

**Impact of NALA Continuing  
Professional Development (CPD)  
events  
(2012 and 2013)**

December 2013

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In 2013, NALA put on 10 innovative and exciting conferences and events around the country. 600 people attended these events. This figure is up from 460 in 2012, when we had 7 conferences and events. These events were aimed at adult literacy, numeracy, ESOL and family learning tutors and organisers to highlight new initiatives and ideas in adult literacy practice and to demonstrate best practice and initiatives which worked.

### **National Forum for Adult Literacy Tutors**

Almost 200 tutors attended 2013 National Forum for Adult Literacy Tutors. The theme of the Forum was 'Teaching strategies for working on literacy and numeracy'. Moira Greene, ALO Clare ETB, demonstrated how we can link multiple intelligences to reading. She made the point that learners may already be very skilled in 'reading' a variety of symbol systems, such as music, body language, a game or even reading between the lines. Tutors need to acknowledge these skills and help learners to recognise whatever strategies they already have so they can use them in improving their text reading skills. She also made the point that bodily and spatial intelligence may be largely neglected in the classroom.

In an anonymous, follow-up survey six months after the event to measure the impact of the event on tutors, 40 tutors (20%) responded to the survey. 95%

of tutors who responded stated that they learned something new at the event and 87% reported that the Forum has inspired changes to their work practice. Before attending the Forum 60% of tutors who responded reported that they were aware of 'Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work'. This compares to a figure of 74% of tutors surveyed who said that they had heard of 'Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work' at the 2012 National Forum for Adult Literacy Tutors.

In a follow-up survey to the 2012 National Forum for Adult Literacy Tutors entitled 'Keeping adult literacy students actively involved in the learning process', 21 tutors (17%) responded. 86% of tutors stated that they learned something new at the Forum and 74% stated that the Forum inspired changes to their work.

During her presentation, Kathy MacLachlan, an Adult Literacy Consultant from Scotland, spoke about the importance of regular reflection and on focussing on learning how to learn. She noted that "it's important to ask students 'what did you do?' 'What have you learned?' 'How did you learn it?' 'How can you use it?' ....We develop a good sense of our learning style through all the task-centred things in our life. We learned it through doing and asking people... not through books." Before ending her presentation, Kathy also offered a warning to tutors about learners returning to education with the expectation of finding the type of learning environment where they are receiving knowledge, dependent and accepting; "If a tutor sees them that way too, it never changes. It is a tutor's responsibility to promote independence... We should be able to open up discussion about power in relationships."

### **Adult Literacy Organisers Forum**

The theme for the 2013 Adult Literacy Organisers Forum was initial assessment in the adult literacy service. 63 ALOs attended. Jay Derrick from the University of London pointed out that in education, the most important issues such as assessment and placement are often 'swampy'. That is messy

and unpredictable; and that there is a tension between this reality and the technical and rational view of education which attempts to organise and capture these processes in terms of standardised rubrics, procedures and assessments. These will only take us so far. Drawing on the work of Donald Schon and examples from disciplines outside education, he showed that for many key actions in the real world, there is no blueprint. This puts professional judgements about how to handle each situation as a unique case, to the forefront.

In a follow-up survey six months after the event to measure the impact of the event on ALOs 21 ALOs responded (33%). 90% of ALOs who responded to our survey stated that they learned something new at the event and 53% reported that the Forum has inspired changes to their work practice. The 2012 ALO Forum looked at 'A vision of adult literacy and provision under the new LETB structures'. 65 ALOs attended the Forum. In a follow-up survey to it, 24 ALOs responded (37%). 96% of ALOs stated that they learned something new, while 58% said that the Forum inspired changes to their work.

### **Numeracy conference**

The title of the 2013 NALA Numeracy conference was 'Helping to meet the challenges of delivering maths provision'. 110 numeracy practitioners attended. Anne Marie O'Neill and Caoimhe O'Callaghan, Maths tutors from the Youth Training and Development Centre in Newbridge gave a workshop on 'teaching significant figures, negative numbers, understanding rounding and maths modelling'. They pointed out that the [www.met.ie](http://www.met.ie) site had lots of information to make a project around data available. A valuable tip in learning for adults was to 'Ask the question' and they find the answer from resources relating to a familiar topic. In this case it was the Irish weather (a subject that is always topical) and this also incorporated geography, using the counties of Ireland. Questions could be – where was the weather warmest, wettest, and coldest and finally take average temperature for 12 months etc. The facilitators encouraged the tutors to 'get into the fun of a given situation'.

In a follow-up survey to measure the impact of the event on numeracy practitioners, 33 attendees responded (30%). 94% of practitioners who responded to our survey stated that they learned something new at the event and 93% reported that the conference has inspired changes to their numeracy work practice. The 2012 NALA Numeracy conference looked at 'Building tutor confidence in teaching mathematics in adult basic education'. 107 Numeracy practitioners attended. In a follow-up survey 16 attendees responded (15%). 88% of respondents stated that they learned something new, while 81% reported that the conference inspired changes to their work.

### **ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)**

The title of the 2013 ESOL conference was 'Phonology and grammar: the hidden assets'. 70 ESOL practitioners attended. Jo Gakonga from [www.elt-training.com](http://www.elt-training.com) argued for a more imaginative and creative approach to grammar teaching. She drew on different areas of research that argued for 'meaningful interaction in the target language' in the classroom. Jo stressed that teaching grammar as though it is only a matter of 'conjugating verbs' is not productive and does not engage learners sufficiently. Learning a language is an active process that demands the teacher uses a variety of materials and approaches. ESOL learners themselves may be accustomed to quite traditional approaches to language learning and will demand and expect grammar as part of their classes so the teacher is expected to fulfil this function. But it does not have to be dry or formulaic. Jo concluded with the comment - 'Learners will go further and faster with explicit teaching in grammar ...but the question is how?' Her answer is to bring interest and inventiveness to conveying grammar points, drawing on real life examples and engaging with the structures the learners themselves need and struggle with.

We will carry out a follow-up survey in April 2014 to look at the impact of the event. The follow up survey from the 2012 ESOL conference entitled 'English for employment: Helping ESOL students prepare for work' showed that 79% of practitioners who responded to our survey stated that they learned something new at the event and 63% reported that the conference inspired changes to

their numeracy work practice. 59 ESOL practitioners attended the 2012 conference with 19 responding to our survey (32%).

### **Family Literacy conference**

The title of the 2013 Family Literacy conference was 'Harnessing technology and social media to engage parents in family learning initiatives'. 70 family learning practitioners attended.

Ciara Brennan from St. Peter's Primary School in Bray gave a very interesting presentation on how their school uses social media to reach out to their parent body. The school has an active blog (90-100 hits per day) in which children and teachers participate and parents are encouraged to post comments ([www.stpetersbrayblog.com](http://www.stpetersbrayblog.com)). The blog allows the parents a window into their child's day in school. The children take pride in putting their achievements on the blog and the school feels that the blog goes some way in helping to develop the children's literacy and oral language skills. Ciara talked through some of the on-line aids the school used in developing their blog. The blog was set up using WordPress which Ciara says they favoured because it is so user-friendly with no coding or internet language required. Various platforms for uploading audio, text, videos and animation are used including soundcloud, vimeo, Go!Animate, animoto and Twittter.

Parents are also given an opportunity to hear the 'school's voice' through videos posted on the blog, they can see what their children are doing, hear what their children are hearing and observe how the teacher interacts with their children. The blog also contains useful sites for literacy and numeracy to help parents to help their children in their own, informal, way. A 'Wednesday for Parents' slot is currently generated by teachers and has included posts on fire safety, maths for fun and exploring news with your child. The school hopes that parents will eventually take over this post as they become more familiar and confident in the technology. Ciara's presentation illustrated how the

creation of a blog can present so many learning opportunities for children, how it may encourage parents to interact with the school via social media and it may assist in taking the fear out of social media for parents.

We will carry out a follow-up survey in May 2014 to look at the impact of the event. The follow-up survey from the 2012 Family Learning conference entitled 'Encouraging parental involvement in family learning programmes' showed that 80% of practitioners who responded to our survey stated that they learned something new at the event and 73% reported that the conference inspired changes to their numeracy work practice. 78 Family Learning participants attended the 2012 conference and 15 responded to our survey.

**Table 1: Impact of NALA conferences**

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2013</b>
	<b>Learned something new</b>	<b>Inspired changes to work</b>	<b>Learned something new</b>	<b>Inspired changes to work</b>
National Tutors' Forum	86%	74%	96%	87%
ALO Forum	96%	58%	90%	53%
Numeracy conference	88%	81%	94%	93%
ESOL conference	79%	63%	na	na
Family learning conference	80%	73%	na	na

Note: na = not available

### **Big impact**

From the table above we can see very strong figures regarding participants learning something new at NALA events. In 2013 an average of 93% of

participants stated that they learned something new at our events, which is a big plus, while an average of 78% said that the event inspired changes to their work. Each of the follow-up surveys were anonymous and carried out on-line. This offers clear evidence that the NALA events had a strong impact on participants and inspired a lot of changes to the way practitioners work.

**Table 2: Awareness of 'Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work'**  
(measured after National Tutors' Forums)

	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
Aware of 'Guidelines' before Tutors' Forum	74%	60%
Not aware of 'Guidelines' before Tutors' Forum	26%	40%

### **Awareness of 'Guidelines'**

Awareness of 'Guidelines' before the Tutors' Forums has been quite strong over the past few years. Quite a lot of new, volunteer tutors attend the National Tutors' Forum which probably accounts for the 40% who were not aware of Guidelines prior to the 2013 Tutors' Forum.

Overall the evidence of the impact of NALA's work can be most easily seen in the post event research which shows a huge number of participants stating that they learned something new at the NALA events and a large number saying that the NALA events inspired changes to their work.