

THE RIGHT TO READ

**The development of partnership strategies
for the promotion of literacy in the community**

**Proceedings of a one day conference
organised by
An Chomhairle Leabharlanna
Dublin 3rd November 1995.**

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**An Chomhairle Leabharlanna | The Library Council
1997**

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna | The Library Council
53-54, Upper Mount Street
Dublin 2
Ireland

Tel: +353 (0)1-676 1167 / 676 1963
Fax: +353 (0)1-676 6721
E-mail: libcounc@iol.ie
Web: <http://www.iol.ie/~libcounc>

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna was established by the *Public Libraries Act, 1947*.
The functions of the Council, as outlined in the *Local Government (An Chomhairle Leabharlanna) Regulations, 1997* are:

- to provide advice and assistance to local authorities in relation to the improvement of the public library service
- to make such recommendations to the Minister in relation to the public library service as it sees fit
- to maintain and operate the central library established under Section 2 of the *Public Libraries Act, 1947 (No. 40 of 1947)*
- to promote and facilitate library co-operation

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Literacy is the ability to read and write and progress
Canadian Organisation for Development Through Education

... it is our clear view that, at a time when unfulfilled reading potential affects the economic, cultural and social life of the country, the potential of a library, and in particular the public library which is freely available to all, as a force in support of reading and information literacy cannot be too strongly emphasised.

Investing in children: the future of library services for children and young people. London: Department of National Heritage, 1995.

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THE RIGHT TO READ: INTRODUCTION

Alun Bevan *and* *Helena Farrell*
An Chomhairle Leabharlanna *National Adult Literacy Agency*

Background

During 1993 the Director of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna and representatives of the Department of Education and Science met to discuss the role of public libraries in the promotion of literacy within the community. The Department of Education and Science agreed to fund two action research projects based in Limerick City and County Offaly.

The Department of Education and Science has had a long involvement with the public library service. It provides an annual grant to public library authorities for the provision of books through the primary school library grant scheme. In recent years its recognition of the importance of access to books in the encouragement of reading skills of primary school children has been translated into greatly increased grant aid. The Department has also involved librarians in the selection and provision of books in such paired reading schemes as the CAPER Project in County Longford.

The funding of the two literacy projects represents the first direct involvement of the Department with public library-based projects and was seen as recognition of the previously understated role of public librarians in helping develop a synergy between the library and more formal education services.

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, as the advisory body to both central and local government on public library development, has always attached a high priority to the role of the public library in this area.

In 1991 An Chomhairle commissioned a study by Margaret Burke and Catherine Keane ⁽¹⁾ on public libraries and adult literacy in Ireland. The aims of this research were:

- to establish what materials and services public libraries provided to basic skills students and workers
- to ascertain opinions and attitudes from both librarians and literacy workers as to the contribution libraries were making or could be making to assist in the improvement of literacy.

In their introduction, the authors wrote:

Those of us who work every day with the printed word must never fail to appreciate the isolation and wide ranging impact of illiteracy on the individual.

The campaign to combat the problem of adults with literacy difficulties in this country presents public libraries with the opportunity to provide information and measures to assist in the elimination of this problem.

The need for basic skills education will never be fully eliminated. The best society can do is to ensure that a sufficient range of proactive services are in place within the community to be able to meet the varying needs of those members of the community who feel disadvantaged through their own levels of attainment in reading, spelling, writing and numeracy.

The 1995 *White Paper on Education* ⁽²⁾ recognises that such

... a sustaining philosophy should seek to promote equality of access, participation and benefit for all in accordance with their needs and abilities.

No one organisation can hope to achieve such an aim. The solution is for a range of agencies to work together in partnership to provide a range of services that can cater for the differing needs of individual students. The need for partnership was illustrated by the composition of the Steering Group established to oversee the two projects which commenced in 1994. The Steering Group consisted of representatives from:

An Chomhairle Leabharlanna
The Department of Education and Science, Adult Education Section
Library Association of Ireland
Limerick Adult Learner Support Services
Limerick City Libraries
National Adult Literacy Agency
Offaly County Library Service
Offaly Vocational Education Committee, Adult Education Centre.

The one group that is so often overlooked when planning services are those who are expected to benefit the most - the users. It had been planned to hold a national conference to present the findings of the research projects. During the planning of the conference two decisions were taken that contributed enormously to its success and to the further development of the projects. The first decision was to allow literacy students to attend the conference free of charge, the second was to invite two students - one from Limerick and one from Offaly - to speak at the conference. The courage of these speakers was matched only by the impact their words had on the

audience. The contribution of the students in the audience to the open discussion at the end of the conference also became a vital part of the proceedings. The Department of Education and Science has extended its grant to facilitate further research and the Steering Group has been extended to include students and tutors.

Literacy

The Director of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), Geraldine Mernagh, has stated:

At the heart of the literacy movement is the conviction that the option to become literate is a fundamental educational and human right for all.

This has been recognised in the recent *White Paper on Education* as follows:

A specific policy priority is that all adults requiring literacy and numeracy education will have such education available to them. ⁽³⁾

People with literacy difficulties experience a combination of specific technical difficulties and these combine with a more general sense of inadequacy and low self esteem which is often heightened by society's demands for greater literacy and numeracy skills. Those who are not comfortable with their own level of competency know that the more literate members of society regard them as inadequate. This stigmatisation leads many to hide their difficulties from employers, friends and family.

In this broader definition of literacy everyone is literate to some extent and the term "illiteracy" therefore is inappropriate and inaccurate.

The first *International Adult Literacy Survey* ⁽⁴⁾ indicates that a significant proportion of the population in the OECD countries have not moved beyond a basic level of literacy. Nearly 25% of the Irish population of working age have only rudimentary literacy skills. This compares unfavourably with the other countries surveyed. The report states that literacy is strongly correlated with life chances and use of opportunities. At the same time the study reveals that individual use of the public library increases in proportion to literacy levels so that, for example, in Ireland those with the highest literacy levels use the library three times as often as those with basic levels of literacy.

The NALA/Horizon report on *Access and Participation in Adult Literacy Schemes* ⁽⁵⁾ indicates that 82.2% of students in the literacy schemes surveyed expressed an interest in progressing to some form of further education. This points to the need for links between agencies within the community to provide support for literacy schemes and create a bridge for students progressing to other forms of adult education. The local library has a crucial role to play.

The role of the public library

The role of the public library in supporting lifelong learning activities within the community has long been recognised. The UNESCO *Guidelines for Public Libraries Promoting Literacy* ⁽⁶⁾ state that:

Working in a multifaceted environment in providing educational, information and cultural materials to people of all ages, the public library becomes a natural bridge in linking literacy and reading at all levels of achievement.

Recognising public libraries as key factors in resolving the issue of illiteracy is crucial to the success of any community-wide literacy programme. For libraries to have a meaningful impact on this effort, educators, social workers and librarians themselves must understand the various roles each play and work together in partnership to help improve literacy levels.

Based on the work of Lyman ⁽⁷⁾ and Thomas ⁽⁸⁾ the necessary conditions for the success of any public library participation in such partnerships can be summarised as requiring the following features:

- clear objectives for future action
- a conscious approach to the problem
- channels of information which work in such a way that they reach those at whom they are aimed in an effective and worthwhile form
- an awareness on the part of library staff on the problems of literacy, including the needs of tutors and learners
- clear ideas on the presentation of material
- suitable materials for the different target groups
- a community profile - libraries must become visible in working with the general public and with various institutions / organisations in order to achieve significant success in this field
- sufficient resources to enable it to act as an information source about learning opportunities and as a resource centre for materials for tutors and students
- promotion and publicity of basic skills courses

- encouragement of potential learners to participate in such schemes
- the provision of space for schemes
- the provision of training for library staff, basic skills professionals and learners
- to serve as a liaison between participating agencies and their clients in the local area.

The two projects in Limerick and Offaly have been addressing these prerequisites and applying them to local conditions.

Both projects have liaised closely with each other and NALA on establishing and consolidating links with basic skills tutors and students. Where there has been a commonality of approach between the two participating libraries (e.g. staff awareness programmes) resources have been pooled and joint training sessions held.

Both projects organised training days for library staff, basic skills tutors, and students.

It was felt that library staff should be able to recognise and understand the difficulties which literacy students experience when approaching any public institution. Two staff training days were held in Limerick City Library to which Limerick County staff were also invited. Offaly County Library held a one-day seminar for staff.

A study visit to Clwyd County Libraries took place from Tuesday 14th to Wednesday 15th February 1995. The visit included meetings to discuss family literacy schemes and basic education in the context of small rural communities. Visits were arranged to branch libraries in Denbigh, Rhyl and Wrexham to see:

- Study base - a basic education resource and drop-in centre
- Second Chance Centre - an IT based basic education resource centre.

It was agreed that the visit was a very worthwhile one. The most lasting impressions of the visit were:

- the successful partnership arrangements between the libraries and the education authorities
- the public face of the basic skills service provided by Clwyd County Council
- the level of training and commitment of the staff involved.

The approaches being taken in both Limerick and Offaly were similar to those in Clwyd but participants on the study trip thought that the Clwyd experience was more structured. One important area of divergence was the openness of the Clwyd approach, with basic skills resources and trainer support being made available in the public library. This differed from the approach taken in Limerick and Offaly which was much more concerned with a one-to-one relationship between tutor and learner. The success of an overt approach was questioned in the context of providing such a sensitive service in a rural community. Whereas the Clwyd approach was seen as one that would not appeal to all learners, it was recognised as one that raised the visibility of both the problems of low levels of literacy and the different options that were available to learners. One-to-one sessions do allow tutors to customise the service to individual students' needs but the positive side of the Clwyd approach was seen to be their attempt to remove all barriers (physical and mental) to access to basic skills tuition.

Since the visit, Offaly County Library has introduced a service similar to Clwyd's *Second Chance* service with PC-based applications for basic skills learners. This is based in Tullamore Branch Library.

Limerick City Library is a partner with other agencies in the area in an application under the EU funded *Horizon Disadvantaged Programme*. The role of the library will be to develop as:

- an open learning centre with specific regard to the education and training needs of :
 - ◆ the long-term unemployed
 - ◆ Social Welfare beneficiaries with limited access to mainline education and training programmes:
 - Traveller women
 - parents
 - users of the Adult Literacy Support Service.

These developments result directly from the discussions that have taken place between the library service and basic skills organisers following involvement in the research projects and the visit to Clwyd.

Other practical steps have also been implemented in relation to the provision, housing and display of basic skills materials. Access to the material has been greatly enhanced by raising awareness of the library staff to the needs of the tutors and

learners, and making tutors and learners aware of the services available to them through the library service.

The need to continue this work beyond the research projects is recognised by all participants. As the Limerick City Librarian stated:

Convincing others of the useful role libraries can play in literacy programmes is an educational process that, like other forms of learning will require time and *continued attention*.

This publication presents the results of the research in both Limerick and Offaly in the words of those most closely involved with the projects.

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OPENING ADDRESS

Dr. Don Thornhill
Department of Education and Science

Introduction

I am delighted to be with you this morning to launch this conference. I would like to thank An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, the Library Council, for this invitation.

Those of us who can read tend to take it for granted. We find it difficult to fully appreciate what it is like for those who cannot read. Occasions like this raise our levels of consciousness and make us more aware of the difficulties involved for individuals with literacy problems, and for society in general.

The conference theme “the development of partnership and strategies for the promotion of literacy in the community” is very much in line with the present thrust of education policy.

The White Paper *Charting Our Education Future*⁽¹⁾ which was published earlier this year is a landmark in policy development in the education area. The White Paper is the product of a very elaborate and extensive consultation process. 1992 saw the publication of the Green Paper *Education for a Changing World*⁽²⁾. This prompted a large number of seminars, both official and non-official around the country and the consultative process culminated in October 1993 in the National Education Convention. This was an unprecedented event, both nationally and internationally and it brought together the main interests and stakeholders in the education system. The Convention Secretariat published its independent report in January 1994⁽³⁾ and this report which brought together the major themes of the consultative process provided an essential platform for the White Paper. The Convention was then followed by the issue of two more consultative papers on regional structures and on school governance and eventually the White Paper itself was published in 1995.

The process of preparing the White Paper was very much grounded on the concepts of partnership and consultation. The emphasis which you have placed today in your conference theme on the development of partnership strategies therefore strikes a chord. The approach taken in the three literacy initiatives in Limerick, Offaly and Longford which you will be discussing today reflect real partnership in action. My colleagues in the Department of Education and Science were delighted to have the opportunity to work with other organisations in developing these.

Partnership role of the public library service

It might also be helpful this morning to touch on the role of the Public Library Service in the education system.

For a number of years it has been offering support to the education system in many important ways.

- Since 1971 the public libraries have been co-operating with the Department of Education and Science in providing a library service to primary schools. I am pleased that it was possible to virtually double the Department's grant for this service this year.
- The public libraries provide reference and other books and services to second and third level students, including inter library loans and making special arrangements for the loaning of books. This is a very important contribution.
- Likewise you have been helping those engaged in adult education, assisting them in self-directed learning and contributing towards their involvement in lifelong learning.

The libraries have for a long time supported literacy and community education which is taking on a new lease of life as is evidenced here today. This includes the role the libraries play in helping people to maintain and build on their levels of reading skills.

The 1983 report of the Commission on Adult Education ⁽⁴⁾ acknowledged this contribution of libraries to adult education.

I therefore see the libraries making a very important contribution to education and lifelong learning, and in particular to literacy capabilities at various levels.

In recognition of this An Chomhairle Leabharlanna is now represented on the Consultative Group on Adult Education.

The new developments which are the subject of your conference today show a new pro-active role by the library service. This approach will in time open up your great treasure of learning material and facilities in a far greater way than ever before. It is timely that you are entering this new phase of your operations as the European Year of Lifelong Learning is on its way. For the future, I would see the relationship between the library and education systems as evolutionary and organic.

Developments in adult education

I would like now to turn to developments in adult education generally and in other areas of the educational system designed to ensure, to the extent possible, that those who leave the educational system have satisfactory literacy capabilities, and that adults with literacy difficulties get the necessary help.

The White Paper puts forward as important considerations in the developing policy on adult education:

- the recognition of the central importance of adult education for personal development, for updating knowledge and skills for overcoming disadvantage suffered during initial education
- the promotion of lifelong learning and continuous retraining and updating of skills.

An important aspect of the development of adult education in recent years has been the expansion of second-chance programmes of particular relevance to literacy work - particularly the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme, and the Special Initiatives for Disadvantaged Adults Scheme.

The Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme is the Department's main instrument for combating literacy problems among adults. Under this scheme tuition is provided free or at nominal costs. Funding is provided to the Vocational Education Committees who operate the programme. The level of this funding has been doubled from £1m in 1992 to £2m in 1995. Under the scheme tuition is provided annually to some 5,000 participants in 110 literacy schemes throughout the country. About 14,000 people participate in the community education aspect of the scheme.

The Special Initiatives for Disadvantaged Adults Scheme is also operated by the Vocational Education Committees. Among other things, this scheme provides for more intensive literacy and basic education courses, and builds on the work done under the Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme. The financial provision for this scheme has been increased from £273,000 in 1992 to over £1.2m this year.

An increasing emphasis has also been placed on preventive measures within first and second level education. A number of important measures have been introduced and expanded in recent years. These include the following.

- The EARLY-START pre-school programmes
- Enhanced capitation grants
- Reduction in class sizes and increased numbers of remedial teachers

- The home-school links programme
- The library service to primary schools, and the School Books Scheme at second level
- Resource teachers for the handicapped
- Increased resources to parent councils.

There is a strong element of targeting these measures on children who are disadvantaged.

These and other measures are designed to retain young people in the second level education cycle until they have completed the cycle, to enhance their experience while they are at school and thereby reduce considerably the significant number of young people leaving the education system with serious literacy problems.

The approach is two pronged - prevention and cure - with a strong emphasis on the former.

Literacy - maintenance of skills, national survey

Of course that is not the end of the story. The maintenance of the literacy skills attained is of paramount importance if we are to gain substantial ground in this area.

This is a good example of where the education system has a common purpose with the library service. The education system needs to inculcate a love of reading and interest in lifelong learning. The library service shares this perspective.

Conclusion

Returning to your conference. I would like to compliment An Chomhairle Leabharlanna for the attractive programme you have organised for today. You are providing us with a very interesting balance of contributions from Sweden, Wales and from Limerick, Offaly and Longford! I would particularly like to welcome the two overseas speakers, Ms. Barbro Thomas from Sweden and Mr. Gwyn Williams from Wales.

It is with great pleasure that I open this important conference.

I wish you well.

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ILLITERACY AND PUBLIC LIBRARIES: AN INTRODUCTION

Barbro Thomas
Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs

Introduction

According to UNESCO's estimate in 1990 there were 948.1 million illiterates aged over 15 in the world. That is roughly one fourth of the total population. Further the distribution is far from fair. The imbalance between developing and developed countries shows that less than 5 per cent of the population in developed countries were considered illiterate, or rather functional illiterates, while almost 35 per cent of the population in Third World countries could not read or write. Need I mention that women suffer to a higher degree than the male population of the lack of reading skills.

Between 1970 and 1985 the number of illiterates grew by approximately 59 million. Since 1985 the number has remained stable. The stability in the figures means a decrease of illiteracy rates: 38.5 per cent in 1990 and - by extrapolation - 21.8 per cent in the year 2000.

So far literacy programmes, economical progress, technical development etc. seem not to have been totally successful. It would be difficult to prove what impact public library efforts, literacy programmes, international development agencies and so on have had on reducing the number of illiterates, in the long run. On the other hand what would it have been like without those efforts? We should by no means give way to defeatism.

But to be cynical, and indeed to be very pessimistic, it might be the case that what has most successfully and most effectively reduced the illiteracy rates, by extinguishing whole populations, are civil or "ordinary" wars, famines, crop failures, diseases, disasters and, not to forget, trade embargoes.

The role of the public library

The mission of the public library is among other things to promote reading. It is however not unusual that circulation rates are regarded as the measure of success. Not to mention other symbols of success like costly designed buildings and the latest technical equipment. Maybe this is the reason why libraries so far have underestimated their role in combating illiteracy and mainly directed their services to the literate customer. Of course there are public libraries that have worked actively

to eradicate illiteracy. But generally speaking public libraries seem to feel a bit uncomfortable facing the problem.

The existence of a public library should in itself be a monument against illiteracy. All efforts to eliminate illiteracy would be in vain unless reading material could be made available to those who have acquired the ability to enjoy reading.

IFLA and UNESCO initiatives

The subject of illiteracy had been dealt with for a long time within IFLA's Section of Public Libraries. In 1985, the Section formed a working group to review the involvement of libraries in literacy matters around the world and to plan a seminar to address this issue. The pre-conference seminar *Public Libraries Against Illiteracy* was held in Massy in connection to the 1989 IFLA General Conference in Paris. The base programme of the seminar was formulated and designed with four goals in mind:

- to bring together information on public library efforts against illiteracy around the world
- to provide an opportunity for the participants to share experiences
- to explore ways in which more public library activities could be planned to expand illiteracy projects
- to develop series of resolutions for action by IFLA.

Linked to the IFLA General Conference in Stockholm 1990 the Section organised a seminar devoted to the same topic. In connection with the 1990 IFLA Conference a pre-session seminar on *Public Library Policy* was held where the question of illiteracy played an important role.

UNESCO has, since the very beginning, in its educational work placed considerable emphasis on libraries. In 1949 the UNESCO *Public Library Manifesto* ⁽¹⁾ was first published. The manifesto stressed the link between public libraries and education. In order to put into practice the advice given, UNESCO set up three pilot libraries, to act as models and testing grounds. The first pilot library was established in Delhi. It was founded in 1950 by the government of India and UNESCO. The principal objective was to provide reading materials for new literates, in four languages; Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and English.

In 1987 the United Nations decided to proclaim 1990 the *International Literacy Year*. UNESCO was invited to assume the role of lead organisation. The Literacy Year became of global importance and the problem of illiteracy was focused on, in the developing part of the world as well as in the developed countries.

IFLA's Section of Public Libraries and School Libraries actively supported UNESCO's goals. In 1990 the Section received financial support from UNESCO to establish guidelines for public libraries working with illiteracy. And this forms the background to the publication issued 1993 by UNESCO - *Guidelines for Public Libraries Promoting Literacy*. PGI-93/WS/4.⁽²⁾

The Guidelines

In preparing and establishing guidelines for libraries working with illiteracy the discussions, papers, proposals and resolutions from the seminars mentioned above have formed the basis for the work. It should be stressed that the document is a desk study, based on reports and papers presented at various seminars and conferences and on discussions with colleagues from Third World countries.

It was agreed that the guidelines established should be possible to apply in developing as well as in developed countries. As conditions differ so much it was evident that it would not be appropriate to establish a manual, but rather to focus on the problem in order to raise awareness and cause discussion within the profession.

The principal problem establishing guidelines for libraries combating illiteracy was, and is, of course the tremendous gap between the Third World countries with a high rate of basic illiteracy and the industrialised countries with various rates of functional illiteracy and lower, but various, rates of basic illiteracy. Library resources, the surplus of books and reading materials are concentrated in the industrial world. Generally speaking libraries that face the extreme rates of basic illiteracy also face a lack of books and reading materials and also suffer from poor library standards as well as poor educational systems.

Therefore the guidelines suggest what might be possible, but national/local conditions will dictate what is feasible. That is why some of the examples given might not at all be applicable or relevant for some libraries. Those complications appear most evidently in the chapter dealing with selection of materials, which might even be provocative, to libraries facing the fact that there is not very much material to select. On the other hand the advice might have relevance for future development. It should be kept in mind that there is a gap between what is desirable and what is possible.

What is stressed is that since illiteracy is a very diversified problem public libraries cannot work in isolation. The public library must work in co-operation with other participants in the field. A necessary condition for success is co-operation. It was also evident that without political support public library efforts will only have limited effects. That means, if the government policy on literacy is negative, neglected or not prioritised, illiteracy will remain for eternity. In that case public libraries should start with promoting public libraries and inform government bodies about how they could be involved in literacy work. What should also be added is the importance of good relations and co-operation with NGO's. It was evident that

successful literacy projects were often based on fruitful co-operation between public sector institutions and NGO's.

The good example

To avoid a too abstract level of advice the guidelines contain some good examples. The examples were based on papers presented at the seminars mentioned and on reports presented otherwise. The examples cover the industrialised part of the world as well as Third World countries. There was also a presentation of the Ranfurly Library Service, as a good example of practical work against illiteracy that started on a charity basis and developed to a well organised and established institution. Showing good practice how to manage book donation programmes in close co-operation with receiving libraries and with respect for the needs expressed. The main objective for book donations must by no means be to help donors to get rid of outworn and shabby books.

Common to the good examples reviewed is that the public library operates within the framework of a national policy and in co-operation with other actors in the field. A principal question was of course: should a good example be bad? And I must confess that it was a temptation not to present some unsuccessful ones. There was especially one example that we could have learned a lot of things from. What I have in mind is the *Rural Press and Rural Library Projects* in Tanzania, that was evaluated by UNESCO in February 1992.

As part of the Tanzania Adult Literacy Programme, rural newspapers and rural libraries were established in the beginning of the early 70s. The rural library programme was extended to the whole country. But the library programme was not in any way affiliated with the National Library Service, which supervised and services other libraries in the country. And I will quote a part from the evaluation:

...The library consists of several shelves in a small office of the Ward Co-ordinator. In one corner of the ceiling was a bees nest which no one could control. The villagers agreed that the facility was inadequate and volunteers in each village in the ward have been asked to make bricks and help to make a new building as soon as the rainy season is over. Iron sheets for the roof, cement, timber and furniture have been requested from the District.

Discussion groups in health (malaria, bilharzia, diarrhoea, need to boil water) agriculture, animal husbandry meet at the library twice a month. Needed is equipment for demonstrating in these areas.

The library received a bicycle from UNESCO in 1970 to take books around the villages, but it was out of order a long time ago. Honorarium for the library attendant has not arrived for several months.⁽³⁾

Such examples were left out for the sake of not to discredit literacy programmes. But I admit that unsuccessful examples might be very good indeed if we use them to learn something.

Information illiteracy

What impact Information Technology will have on the literacy problem is not easy to predict. The scene has changed since the guidelines were published. The information society, still a bit abstract only a few years ago, is suddenly present. More concern has been paid to the concept of “information illiteracy”. There is also an increasing concern for the widening gap between the information rich and the information poor. A gap that is visible in industrialised countries as well as between the industrialised world and Third World countries. What this means for public libraries and their literacy work is however still difficult to predict. But it probably means something. It might be the case that this is a challenge not experienced since the Gutenberg revolution. It is not unlikely that the technical development will widen the gap between the information poor and the information rich. Which means not only the well-known fact that the Third World countries will be left behind but also that within the industrialised world the gap will widen. In that case the public library ought to examine its role. To provide the tools for those who have no other choice. To give the general public access to the electronic highway, if there is one.

It is also important to keep an eye on the development to see in what direction the information society moves. To prevent people from being poisoned by information, to secure that there are alternatives to the entertainment industry. To regard what happens to literacy if or when words are replaced by symbols. All this is difficult to foresee. But public libraries should be aware. Among already existent definitions information illiteracy might become an overall problem to be solved with solutions not yet invented.

Illiteracy in Europe

What was not focused on in particular in the process of establishing the guidelines was the situation in Europe and other industrialised countries. We know there are various illiteracy rates within the comparatively prosperous European world. Usually we connect illiteracy with the following factors:-

- poor living conditions
- poor educational systems
- lack of reading material
- poor or non existent public libraries
- lack of reading tradition

- lack of literacy tradition

The above mentioned factors are not to a great extent present in Europe even if there might be imperfections. On the contrary conditions are on the whole favourable to foster literacy. Living conditions might differ. Compulsory education was introduced in the 19th century and has been continually improved. There is definitely not a lack of reading material. Public libraries show a comparatively high standard. There is a long and strong reading tradition and there is also a long and strong literacy tradition. For example, Ireland has just added another Nobel Prize winner to the list and still Ireland as well as other European countries report various and astonishing high illiteracy rates.

This fact should be of great concern for those responsible for the educational systems and of course for public libraries. We need an in depth examination of the situation and national programmes to promote literacy. We should learn from the successful examples, that success is based on a national policy, co-ordination of efforts and co-operation between all actors in the field, namely the educational system, public libraries, NGO's and all the various voluntary groups devoted to the matter.

Final remarks

The IFLA/UNESCO guidelines were set up in order to focus the role of public libraries in combating illiteracy and promote literacy. It ought to be stressed that they should be regarded as a draft that ought to be revised at some future stage. Since needs and resources vary so widely there can be no common standards or guidelines. Reservations must be made that some advice and examples given might not be applicable or relevant for some libraries but might for others. The guidelines were established to encourage further discussion in order to promote library services in support of literacy work. And so I hope they will.

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ADULT LITERACY INITIATIVES IN CLWYD COUNTY

W. Gwyn Williams

Clwyd County Library and Information Services

Background

The Clwyd Library and Information Service has always considered the libraries educational role as a major policy objective.

We always related to the mid-nineteenth century concept that a public library and information service should be the “people’s university” and that the public library has a prime responsibility in the provision of educational support to all groups and ages in society and a responsibility to foster, develop and promote literacy skills in the community.

As such there has developed in Clwyd a history and a well established pattern of co-operation between the Library and Information Service and the Adult Education Service of the Local Education Authority. Such collaboration has involved a wide range of activities ranging from joint planning and monitoring of continuing education provision to joint training and the joint provision of adult education services. Major elements in this partnership approach have included 5 activities:

Firstly, the establishment of a Joint Adult Continuing Education Committee co-ordinated by the library service and involving other adult education agencies such as the Workers Education Association, and the Extra-mural Departments of the University of Wales. This Committee provides a forum for information exchange, planning and monitoring and encompasses most of the education providers in the area. Prior to the Library Services’ initiative in establishing the Committee, such a collaboration was at best ad-hoc and at worst non-existent. It is also significant that all the partners involved in the forum readily accepted the role of the library in leading the partnership in that the library was seen as an honest broker, and completely unbiased in that it did not appear to represent any particular interest other than that of the customer.

Secondly, the production of an Adult Education Pack - a locally produced information resource but linked to wider sources of such information including computer data basis such as the Training Access Point initiative and the ECCTIS (Education Counselling and Credit Transfer Info Service) data-base now available on CD-Rom. This pack provides a starting point for handling adult education information needs.

Thirdly, Adult Education Fortnight - a joint annual promotions event (usually starting in early Autumn to coincide with the time most people enrol in adult education classes), supported by a range of agencies and featuring promotional displays, staged exhibitions and guidance sessions and manned (or personed) class enrolment desks in libraries.

Fourthly, the development of Open and Distance learning services through public libraries.

Fifthly, joint research projects - for example one of the first research projects was to emphasise and establish the needs of adult independent learners locally.

It was a result of such a joint research project that we discovered that although libraries were at the forefront of national literacy and numeracy campaigns, since the 1970's there were a great many potential customers who were not in fact taking advantage of the services then available.

In view of the established pattern of close co-operation between the Library and Information Service and the Education Department, it was considered that a joint approach to meet the needs for basic education was the most logical, innovative and potentially the most effective response.

A funding application was thus submitted to ALBSU (the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit - a national development agency for literacy, numeracy and related basic skills in England and Wales - now re-named simply the Basic Skills Agency,) - the application was for funding to create a permanent, proactive facility to be known as "Study Base" at one of the major libraries in Clwyd - in the town of Wrexham.

The overall aims of the Project were to increase and vary the style of provision of A.B.E. in the County by the establishment of additional classes and to explore ways of enabling tutors and students to evaluate and exploit a wide range of resources. The specific objectives of the Project were:

- to increase the provision of group based adult education by the establishment of two daytime classes each week at the library
- to establish a drop-in centre available at specified times offering advice and additional support for individual students
- to provide facilities for the evaluation of learning materials by tutors and students
- to establish and maintain a collection of relevant materials in a variety of media including books, journals, audio, video and computer software.
- to develop library user education programmes for A.B.E. tutors and students.

- to establish outreach facilities in order to make material from the resources centre available to tutors and students on a county-wide basis for evaluation and use:
 - ◆ by visiting groups in order to disseminate and evaluate materials
 - ◆ by loaning materials to A.B.E. groups via the Library and Information Service's network
 - ◆ and by facilitating the exchange of resources between A.B.E. groups.

The Wrexham Library is a modern open building with what is considered to be a warm welcoming ambience set in a complex with an arts centre, meeting rooms and a busy cafe. A wide range of other facilities are also available - for example a large foyer provides an excellent environment for information displays, an Adult Education Advice and Guidance Counselling Service was based in the library, together with a Welfare Rights Help Desk, a Training Access Points Terminal and an Open Learning Collection.

Study Base was also therefore located in the main library but with an adjacent room set aside for teaching and learning.

Whilst such a setting appeared to us to offer obvious advantages, to some, such advantages were also seen as possible disadvantages from the point of view potential customers. They thought that:

- perhaps a library may not be the most natural place to attract people with reading difficulties
- traditionally libraries have a middle-class image - potential customers may not fit into this socio-economic group
- libraries are very public places - potential students may not wish to be seen receiving the Basic Education service
- busy library staff would have yet another service and customer group to deal with - could they cope with the additional work load?

Were our objectives achieved, or were the reservations expressed by the doubters proven?

In answer to that question I can do no better than to quote from the conclusions of a report on the project produced two years after its inception. The review concluded that:

- 1) *One of the basis of this Project has been to see how a partnership between two different services in an authority can work to the benefit of both. As this Project continues the benefits grow clearer. The library is a natural focal point for the public to get information and having a person on the spot to answer queries is a good link into the (A.B.E.) service. The public find our library an unthreatening place to be in, and many prospective students seem quite prepared to stand and chat about their problems, although a private room is also available. The building is well used by the public so that a student could be coming in to take advantage of any of the library or Arts Centre services.*

The collaboration between the two departments has also worked well in other ways - passing on referrals, developing the Library User pack, distributing publicity and sending materials out to groups. Another outcome has been the establishment of the Library Service's own collection of (A.B.E.) materials distributed throughout the County.

Conclusion 1: The partnership between the Education Department and the Library and Information Service has been very useful.

- 2) *There are now many good A.B.E. resources around but many providers of basic education, especially those outside local authority provision, do not know where to look or what is available. Very few book shops, even the best, carry these materials so that a permanent display which can be seen during long opening hours, together with the opportunity to discuss those materials with a practitioner, is welcomed by many.*

Conclusion 2: A good resources centre such as Study Base enhances the quality of the service offered.

- 3) *The flexible timings offered in a drop-in centre are very helpful to many students, allowing them to continue tuition when temporary or permanent changes occur in their lives. Being open several times a week also gives students the opportunity to have concentrated provision over a shorted length of time - especially helpful to beginners or those with a short term aim such as passing an entrance test. The ideal would be to open full-time but this is costly in tutor hours. Even that would not satisfy some people - one young man worked in an Indian restaurant and wanted help after 11 p.m. or before 9 a.m.!*

Conclusion 3: Flexible hours of tuition are necessary for a wide range of reasons.

- 4) *The opportunity to choose whether to work in groups or individually is welcomed by many students. Group work can offer the support of other students, help to build confidence and form a bridge into other adult classes. In groups, the dropout rate seem to be less after the first meeting or two - most of the longest attending students are those who work in groups.*

Conclusion 4: Groupwork offers the student the opportunity to develop more skills and is a useful step into more transitional FE provision.

- 5) *It is important for the surroundings to be attractive and comfortable - too much A.B.E. is in places that are used by other groups, so that materials etc. have to be taken away or locked in a cupboard at the end of each session.*

Conclusion 5: Good quality surroundings raise the status of A.B.E. provision and the self-esteem of the student.

- 6) *Working alongside other services can work to the benefit of the client. This has been particularly true with for example, the, Adult Education Advice and Guidance Counsellor based at the library. Clients with a literacy need seeking the advice of the Education Guidance Counsellor have been passed straight to the A.B.E. Service for a chat, and as A.B.E. students have been ready to move on they have been referred back to her.*

Conclusion 6: A.B.E. needs to be part of a network of providers.

- 7) *Good publicity is vital. Personal calling to other agencies, simple eye-catching leaflets and posters are all very valuable - the response to the posters on site in Wrexham Library was particularly good. But this process has to be on-going - "out of sight, out of mind" can be very true.*

Conclusion 7: Publicity can take many forms and is an important part of our service.

- 8) *A.B.E. groups in an area such as Clwyd can feel very isolated. A centre where tutors can chat to another practitioner and see resources is welcomed. A visit by someone bringing materials can cause great excitement, especially if those books can then be borrowed.*

Conclusion 8: A good resources centre can be a focal point for an A.B.E. service.

- 9) *Staff in a drop-in centre need to be as flexible as those in an Open Learning Centre - both paid and volunteer tutors. They have to be prepared for different students on different days. Methods of initial assessment of students and assessing progress need to be understood and adhered to by all tutors and records of students' work have to be clear and up-to-date to keep continuity in tuition and students motivation high. Tutors have to know the materials available and the materials themselves must be easily accessible.*

Conclusion 9: Staff training and development must be an integral part of today's A.B.E. provision.

- 10) *Information technology has been an essential part of the Project both in teaching students and in the preparation of materials. Knowledge of computer technology is fast becoming a necessity in today's society. "Hands on" experience is seen by our students as more important than the use of expensive software. Word processing is proving a useful tool in improving written English, and when students have problems with handwriting, seeing their work neatly printed is very rewarding. The use of computers is often a selling point in persuading uncertain prospective students to come along; it is easier to tell friends you are learning about computers than learning to read or write.*

Conclusion 10: Information technology has much to offer A.B.E. both in tuition and in raising its image.

Those were the conclusions of A.B.E. staff working at the Centre which I think reflect the success of the project. In terms of numbers, 131 students regularly used Study Base in the first year and nearly 200 students regularly used the centre in the second year.

The Local Education Authority certainly considered that the project was a success and by using Educational Support Grant monies (that is, Government funding) proposed the establishment of a second centre in the North of the County. As the partnership was proving to be so successful with Study Base, the Library Service had no hesitation in offering to house this new project - named "The Second Chance Centre" at its new Rhyl Library - a library with facilities similar to those of Wrexham. The A.B.E. Service of the Education Department was more than happy to accept the offer.

This centre was sufficiently funded to provide facilities for the extensive utilisation of information technology for A.B.E. As such it was the first centre in Wales to do so and has subsequently attracted much national and international interest.

The objectives for Second Chance were much more succinct than Study Base, they were:

- to establish an Open Learning Centre that:

- ◆ provides opportunities for adults to improve their basic skills
- ◆ provides flexible opportunities for learning
- ◆ removes the barriers to learning which have prevented adults from improving their basic skills
- ◆ enables access to and support for other educational opportunities and resources
- ◆ provides a variety of styles of learning.

Again, to establish whether these objectives were achieved I quote from a review report undertaken 3 years after the project had started and which reported the outcomes as follows:

The Open Learning Centre in Rhyl was set up in May 1989. Before the end of that month the first students had made contact and were receiving tuition in other parts of the library while improvements were being made to the designated area and furniture and computers were being installed.

In the early months there was a great deal of activity arranging advertising, planning resources and making new contacts but by the end of the first nine weeks the centre was established and had 33 students attending at least once a week. By the end of the first year there had been almost 300 referrals and weekly attendance's were close to 200.

The centre itself has a wide range of resources in terms of both staff and equipment. New referrals are given the opportunity to discuss their needs with a full-time member of staff who then directs them to the range of opportunities available.

There are many books and worksheets for English and Maths at varying levels; some are Open Learning materials while others require more tutor support. There are computers with a variety of software for teaching literacy and numeracy skills and word-processing, database, spreadsheet and desk top publishing.

- *Tutors offer one-to-one tuition and group sessions. There are courses available for Wordpower, Numberpower, GCSE and English for Speakers of Other Languages as well as classes for those with Special Needs, Women Returners, and those requiring Study Skills.*

The need to extend and develop the curriculum was apparent from the beginning and this has been achieved with co-operation and support from the other agencies and providers.

- *The Centre is open at times to suit most students and in a central location accessible to people from a wide area with outreach facilities in other nearby towns.*

The Centre is open daily from 10.00 till 4.30 with an extension one evening a week until 7.00 and weekend provision on Saturday mornings between 09.30 and 12.30.

Enrolment is ongoing throughout the year and accredited courses can be joined at any time with opportunities for taking qualification either through assessment or examination or both, available to all students at a range of levels.

Using the range of Open Learning materials, students can, if they wish, work from home or in a different learning environment and call in the centre only when they need tutor support or new materials.

The flexible approach, offered in the Centre, removes many barriers to learning and enables adults to make a commitment to improve their basic skills.

The student-centred ethos means that there are no barriers of time, place or level of ability. Students can enrol when they want to, study in a place where they feel comfortable, work at their own pace, on their own scheme of work and at their own level.

Other barriers, such as childcare needs or physical disability have been addressed and the Centre provides free crèche facilities and ensures that those in wheelchairs can gain access to the facilities.

Lack of confidence is the main barrier facing most adults wishing to return to learning to improve their basic skills. The centre attempts to overcome this barrier by providing resources which are seen to be of good quality and therefore raises the status of A.B.E. This is further enhanced by the introduction of computers which attracts many new students to the centre and enables new teaching methods to be employed alongside traditional ones. The staff, both paid and voluntary tutors, are highly motivated and are well

qualified to meet the needs of the students both in terms of practical skills and emotional support.

Establishing the centre in a library, rather than in an educational establishment, has removed the psychological barriers which many students feel, especially if they have failed at school. The nature and location of the building has helped to overcome this barrier.

The Adult Education Guidance Counsellor provides invaluable support to new referrals and to students who want to access other opportunities and need help with their basic education. The Centre is able to provide this help and enables a large number of students to gain qualifications which provide the first step to further educational opportunities or work prospects.

The centre has forged links with other agencies and providers and thus enabled the referral network to be extended and also allowed students to access other local courses.

So it would appear from the comments of the A.B.E. staff at the Rhyl Second Chance Centre that they considered the project to have been a success.

In 1992, responsibility for Adult Education including A.B.E. was transferred from the Local Education Authority to the Colleges of Further Education and it is significant that all the Colleges of Further Education in the County were anxious to retain the A.B.E. centres established in libraries and provided the necessary funding not only to retain and maintain these centres but that they wished to develop additional A.B.E. provision through libraries and to further investigate the potential for adopting open learning methods for delivering A.B.E. in libraries.

As a result the Library Service and the Colleges of Further Education of a fourth project which received ALBSU grant aid and was aimed at increasing access to basic skills in the more rural, outlying areas of the County by establishing and developing open learning opportunities and short courses in basic communication skills, by examining methods of making existing collections of materials more widely available to potential students and to increase access to support mechanisms on a regular basis.

Second Chance centres were established at three rural market town libraries, one in each college area. The intention was to extend A.B.E. provision to areas of identified need but with no or very limited existing provision. Cognisance was also taken of existing Open Learning Services within the library and the availability of suitable space and facilities.

A part-time tutor was appointed to each project centre. This tutor, together with the Area Second Chance Co-ordinator and the local Community Librarian, in each case

established a local Project Management Group which met regularly to monitor and develop the and in each case established good, close working relationships.

A collection of A.B.E. materials was established at each centre drawing on Library and Information Service stock as well as the colleges' and the tutors' own teaching materials. Computer facilities were established at each centre. Storage and display shelving and teaching/study areas were earmarked.

The centres operated on the basis of both short courses and drop-in facilities. The materials were also available for students to use on an independent basis at times when the tutor was not present. Both the short courses and the drop-in facilities were successful.

The Community Librarians involved in the project attended a short course based on elements of the Initial Teaching Certificate in Teaching Basic Communication Skills in order to raise their and their staffs' awareness, of A.B.E. This course was also attended by other Community Librarians throughout the Service in order to disseminate information and good practice as widely as possible.

The outcomes of the project to date are as follows:

- in excess of 1100 attendees have been recorded
- a much higher than targeted percentage (30% as opposed to 10-15%) of students undertook accreditation. This seems to confirm the trend towards students desire for accreditation.

It is a significant feature of the project was that 70% of the students were new A.B.E. learners and it can readily be shown therefore that the project achieved its major aim of extending provision to those unable, unwilling to undertake such courses or unaware that such services were available.

Short courses proved to be very popular.

The project was very successful in forging new partnerships between librarians and A.B.E. staff locally. Undoubtedly, the establishment of such partnerships is a key to successful service provision.

Although the tutors were present at only specified, and limited, times the extended opening hours of the libraries enabled ready access to the resources and facilities. Additionally it was possible to arrange particular events outside normal opening hours by using library meeting rooms and similar facilities.

The impact of the project

As a result of this project A.B.E. provision has been permanently established in three new locations - two of which it had proved difficult to make any impact previously. It is considered that the use of libraries does make this easier to achieve.

Core collections of materials, computer facilities and study areas have been established at these three libraries and this provision is now seen as part of the everyday service.

Networks of contacts for referral, for information and for assistance have been established by the pooling of the expertise of two professional groups.

Community Librarians across the County have received training in A.B.E. provision.

It is significant, and a mark of the success of the project that the three library based A.B.E. centres are continuing in operation and that the colleges have each resolved to meet the tutorial costs with the result that the Library and Information Service has readily agreed to provide the space, the resources, the facilities and the staff time to support the provision.

Well, there you have some examples of the Clwyd experience in developing a partnership approach between libraries and A.B.E. Services and from which we deduce that such a partnership can be very successful that despite reservations initially expressed by A.B.E. tutors, students do not find libraries daunting places - quite the opposite that students appreciate the long opening hours of libraries and the fact that if an A.B.E. tutor was not available, the library staff were more than willing and able to help that students appreciated both the ambience of the library and the fact that a public library was accessible to the physically handicapped - factors not always true of other accommodation that A.B.E. services have to use. To quote the response from one student:-

I have enjoyed visiting the centre and the library, I can spell my words much better now and I can understand them. I now belong to the library and I have found full-time work

That quote from the experience of one student, in that it reflects exactly what we are trying to achieve, "will do for me" as they say.

Note:

Since the presentation of this paper, local government re-organisation in England and Wales has taken place. Clwyd County Council was divided into four unitary authorities. Gwyn Williams is now Head of Cultural Services, Denbighshire County Council.

COUNTY OFFALY PROJECT - 1

The librarian's perspective

Anne Coughlan
Offaly County Libraries

Introduction

There are fundamental questions to be addressed in relation to adult literacy provision and public libraries in the Irish context:

- why should the public library be involved in literacy provision?
- to what extent should the public library service contribute?
- what contribution can the public library make to adult literacy?

The project, initiated by the Department of Education and Science, provided an impetus to critically examine this area of service, to determine the extent of public library involvement and in practical terms, to establish what form this involvement should take.

Background

Offaly County Library had worked with the Offaly Reading & Writing Scheme in a number of areas since the early 1970's:

- literacy resources were purchased and made available in branch libraries where only one bay of shelving was assigned to these resources, with relevant publicity material
- a stock-list of literacy resources was compiled and made available in branch libraries
- publicity for the local literacy scheme was printed on the library's information leaflet
- exhibitions to promote adult education were provided in some libraries
- branch libraries were used for tuition purposes
- the library acted as a referral agency - individuals were referred to the literacy scheme by library personnel.

Some of these initiatives were successful and are now established practice, for example, the use of the library for one-to-one and group tuition has been very successful in Edenderry Library. Other branches are used from time to time for literacy tuition. The library is seen by students as a public place and a neutral venue for tuition purposes. Promotional exhibitions are sited in libraries and libraries continue to act as a referral agency.

However, the tutors and students made little use of the literacy resources provided in branch libraries and in time, these resources were withdrawn from branches and the collection centralised at Headquarters.

In 1992, a meeting was held at Tullamore Library involving the then Adult Literacy Organiser and a group of tutors. The purpose of that meeting was to discuss the variety of resources appropriate to individual students and how best the tutors could avail of these resources. The outcome of that meeting was the implementation of a special lending scheme for tutors whereby they could borrow up to 10 books at any one time - free of charge, from the total lending stock of the library. The uptake on this scheme was again disappointing.

Historically our involvement with the literacy service was sporadic. There was no structured programme or evaluation mechanism in place. Experience in Offaly had highlighted the need for an on-going programme which would integrate the public library services in the provision of basic education. There was also the need to question the notion that all literacy students were homogeneous and that the provision of "literacy materials" in sufficient quantity met the needs of literacy students.

The project

In early 1994 at the beginning of the project, we consulted with a wide range of individuals and groups involved in education including the Adult Education Organiser, to discuss how the proposed project could examine and implement measures which could have long-term beneficial effects. We also consulted with other County Librarians who had experience in this area. We found that the experience in these counties was similar to the Offaly experience.

Against this background, we set out the objective of the project and the critical areas we wished to examine and develop.

The objective of the project was to establish a structured programme formalising the library's role in adult literacy provision thereby strengthening the links between the Library and the VEC Literacy Scheme.

It was our intention from the start, to work with the Literacy Scheme since it is the principal provider of a literacy service in the county.

The school year (September to June) was considered to be an appropriate time-frame to achieve this objective but no time period was specified initially, because of the experimental nature of the project.

In our outline proposal to the Department of Education and Science five key areas were specified for examination:

- the library's role in the promotion of adult literacy
- the provision of an induction course on library services for tutors - to inform the tutors of the services of the library and its value as a learning resource and to encourage them to introduce students to the library
- formal training for library staff - to inform library staff of the needs of the Adult Literacy Training Service and to enhance the quality of the library service to students and tutors
- resources: a joint examination of the total resources of the library by librarians and tutors with a view to establishing appropriate resource bibliographies, not limited to traditional adult literacy materials. It was felt that the interpretation of literacy resources could be broadened, and that traditional literacy resources were limited and in our opinion would not encourage or stimulate reading as a lifelong habit. In hindsight, the student should have been specified as a key player in this process but at this stage we were working at one remove from the students. Tutors needed guidance in selecting suitable reading materials for their students. It was felt that this joint examination would bring together the knowledge and expertise of the librarians with the expressed needs of the students thus facilitating the building of a resource list
- the role of the library in the provision of resources for the student while attending the formal literacy scheme and later as an independent reader. It was our intention that the students would continue to use the library thereby reinforcing their reading skills. Studies have shown that there can be a relatively high degree of return to illiteracy some years after the ending of formal classes. The students' introduction to the library, therefore, was vital.

Action plan

We set out a plan of action based on the objective and key areas as outlined. The students and their needs became the focus of the study as the project developed. The plan focused on the following areas:

- promotion

- tutors
- students
- library staff and services
- resources
- evaluation
- establishment of annual programme

Promotion

The promotion of the library permeates all areas of the Action Plan. To date we have examined three areas in particular - promotional material, promotion within the library and outreach activities.

Library Information Leaflets

- a newly designed library information leaflet for the general public was produced and deposited in the adult literacy resource room, and in various other public places in the town
- a simplified information leaflet in 'large print' was produced, outlining opening hours, 'how to join' and borrowing procedures
- a booklet was produced providing an introduction to the library specifically aimed at literacy students
- a leaflet outlining the rules of the library and the responsibility of users.
- a poster and guide to computer software was also produced.

Discussions have taken place with local radio personnel with a view to having a slot on radio to promote literacy and libraries.

Promotion within the library was also examined.

- internal guiding was improved and emphasis was placed on presentation of stock.
- ‘Help’ notices were placed at desk and in prominent positions around the library as students felt reluctant to ask for help. These improvements were recommended by students.
- library procedures were examined by participants and were considered to be clear and straightforward. e.g., Application Form presented no difficulties to the students.

Outreach: sixteen meetings were held during the course of the project. Formal meetings with Literacy Scheme participants is an important and effective way to promote services. Not alone are we reaching out to individuals but to the families and friends of the participants.

A free service was extended to all literacy students while participating on the scheme and students recommended the mechanism whereby this could be put in place without stigmatising the users.

Tutors

A library induction module was provided for new tutors as part of their in-service training programme.

The library training module was carefully planned with clearly defined objectives, programme and evaluation mechanism.

Suggestions and comments made by tutors were encouraging. Tutors wanted more time for the library induction course and suggested a ‘review’ night after some practical use of the library. They also suggested using a library for their own practical training sessions in order to have access to a wide variety of source material.

Their positive response to the Library Service was very encouraging for library staff.

Students

Our first formal meeting with students was arranged by the Literacy Organiser. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce students to the library and to access their needs. A series of library information sheets was produced for that meeting and these have since evolved into a *Library Information* booklet for the literacy scheme.

This was a very important meeting for us and a very successful one. The students expressed their needs openly and freely and gave positive feedback on the library service. They also made positive suggestions, which we were able to implement.

Library staff

A one day seminar was organised for library staff in co-operation with the Adult Literacy Organiser. The objectives were:

- to inform library staff of the needs of the Adult Literacy Service
- to enhance the quality of the library service to the participants
- to promote co-operation and partnership as a means of improving the effectiveness of the library service in this area.

Tutors and students participated with library staff in group-work discussing sensitivities and difficulties experienced on both sides of the control desk.

Library resources

The resources relevant to students' needs were examined and an attempt made to classify them into broad categories. This was essential in order for us to identify our requirements and to manage our stock effectively:

- materials produced in-house by the literacy scheme to meet the immediate 'wants' of the students
- published resources for tutors e.g., NALA's publication on training *New ideas for tutor training in adult literacy work* ⁽¹⁾
- published literacy booklets: i.e., produced by schemes / written by students / compilations specifically for adult literacy students.
- published remedial and simplified material e.g., age-appropriate and ability appropriate books.
- general published works in fiction and non-fiction including large print books, newspapers and periodicals.
- non-book material: audio books / unabridged audio books linked with printed books / videos
- computer software
- guides / bibliographies.

This categorisation is by no means definitive but nevertheless clarifies the term “resources”.

The literacy scheme and the library have worked closely together in developing a strategy for the compilation of a resource list. The tutors and students are now involved in generating such a resources list which will provide information on resources and indicate the ability-range of the resources. Such a list will be very useful for students, tutors and library staff.

An area in the library was designated for use by the participants of the scheme, where notices of educational opportunities are displayed. Facilities are provided for study. A small collection of literacy material is on display and the items are available for loan. A computer with CD-ROM (funded from the project grant) is installed with learning packages.

This facility is relevant to the needs of all individuals learning and not limited to literacy students. Students therefore feel free to use this area without feeling stigmatised. It also encourages self-directed learning which is an important objective of the library service. The legend “Study Base” is used to indicate the area which is modelled on the Clwyd Library Literacy Service.

Evaluation

We put an evaluation system at each stage of the process which provided valuable insights and information.

It gave us the opportunity to reach an audience which heretofore was beyond our reach. It broadened the library’s role from being a passive provider to that of an active participant in the literacy field.

It involved the learners as active participants in their own education. It also allowed them the opportunity to contribute in a variety of areas - articulating their needs, being involved in establishing registration procedures, in the compilation of the resource list, etc. We provided them with the opportunity to make active choices by not only making the library accessible but by making a wide range of books accessible. We discussed stories and books. Students made many practical suggestions about promotion / promotional literature and the presentation of stock.

The meetings arranged in the library became social gatherings. Students became aware that they were not alone in their difficulties and benefited from the social interaction.

The student numbers are relatively small - less than 200 persons are currently participating in the literacy scheme. To date 31 students and 19 tutors are registered library users. A record of items borrowed by the scheme has also been kept since June 1995. Books have been borrowed from all categories of stock. The out-turn to-

date is: 17% from the junior library: 80% from the adult library and 3% audio material.

Less than 10% of the total items borrowed were from the 'pure literacy' section and were borrowed by the tutors. No student borrowed from the literacy section. It is too early to draw conclusions from the pattern of use to date. This area will be closely monitored during the coming months.

In library terms the figures are small, so how do we assess the true value of the library service in this area?

Serving the new reader is not easy. There is no package that can be purchased to fully meet all the requirements. The project opened up the resources of the library to the students and the tutors. Many were unaware of the extent of the services and resources that were available and few were aware that their local library was part of a network.

The development of a resource list or bibliography by the local tutors and students is very worthwhile. The development of a national bibliography of literacy resources fully classified by age and reading ability would be a major contribution.

The library has a positive contribution to make to the literacy service. There are areas exclusive to the Adult Literacy Scheme, the management and organisation of the scheme, tutor recruitment and training, etc.

It is the function of the public library to provide and manage resources to meet the needs of the community and to promote the library services, in other words to create readers and encourage reading as a worthwhile pursuit.

In our opinion, it is not our function to provide textbooks or basic literacy materials. It has been shown that these are best provided by the Scheme itself. Copies of such materials could be placed by the Scheme in the library for public use.

The use of the library as a neutral venue for tuition purposes is a valuable contribution. The use of the public library by the student is an important step in the social integration of some students. Many would not have been able to avail of valuable community services because of their inability to read or because of their low self-esteem. The library training module can be a positive force in this area.

Library staff are generally skilled in dealing with the public. Their skills were enhanced through participation in the project. The expertise of librarians in matching reader and book is readily available in libraries. A designated staff member to act as liaison person is essential to the success of the programme.

It would be very worthwhile if such a programme could be implemented on an annual basis. It is a labour intensive programme in which the library personnel play a vital role. Their commitment and support has made the programme possible from a

library viewpoint. Literacy provision is a complex and challenging area where the library can play its unique role in maintaining reading habits and encouraging reading as an enjoyable and worthwhile pursuit throughout life.

The project is a partnership in the real sense. Mary McLoughlin, Adult Literacy Organiser, has made a substantial contribution to the success of the project to date. Without that input the project would not have worked.

The project has pointed the way forward for us. We are still at the initial stages of development. We are hopeful that the discussions at today's conference will help us along that route.

In summary, there are three important points to make in relation to the Library's role in literacy provision.

- *Stock:* A wide range of resources is readily available and accessible to help students on their progression route to reading and afterwards as independent readers. The selection of suitable material is critical and it is important that students are given the opportunity to make the selection themselves. Librarians have experience and knowledge of a wide range of publications both current and retrospective. They also have available to them the structures to acquire such materials on demand by purchase or through Inter-Library Loan
- *Library Staff:* Staff, in my opinion, are our most valuable asset. Library staff must be given extra training to be aware of the needs of this particular audience. They must give extra time to assist the tutor or the student to select appropriate reading material. It is important also that staff members are designated liaison persons
- *Social Dimension:* The interaction during the course of the programme is an important step in the social integration of the students. It gives them the opportunity to "negotiate" in relation to their own needs. Many would not or could not avail of valuable community services because of their low self-esteem. The library training module and "open nights" can be a positive force in this area.

Annual programme

We would suggest the following as an outline annual programme.

- **Tutors** - a library module to be a required part of each tutor training course. The continuation of the existing tutor loan scheme
- **Students** - free membership for all students. Library induction course when appropriate. Open evenings outside normal library hours for course participants (i.e. tutors, students, adult literacy organiser, library staff)

- **Library Staff** - designated library person/s. Inservice training for library staff
- **Library Service** - promotional material to target literacy audience. Improved stock management and promotion. Library guiding to meet the needs of new adult readers.

References:

- (1) National Adult Literacy Agency. New ideas for training in adult literacy. Dublin, NALA, 1995.

COUNTY OFFALY PROJECT - 2

The literacy worker's perspective

Mary McLoughlin
Offaly Vocational Education Committee

Anne Coughlan has outlined the involvement of County Offaly Library in complementing the literacy service in Offaly. To put County Offaly literacy provision into its historical context I will begin by referring to the publication of the *Murphy Report* ⁽¹⁾. One of the major findings of Murphy was the high rate of illiteracy within rural and urban communities. The publication of this report prompted a number of Vocational Education Committee's (VEC), including Offaly, to look at the issue of literacy provision. In 1978 County Offaly VEC responded by collaborating with Mr. Tom Woods in providing tutor training for Volunteers from Offaly and surrounding areas. At the same time a B post teacher was given responsibility for introducing literacy provision. By 1980, 6 students were working on a 1:1 basis with volunteer tutors.

On the appointment of an Adult Education Officer (AEO) in County Offaly in 1980, literacy provision was given priority attention. This was a major development as tutor training and support was provided from 1980 onwards. Provision gradually expanded from 12 students in 1980 to 186 students in 1995.

Another development was the publication of the County Offaly Research Project in 1987 ⁽²⁾. This marked a watershed in literacy provision in Offaly and resulted in an number of important developments. These were:

- the provision of group and 1:1 tuition with group tutors receiving payment
- a more systematic approach in raising public awareness of the literacy provision in the county
- students began meeting and student events became a regular feature of provision.

The third development was the inclusion of accredited progression routes for students. This was introduced in 1991.

It is important when providing a programme of progression routes to ensure that one of the key elements of adult literacy philosophy is not neglected. I'm referring to having an individualised approach to each adult learner. Building on the adult learner's level of skills and needs is of vital importance in the field of adult literacy provision. The implications of this approach are considerable. Schemes must

command adequate support and resources if they are to avoid fitting students into an inflexible structure or setting irrelevant and/or unrealistic goals for learners. Consequently in Offaly and other schemes a significant proportion of the organiser's time is spent on designing customised materials and on resourcing materials relevant to individual students needs, on training and on supporting tutors to do this and on encouraging students to move towards accreditation. This dedicated attention was made possible by the Department of Education and Science ALCES (Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme) initiative of 1985.

A further development was the Department of Education and Science ALCES funding initiative.

In Offaly this ALCE budget is used to pay an organiser. As this ALCE budget was increased, the organisers hours were increased. Currently a full-time organiser is employed in Offaly.

A parallel development was enhanced co-operation between the County Offaly Library Service and the Literacy Scheme from 1980 onwards. This had been happening to some extent prior to that.

From the 1970's branch libraries were involved as follows:

- special bays for displaying literacy materials, newly purchased collection of books and tapes were arranged in the library
- literacy provision details were included in the library information leaflet from 1977
- in some libraries separate rooms were used as tuition venues.

From the early 1980's in an attempt to bridge the existing resources gap links were established with Offaly County Library. Since then the Offaly Library Service has been involved in supporting the Offaly Reading and Writing Scheme in a number of other ways.

In 1992 Offaly County Library introduced a free library membership initiative for tutors. Tutors could borrow ten books for use with their students. There was a poor and disappointing response to this offer at the time.

In November 1993 County Offaly Reading and Writing Scheme accepted an invitation from Offaly County Library to participate in the current project. The main aim of the project as already stated was to establish a model of good partnership practice which could be replicated by other library/literacy initiatives in the future.

The project was viewed by us in Offaly as a unique opportunity to facilitate equal participation by all involved in the project, that is an opportunity for providers and learners to work together in providing a high quality service for learners.

This offered exciting challenges and possibilities. However there were many practical problems to be confronted. We had to ensure that this was going to be a process of exchange and sharing of needs, experience, ideas, criticisms and proposals with equal involvement by all. Quite often the consumer, in this case the learner, is legislated for without any consultation. As a result services are less effective.

In January, 12 students representing the 195 students in the scheme participated in a workshop facilitated by the County Librarian and Adult Literacy Organiser. This workshop was designed to enable the students to specify exactly their library related learning needs and how these could be met by the library services. The session enabled the student participants to reflect on, and understand library resources and uses. The group was facilitated by a use of questionnaire carefully designed to elicit suggestions. This first session with students proved to be enlightening and very worthwhile. Students identified their needs and interests and suggested additional workshops and agendas. One concrete result was the introduction of a free library service for students. The scheme was enthusiastically received in marked contrast to the 1992 free book scheme initiative which I have already referred to. The free book scheme has now been extended to the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (V.T.O.S.) and Youth Reach students at basic education level.

Following student recommendations an "open night" was held, 20 students, many of whom were accompanied by their tutors, attended. At the meeting the disparity and range of individual needs, interests and ability levels were emphasised. As I have said already students need a wide range of materials using different language levels to aid improving student reading skills which would in the long-term make reading enjoyable and pleasurable. Purchase of suitable reading materials should not be based on the assumed needs of students i.e. needs defined by tutors/library personnel. Rather they should largely be determined by a process whereby individual students identify their interests and needs, in essence a student-centred approach. Another focus of the evening was the levels of literacy now required in adult life. Students and tutors referred to the increasing number of tasks which require high levels of literacy skills and discussed how the library might provide materials which would reinforce learning.

To date tutors have participated in a number of in-service training sessions. During these sessions the tutors were given opportunities to explore a wide range of materials, to examine critically, and to constructively analyse and evaluate the materials available. The tutors are now aware that a range of student resources for all levels of ability are available and that others can be requested. Collections of books, magazines, tapes and videos were also made available at the workshops. In all 16 working sessions have been held involving tutors, students, the literacy organiser, the County Librarian and library personnel. In addition a book review form was designed which students and tutors could fill in together, giving them the opportunity to discuss a particular book/books and to reflect on the value of those books. The books read, and students' comments are being recorded and made available for use by library personnel, tutors and students. There remains considerable opportunity for

literacy practitioners to undertake projects and research in all aspects of materials provision and design relevant to students at all levels.

I have endeavoured to outline in a sequential way the development of literacy provision in Offaly and the work undertaken by the partners in this initiative.

As I have stated, the practicalities of involving tutors, students, library and VEC personnel as equal participating partners in a national project did in the beginning seem to be an enormous task. However our experience has already shown that equal participation at every stage is crucial to success in any educational undertaking.

Systematic recording by means of questionnaires and evaluation sheets was viewed as an essential and central element of each project session. The time set aside for this worthwhile task, gave the participants opportunities to clarify and review what they had gained from each working session, and to identify actions to be taken. This feedback mechanism was very worthwhile in helping us to evaluate the effectiveness of the work carried out and in planning further activities and also in building student confidence and self-esteem which is a key principle of literacy provision in Offaly.

Concentrating on providing a student with reading and writing skills alone has been proven to be an inefficient and barren exercise. The literacy problem is much wider than this. Tutors must facilitate a process which leads to improved confidence and self-esteem. The quality and in-service training of volunteer tutors is a critical factor in the success of the Scheme. Tutors in the County Offaly Reading and Writing scheme are required to pursue rigorous initial, and ongoing training and this has been made possible by the ALCE funding from the Department of Education and Science. Training methodologies and approaches which have been tested, adapted and refined over the years ensure a highly qualified group of tutors and an almost a zero rate of student dropout.

A key principle of the Scheme is to ultimately produce autonomous self-directed learners. Students are encouraged to set immediate and long-term learning targets, and to choose programmes and materials relevant to their interests and needs. The equal participation of the learners in this library/VEC project has been part of that process of equal partnership and of building confidence and self-esteem. The VEC and the library schemes have also benefited enormously from listening to the views, ideas, evaluations and suggestions of student and tutors.

This initiative has helped to create an open and flexible learning opportunity by maximising access to the library and its resources thus enhancing learning opportunities.

The project has enabled learners to move from a situation of having control in the class situation to having the skills and confidence to liaise and negotiate on an equal basis with another service provider. The rewards have been immense in terms of students looking at the world with renewed energy and pride.

I have referred extensively to student involvement and needs. As I have detailed tutors too were involved as equal partners in the project. I would like to put on record that without the commitment of voluntary tutors the Offaly service would not survive. It is significant that of 56 tutors in Offaly a majority are voluntary unpaid tutors who devote a minimum of 3 hours per week preparing and delivering literacy tuition. They also attend monthly in-service training, complete monthly progress reports and wholeheartedly become involved in publicity and open days.

This vast amount of voluntary tuition and related work is supplemented by a number of paid group tutors who work on accredited programmes and who are also involved in all aspects of training and support.

At this stage a development plan for outreach centres in Edenderry and Birr is envisaged for the future. This development plan would afford opportunities for further collaboration with our library partner. At present the branch library in Edenderry is actively involved in providing a study centre for a group of students studying for the Junior Cert. It is also used as a training venue for a 12 week tutor training programme. As well it provides books/resources for adult learners in V.T.O.S and Youthreach and other basic education programmes.

Since the early 1980's, Edenderry library personnel have been referring adult learners to the literacy scheme.

The inclusion of a library module in our tutor training programme and the introduction of in-service modules on library resources for all tutors in the scheme, highlighted the potential of the public library as a support and resource for tutors. Participation in this present initiative has given the practitioners further opportunities to explore the role, function and mission of the library. It has highlighted the value of a partnership arrangement as a mechanism for promoting a co-ordinated student focused service.


Summary

To summarise, this project is very exciting and challenging. Already positive results have become evident, the long-term benefits for students and tutors have yet to be assessed. Current activities need to be reviewed. To some extent we have been working to date with a captive audience. There are many others who are currently not involved such as, parents of young children, groups on the margins, unemployed and others.

A participative approach involving all partners demands a flexible approach to planning. Other schemes contemplating similar actions may need to adapt some of the activities and actions to suit their particular circumstances while ensuring that the main participants - learners, tutors and providers are involved in a real partnership of exchange and innovation. It has to be said that without the enthusiasm, commitment, expertise and patience of Anne Coughlan the co-operation of the library personnel

and the tutors and students of County Offaly Reading and Writing scheme this piece of action research would not have been possible.

References:

- (1) Adult education in Ireland: a report of a Committee appointed by the Minister for Education; [Chair: Con Murphy]. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1973.
 - (2) Getting help with reading and writing: Co. Offaly Research Project. Dublin: NALA, 1988.
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COUNTY OFFALY READING AND WRITING SCHEME BASIC EDUCATION & LITERACY PROVISION
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November 1995.

Total Attendance (1:1 & Group Tuition)		Description of Groups				Nos
Centre	Gender M F		1:1 Tuition	Group Tuition		
Tullamore	43	67	32		Junior Cert.	15
Birr	8	7	15		(C&G)Wordpower level 2	6
Edenderry	7	8	7		(C&G) Wordpower level 1	10
					(C&G) Wordpower Foundation	11
					N.C.V.A. Foundation Level	4
					Non exam group- prep. for (C&G) Foundation Level	40
Total Student Nos.	189				Remaining 103 students receiving 1:1 tuition, a number of whom will move into group tuition before June 1996	86

COUNTY OFFALY PROJECT - 3

A student's perspective

Christine
Offaly Literacy Scheme

I first became interested in Adult Literacy when I saw a lady I know on our local paper. She was presenting flowers to President Robinson at Adult Literacy day in Dublin. It was a year later before I rang the Adult Education Centre as I was still very nervous about asking for help.

The Literacy Organiser met me at my home where she was able to assess me. I started on a 1:1 then 3 months later I joined a group as my tutor Alice and I decided I was ready. I decided to give it a chance as I had taken the first step. My new tutor and her students were willing to have me in their group.

Before our class would start we would chat and start into our reading with three other students. Reading aloud came a lot easier as you did not feel so ashamed of yourself.

Then our tutor asked us if we would like to do Wordpower Stage One which was held by City and Guilds it meant a lot of hard work but we would get a Certificate at the end. It was very good. We did a lot of reading and writing. Learning to fill in forms and communication skills for everyday living. We did dictionary work which is a great help as I would never use a dictionary before joining the class.

Our tutor would give us a task to do, it could be using a map which I could not do till our tutor taught me so at least I can now go anywhere if I have a map. Filling in forms was another task we had to do, for people with reading and writing difficulties it can make life a lot easier.

As part of our project we read short stories by Irish Writers. These books were borrowed from the library. We read *Amongst Women* and Maeve Binchy and Alice Taylor.

I was really looking forward to getting my Certificate. but I was so disappointed when it came as it has literacy and basic skills written on it. I was looking so forward to framing it and hanging it up you probably think I am being selfish but I know from talking to other students they feel the same. After all, the tutors take great care in ensuring confidentiality and then when you get your cert. the word literacy is put on it.

I was talking to my sister in England last week on the phone I told her about the library meeting in Dublin and she was really delighted. I write to her often. She said

she could see a really big improvement in my writing and spelling she also said she really enjoyed reading the letters as it was like talking to me.

I was on Radio 3 a couple of times talking about adult literacy classes and to let anyone that wanted to join the classes know that the classes have a lot to offer them.

On one occasion I was asked if I would like to meet newly trained tutors. I agreed. Our County Librarian, Anne, was at that meeting also. The new tutors asked a lot of questions about the new library scheme and how it worked for the students.

The tutors asked me how we got on with each other in our group. They asked me did we have any difficulty with the work we had to do, and if they could do anything to make it easier for us to learn as they are nervous themselves. When they start with a student they were training to become tutors and it would help them if they knew what we, the students, wanted.

An awareness day for students, tutors and library people was held in May 1995 at this library meeting I met a student I had worked with some years ago I am not ashamed as I was when I started first. It has done me a lot of good to talk to other people and share our problems.

Anne Coughlan was there to let us know about the library service and to tell us about free lending scheme for tutors and students also the benefit it could be to students if they wished to use it.

I found it very interesting and it is certainly a big improvement on the old system. I do hope to do City and Guilds Stage 2 next year. I hope to make good use of the free scheme for students.

I won't be afraid to ask for help in the library. As I have got to know Anne and Mary Butler and the other staff I look forward to the challenge ahead of me.

LIMERICK CITY PROJECT - 1

The librarian's perspective

Dolores Doyle
Limerick City Libraries

In 1993 An Chomhairle Leabharlanna invited Offaly County Library and Limerick City Library to participate in a research project to explore methods of improving public library input into adult literacy provision. It was felt that public libraries have much to contribute to local initiatives aimed at tackling the problems associated with levels of literacy in the community. It was also felt that this is only attainable through inter-agency co-operation and the development of joint strategies. A grant of £10,000 from the Department of Education and Science was apportioned with £4,000 going to each authority and the balance reserved for the publication of the final report and general administration.

The aim of the project is to encourage adult literacy students to come into the library, to help them to read, to provide them with suitable reading material, make them familiar with the broad range of facilities and services which are available to them and essentially to make them lifelong users of the library. We need to be aware that not all students who have acquired literacy skills will retain that skill. To help literacy students retain and develop their literacy skills is very much a question of provision of adequate reading material. Here the public library can play a very important role in identifying material in the general library stock that is of interest to those seeking to improve their literacy skills. The solution to this problem is necessary if we are to prevent the 45% of new literacy students from losing these recently acquired skills. Discussion with Offaly revealed that both ourselves and Offaly had similar ideas.

Previously students were introduced to and used the literacy section in the library, the materials in which were dull, boring and unattractive. We, in the library service are aware and have experience of a wide range of publications which can meet a broad range of requirements. The resources in any public library can meet and satisfy the requirement of any individual student. The question which needs to be addressed therefore is how to get students to come into and continue to use the library given that libraries appear to emphasise the literacy problem rather than alleviate it. A training programme was put in place with the co-operation of the Adult Literacy Organiser. Literacy is a very diversified problem and this project has taught me that neither public libraries nor literacy agencies can work in isolation but in partnership.

For the purpose of the project we looked at staff training, library procedures, tutor training and levels of family literacy.

Staff training

Training of library staff is essential to enable them to deal sensitively with literacy students coming into our libraries. Literacy training begins with raising the awareness of the literacy problem, characteristics of persons experiencing problems with individual levels of literacy and the needs of the Adult New Learner.

To this end two staff training days were organised with students, tutors and staff participating. I feel this process was useful in sensitising staff to the hidden handicap faced by those with low levels of literacy skills as the students related accounts of their lives which included their families, their school days and their working lives.

The perception and reaction of literacy students to libraries revealed a fear of books, lack of information, fear of filling in forms, being frightened of approaching staff, (someone in authority), the idea that you need to be educated to go into libraries and the need to wear the right clothes. One student commented that for him “going into a library was like walking up a cathedral isle with hobnail boots on.” The students’ worse fear is to be seen by other members of the public (perhaps their next door neighbour) while borrowing books from the literacy section. These are reactions which we must take on board.

A role playing session demonstrated the problems which students might encounter on their first visit to the library. Some of them were not able to complete the application form so we must ensure that this first encounter receives sensitivity and confidentiality. If the forms are completed in the library then this should be done in an area which allows a reasonable degree of privacy. Some were frightened by the sheer volume of books. It was pointed out that a staff member giving them too much information could be off-putting (e.g. rattling off the list of the categories of charges). Some would only approach the desk when other members of the public were not present. Our staff need to be aware of all those issues.

One important area which emerged during the training session was our library procedures. Can they be simplified? A review of these procedures can provide an awareness session for library staff. How many things does a person need to do to get a library card? It is easier to get a Morrison Visa! Libraries can be flexible by providing tutors with forms to be filled out as part of a learning activity.

I believe that sensitising the library staff to all these problems is one of the first steps in becoming involved in literacy efforts.

Library Procedures

A number of other issues arose during the training days:

- location of literacy material - too visible to general public

- registration forms are too complicated
- A.L. marked on Membership Cards (For staff purposes to identify free membership)
- students did not realise they could borrow children's books on adult ticket.

Tutor training

We need to be aware that a crucial element in the successful use of library materials is the degree of co-operation which the staff of the library can develop with literacy organisers and tutors.

This strengthens the case for close library involvement in tutor training programmes thus providing a more direct approach to students as well as tutors. Some students will become members of the library only as a direct result of encouragement by their tutors. In becoming part of the tutor training programme, libraries publicise their literacy collections and indicate a willingness to work with tutors and their students. This reinforces the point I make in my introduction that libraries can only tackle the problem of low levels of literacy by working in partnership with other groups such as tutors.

An interesting finding was that some of the people coming forward as voluntary tutors were not themselves users of the public library. Has that a relevance? I feel it has because as mentioned already almost half of the literacy students cease to retain their basic reading skills. Therefore, I feel it was necessary to convince these tutors of the value of the library service and the pleasure which can be obtained from reading, if they in turn are to impart this to their students.

To deal with this issue we decided to promote the value of the library to the tutors. Tutors were invited to the library where the facilities and services were explained to them and where the wide ranging resources of the library were shown to them. They were introduced to and informed on every section of the library which included the adult literacy section. I have no illusions in that convincing others of the useful role libraries can play in literacy programmes is an educational process that, like other forms of learning will require time and continued attention.

Co-operation involves a continual effort to share ideas, open communication, and a willingness to keep trying to make it work.

Family literacy

As a case study in my own authority I decided to look at Moyross. Youngsters whose parents experience problems with their own personal levels of literacy are twice as likely as their peers face the same problems. Moyross community in Limerick City is an area of high social deprivation where low levels of family

literacy are a major problem. Research has indicated that the single most important factor in determining the life chances of children is the level of educational attainment of their parents, particularly the mother.

A survey conducted this year by Moyross Employment Co-operative revealed unemployment at 70.6%, only 27% completed primary education while only 4% reached third level education. Ten per cent of the sample surveyed indicated a learning difficulty in either one or more of reading, writing, maths and spelling. Of those who responded to the offer of adult literacy classes, 95% declined. It is believed from other research work carried out and by Moyross Co-operative's own first-hand experience that the true levels of learning difficulty are much higher than those stated in the responses to this question.

It was from this perspective that an Open Evening was arranged in Moyross Community Centre rather than in the library. The initial answer in this instance was not to be found within the library walls. This particular initiative had the co-operation and active support of Patricia Kennedy, Adult Literacy Organiser, the Principal and Staff of Corpus Christi School and members of the local community. Leaflets and posters advertising an introduction to and a display of library books for adults and children were distributed to the community and all were invited to attend. A wide variety of books for adults and children together with adult literacy material was carefully selected for display.

Approximately 30-40 people attended even though the 1,200 houses in the area were notified. A talk was given on books and reading and the services offered by Limerick City Library. Storytelling was incorporated with the objective of encouraging parents to read to their children as well as perhaps giving them the incentive to improve their own reading skills by reading children's books.

It is difficult to say at this stage if there will be any spin-off effect. Those parents were encouraged to inform their friends and neighbours about the event. I feel that the biggest problem in this area is to get adults with reading difficulties to come forward for help. Also, the children in this area have access to books only through the Schools Library Service. Therefore, to prevent the cycle of literacy problems reaching this generation of children, proper provision of books is required in primary schools.

At present there is no branch library in this area. A deposit collection of books is available in the Parent's Room in the school and is used by about sixty adults.

Other initiatives are being planned for the area and it is hoped that with continuous effort to reach those with reading difficulties.

A review day was held with students, tutors and staff to provide constructive feedback on the project to date. The students were very happy with the way library staff dealt with them at the desk. Some of the students are now more confident users of the library and they have all overcome the very real fears which they originally

had. They all agreed that a tutor should accompany the student on their first visit to the library.

We also asked the students to select any two books which they felt were suited to their reading ability. Only one student selected one book from the literacy section. All the other books selected were from the general lending stock. The students regard the literacy material as being *too childish, unattractive, dull, boring and the voice on the tapes spoke much too quickly*. They endorsed the idea that literacy material is only suited to individuals with almost no reading skill.

Summary

To attract and retain literacy students as members, it is necessary to present the library as a friendly, helpful establishment, one which can provide valuable assistance with their studies. This can be achieved only with staff training.

Students may be reluctant to come to the library on their own. Tutors should, therefore, be encouraged to bring their students to the library, where an informal programme welcoming the students to the library can be presented.

The library must be involved in tutor training programmes if the tutors are to be convinced of the value of the library service.

It was evident from the project that library procedures and registration forms should be simplified if literacy students are to be encouraged to become members of the public library.

Adult literacy students must be seen as active learners and understood by all facilitators. They have varying needs and reading levels and as such should not be seen as one homogenous group but as individuals. Personal levels of literacy which impact negatively on every day life are a serious problem but we need to go beyond this problem and allow the student to develop as a total person. Otherwise the students will lose their newly acquired skills. In this regard one problem which has been highlighted is the need to identify material in the general library stock that would be of interest to new students. A bibliography of such material needs to be prepared. An audio tape could also be prepared in-house.

There are no quick fixes with human beings. The public library is very much dependent on the Director of NALA, the Adult Literacy Organisers and volunteer tutors to create an awareness among the students of the facilities available to them in the library. In conclusion 'illiteracy' is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "*the quality or condition of being illiterate, absence of education especially inability to read or write.*" But during this project I learned that 'illiteracy' means fear, low self-esteem, shame, being stigmatised, secrecy, confidentiality and lack of confidence.

LIMERICK CITY PROJECT - 2

The literacy worker's perspective

*Patricia Kennedy,
Limerick Adult Learner Support Service.*

The Limerick Adult Support Service, under Limerick City VEC organises reading and writing classes for adults and young people throughout Limerick City. We have over 200 students getting help each year. With these, there are approximately 80 volunteer tutors and eighteen part-time workers on a Community Employment Project. These community employment participants are employed as out-reach workers and tutors within the areas of high unemployment of Limerick City.

There is a significant adult literacy problem in this country and those of us working in the field are acutely aware of this because of the increasing numbers who come forward for help every year. Our learners come from literally all walks of life and come with many diverse needs.

Our service in Limerick has been in operation now for almost twenty years. There have been many changes during this time, the most significant being:

- the great increase in numbers getting help
- a substantial increase in funding and commitment through the Department of Education and Science's Adult Literacy and Community Education budget
- expansion of community based adult literacy provision
- high quality of tutor training, developed by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
- much of the stigma associated with literacy work has broken down

However, having said this, we still have a long way to go when we consider that there are still probably thousands of people out there who have not yet received any help with their reading and writing difficulties, either because they don't know that there is a service out there for them, or because they have fears about asking for help. Some other issues which are important for the future of literacy work are:

- the need for better support and guidance for students

- the need for better support for tutors
- the organisation of more group classes for students
- provision of accreditation for students
- development of better assessment and evaluation methods for students
- need for more suitable learning materials and books
- need for increased public awareness and sensitivity
- need to raise the profile of A.B.E. activities.

It is with all of these issues in mind that we welcome the recent development of a more active partnership with the library service. The building of this partnership is really a very recent occurrence. We were both clearly about bringing the world of reading to people, yet we worked in isolation from each other.

When Dolores Doyle, our City Librarian, came to hear the views of several of our adult learners, the reasons for us never really crossing paths became quite obvious. The literacy learners talked about the library being only for 'educated' people, for people of a certain 'class'. They also felt that the library in many ways would be the last place for them to go as they would be unable to read many of the books. Everybody spoke about the silence and how conspicuous they might feel in a library. The formalities at the information desk were also a deterrent. This last point probably reflects the way many people with reading problems feel about the way they can be embarrassed at banks, social welfare offices, tax offices or other public service organisations, where literacy is required.

After this, the literacy learners agreed to participate in a literacy awareness day for library staff. The students told us very openly about the effects of a reading difficulty on their lives and what they perceived to be the cause of this difficulty. This was a real eye opener for us all. Many other activities have since taken place, such as an Open Evening where all our students and tutors were invited to the library to hear of the many services which is offered. This too was a real success, particularly under the influence of very nice wine and food! For me, it was great to see such an interest being taken in our work. It was great to get such a warm welcome.

We have also been invited to poetry readings in the library, and just recently, one session of our tutor training course took place within the library. The tutors and learners are really becoming convinced of the benefits of the library for the Adult Literacy Service.

A study trip to Clwyd in Wales which was organised by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, The Library Council, confirmed this view for me. There we saw at

first hand the success of what seemed to be a very close partnership between the library and the adult education sector. What most impressed me was:

- the high profile of A.B.E. work... and rightly so! The Open Learning Unit of Study Base within the libraries showed how adult literacy activities can comfortably take an equal place beside all other adult education activities. Similarly, the adult learner books and materials held their own alongside all the other collections, and this was all done in a very open way
- the range of interesting adult learning materials and books which were on display there. Much of this material was produced by the local schemes and seemed very relevant to the everyday learning needs of adults
- the librarians answered queries from the public about adult education classes and offered a referral service for this
- adult literacy classes took place within the library.

In Ireland, many literacy schemes are often open for very limited hours and access to books by tutors and learners can be a problem, whereas libraries are almost always accessible, their location is usually very well known and the borrowing system is very efficient.

In Limerick City, we now have a similar Open Learning Unit in our library. However, there is a need for more home-produced material in this country, we do need to have a wider range of interest based worksheets and books. At one stage, we asked our learners to evaluate some of the materials in the Open Learning Unit. Interestingly, many felt that they would prefer to borrow from other collections in the library, that these were more appealing than the adult learner books, so this raises many questions for us! They requested easy-to-read books on very wide ranging topics which included rugby, alcoholism, motoring, war, ferreting, cookery, decorating. They also talked about wanting to read 'respectable books'....not small books, not books that have words that are not relevant to their lives but books that have big print, lots of colour, and can keep their interest. Added to this, they would like books with comprehension questions and spelling tips, as well as books which progress from one level to another, where they can see how they are improving.

Another interesting development in Limerick is the Limerick VEC led HORIZON Core Skills Project.. The Limerick City Library and the Literacy Service are partners in this Project, amongst many other organisations. The two key elements within this Project are:

- staff development and training for adult educators
- materials development for trainers and learners.

I have outlined just some of the potential for the Library-Literacy partnership and in particular the advantages for the Adult Literacy Schemes in this partnership.

There is another side to this, and that is the benefit for the library service in becoming more involved with the adult education sector, and in particular, with the literacy service. My own personal experience from being involved in this work is one of great satisfaction in working closely with the tutors who are very dedicated and with the learners who show such courage. Our on-going development work with NALA, with the VTOS, with the Community Education network, should prove that this really is a mutually beneficial partnership and one well worth building on.

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE
CAPER PILOT PROJECT, COUNTY LONGFORD, 1994-1995**

*Mary Carleton Reynolds
Longford County Library*

Historically the public library service has always enjoyed strong links with schools and has for many years been involved in the provision of a library service to primary schools. A Primary School Library scheme funded by the Department of Education and Science and administered by the public library authorities has been in existence since 1971. The Department provides a small grant (currently £1.00* per child) for the provision of books to every primary school in the country. The books are selected, processed and delivered to the schools by the public library authority. In recent years, due to the stinging cutbacks in funding suffered by many library authorities and the high cost of running a school library service, the provision in most counties has had to be severely curtailed. In Longford, with 41 primary schools and a pupil population of 4,429, the current level of Department of Education and Science funding allows for the purchase of approximately 3.5 new books per class per annum. In a county such as Longford, which has a largely rural population - with most children only having access to books and reading through the school library, this situation is - to say the least - very unsatisfactory.

In 1993, Longford County Library Service targeted school libraries as an area of high priority and acquired a new, fully equipped, school library van with a view to re-launching the School Library Service in September 1994. A questionnaire was sent to every primary school in the county asking about the number and condition of their school library collections, how the books were being used, whether they were relevant to their needs, etc. A lot of effort was then put into building up the school library collection, including the purchase of new stock, diverting suitable branch library material into schools, and repairing and recovering old stock. Based on the number of books in the collection it was estimated that the library service could allocate approximately 12 books per class, per school.

In July 1994 the Department of Education and Science asked if the library service would be prepared to participate in a pilot CAPER project based in Longford.

In 1994, Longford's total per capita grant from the Department of Education and Science for the school library service was £2,350 for 4,608 pupils. The mention of CAPER funding of £12,000 for the purchase of books for approximately 1,200 children in the 4-7 year age-group was almost as good as winning the National Lottery!

I met with Eamonn O Muirheartaigh, of the Department of Education and Science, to discuss the project and to visit the showrooms of International Educational Services to see the range of children's books available.

It was agreed that Longford County Library Service would organise the selection and distribution of the books to schools and that the stock purchased would become part of their schools library collection. A quota of 4 books per child was worked out which would mean purchasing approximately 5,000 books.

Selection policy

The basic aim was to provide as broad a range of books for the 4-7 age group as possible, reflecting their differing ability levels, and to include picture books, nursery rhymes, read aloud stories, books with simple text, recommended reading series for paired reading, poetry, plays and some basic information books which would support all the subject areas covered in the curriculum.

Our main selection criteria was *Will it appeal to, and be read by, the child?* and in helping us to choose we focused on:

- *Subject matter:* is it appropriate to the age group? Will it catch their interest or does it give scope to develop the child's imagination? Is the dialogue realistic and natural?
- *Format:* Is the size and shape of the book attractive enough to be chosen? Does the cover look interesting and would it encourage a potential reader to dip in? Will it be able to withstand heavy use?
- *Illustrations:* Are they of a high standard? Is it easy to relate them to the accompanying text? Will they support and encourage the reader?
- *Typeface and paper:* Is the typeface clear? Is the paper of a good quality and is the colour easy on the eye? (Matt paper is better than glossy).
- *Cost:* A very important factor. Does the price represent good value for money? Is the cover and binding suitable for its intended use? I decided in most instances to go for paperback format and have the covers laminated as they are very durable and are much cheaper than the hardback version.

The bulk of the stock was selected and ordered in early August. The books started to arrive about two weeks later. Every single book had to be checked in, stamped, labelled and given a number before it could be delivered to schools. This was a mammoth task which placed a very heavy burden on the resources of a small library system, particularly during what is the normal holiday period. Two students were employed during the months of August and September to help with the extra workload. Most of the books selected had to be ordered from the UK and quite a

number were slow in arriving. Our aim was to have the books in all schools by mid-November.

Launch of the Caper Project

The Department of Education and Science launched CAPER in Longford by running an introductory seminar for parents and teachers from 11-14th October. The library's input was to talk about the books themselves and to explain how and when they would be delivered to schools. The school library van would call to every school and teachers would be able to come on board and, with the assistance of the library staff, choose their quota from the selection of over 2,500 books that were on display. They would be notified of the date and time the van would be calling which we hoped would be over a four week period beginning on the last week of October. The itinerary was drawn up and the first schools were visited on Tuesday 8th November. By Wednesday 2nd December, we had visited every school in the county. We planned to give each school four books per child and almost immediately we ran into problems.

Most teachers with junior and senior infant classes were only interested in the very simplest picture books, with little or no text, and there were not enough in this category. We were calling to approximately three schools per day and by the time we reached the last one, there was very little left to appeal to them. We had to quickly rethink our strategy and give every child two books on the first visit and promise to make a return visit after Christmas. When everybody would have an opportunity to exchange existing stock and would be given two additional books.

By 2nd December 4,197 books had been delivered to 1,503 pupils in 37 schools. Between February 2nd and May 12th, every school had received a second visit with those who had received only two books per child on the first visit being given first priority. On our second visit it was immediately evident how much the reading ability of children had improved and the teachers knowledge of the bookstock had increased from the choice of books being selected. *Letterland, Literacy links, Happy family series, Meg and Mog, Banana book* which had been largely passed over on the first visit were now in big demand. The positive comments of teachers were also very encouraging.

By the end of April 1995, 7,412 books had been placed in 37 schools as part of the CAPER Project.

Overall, from the point of view of Longford County Library Service, I feel that this pilot project was extremely worthwhile. I would like to thank the teachers and parents for their whole hearted co-operation and support and, of course, my very own hardworking staff and in particular my Schools Librarian, Grainne Milner. I would also like to thank Mrs. Norma McDermott, Director of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, who was of great assistance in the early stages of the project, also, the Department of Education and Science and in particular Eamonn O Muircheartaigh for choosing Longford for this project and for his support throughout the year. In conclusion I

would like to summarise from my point of view the strengths and weaknesses of a project such as this.

Weaknesses

- a demand has been created for, and an interest in, books and reading - but without proper funding on an ongoing basis the current level of provision cannot be maintained
- projects such as this require adequate forward planning and being given such a short time to organise the selection, acquisition, processing and distribution of this volume of bookstock places a very heavy burden on a small library authority

Strengths

- over 7,000 new books in a wide range of categories were acquired as part of Longford School Library Service stock and made available to primary schools throughout the county
- the importance of books and reading in a child's development being highlighted
- the joys of reading for pleasure being discovered by many for the first time and, hopefully 'the reading habit' once discovered will never be forgotten
- parents and teachers being exposed to a wide range of high quality literature in fact and fiction available for children today
- increased usage of the public library service by parents and children and an increase in class visits by schools
- rural children who do not live close to libraries or bookshops having free access to a wide selection of up-to-date, attractive, relevant literature
- a greater awareness of the vital role the school library can play in the life of a school
- better co-operation and communication between the school and the public library.

Appendix 1:

Abbreviations used in the text

ABE	Adult Basic Education
AEO	Adult Education Officer
ALBSU	Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (now the Basic Skills Agency)
ALCES	Adult Literacy and Community Education Scheme
CE	Community Education
ECCTIS	Education Counselling and Credit Transfer Info Service
FE	Further Education
IFLA	International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NGO	Non-governmental Organisations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VEC	Vocational Educational Committee
VTOS	Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme

**COUNTY OFFALY READING AND WRITING SCHEME
BASIC EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROVISION**

November 1995

Total attendance (1:1 & Group Tuition)				Description of Groups	Nos.
Centre	Sex		1:1 Tuition	Group tuition	
	M	F			
Tullamore	43	67	32	. 78	Junior Cert. 15
Birr	8	7	15	0	C&G Wordpower Level 2 6
Edenderry	7	8	7	8	C&G Wordpower Level 1 10
					C&G Wordpower Foundation 11
					N.C.V.A. Foundation level 4
					Non exam group-prep. for C&G Foundation level
Total student nos.	189			Remaining 103 students receiving 1:1 tuition, a number of whom will move into group tuition before June 1996	86