In-Company Training measure, funded by the European Social Fund (ESF). This aim of the project was to devise a workplace basic education (WBE) model for small and medium enterprises (SME's). Inez Bailey, Director of



Helen Fitzpatrick, Organiser, Co. Monaghan Adult Literacy Scheme



'Weighing up' - workplace numeracy skills in action.

NALA, subsequently contacted Mr Larry McCluskey, CEO of Co Monaghan VEC, with regard to the undertaking of this project that is now up and running. It represents a genuine opportunity for the VEC to extend its adult literacy and outreach services and to support the concept of "Lifewide learning", as identified in the White Paper.

The project began with a series of meetings and discussions between NALA and Co. Monaghan VEC. Once the details and modus operandi had been agreed, recruitment of the project coordinator began. The co-ordinator, Linda Pinkster, commenced employment at the end of March. Since then, work has been underway to establish and develop the project.

One of the co-ordinator's first tasks was to name the project. It is called the SMART (Skills, Management and Relevant Training) Programme. Some key details about SMART are outlined in Box 1.

Once christened, implementation of the programme began. Initially, research was undertaken to establish what companies are operating in the county and what other forms of company training are provided. From this research, it is clear that there is no similar training on offer to employees in the county.

It was agreed to target a small number of businesses in the first instance to ascertain the level of interest. Twelve companies were selected from the manufacturing sector. These companies have a track record of providing training for employees and some have received the FAS Excellence through People award. It was felt that such companies have already demonstrated a commitment to employees' training and development and might, therefore, be more receptive to the idea of WBE. Furthermore, spring/summer months are particularly busy for the service sector. Thus, it was agreed to delay work in this area until the autumn.

Promotional literature was prepared and sent to the manager and HR/training manager (where applicable) in each of the twelve companies. This initial correspondence was then followed by a phone call (many phone calls in some incidences!) to establish if companies were interested.

Of the twelve contacted, four expressed interest and meetings were arranged. From discussions with these companies, two distinct groups requiring training emerge:

1. National employees with basic skills deficiencies - this group are precluded from taking on additional responsibility

From this research, it is clear that there is no similar training on offer to employees in the county.



'Checking stock sheets' - workplace literacy in action.

Box I

Key Details re SMART

WHAT?

WHAT IS SMART?

SMART is a workplace basic education (WBE) programme. It is an innovative way of improving adult literacy skills in organisations. The SMART programme may include literacy, numeracy, communications, computer skills, interpersonal skills, problem solving and report writing

WHERE?

WHERE DOES SMART OPERATE?

SMART is designed to develop WBE programmes in SMEs in Co. Monaghan. The training is provided on site, where possible, or in a mutually convenient location.

WHEN?

WHEN DOES SMART TAKE PLACE?

To be of real benefit, the programme should be of 80 hours duration with each individual class lasting 2 hours. However, SMART is a flexible programme and can be tailored to meet the needs and availability of employees. Shorter "taster sessions" can be organised in advance of a longer course.

Ideally, the training should take place during working time. This requires a high level of commitment on the part of the employer and a willingness to release staff to participate. However, it is not always practical or feasible for employers to release staff for training. In such incidences, training can be organised to take place outside of working time and the employees will be paid to participate.

WHO?

Who organises and who can participate in **SMART?**

SMART, is a joint project between Co. Monahan VEC and NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency), funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) In-company Training measure. The VEC in Co. Monaghan has employed a part-time co-ordinator who is responsible for initiating contact and working with employers and employees in the development and operation of training programmes.

WHY?

WHY SHOULD A COMPANY PARTICIPATE IN A WBE PROGRAMME?

In a rapidly changing economy and with the advances in technology, employees require increasingly higher literacy levels if they are to adapt and perform effectively in the workplace. Furthermore, increased health and safety legislation requires employees to understand signs, notices and instructions and to record faults, analyse problems and communicate effectively. This places increased responsibility on employers and increased pressure on employees with literacy difficulties. Problems of staff recruitment and retention, lowered output, high absenteeism, higher accident rates and poor quality control are all linked to basic skills difficulties among staff.

To be of real benefit, the programme should be of 80 hours duration with each individual class lasting 2 hours.



'Reading a technical drawing' - workplace literacy in action.

SMART has a role to play in combating these problems. It is an innovative action aimed at improving literacy skills in the working environment. It offers benefits for employers and employees alike.

HOW MUCH?

How much does a WBE programme cost?

The estimated budget for a 30 week programme for 1 group of 7-8 employees is €12,000. This

cost is borne by the project, i.e. the employer does not pay for the training. The employer's contribution is the cost of releasing staff to participate in the training. If this is not feasible, and employees are willing, training can be scheduled to take place outside of working time. In this incidence, a training allowance, equal to the employees' hourly rate of pay, is payable for each hour of training attended.

or seeking promotion in the workplace because they lack the skills necessary to fill out forms, maintain records, do interviews, etc.

2. A large, and growing, population of non-national employees - this group cannot fully integrate into the workplace or community, as they lack the basic language skills.

To meet the needs of both groups, training is required in a number of areas:

- Communications;
- Teamwork;
- Form filling;
- English language;
- Basic computers.

It is planned to commence this training in three companies over the summer months. Initially, the training will comprise 20-24 hour courses, which can be built on, if there is significant interest. One of the companies is willing to release staff during working time to participate. The remaining two felt that this would not be feasible due to production schedules.

The outcome of these initial training courses will, hopefully, be positive for the participants. Furthermore, it will provide relevant feedback and learning for the company and the VEC regarding skills needs, relevant training and effective forms of delivery.

This feedback and learning will form part of the overall project evaluation and inform future action.

It is an innovative action aimed at improving literacy skills in the working environment.



'Reading machine operation detail' - workplace literacy in action.

New Awards Will Create New Opportunities For Adult Learners

A current FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) Working Group has two NALA representatives:

- Frances Ward, NALA
 Chairperson and an Adult
 Literacy Organiser with the City
 of Dublin VEC
- Jenny Derbyshire, Development Worker with NALA

This group is exploring issues in relation to standards and awards at Levels 1 and 2 in the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) new Framework of Oualifications.

In this article Jenny Derbyshire describes:

- The new framework:
- How the new levels relate to the present system of awards, and
- What the working group is doing at present.

Developments in accreditation

The new developments in the area of accreditation will benefit

many learners involved in adult basic education who are interested in gaining nationally recognised certificates.

CURRENT SITUATION

At present awards are available from FETAC (the Further Education and Training Awards Council) in many areas related to general education and training. FETAC are currently operating the processes and making the awards of the former awarding bodies (FAS, CERT, Teagasc and NCVA).

FETAC / NCVA Foundation Level modules have proved particularly suitable for adults and young people taking part in basic education and training programmes in non-formal settings. Many adult literacy learners submit portfolios for accreditation at Foundation Level

The core modules for the award are Communications, Mathematics and Personal Effectiveness (which is delivered as an integrated module). To gain a full award learners do the three core modules and the five elective modules. Learners are awarded a Record of Achievement for each single module and can build towards a full award if they wish to do so.

From a wide range of the shorter elective modules some are especially popular with adults and young people. These include:

- Art and Design;
- Crafts of all kinds, including upholstery, wood craft, metalwork, puppetry and textiles;
- Computer Literacy;
- Drama, Video Production;
- Food and Nutrition, Food and Cookery,



Jenny Derbyshire, NALA Family Literacy Policy Worker



- Caring for Children, Child Development and Play;
- Horticulture;
- Preparation for Work;
- Personal and Interpersonal Skills.

Working for these modules has helped learners structure their knowledge, understanding and skills and prepare their work for accreditation, while still being able to follow approaches that suit their style of learning. The modules allow for a range of different methods of both delivery and presentation of evidence for assessment

RECOGNISING A RANGE OF SKILLS

One strong feature of the FETAC / NCVA approach to awards has been the possibility of gaining Records of Achievement for practical demonstration of skills and knowledge, without a high level of literacy. This relates well to a Multiple Intelligences view of education and is very important for learners whose strengths, skills and intelligences may not been recognised in the traditional school system of awards.

However, many learners who would like to start to achieve nationally recognised certificates find that foundation level modules require a level of work that they are not yet ready to meet. Many literacy learners have therefore found that although they feel ready to work for accreditation there has not been a suitable award available in the Irish system. The new National Framework of Qualifications with its two proposed levels 1 and 2 will address this need.

THE NEW FRAMEWORK

The National Framework of Qualifications established by the NQAI (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland) creates a single, internationally recognised structure through which learning achievements may be accredited from the access Level 1 through to Level 10, which matches PhD standard.

At each level the standards are set in the same areas:

- **Knowledge**, which is divided into 'breadth' and 'kind';
- Know-how and Skill, divided into 'range' and 'selectivity';
- Competence, divided into 'context', role' 'learning to learn' and 'insight'.

FETAC will be responsible for awards from Levels 1 to 6. The current FETAC / NCVA Foundation Level awards will probably be placed mainly at Level 3 on the new framework.

This means that the new Levels 1 and 2 will make accreditation available to learners working at stages that have not been recognised previously in the Irish system of national awards. This will be very important to learners in adult basic education, workplace education and training settings.

Expert Working Group

FETAC has brought together an Expert Working Group to provide assistance to the Council with regard to the new Levels 1 and 2 in the National Qualifications Framework. The group will assist in the development of policies and processes for the determination of standards for awards at these new access levels

'The new Levels 1 and 2 will make accreditation available to learners working at stages that have not been recognised previously in the Irish system of national awards. This will be very important to learners in adult basic education, workplace education and training settings.'

The working group has been convened by Marie Gould from FETAC and is made up of a small number of individuals who have knowledge and expertise specifically relevant to policy development in determining standards at Levels 1 and 2.

ESTABLISHING GENERAL PRINCIPLES

At present the group is exploring and defining the kinds of awards needed at the new levels. It is clear that the scope of the awards will need to allow for a diverse range of learners and learning settings. It is vital that the awards are inclusive and support widening participation.

At present a number of underpinning principles are emerging, indicating that the awards must be

- Accessible: there should be no barriers to entry at Level 1;
- Genuinely learner-centred: reflecting the needs and requirements of different learners;
- Flexible:
- Relevant;
- Integrated with other areas of development and achievement.

An important point in discussions related to literacy and numeracy. Some learners, especially people living with various disabilities, will develop communication skills without ever being able to achieve reading or writing skills. Much discussion centred on the proposal that literacy should therefore be an optional element, rather than a core requirement of awards at the new Level 1, in order to maintain the principle of access at this level.

Mapping the Learning Journey and the new levels

At an early point in the working group discussions it became clear that aspects of Mapping the Learning Journey are relevant to the areas of learning and levels described at Levels 1 and 2.

Mapping the Learning Journey is a framework that supports teaching and learning in adult basic education. It is not an accreditation system, but will help tutors and learners to chart progress and the development of learning. The framework was initiated by NALA and has been thoroughly researched and piloted in conjunction with adult basic education tutors and learners in a wide range of settings. Following this pilot phase, NALA expects to publish the framework during 2004.

As learners and tutors begin to use the Mapping the Learning Journey framework, they are likely to find that it matches the kinds of work they may wish to produce for accreditation at the new Levels 1 and 2.

I. AREAS OF LEARNING

The four cornerstones of the Mapping the Learning Journey framework relate closely to the areas of learning described in the qualifications framework, as shown below:

'The awards will need to allow for a diverse range of learners and learning settings. It is vital that the awards are inclusive and support widening participation.'

Table I - Areas of Learning

Mapping the Learning Journey: 4 Cornerstones	NQAI National Qualifications Framework: Areas
I. Knowledge and skill base	Knowledge in terms of breadth and kind Know-how and skill in relation to range and selectivity
2. Range of application	Competence in terms of context
3. Fluency and independence	Competence in terms of role
4. Depth of understanding	Competence in terms of insight

2. Levels

Initial linking of the three levels of Mapping the Learning Journey to the new national levels for accreditation indicate that these fit as follows:

Table 2 - Levels for Accreditation

Mapping the Learning Journey: 3 Levels	NQAI National Qualifications Framework Levels I and 2
Beginning Level	Level I
Mid level Upper Level	Level 2 and perhaps merging into parts of Level 3

This match makes sense, as Mapping the Learning Journey is intended to support teaching and learning up to the present FETAC / NCVA Foundation Level, which is likely to be placed at the new Level 3.

Next steps

FETAC is currently defining 'Fields of Learning' for awards and the Working Group is exploring the fields of learning and the kinds of units that could be most useful at Levels 1 and 2.

At present the group hopes that it may be possible to initiate a pilot project for developing Levels 1 and 2 early in 2005.

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A Milestone in the Development of Numeracy Provision

The NALA Numeracy Strategy 'Meeting the Numeracy Challenge' was launched by Minister Mary Coughlan TD, Department of Social and Family Affairs, at the 23rd Annual General Meeting of NALA on the 3 April 2004. The strategy provides a roadmap for the further development of adult numeracy in Ireland and its integration into all Adult Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision.

Why was the strategy needed?

As a developed country, Ireland and her citizens live in an environment where the capacity of the workforce to accumulate and manipulate knowledge is vital, if the national economy is to continue to prosper and be competitive, in a globalised. rapidly changing market place (OECD, 2000)1. A lack of adequate numeracy skills in the population will critically affect this prospect, both on a national and an individual level. Numeracy skills underlie independent functioning and action as a parent, citizen or worker, and can act as a gatekeeper for entrance into further education

and into many technical and other occupational areas.

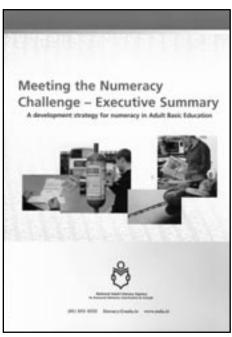
Compelling facts

- 1. NALA has drawn up a dedicated Numeracy Strategy.
- 2. The strategy sets out goals for the development of resources, numeracy tutor training, assessment and accreditation, awareness and promotion and the effective monitoring of provision over a three-year period.
- 3. For the first time numeracy has been clearly defined in the context of ABE in Ireland.
- 4. The need for a NALA numeracy development worker has been highlighted.
- Numeracy awareness raising for ABE providers and other relevant organisations and for potential tutors and learners needs to take place nationally, regionally and locally.
- 6. Necessary resources need to be put in place to deliver the full strategy and its benefits

The relationship between Ireland's economy and education provision, especially 'adult education', often focuses on whether existing provision can meet the needs of new economic developments, on how education provision should be developed to prepare future generations for the knowledge-based economy. In Ireland, the government has increased its funding to adult education dramatically and has put forward



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The Executive Summary of the NALA numeracy strategy 'Meeting the Numeracy challenge'

OECD, 2000. Literacy in the Information age: final report of the International Adult Literacy Survey, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris.

a number of concurrent policies as drivers for development. A central focus for these developments is the provision for adult literacy and numeracy in ABE. The White Paper on Adult Education 'Learning for Life' (2000)² emphasised the need to 'ensure the centrality of universal literacy and numeracy in all lifelong learning policy and practice'. The focus on the development of literacy and numeracy skills was further reinforced in the report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning (2002)³. Numeracy is specifically mentioned within the 'Tackling Educational Disadvantage' Special Initiative of the Governments new national Social Partnership Agreement for 2003-2005, 'Sustaining Progress' (2003).

The manner in which a particular country views numeracy at policy level, will inevitably affect the kind of provision that is available to adult learners in that country. Unless numeracy is clearly defined in its own right, separate from literacy, there is a danger that it will not receive equal prominence in policy provision nor will it be given the necessary impetus required to:

- Systematically explore the nature of numeracy leading to the development of nationally agreed definitions;
- Formulate policy statements about the significance of numeracy in society and create strategies to address the needs identified for training and development;
- Gather reliable data on the extent of need for provision in adult numeracy at a national level (as opposed to quantitative literacy);

 Provide funding for designated research projects in adult numeracy.

NALA has recognised for some time that 'numeracy provision calls for as detailed and thoughtful an approach as has been given to literacy' 4 and the Strategic Plan 2002-2006 made a commitment to develop and promote a dedicated numeracy strategy for Ireland.⁵ Subsequently NALA put together a working group comprising representatives of relevant stakeholders, with a brief to look at and report on current adult numeracy issues, and to produce a proposed strategic plan for adult numeracy. The group met monthly from December 2002 through to May 2003. The resulting report, 'Meeting the Numeracy Challenge,' discusses the findings

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⁶ NALA will: '... develop and promote a dedicated numeracy strategy' (the National Adult Literacy Agency, Strategic Plan 2002-2006, Step 6, p17).



Measuring up at work - a typical numeracy skill

² Learning for Life: White Paper on Adult Education', Government of Ireland, July 2000, p150

Report of the Taskforce on Lifelong Learning, 2002, Stationary Office, Dublin

NALA Guidelines for Good Literacy Work: Policy Document of the National Adult Literacy Agency, (revised edition), NALA: Dublin, p.54

of the working group and details a way forward for the further development of adult numeracy in Ireland.

The findings of the group were underpinned by a review of international development in adult numeracy and the data gathered from both the NALA audit and the research carried out by the University of Limerick⁶.

Supporting research

Internationally adult numeracy as a whole is in an early stage of development. However there has been a significant increase in government funding for ABE in many countries that participated in International Adult Literacy Survey. This funding has led to a range of initiatives aimed at defining and delivering adult numeracy provision. Approaches that have shown noticeable benefits internationally include:

- A clear definition of adult numeracy based on the real needs of adults at this time;
- An integrated lifelong learning approach to adult numeracy provision looking at educational needs from school through to adult learning;
- A methodology for the delivery of adult numeracy provision based on an agreed definition of numeracy;
- An accessible, high quality tutor train programme for adult numeracy tutors;
- A range of networking opportunities for adult numeracy tutors;
- A national core curriculum for adult numeracy (England and Denmark);
- A range of appropriate adult numeracy resource materials.

During autumn 2002 NALA conducted a national numeracy audit of over 400 organisations from adult literacy and other ABE settings. The message that came back from the centres was clear. there is some excellent work on adult numeracy being done nationally but adult numeracy is the 'poor relation' of adult literacy. In addition the need for dedicated professional development for adult numeracy tutors was highlighted. Other research (Maguire, 2003)⁷ concluded that a contributing factor to the current status of numeracy provision in ABE was the lack of a unified concept of numeracy amongst service providers, who were not operating to a generally agreed vision or concept of numeracy in the context of ABE. It was therefore essential that a consistency of approach be applied across the ABE sector and that service providers had a clear national definition of numeracy to follow in providing numeracy services and when interpreting published government policy

Internationally adult numeracy as a whole is in an early stage of development.



At the launch of the numeracy strategy at the NALA AGM were I-r:Terry Maguire; Inez Bailey NALA Director; Mary Coughlan TD, Minister of Social & Family Affairs; Frances Ward Chairperson NALA.

⁶ 'Engendering Numeracy in Adult Mathematics Education with a focus on Tutors: A Grounded Approach (T. Maguire, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Limerick, May 2003)

documents. The Numeracy Strategy meets this need and provides a roadmap for the further development of Adult Numeracy in Ireland, and its integration into all Adult Literacy and Adult Basic Education provision.

The Numeracy Strategy

- Mission Statement;
- Definition of Numeracy;
- Goals:
- Steps in Implementation;
- Recommendations

MISSION STATEMENT

To ensure, by providing accessible high quality learning opportunities, that all adults can develop their numeracy capacity.

DEFINITION OF NUMERACY

Defining what is meant by the term numeracy was a challenging task for the working group. Having reviewed both national and international definitions of numeracy the group proposed its own definition as follows:

'Numeracy is a lifeskill that involves the competent use of mathematical language, knowledge and skills. Numerate adults have the confidence to manage the mathematical demands of real-life situations such as everyday living, work-related settings and in further education, so that effective choices are made in our evolving technological and knowledge-based society.'

THE GOALS OF THE NUMERACY STRATEGY

Over for the next three years to ensure that:

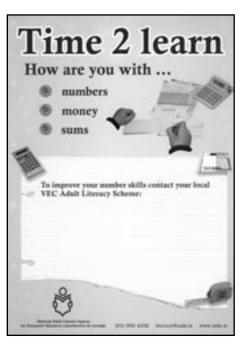
• There is well-resourced quality

- adult numeracy provision throughout Ireland in a range of different settings;
- There is greater participation by adults with numeracy difficulties in learning opportunities;
- There is an increase in the number of suitably trained adult numeracy tutors
- Adult numeracy tutors have access to nationally recognised tutor training provision, designed to meet their training needs;
- There is greater national awareness and understanding of adult numeracy issues; adult numeracy has a high profile within adult literacy;
- Adult literacy schemes and other ABE settings are clearly seen to offer numeracy as an essential and integral part of their provision;
- Adult numeracy provision is supported by the availability of a range of quality tutor and learner numeracy resources.

STEPS TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION

- Raise awareness and profile of adult numeracy issues; promote adult numeracy to both learners and tutors; further develop a nationally recognised, accessible training programme for tutors of adult numeracy in Ireland.
- Develop a wider range of Irish-produced adult numeracy materials; inform the development of appropriate assessment and progression routes for adult numeracy.
- Carry out research on adult numeracy issues, including the types of resources required by adult numeracy tutors and adult

Defining
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General NALA poster for promoting numeracy tuition.

learners.

 Support the development of new approaches to adult numeracy; produce a system for monitoring and evaluating developments in adult numeracy; aid the formulation and implementation of central Government policy on adult numeracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendations put forward by the working group include the following:

- Integrate numeracy into all literacy and ABE provision with a concomitant increase in resources for adult numeracy;
- Create the role of NALA Numeracy Development Worker;
- Include numeracy as an explicit and integral part of all initial training of adult literacy tutors;
- Establish a numeracy training programme development group, to review training needs and further develop a nationally recognised, accessible numeracy tutor training programme;
- Review numeracy resources currently available nationally and internationally;
- Include a numeracy specialist on the NALA materials working group;
- Produce a basic numeracy resource pack;
- Provide a methodology and support for the development of a range of dedicated numeracy resource materials;
- Support and facilitate an adult numeracy network;
- Provide a clear path of

- progression options for adult numeracy, including the option of accreditation at a national level;
- Devise and deliver a specific Numeracy Awareness Training programme;
- Devise a promotional strategy for adult numeracy that focuses on adult learners, parents and adult numeracy tutors;
- Collect and record adult numeracy statistics as a separate item within the overall data for adult literacy.

Having a recognised strategy for adult numeracy means that in the future numeracy will be tackled head-on in provision. The potential benefits of this in terms of personal empowerment and active citizenship are significant and include, reduced inequalities in learning opportunities, less social exclusion and sustained economic competitiveness.

Thus, it may be seen that this national numeracy strategy produced by NALA marks an important milestone in the development of adult numeracy provision in Ireland. However the success of any strategy invariably lies in its implementation. To be successful, the implementation of this modern and comprehensive numeracy strategy must be adequately resourced, prioritised and carefully planned. It is vital to the national interest that the necessary resources, in terms of finance and personnel, be urgently put in place to deliver this groundbreaking strategy in full. If this investment is made, then Ireland's citizens and, as a result Ireland's economy, will reap very real benefits. 🙈

Having a recognised strategy for adult numeracy means that in the future numeracy will be tackled head-on in provision.

ESOL: The Big Picture

"I have Beginners and Elementary in the same class. What resources should I use?"

"Some of my Beginners have literacy needs, some have a university education. What activities can I use so that everyone can participate?"

"Where can I find resources on Irish life? Do I have to make them myself?"

"My learners can't speak a word. How can I get them to use English outside the class?"

Project Background

These were just a few of the questions that Louise Michael and myself constantly heard while facilitating the NALA "Introduction to ESOL" and other TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) workshops around Ireland over the last two years. Some of these were questions we had asked ourselves when teaching refugees, asylum seekers and other migrants here in Ireland; they were also questions continually voiced by other teachers at our respective centres, the Dublin Adult Learning Centre and SPIRASI. The learners were eager to learn, the teachers were enthusiastic, but a dearth of culturally and linguistically appropriate material for these

Beginner ESOL learners was, and still is, a significant challenge.

THE TEXTBOOK QUESTION

When holding the" Introduction to ESOL" training course, the issue of whether or not to use standard TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) textbooks always arose. While many teachers used selected exercises or units from standard texts, the general consensus was that these textbooks were not appropriate for the ESOL learner usually encountered in a VEC class for the following reasons:

- Most textbooks are
 ethnocentric, assuming that
 learners will understand and
 relate to the western-European/
 US cultural references.
 Many of the topics or themes
 in the books can be either
 alien or inappropriate to the
 backgrounds of learners, such
 as holidays abroad, Michael
 Jackson's lifestyle or British
 boarding schools.
- Most TEFL texts are aimed at learners studying on a short-



Genevieve Halkett, ESOL Trainer



ESOL Leaner gets down to work.

- term basis in Canada, Britain or the US or those abroad who wish to go on holiday, do business in or pursue a course of study in a college or university in those countries.
- These course books also assume that learners following a certain course all come from the same formal educational background. In contrast, however, many of our learners have had sporadic or disrupted schooling, limited formal education or have varying levels of literacy in their first language or in English (they may write in a different script). It also assumes that learners are able to follow an intensive course for academic reasons (15 hours or more a week). Because of this, there is very little room in the text for consolidation of past material. The tests at the end of units are often difficult for learners unaccustomed to the format.
- Many of the exercises in the book do not suit the learning methodologies our learners are used to or are expecting.
- The language in the textbooks is almost always formal and the accents on the tapes are British or North American; there is very little colloquial expression.
- Because the books are for classroom use only, the learners are unable to take what they have learnt home for review and revision; this means many of them will be taking notes on the book in class or copying directly from the book and will not be taking part in class discussion. Those listening to the teacher who is using the book will have no material for consolidation at home.
- Our learners are ESOL

(English for Speakers of Other Languages) learners: they need survival English for everyday use where grammatical structures are incorporated into functional English.

Most teachers report that their learners repeatedly request some kind of "text," since they require structure and consistency and because many may have to be absent for various reasons (illness, child care, working shifts, etc.) and would like to keep up with class work. Accordingly, a pack of carefully selected materials from skills-based books usually satisfies most learners.

The inevitable response is: "Which materials?" There are many UK, Canadian and US ESOL texts with excellent resources, including: Friends, Families and Folktales and Writing Works from Language and Literacy Plus (UK); the Recycle Your English series from Georgian Press (UK); Teaching Literacy in ESOL Classes from Avanti Books (UK): Longman's Picture Stories and Apply Yourself series (US); Steck-Vaughn's



ESOL learners discuss an exercise during a tuition session.

English ASAP series (US); Living in English (National Textbook Company, US) and the Canadian National Adult Literacy Database (www.nald.com).

Even though teachers find the above texts extremely versatile and easy to use, they are aimed at local immigrant populations (e.g., the Punjabi community in the UK, the Hmong in the US and the Chinese in Canada) and may not be culturally appropriate or relevant to the Nigerians, Romanians, Ukrainians, Moldovans, Algerians and Congolese which make up the majority of the new communities in Ireland.

Another drawback of these resources is their irrelevance to the local specifics of: geography, colloquial expressions, shops and services, currency or social activities and customs. Although an exercise in a UK text may fulfil the structures and tasks needed by beginning ESOL learners (e.g., asking about bus fares or describing food), most learners may not feel that knowing how many pounds sterling it is to get to Manchester or how to cook haggis has any context in their daily life.

These are some of the issues we hope ESOL: The Big Picture resource pack will address.

A New ESOL Resource

After consultation with learners and teachers at our centres and taking into consideration the feedback from participants at our training sessions over the last two years, co-developer Louise Michael and I have developed themes covering information and activities that are absent in contemporary ESOL materials.

The pack is divided into three modules, with themed units contained in each module. The units and activities are not meant to be used as set textbook lessons; rather, it is hoped they can be used as supplementary material teachers can dip in and out of to suit the needs of their learners. The material is designed for use in various ways and for a variety of learners. Each activity is accompanied by a lesson plan that outlines how to set up and carry out the activity and suggests variations and extended activities.

Although the material is aimed at Beginner ESOL learners, many exercises are probably more suited to a mixed-level class of Beginners, False Beginners and Low Elementary levels. The emphasis is on task-based learning and spoken production, but each module provides the opportunity for integrated skills (using listening, speaking, reading, writing and vocabulary building).

Mixed literacy levels are also taken into account and many exercises



ESOL learners enjoying a literacy tuition session.

require very little written ability, focusing on pictorial prompts and spoken production; in addition, some exercises may also be appropriate for learners with fair to good English but low literacy levels.

Student and teacher-generated materials are included, and may give those using the pack ideas on how to use their most valuable resources - their learners. It may also assist in showing them how they can create material, requiring a minimum of material and time, which is tailored to their own learners' needs and can be used in a variety of ways.

For those teachers using the FETAC ESL Foundation Level Portfolio with their learners, the activities all fulfil the Specific Learning Objectives (SLOs) of this module.

Many of the photos and activities are Dublin-based; however, we have included suggestions for those teachers outside Dublin on how to adapt or create locally based materials. These materials will be piloted by teachers in centres around the country.

The first module, "Children," consists of 4 units: A New Baby, At the Chemist's, At the Doctor's and Education. The activities are varied, including the use of photo storyboards, student writings, group activities and pair work, writing frames, listening activities, dialogues and role-plays, and form-filling exercises.

The second module, "In the Community," includes units on Rights and Responsibilities, In the Community, Getting Around

and Shops and Services, while the "Intercultural Awareness" module contains units on Religions and Festivals, Around Ireland, Family Life and Comparing Cultures.

We realise that these materials are only scratching the surface of ESOL learners' and teachers' needs. We hope, however, that they may provide added culturally relevant material, assist in meeting learners' ESOL and real-life requirements and pave the way for the creation of learner and teachergenerated materials in their own classrooms.

Mixed literacy levels are also taken into account and many exercises require very little written ability, focusing on pictorial prompts and spoken production.

Developing a broad curriculum in Adult Basic Education: the prison education experience

Prison Education in Ireland

Prison education in Ireland, in its modern form, started in the late 1960s and consists of a partnership between the Irish Prison Service and a range of educational agencies from the community, particularly local Vocational Education Committees and Public Library Services. For well over a decade now, teachers have succeeded in involving over 50% of the prison population voluntarily in education.

Adult Basic Education in a prison context

By the early 1980's an adult education philosophy and methodology underpinned teaching in prison and this remains the primary orientation of those

working in prison education today.

During the late 1980's a **further dimension** was integrated - the direct addressing of the personal problems of prisoners that come to light in the context of crime and punishment. Thus, issues such as personal health, addiction awareness, anger management and preparation for release are addressed within the education environment.

Surveys have shown that literacy difficulties are faced by a much larger percentage of people in prison than in the general population. A recent survey by Mark Morgan and Mary Kett (2003) showed that half the respondents from the prison population were at Level 1 or below of the International Adult Literacy Survey, compared with 25% in the general population (25; see also an article on this survey in the NALA Journal, Winter 2003). This context affects many aspects of the curriculum in prison education.

STYLES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

There are a number of striking aspects to the style of teaching and learning that can be found in Irish prisons.

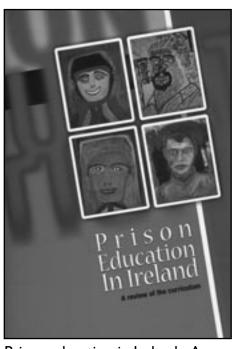
INFORMAL APPROACH

Prison classrooms usually have an informal look and atmosphere about them. To an outsider this may appear loose or unstructured, yet this informality plays an important part in creating a non-threatening, flexible and encouraging learning environment for the student.

The importance of the learning atmosphere must be viewed



Kevin Warner, Co-ordinator of Education, Irish Prison Service.



Prison education in Ireland - A review of the curriculum.

particularly in the context of working with people who may have had difficult educational experiences that frequently ended in 'failure', where the student was often excluded within the classroom itself.

Bringing the outside in

Education in prison tries to 'normalise', to bring life in prison as close as possible to that outside:

'It allows the prisoner to be part of a life that is officially cut off from him/her and shows something of the possibilities for living after his/her time in prison is over.' (Prison Education in Ireland, 13)

FLEXIBILITY AND CREATIVITY

In prison education, as is appropriate for adult education, a great deal is left to the professional judgement of teachers in the way classes, courses and activities are planned and conducted.

Teachers must make great efforts to adapt to their own specific prison environment, whether working with juveniles, older men, women or other distinct groups.

Sentence lengths affect both the curriculum and approaches to learning, for example:

- teachers in prisons where there is a high turnover have to develop short compact courses;
- others face the challenge of keeping long-term prisoners motivated and interested over a lengthy period.

Report on the curriculum in prison education

In April this year **Prison Education in Ireland: a review**

of the curriculum was published. The purpose of this publication is to outline and review the curriculum in Irish prisons, which has been developing for more than thirty years, in response to the needs of the prison population. The document describes the variety, depth and quality of the service provided by the Prison Education

AIMS OF THE REPORT

Units.

The report has two related aims:

- Firstly, it aims to provide information on education in Irish prisons and create a context for teachers who are entering this area for the first time.
- Secondly, the report fulfils an evaluative function. As an overview of what is seen as best practice in prison education, it seeks to highlight existing accomplishments, look to future possibilities, and provide a checklist that prison educators can use to examine areas where programmes can be improved or developed.

RATIONALE OF PRISON EDUCATION

The first part of the curriculum report explores the rationale of prison education, touching on aims and objectives, methodology and other themes outlined above.

FOUR PRISONS

The second section describes four specific contexts that prison teachers work in:

- open prisons;
- juvenile institutions;
- womens' prisons and
- places largely housing sex offenders.

'The importance of the learning atmosphere must be viewed particularly in the context of working with people who may have had difficult educational experiences that frequently ended in 'failure', where the student was often excluded within the classroom itself.'

Curriculum for adult basic education in Irish prisons

The third section is the heart of the report, detailing the major subject areas provided in prisons. This part of the document shows in particular how a broad curriculum can be developed in an adult basic education context, where many topic areas are presented in ways that make them accessible for learners with very little previous experience of education.

I. LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Literacy teaching and learning is addressed by building on best practice for literacy work with adults and young adults in the community outside. Some learners work in a one-to-one context, but most learn in a group setting. Here three or four learners work with a teacher on both individual and group learning activities, depending on the learning styles and interests of the people involved. Literacy learning based on the learners' own words and language, often through the "language experience" approach, has led to the publication of readers by adult literacy students.

Literacy students are also encouraged to take part in other classes. 'Once the student's confidence begins to grow, he/she can participate in other classes where written work is required. Doing this, with the support of the literacy class, can further increase self-confidence.... and enjoyment' (25).

In Shelton Abbey, an open prison in Co Wicklow, a family literacy course has been introduced. During the six-week course, learners discuss how children learn literacy in the home and plan ways in which they can still take part in this while in prison. By the end of the course the men either tape a story for their children or practise a story, which they then read to their children during visiting time.

2. Developing Basic Education through other subject areas

One major point about education in prison is that many topics and subjects are addressed in the context of literacy learning. As so many prisoners face difficulties with reading and writing all teachers have to integrate literacy approaches in their subject areas. Aspects of the curriculum discussed and described throughout the report reveal the kinds of developments that can take place in the context of adult basic education. These include:

- General Subjects
- The Arts
- Practical subjects
- Home Economics
- Computer Applications

'Education in prison tries to 'normalise', to bring life in prison as close as possible to that outside'



The many sides of prison education.

GENERAL SUBJECTS

Many subjects in the usual school curriculum are adapted to suit adults returning to learning after many years of alienation from the school system, together with wider topics popular with adult learners, such as philosophy and sociology.

A wide range of approaches is used to engage learners who have not experienced great success in education in the past. These include discussion, debates, projects, fieldwork, magazine production and other activities, often based on teamwork across subject areas. Learners also gain certificates from a number of educational bodies.

THE ARTS

Performance, visual and creative arts are major elements of the curriculum in all prisons. All aspects of art, music, drama and writing are popular:

'Being able to follow through to the end of an art object, a song, a poem or a play can be particularly fulfilling for a student who has experienced failure in the past.' (33)

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS

These include woodwork, metalwork and horticulture. 'This section of the curriculum appeals greatly to many prisoners..... The use of tools, and machinery, the potential to produce a practical, solid, finished object that can be given to family or friends, provides a great incentive to attend classes' (34).

Home Economics

Most prisoners have to eat alone in their cells so this is often the most popular subject in the prison environment. Home Economics classes provide a chance to learn cooking skills, enjoy a sociable meal together, learn about budgeting, and develop health awareness and social skills.

Computer Applications

This is an important feature of the attempt to retain links with developments in the outside world, for both short term and long term prisoners, although Internet access is prohibited at present in most prisons.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE CURRICULUM

The report also describes a number of other important curriculum areas, including:

- Physical Education;
- Multi-disciplinary work which focuses on issues relating to 'offending behaviour', such as addiction awareness, thinking skills and anger management;
- Pre-release courses;
- Post-release projects in the community, which seek to support the continuation of the educational effort beyond the prison gates;
- Third-level courses, such as those offered by the Open University and the National College of Art and Design, in close co-operation with VEC staff.

'Issues for the Future'

The final section of the report draws largely on a huge number of ideas, aspirations and suggestions that came from teachers working with prisoners. This illustrates the dynamic change that is all the time bubbling away in prison education, as teachers adapt and respond to new needs, problems and possibilities.

'the document shows how a broad curriculum can be developed in an adult basic education context, where many topic areas are presented in ways which make them accessible to learners with very little previous experience of education.

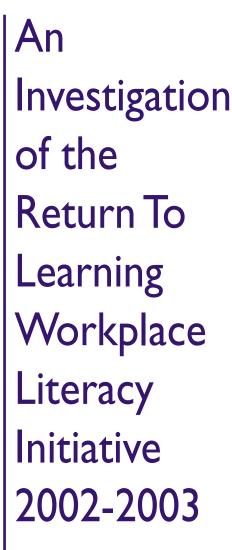
Concluding points

This report was compiled by senior education staff working within prisons, following a process of extensive consultation with, and involvement by, VEC teachers working in prisons. The curriculum review group was chaired by Ciaran Leonard, Head Teacher at Mountjoy Prison, and included the Head Teachers of the Dochas Centre, Shelton Abbey, Fort Mitchel, Arbour Hill and the Midlands Prison. The main author of the report was Catherine Coakley, Deputy Head Teacher at Cork Prison.

Copies of this report are available from the Co-ordinator of Education, Prison Education Service, Block 5, Belfield Office Park, Beaver Row, Dublin 4 or by e-mail request from mlsymes@irishprisons.ie

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- Irish Prison Service, 2004
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- Prison Service, 2003.



The basis of this article is the research undertaken for an MEd dissertation with Mary Immaculate College/UL (2004).

In comparison to other developed countries, the level and range of workplace literacy provision in Ireland is quite limited, as is the level of research into the subject. However, many of the key stakeholders, the Government, NALA, trade unions and employers have recognised the importance of having a capable and literate national workforce and have reacted to varying degrees.

There have been a number of projects in specific locations, but none on a national scale. The main focus of this study was phase¹



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The basis of this article is the research undertaken for an MEd dissertation with Mary Immaculate College/UL (2004).



II of the Return To Learning Initiative (R2L); which involved the 'rolling-out' of the R2L project by making funding available to all Local Authorities throughout the Republic of Ireland. Therefore an investigation of the Return To Learning Initiative (R2L) offered the possibility of generating data from a national workplace literacy project and in the process highlight some of the current issues concerning workplace literacy in the Republic of Ireland. The study had two components: firstly there was the administration of a national postal survey to all R2L co-ordinators, secondly, a case study involving stakeholders in the Waterford City and Co. Kerry R2L projects. Due to the constraints of space I have decided to base this article on the findings² from the national survey.

The data is presented within the framework of three themes:

- Project profile;
- Student impact and
- Project implementation.

Project Profile

GENDER

As can be seen from Table 1, males outnumbered female participants with a ratio of almost 30:1. In fact only 4 of the 20 projects reported any female involvement.

Table I - Participant Numbers

	Male -	Female -	Male -	Female -
	Initial	Initial	Completion	Completion
Number of Participants	393	13	321	12

Patricia Conboy's report (2002) of the five Local Authority Return To Learning Initiative pilot projects (phase I) provided a very useful starting point for this study.

² Data is based on 20 projects.



AGE OF PARTICIPANTS

Fifteen of the R2L co-ordinators provided data regarding the average age of the project participants. The age profile per project of the male participants ranged from 37 to 56 years of age, with the overall mean average being 43.9 years. Data on the age of the female participants was limited, with only 3 of the 4 projects with females contributing data. The age profile across these three projects ranged from 35 to 45, years with the overall mean being 40 years.

PREVIOUS EDUCATION LEVELS

Six of the areas did not supply data relating to previous educational

project is a partnership initiative between the Local Authority and the Vocational Education Committee (VEC). It is a workplace basic education programme for Local Authority employees who wish to improve their basic skills. The 80 hour programme takes place on work time, usually for 4 hours per week. The course takes place in either the workplace, the local VEC or a suitable venue.

The Return to Learning

attainment levels or age on leaving school. The data produced. therefore relates to 278 of the initial 393 participants.

Table 2 - Prior Schooling Levels of R2L Participants

Primary	Junior	Senior	Further
185	58	26	3

AGE ON LEAVING SCHOOL

The low levels of educational attainment are mirrored in the ages at which participants completed full-time schooling. Of the 278 participants whose age was reported, 228 left school at 16 years of age or younger.

SUBJECTS OFFERED

For the purpose of presentation, the subjects were amalgamated into broad categories. For example, some R2L co-ordinators specified spelling, reading and writing whilst others used a generic term such as 'communications'.

Table 3 - Range of Subjects offered by R2L Programme

Subjects	Number of Projects		
Communications	19		
Computers/IT	18		
Mathematics	11		
Personal Skills	9		
Other	2		

Accreditation

Twelve areas worked towards FETAC accreditation with eight of the areas completing their portfolios within the allotted eighty hours. Table 4 indicates the number of projects that employed FETAC modules as an accreditation framework. The figures in brackets indicate that modules were undertaken but had not yet been submitted for assessment at the time of the research.

Table 4 - FETAC accreditation undertaken

Subject	Foundation	Level I	Level 2
Communications	4 (2)	(1)	I
Computers	7 (1)	(1)	
Personal & Interpersonal Skills	(1)		

The situation appears to be rather *ad-hoc* at the moment, this is because it is optional, with some projects employing FETAC accreditation, whilst other groups did not go down the accreditation route. The development of a national R2L certificate in line with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland's ten-stage framework could be considered.

LITERACY ABILITY LEVELS

Of the 20 projects that participated in the study, only twelve indicated that they had undertaken any degree of formal assessment prior to the commencement of the course. The R2L co-ordinators were asked to indicate literacy level according to the three levels of literacy commonly employed by The Department of Education and Science. The summary results are produced in Table 5.

Table 5 - Reported preprogramme literacy levels

			Number
Level I	Level 2	Level 3	of projects
42	133	25	12

Five of the projects reported that whilst they had undertaken a formal pre-course assessment, they had used the completion of the FETAC portfolios as a de facto form of assessment, rather than as a formal post-course assessment protocol.

Apparent improvements in literacy abilities that are directly

The situation appears to be rather adhoc at the moment, with some projects employing FETAC accreditation, whilst other groups did not go down the accreditation route.

attributable to the R2L course must be treated with extreme caution. However, for comparative purposes the six projects that indicated preand post-course assessments the results are as follows: of the lack of resources available to track participants once they have completed the course.

If the intention of workplace literacy is to engender a desire

Table 6 - Reported pre/post programme literacy levels

	Pre-Course			Post - Course			
	Level I	Level 2	Level 3	Level I	Level 2	Level 3	
Course I	I	П		I	П		
Course 2	7	69	7	7	66	10	
Course 3	7	8	2	5	7	5	
Course 4	2	5		2		5	
Course 5	4	4		4	2	2	
Course 6	4	3		2	2	3	

Student Impact

PROGRESSION

Progression to other adult education programmes is a rather crude indicator of the level of impact a programme can have on the individual. In some areas there may be no R2L follow-on course, and participants may need to attend classes in the evening (which may not suit certain individuals). Specific numerical data from the returned questionnaires indicated that in ten of the areas. participants had either continued with the R2L programme or had undertaken another adult education programme. The questionnaires indicated that 171 or 55% of the 321 who completed the programme progressed onto some further form of education programme. This level of may seem comparatively low. However, the level of data supplied may simply be indicative

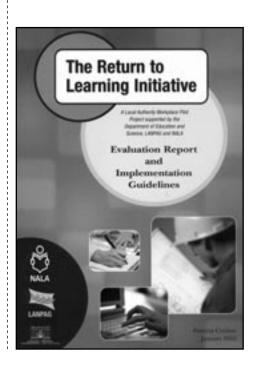
within the participants to continue with adult education programmes then the R2L programme appears to have met with some success. The progression rate of 55% would certainly provide a degree of validation. However, one should be wary of solely attributing success to the R2L programme. Investigations based primarily on participants of a programme are necessarily limited by examining the very people who chose to take part in the project. Whilst this cohort provides useful data it is necessarily self-limiting. Workplace literacy providers also need to investigate those groups of workers who were offered workplace literacy, but chose not to avail of the programme.

Implementation of the programme

Unlike many other education programmes, where learner

Table 7 - Post R2L progression options undertaken

Other e.g. EC BTEI	DL, Continuation	of R2L VEC Adult Education or Literacy Projects
35	66	70



have to contend with the needs of the employer as well as those of the employee. Whilst County Councils in principle may support the programme, it is the front-line local management and supervisors who are under great stress to complete work, roads still have to be repaired, parks kept clean and so on. Line managers and supervisors who are directly compromised by the requirement to release workers need to be fully briefed on the impact that low levels of literacy skills can have on their staff, both as individuals and as employees.

In the questionnaire, the R2L co-ordinators were asked to rate the degree of helpfulness they encountered when dealing with supervisors/managers in arranging time off for participants to attended classes. The research indicated there was a general degree of satisfaction reported from the R2L co-ordinators, with only one project reporting that they found the supervisors very unhelpful.

It would appear from the comments of the R2L co-ordinators, that the Partnership Facilitators played a central role in the smooth implementation of the programme. The liaison role that the Partnership Facilitator provides, offers a useful model for the implementation of all workplace literacy programmes, not just those associated with Local Authorities

Workplace literacy may be a well-intentioned concept with overtones of social justice. However, the needs of the workplace clearly need to be taken account of, particularly at local levels of management. The research

indicated problems of lack of clear communication and inadequate replacement of staff to cover release of employees attending R2L.

Conclusion

If workplace literacy provision is to continue or expand, employers and employees need to be shown the benefits to them and their workplaces. Simply appealing to an employer's sense of social justice is not necessarily the way to convince employers of the benefits of workplace literacy programmes. The merits of workplace literacy need to be demonstrated in clear, unambiguous terms to employers. National workplace literacy evaluation strategies need to be agreed upon if the benefits of implementing such a programme can be demonstrated to employers.

The dividends from workplace literacy participation may not always be clearly evident, at least in the short term. Participants, particularly those who have had a successful experience of the R2L programme can act as peer recruiters of other adults into basic education programmes. When one considers that well over 300 participants took part in phase II of the R2L programme, the ensuing level of exposure to adult basic education cannot be overestimated.

LANPAG, the Irish Local Authorities, NALA and the Government are to be congratulated on their commitment to expanding the range of options available to the adult learner. However, the R2L Initiative should be viewed as one measure towards improving access to adult education, albeit an important measure.

The dividends from workplace literacy participation may not always be clearly evident, at least in the short term.

NALA Announces Financial Literacy Campaign Supported By The EBS Building Society

The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) has recently announced a three-year financial literacy campaign supported by the EBS Building Society. The NALA / EBS Financial Literacy Programme has been designed to help tackle the barriers to financial literacy experienced by 500,000 Irish adults (OECD, 1997). This campaign will also help to address the issue of access to financial services. Through international research and anecdotal information in Ireland low literacy levels has been identified as a barrier to accessing and understanding financial products and services.

The NALA / EBS Financial Literacy Programme will involve:

- Research to identify the role of low literacy levels as a barrier to accessing financial services;
- Publication of a Plain English Guide to Financial Terms;
- Support for a series of events during National Literacy Awareness Week (NLAW) 2004;
- Support for International Literacy Day Conference 2004;
- Promotion of financial literacy and local VEC Adult Literacy service using the EBS branch network;
- Support for production of financial literacy tuition support material;
- The NALA Literacy Awareness Training (LAT);
- The NALA Plain English service including training and editing; and
- Support the development of a family literacy resource.

Why financial literacy?

People with basic numeracy and literacy skills are customers of financial institutions. In the International Adult Literacy



Tommy Byrne, NALA





Inez Bailey NALA Director, Ted McGovern, Chief Executive, EBS Building Society and Conor Hickey, Simon Community Federation Director at the launch of EBS Positive Impact initiative which is funding the NALA / EBS financial literacy campaign.

Survey 500,000 (25%) Irish adults were found to have difficulties with simple numeracy and literacy tasks like adding up a bill, understanding a pay slip, filling in a form (OECD, 1997). Quantitative literacy is based "on the knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic functions". Level 1 implies difficulty with "a single relatively simple operation, such as addition". In order to adapt and participate fully in economic and financial spheres people require ever-higher skills levels. With over 50% of Irish adults with less than the desirable level of skills required to function effectively in today's society, ensuring access to and understanding of information presents a huge challenge.

People with basic numeracy and literacy skills may not be able to:

- Fill in an application form for a mortgage application;
- Read correspondence from a financial institution (e.g., annual statement, letters);
- Understand details on their pay slip (tax credits, PRSI, etc.);
- Follow information notices in a financial institution's premises;
- Understand the conditions attached to a loan; and
- Understand information about their financial rights.

Therefore "financial literacy", which incorporates basic numeracy and reading skills, is an important consideration for financial institutions amongst others. In a recent speech Howard Davies, UK Financial Services Authority (FSA) chairman, said "the priority must be to raise the base level of adult financial literacy. This will not only help us achieve our objective of promoting public understanding

of the financial system but also improve consumer protection and reduce the opportunities for financial crime" (speech, FSA's 3rd Education Conference, London, 12 March 2002).

Why have NALA taken this on?

In recent times various organisations in the financial services area in Ireland (for example, Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS), Irish Financial Services Regulatory Authority (IFSRA), Euro Changeover Board amongst others) have approached NALA. These organisations are aware that members of the public with low levels of numeracy and literacy would find it very difficult to understand financial services. In addition the availability of increasingly complex financial products and the growing need to be financially self-sufficient (for example, pension provision and tax assessment) means people must be increasingly financially literate.

Speaking about the campaign, Inez Bailey, NALA Director said: "With



Counting money is one of the most common financial literacy skills need for day to day living.

over 50% of Irish adults with less than the desirable level of skills required to function effectively in today's society, ensuring access to and understanding of information presents a huge challenge. The financial literacy programme being rolled out in partnership with EBS will help, in the first instance, to raise awareness of the issue. It will also involve a number of practical activities with the financial services industry and with the general public to help equip more people with an adequate level of skills to enable them to make informed and relevant decisions."

The international perspective

Research has shown that a "lack of financial literacy increases the risk that consumers may fail to buy products which would meet their needs or may fail to make sufficient provision to meet those needs" ('Towards a national strategy for financial capability', FSA, 2003). On an international front there has been a drive for addressing financial literacy for adults with poor basic skills through a wide range of initiatives and collaborations. These include:

- The ANZ (Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited) Survey of Financial Literacy in Australia in 2003;
- Adult Financial Literacy
 Advisory Group established
 by the Secretary of State for
 Education and Employment in
 the UK:
- The UK Financial Services
 Authority and the Basic Skills
 Agency who worked together
 to produce the Adult Financial
 Capability Framework;
- The Money Smart Initiative from the US Department of

- Labour for persons seeking new jobs or entering the workforce;
- In the United States of America, the National Endowment for Financial Education (NEFE) issued a report in 2003 examining the causes and possible cures for a financial literacy crisis;
- NIACE's (The National Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, UK) ICT and Basic Skills project with support from the Prudential Financial Services to produce an on-line financial literacy resource targeted at both learners and tutors: www. moneymatterstome.co.uk; and
- In the UK local initiatives involving Citizen Advice Bureaux advisers and basic skills tutors. In addition Credit Union workers, money advisors and resettlement workers from housing associations working together to address financial literacy.

Objectives of the campaign

The objectives of this strategy are to:

- Raise awareness of the issue of financial literacy among staff in EBS;
- Advance policy and practice on financial education and promotion for low numeracy and literacy populations, through the development of a strategic document;
- Provide practical training and resources to be used by frontline EBS staff operating in financial services companies and their agents;
- Provide a practical resource for people working with low numeracy and literacy clients to



Even ATM 'cash machines' can be a barrier for adults with low literacy levels.

advance financial literacy (i.e., the financial pack) in a variety of Adult Basic Education (ABE) settings.

Why the EBS Building society is supporting this?

The EBS Building Society considers that this campaign proposes a number of activities that will benefit both its staff and their existing and potential clients. This is part of the EBS Positive Impact, three-year partnership agreements with two community partners, NALA and the Simon Community. Commenting on the campaign, EBS Building Society CEO, Ted McGovern said: "By taking a more strategic approach to the whole area of corporate social responsibility we will be able to systematically ensure that we are having a positive impact on the communities in which we operate, on our members, employees and on the environment. Through a commitment of financial resources and by enabling the involvement of our employees with our two new community partners through a company-supported volunteer programme, we will play our part in helping to meet clearly identifiable community and social needs.

For more information on the Financial Literacy Campaign contact Tommy Byrne by email at tbyrne@nala.ie or phone on 01-809 9195.

Framework for Literacy and Numeracy

Background

Mapping the Learning Journey (MLJ) is an assessment framework to support teaching and learning in adult basic education. NALA began work on the assessment framework following consultations on the Quality Framework in 1999, which identified a need for a consistent approach to assessment by tutors, learners, ALOs and senior VEC management. The Department of Education and Science funded the development of MLJ over three years. It is rooted in current practice in adult learning and literacy and takes into account international research. The framework was developed in consultation with, and piloted by, adult literacy practitioners and learners. The pilot sites included VEC adult literacy schemes and FÁS, Youthreach, a Senior Traveller Training Centre, Community Training Centres, two prisons and a drugs project.

What is MLJ?

MLJ is a system for describing the progress and achievements of adult literacy learners. It provides a structured way of identifying specific strengths and weaknesses at a particular point in time, and, over a period of time, can be used to demonstrate or map progress.



John Stewart, National Adult Literacy Co-ordinator.

The purpose of MLJ is to support teaching and learning and to capture the holistic learning achieved by literacy learners.

The purpose of MLJ is to support teaching and learning and to capture the holistic learning achieved by literacy learners. It is based on four cornerstones of progress. The four cornerstones are:

- Knowledge and skills within four areas of learning;
- Depth of understanding and critical awareness;
- Fluency and independence;
- Range of application.

The first cornerstone relates to the knowledge and skill base. and focuses on four areas of learning, namely speaking and listening, numeracy, reading for understanding and writing to convey information. The three other cornerstones recognise the development of insight and understanding, independence and the transfer of learning outside the literacy class to real life situations. Each of the cornerstones is broken down into more specific elements. and these elements can be mapped according to the level of the task and how well the learner tackles it at a particular time.

Mainstreaming Steering Committee

In May 2004 an MLJ
Mainstreaming Steering
Committee was established to
oversee the introduction and
implementation of MLJ into VEC
ALSs that wished to participate.
This Committee will comprise
three IVEA representatives, three
NALA representatives and one
nominee from the Department
of Education and Science. The
purpose of the Steering Committee
is to:

 Agree a mainstreaming plan for the introduction of MLJ to the VEC adult literacy service;

- Advise the Department of Education and Science on the resource implications for the introduction of MLJ:
- Oversee the mainstreaming of MLJ; and
- Explore the issues of assessment for accountability purposes.

Challenges

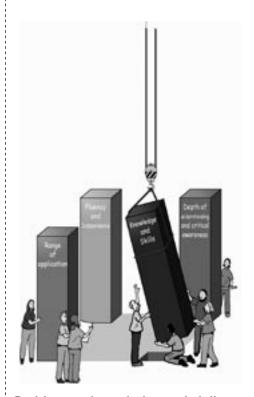
Adult literacy services have developed significantly over the last six years in qualitative and quantitative terms and there are several challenges in mainstreaming an initiative like the MLJ.

SCALE OF EXPANSION

The sheer scale of the quantitative changes is worth noting. The number of literacy learners doubled between 1997 and 1999, and doubled again between 1999 and 2001. By the end of 2003 there were 31,500 learners, a rise of 50% since 2001. There is now an increasingly multicultural and diverse group of learners with nearly 6,000 ESOL learners compared to half that number in June 2002

As the numbers of learners increase, there is also an increase in the numbers of tutors. There were 792 paid tutors in 2000 and this number has doubled to 1627 by the end of 2003. This figure includes 123 mainly part-time resource or outreach workers.

The pace of development has been so frenetic that there is a certain feeling among literacy managers that there is a need to consolidate structures and services rather than incorporate more changes.



Building on knowledge and skills with Mapping the Learning Journey.

Variation between schemes

It should also be noted that in 1997, before the significant investment by the Department of Education and Science, schemes were already at different points of organisational development. Following a period of rapid expansion, it is still true to say that literacy services are at different stages of development and there is sometimes wide variation between services throughout the country. This is not a new situation and it can highlight how responsive local literacy services have been to local needs. However, there is a lack of consistency in certain areas such as staffing, and this is particularly relevant to mainstreaming an initiative like MLJ. While there may be a need to provide extra human resources over a certain period to support the introduction of the MLJ in interested VECs, there is a concern that no common or consistent staffing structure exists to accommodate this support. The concern is that taking on another piece of qualitative work, even if supported by extra resources, would further add to the fragmentation of the national adult literacy service and complicate an already diverse system.

Benefits

There is no doubt that there are significant challenges, but the prize for overcoming them is substantial.

IMPROVED TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

The evidence from learners, tutors and organisers on the pilot is that MLJ has a positive impact on the teaching and learning process. The framework captures and demonstrates learner achievement in a comprehensive and holistic way. It identifies opportunities

for learners to direct the learning activities to clear and meaningful goals. Practitioners on the pilot also reported a positive impact on their practice. They found that the task of producing evidence for the MLJ pilot caused them to think more deeply about areas they had not previously attended to consciously. They found that the MLJ helped them respond to learners' goals with 'rich tasks' that worked on the practical skills as well as addressing issues of self-esteem and confidence.

MEASURING PROGRESS IN LITERACY

There are also systemic benefits in mainstreaming MLJ. At the moment, there is no national evidence of progress in literacy levels as a result of the significant investment since 1997. This is a risk in itself, in relation to securing continuing increases in funding. But it is also unhealthy for the thousands of practitioners who are tirelessly applying themselves at local level to addressing the significant adult literacy problem without any consistent way of demonstrating success to public policy- and decision-makers. This is not to say that MLJ is an instrument for management or accountability. But it can contribute to a shared understanding of what progress in literacy actually means, and demonstrate progress from a teaching and learning perspective. For example, if MLJ highlights that learners on intensive literacy programmes can make significant progress, it will be easier to convince funders and stakeholders to support such programmes. Likewise, MLJ may highlight that learners on two hours tuition per week need certain supports to reinforce progress.

Practitioners on the pilot also reported a positive impact on their practice. They found that the task of producing evidence for the MLJ pilot caused them to think more deeply about areas they had not previously attended to consciously.

Similarly, MLJ is not an accreditation system, but the evidence of progress can contribute to accreditation portfolios if the learner so desires. FETAC are interested in how the MLJ can contribute to the development of new accreditation below FETAC foundation level as part of the National Framework of Qualifications. NALA are actively progressing this issue through the FETAC Expert Group on Levels 1 and 2 in the National Qualification Framework.

Conclusion

The introduction of a system such as MLJ can contribute in many ways to the development of adult literacy practice. It will lead to more debate on assessment and how to achieve progress rather than less and can enhance understanding at national, local and personal levels of what we actually mean by progress for adult literacy learners. It will develop a consistent national benchmark to allow practitioners to discuss assessment with their peers from other counties, whether their service actually participates in MLJ or not. 🙈

Your Quality Framework three years down the line

This article looks broadly at the Quality Framework to date and give some words of advise on the its future use and relevance.

An overview of the story so far...

The Evolving Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education (ABE) is now in its third phase of rollout to the 135 VEC adult literacy schemes and to a range of other adult literacy providers. So far this year over 70 VEC Adult Literacy Schemes in 27 of the 33 VEC areas are using the Quality Framework for ABE. Warrenmount Education Centre is also using the Quality Framework this year. Warrenmount represents, what we hope will be the first of many non-VEC adult literacy services, to use the Framework in the coming years.

The experience of Quality Framework users

Users of the Quality Framework overwhelmingly think it a worthwhile and effective way to improve quality in ABE and are glad they got involved. The experience of users of the Quality Framework, however, has often shown to be dependent on the level



Claire O'Riordan, Quality Framework Co-ordinator, NALA



of familiarity of users with the Framework.

FIRST TIME USERS OF THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK

Typically first time users of the Quality Framework find it challenging. The SIPTU Adult English Scheme and the Co. Mayo VEC Adult Literacy Service were first time users of the Quality Framework in 2003 and they said the following:

"We were confused at the start but our understanding improved greatly...We found that team members learnt to work together and were able to produce concrete evidence on available resources and learners' attitudes to them". – SIPTU

'It takes time to get used to the process' – Co. Mayo

In some cases new team members were not given enough information before the first evaluation team meeting. The result of this was poor understanding of the Quality Framework and the roles of key players, some resistance and very slow progress. Where adequate information was given before meetings the Quality Framework was understood progress was much faster and the value of the process was appreciated and supported.

VETERAN USERS

Veteran users of the Quality Framework are those who have used it for more than a year.

The bulk of the 35 VEC adult literacy schemes who piloted the Quality Framework in 2000 are the longest users of the Framework and are its original champions. After the pilot, the evaluation

process was adapted. For some of these original users there was initial slight resistance to changing to the new model. Now though:

'Established teams have a greater appreciation of the value of the Quality Framework and the need for the nine steps [evaluation] process, as they have become familiar with it they move forward more rapidly and with more confidence'.

— A Quality Framework Facilitator

The level of comfort and ease of users with the Quality Framework increases with continued use. The following quotes illustrate the general adherence to this point across Quality Framework users.

'Our teams understanding of the evaluation process was easier the second time around,' Marie Condon, Navan.

Teams expressed their surprise at how well they had come to understand the Quality Framework.

COMMON ISSUES FOR ALL USERS: COMPLEXITY OF THE PROCESS AND LANGUAGE USED

Despite the refinement of the Quality Framework after the pilot many users still consider the evaluation process too complex and its language difficult to access.

In particular, users have difficulty with the number and distinctiveness of each of the nine steps of the evaluation process. This will have to be looked at in future reviews of the Quality Framework. In the meantime Quality Framework facilitators have been advised to

"We were confused at the start but our understanding improved greatly...We found that team members learnt to work together and were able to produce concrete evidence on available resources and learners' attitudes to them"

use Plain English in explaining the evaluation process and to present the nine steps under five broader headings (below), if these are useful to the team they are working with.

one Quality Framework team, said that the:

"Quality Framework has been an excellent experience, excellent team and

Step 1: Ideal	Step 2: Current Situation	Step 3: Choosing signs of quality	Step 4: Looking for evidence	Step 5:	Step 6: Making sense of evidence	Step 7: Action Planning	Step 8: Communicating findings	Step 9: On-going
		2. Signs of quality		3. Evidence			on planning and nmunication	5. On-going monitoring

Models of usage of the Quality Framework

There are a number of ways that the adult literacy providers can, and have used, the Quality Framework. Two of the most popular are:

- The multiple service model;
- The individual service model.

The multiple site model is one where a number of ABE sites in an area form a single Quality Framework evaluation team. This model has many advantages. The team has:

- A bigger pool to chose team members from;
- More experienced Quality
 Framework teams can be motivational in highlighting successful prior outcomes;
- The division of work spread across a wider area:
- Resources can be used more efficiently.

Co. Cork has particularly embraced the multiple service model of using the Quality Framework. Marion O'Mahoney Co-ordinator of East Cork covering seven VEC adult literacy schemes represented on teamwork. The facilitator guided us through the statement flawlessly. We now have a wonderful structure for future work.'

However, some of the difficulties identified with the multiple model of using the Quality Framework were those difficulties of suiting everyone's times for meetings and the involvement of too many new members at one time.

INDIVIDUAL SERVICE MODEL OF USING THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK

The individual service model is the most common way of using the Quality Framework to date. This model also works well. One indicative quote from an ALO operating the individual service model application of the Quality Framework is:

"[The Quality Framework is] extremely positive - a useful tool to break down the work that needs to be completed in the scheme." – Michelle Donovan, ALO, Dundrum.

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Things to keep in mind when using Framework in the future

Whilst the Quality Framework is fast becoming "a way of thinking and operating" in user services, it is particularly important to bear in mind:

- The need to continue to enable and encourage learner contribution in Quality Framework teams;
- The value of evidence:
- Pooling and storing evidence; and,
- Evidence from the Quality
 Framework and its relevance to
 FETAC

CONTINUE TO ENABLE AND ENCOURAGE LEARNER PARTICIPATION

The need to continue to enable and encourage learner contribution in the Quality Framework is paramount. In some Quality Framework teams learner attendance and or involvement at evaluation team meetings has been less than was anticipated. However, learners on teams are making a 'very positive and valuable contribution' to Quality Framework.

"Learners' presence has value [but], more preparatory work with learners is needed [at times]" – Anne Doyle, Quality Framework Facilitator

Feedback shows that evaluation teams benefit from having learners on a team. It also shows, however, that a significant number of learners, particularly if they are new to existing Quality Framework evaluation teams, continue to have difficulty in understanding their role in the process. Careful selection of learners for Quality Framework teams is vital. Learners need to have good reading and writing abilities and be confident communicators. They also need to be properly briefed and supported throughout the process (see 'Using the Evolving Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education in 2004' for tips on how to do this).

THE VALUE OF EVIDENCE

Readily accessible and multiple evidences are important to 'show' that a service is providing quality learning opportunities. It is important from a number of perspectives, most especially from the perspective of the adult literacy learner and from a public accountability perspective.

"We are operating increasingly in a climate where resources are scarce, where investment must be seen to be justified, and where public policy actions have to be monitored closely and proven to work..."

– Minister for State, Sile de Valera at the launch of the

Evolving Quality Framework

Speaking about evidences and her experience of working with evaluation teams as a Quality Framework Facilitator, Carrie

User Guide for ABE

Walsh said that:

"There was considerable work on gathering evidence in every case. All team members were aware of the necessity to produce clear proofs of the scheme's performance relating to specific Statements. There was generally good cooperation and participation in gathering the evidence."

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Evidences of quality are usually there although new or updated evidence may need to be compiled. A number of Quality Framework evaluation teams have had difficulty in identifying existing evidences and in acknowledging the merit of this evidence, often qualitative. The fact is that Quality Framework User services have considerable evidence of quality to hand, the challenge is to identify, record and store this evidence appropriately.

POOLING AND STORING EVIDENCE

Quality Framework users are building up a book of evidence to illustrate quality in their service but gathering evidence is time and resource consuming. Veteran users of the Quality Framework are increasingly identifying and exploiting evidences that are relevant across a number of statements of quality (standards of quality). They have seen that many Statements of Quality in the Quality Framework are linked and may share evidences. For example, the Statement on Additional *Learner Support* and the statement on Premises are linked. Premises is in turn is linked to the Statement on Scheme Funding and Scheme Funding is very closely linked to the Statement on Resources for Teaching and Learning. There are many more examples of linked statements with potentially shared evidences.

As yet, there is no agreed 'best way' discovered for pooling relevant evidence across linked Statements of Quality. Some Quality Framework Users are, however, keeping folders on separate Statements of Quality and before the final stage of the process are recording how or

what evidence they think would be suitable for other Statements. They then record this on the inside cover at the front of the folder for easy access later. Then when they go to a new Statement/s they may already have some evidence to consider based on work done on earlier Statements. This period of **checking relevancy** of evidences for/across different statements and recording its location is called 'cross-referencing'.

NALA suggests at this time that Quality Framework users compile a loose-leaf folder or book of evidence of quality assurance under the five Quality Areas of the Quality Framework: Resources, Management, Teaching and Learning, Outreach and Promotion and Progression.

This folder would be a companion document to the Evolving Quality Framework User Guide and would be a way for Framework users to 'match' their own work on the Framework. Quality Framework users could cross reference evidences. This could be done for example by photocopying relevant evidence and slotting it in each time under each relevant Statement of Quality.

As teams become familiar with the Quality Framework process there may be a danger that they would take 'short-cuts'. Teams might begin to convince themselves 'we already have evidence for that' rather than checking if better or more definitive evidence may be available. It is important to safeguard against handy short cuts when more research may be required.

EVIDENCE FROM THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK AND ITS RELEVANCE TO THE FETAC DRAFT QUALITY ASSURANCE DESCRIPTOR

Evidence from the Quality
Framework is highly relevant
to the FETAC Draft Quality
Assurance Descriptor. The FETAC
descriptor is a quality assurance
descriptor for the Further
Education Sector. Both models
go 'hand in hand' and have a high
degree of agreement in terms of
quality areas covered.

The Quality Framework is a customised process to gather evidence to meet standards. The FETAC Draft Quality Assurance Descriptor for Further Education sets out standards that Further Education providers will have to achieve (when the draft is finalised) to be 'quality assured' by FETAC. The FETAC descriptor is **not** a tool for evaluation like the Ouality Framework but a set of standards that has to be met. Consequently, to achieve the FETAC standard you have to have a process that yields meaningful evidence. The Quality Framework is the customised process for the adult literacy service that does precisely this.

Towards the end of 2003/ beginning of 2004 an adult literacy service participated in the piloting of the FETAC Quality Assurance Draft Model for Further Education. Walter Balfe, FETAC's Development Officer overseeing Quality Assurance said that he was:

'...happy to say that the NALA Quality Framework assists providers in meeting FETAC's quality assurance requirements.'

The ALO who participated in piloting FETAC's Descriptor also said that being involved in the Quality Framework for Adult Basic Education had been very useful in completing the Descriptor because there were many similarities between both models. FETAC plan to introduce site visits further down the line and a 'book of evidence' for the Quality Framework would be invaluable for Quality Framework Users.

Conclusion

Three years down the road Quality Framework users are now playing a significant role in contributing to the evolving quality culture in ABE. The continued success of the Quality Framework, success being defined primarily as the journey towards quality as much as the outcomes of this journey, is dependent on the sustained effort and commitment of all stakeholders in the Quality Framework.

If you require any further information on the Quality Framework contact Claire O'Riordan, Quality Framework Co-ordinator, @ 01 809 9193.

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NALA Quality
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NALA Glossary

- Action Learning learning by doing, reviewing and doing better next time
- Ad hoc not regular or planned, happening only when necessary.
- Adult Basic Education refers to the development of competence in adult skills that are needed to fully take part in society such as literacy and numeracy.
- Analyse to examine the details of something carefully, in order to understand or explain it Blood samples were analysed in the laboratory
- Assessment Framework Guide to know where a learner is when starting tuition and how well the learner is progressing
- **Attributes** quality or characteristic that someone or something has
- Basic Skills Unit Unit within the British Department of Education & science which is devoted to basic education
- **Best practice** a term used to describe good quality work/good working habits
- Brainstorming This is a method of using a group of people to generate new ideas about a problem. It involves uncritical acceptance and noting of every suggestion / idea voiced. Ideas and opinions are encouraged to be given freely and do not have to backed up with reasons, logic or ways of doing, in order to be noted for consideration.
- **Collate** analyse and compare to identify points of agreement and differences
- Comment book A special book where stakeholders can write their views on a particular subject or area
- **Consensus** when all the people in a group agree about something

Consistency – always happening (or behaving) in a similar way, usually positive

Dental Health Foundation

- Government funded organisations promoting better dental health
- **Distance education** learning at home
- **Dynamics** the way that parts of a situation, group, or system affect each other
- Educational Disadvantage
 Committee Government

committee to examine and devise solutions to tackle the issue of educational disadvantage

- Education Equality Initiative (EEI) was established in
 - (EEI) was established in 2000 to address educational disadvantage.
- **Ethical** relating to what is right or wrong
- Ethos the ideas and beliefs or a particular person or group
- Evaluate to consider or study something carefully and decide how good or bad it is
- **Facilitator** a person who helps the group/team to develop and work together effectively towards their common goal
- **Focus Groups** a group of people who are brought together to discuss what they think about something such as a new product
- Framework The basic structure that supports something such as a building and gives it its shape
- **Generic** general, not specific
- **Guiding Principles** values
- **Holistic** dealing with or treating the whole of something or someone not just parts
- **Implement** system or plan to make something happen
- Library Council Organisations for

the development of libraries

Literacy Implementation Group

- committee established to oversee the implementation of the adult programmes of the White Paper
- **Mentor** an experienced person who gives help and advice to a less experienced person
- **Mind-mapping** a picture that links images of ideas and thoughts
- **Monitor** watch something carefully and record your results
- NALC National Adult Learning Council – statutory body established to oversee the implementation of the White Paper
- **Networking** when you use events, usually social, to meet people who might be useful to you
- **Partnership** when two people or oganisations work together to achieve something.

Plain English or Plain Language

- use of clear words and sentences for easier reading
- **Process** a series of actions that you take in order to achieve a result
- **Qualitative** relating to how good something is and not how much of it there is
- **Quality** how good or bad something is good/high quality, poor/low quality.
- **Quantitative** relating to quantity **Social interaction** talking or doing things with other people or the way you do this
- **Stakeholders** All those who have an interest in an organisation or an issue/s. These may include clients, staff, government etc.
- **Statutory** decided or controlled by law
- **Storyboard** telling a story through means of a series of pictures: drawings, collage, photographs etc. As a combination with, or alternative to a word story.
- **Strategy** a plan to achieve something **Traveller Training Workshops**
 - local organisations providing

- vocational training for adult Travellers
- Western Health Board public health services operation and management organisation for the western region
- White paper Government policy document outlining the plan for the future of adult education.
- Youthreach refers to local training units, in different centres around Ireland, providing vocational and basic skills to early school leavers under18 years of age

Abbreviations

- ABE Adult Basic Education refers to the development of competence in adult skills that are need to full take part in society such as literacy numeracy, communications,
- ADM Area Development

 Management a statutory
 organisation set up by the
 Department of An Taoiseach
 which funds and oversees local
 development projects
- **AEO** Adult Education Organiser
- **AEOA** Adult Education Organisers Association
- ALO Adult Literacy Organiser
- ALOA Adult Literacy Organisers Association
- ALS Adult Literacy Scheme
- **AP(E)L** Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning
- **BETA** Basic Education Tutors Association – represents salaried Adult Literacy Tutors
- BSA Basic Skills Agency
 organisation for the support and development of ABE in England & Wales
- CE Community Employment FAS employment training programmes in operation through out Ireland
- CEEOA Chief Executive & Education Officers Association –

- representing CEOs & EOs in VECs
- CEO Chief Executive Officer the most senior management position in a VEC
- CERT The State Tourism Training Agency
- CIF Construction Industry Federation – employer representative body
- CTW Community Training
 Workshops training unit, in
 different centres around Ireland,
 providing vocational and ABE
 skills to early school leavers over
 18 years of age
- CWC Community Workers Co-op DES – Department of Education & Science
- **DETE** Department of Enterprise Trade & Employment
- **ECDL** European Computer Driving Licence
- **EO** Education Officer the senior education staff member in a VEC
- ESL/ESOL English as a Second Language/English as a Second or Other Language
- **FÁS** The Irish national employment training agency
- **FETAC** Further Education Training Awards Council
- **FSAI** Food Safety Authority of Ireland statutory body establish top over see the improvement of food safety
- **IBEC** Irish Busines Employers Confederation – employer representative body
- ICCPE Irish Centre for Continuing Pharmaceutical Education
- ICT Information & Communications Technology
- ICTU Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- ISC Information Society Commission – which is devising a strategy for development of ICT in Irish society
- ISME Irish Small &
 MediumEnterpises employer
 representative body

- IT Information Technology
- ITUT Irish Trade Union trust
- IVEA Irish Vocational Education Association representing Vocationa Education Committees
- **LALB** Local Adult Learning Board
- **LIP** Literacy Implementation Plan
- NALA National Adult Literacy Agency
- NALC National Adult Learning Council – statutory body established to oversee the implementation of the White Paper
- NALP National Adult Literacy Programme
- NAPS National Anti-Poverty Strategy – government medium term plan to tackle poverty
- NCCA National Council for Curriculum & Assessment
- NCGE National Centre for Guidance in Education
- NDP National Development Plan government medium term plan for economic and social development
- NQAI National Qualifications Authority of Ireland – Government funded body which manages qualifications at national level
- NTDI National Training and
 Development Institutes —
 Independent education organisation
 which provides courses in different
 centres around Ireland for people
 with disabilities
- **SFA** Small Firm Association employer representative body
- SIPTU Services, Industrial, Professional & Techical Union
- **T.E.A.M.** Together Everyone Achieves More
- **UNISON** UK union representing unions in the public sector
- VEC Vocational Education Committees – managing adult and further education at County level
- VTOS Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme
- VTSU Vocational Training Unit
- **WIT** Waterford Institute of Technology a third level