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Libraries and literacy in the Republic of Ireland: a study of present provision for adult literacy and how libraries can complement and improve services to these clients

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PUBLISHER

Loughborough University of Technology

LICENCE

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REPOSITORY RECORD

O'Neill, Janet V.. 2021. "Libraries and Literacy in the Republic of Ireland: A Study of Present Provision for Adult Literacy and How Libraries Can Complement and Improve Services to These Clients". Loughborough University. <https://doi.org/10.26174/thesis.lboro.14345738.v1>.

LIBRARIES AND LITERACY IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND.
A STUDY OF PRESENT PROVISION FOR ADULT LITERACY
AND HOW LIBRARIES CAN COMPLEMENT AND IMPROVE SERVICES
TO THESE CLIENTS

by

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A Master's Dissertation, submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the Master of Arts degree of the
Loughborough University of Technology

September 1990

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c J V O'Neill, 1990

JANET O'NEILL, "Libraries and literacy in the Republic of Ireland. A study of present provision for adult literacy and how libraries can complement and improve services to these clients".

MA Dissertation, Department of Library and Information Studies,
Loughborough University of Technology.

ABSTRACT

An examination of provision for Adult Literacy in the Republic of Ireland. The meaning of literacy is discussed as are the causes of illiteracy and the need for literacy in the industrialised world. The development of adult literacy provision in Ireland is surveyed including a look at the state of Adult Education and the work of the National Adult Literacy Agency. Literacy schemes in Dublin and Offaly are described and the response of libraries is discussed, with emphasis on the work of Dublin Public Libraries and Kilkenny County Library. A strengthening of political will, change in attitudes and increased resources are seen as necessary for the future development of work in this field.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Sturges for his advice and support during the writing of this dissertation.

I would also like to thank Ms A O'Brien for her help in providing contacts.

Sincere thanks to the many people in Ireland who gave up time to see me, especially,

Ms Fionnuala Hanrahan, Deputy City and County Librarian, Dublin Public Libraries and Secretary, Library Association of Ireland.

The staff of Dublin Public Libraries:-

Ms Betty Boardman - Coolock Library

Ms Eithne Mallin - Donaghmede Library

Ms Katherine Keane and Ms Margaret Burke.

Ms Norma McDermot and the staff of An Chomhairle Leabharanna.

Ms Geraldine Mernagh, Organiser/Development Worker, National Adult Literacy Agency.

Ms Bernadette Brady, Dublin Literacy Scheme.

The staff of Aontas.

Ms Helen Walsh, Kilkenny County Library.

I would like to thank Mrs Sheila Mercer for her patience in typing this dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their support and assistance during this year.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1990 was designated International Literacy Year by the United Nations focussing attention on literacy and illiteracy throughout the world. Unesco figures estimate that there is a global illiteracy rate of 27.7%⁽¹⁾ Illiteracy has been recognised in the developing world for some time but in the industrialised countries, with many years of compulsory education, mass literacy is assumed. This has been disproved, especially since the 1970s and now there is an effort in many industrialised countries to provide limited provision to aid adults with reading and writing difficulties through the public and voluntary sector.

The purpose of this study is to look at this provision in one of the European community nations, the Republic of Ireland, and to examine the role of library services in supporting and sustaining literacy. The acquisition of literacy starts in the schools but the study will concentrate on the provision to adults who have failed to attain literacy through the educational system and are now returning to classes to achieve their literacy goals.

The island of Ireland lies in the Atlantic Ocean in the North West of Europe. It has a total area of 84,421 sq km and is divided politically with the six northern counties forming Northern Ireland which is part of

the United Kingdom and the other twenty six counties constituting the Republic of Ireland which gained independence from its near neighbour, Great Britain, in 1922. The total area of the Republic of Ireland is 70,282 sq km and it has a population of approximately 3½ million people.⁽²⁾

The Republic of Ireland is a parliamentary democracy. It has two Houses of Parliament known in Irish as Oireachtas consisting of an elected House of Representatives (Dail Eireann) and an upper house (Seanad Eireann). The Head of State is an elected President and the Head of Government is the Prime Minister or Taoiseach.

Local government is the responsibility of 115 local authorities, which may be county councils, county boroughs, boroughs and urban district councils. The elected members of these authorities take major policy decisions and the day-to-day administration is carried out by officials under the charge of a county or city Manager.⁽³⁾

Ireland's economic development since the 1960s has been accompanied by demographic changes. Traditionally there has been a great deal of emigration but with increased prosperity that has dwindled and Ireland experienced a population growth of 1.5% annually in the 1970s. These demographic changes have profound implications for planning social, educational and economic needs.⁽⁴⁾

Employment in Ireland is in industry (32%), services (49.1%) and agriculture (18.9%). Irish trade has diversified since joining the

European Economic Community in 1972, and the market for agricultural exports has improved, but it has opened the way for the import of foreign goods leaving a deficit in the trade balance.

The education system in Ireland is under the control of the Department of Education and provides free primary and secondary education. Attendance is compulsory between the ages of six and fifteen. Most children attend a National School, which is equivalent to a Primary School, over which the state has control in terms of the curriculum and salaries.

Secondary schools are run by private institutions or religious communities, but with state assistance.

Parallel to the secondary school system are the Vocational schools. There are 246 of these and they provide training in practical as well as general subjects, with the aim of preparing pupils for employment. They also provide training for trades and evening courses for adults. These schools are under the management of a Vocational Education Committee elected by the local authority for the area.⁽⁵⁾

The official languages of the Republic of Ireland are Irish and English. Until the 1850s Irish was the language of the majority of people but it has lost ground to English over the years in spite of Government's efforts to promote it and the fact that it is a requirement for certain appointments in local government. Irish is spoken as a living language

only in certain areas, most of which are along the western seaboard, known as Gaeltachts.

Ireland prides itself on its long literary tradition in both languages and the nation has a respect for learning dating from early Monastic times. Some people find it hard to believe that the land of "saints and scholars" has problems with illiteracy. In this study we shall look further at the state of literacy in Ireland.

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CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS LITERACY?

1) What is Literacy?

According to Street⁽¹⁾ the term literacy is

shorthand for the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing.

The study of how people gain reading and writing skills and their subsequent use covers many disciplines and, although there is agreement that literacy is about reading and writing, there is also debate on how literacy is defined in terms of measurement and what knowledge counts as literacy.

Wagner⁽²⁾ remarks that the methods chosen to study literacy reflect the discipline of the investigator, with the anthropologist interested in how literacy works in community and cultural life with little attempt to quantify literacy abilities, and psychologists and educationalists studying measurable abilities using tests and questionnaires with little investigation of the wider social context.

Levine uses the analogy of a cake to reflect the wide mix of disciplines

We are dealing with a complex amalgam of psychological, linguistic and social processes layered one on top of

another like a rich and indigestible gâteau. (3)

The picture conveyed is enlarged to show how the consumers of the cake, teachers, pupils, politicians and employers try to get a particular slice and have it defined as the standard helping for everybody else.

The variety of definitions available for literacy are analysed by Kedney⁽⁴⁾ and are divided into three categories showing the ways in which literacy can be viewed.

The statements can be divided into those in quantitative terms, those based on tasks requiring literacy skills and statements concerned with an analysis of the operations involved. Quantitative statements are usually related to years of schooling or the results of reading tests such as the Watts-Vernon test used by the Ministry of Education in the United Kingdom. This test consisted of thirty-five questions on two sides of foolscap paper to be completed within a given time and it measured comprehension. Results were used to define literacy and illiteracy thus:-

illiterate readers ... those whose reading age (regardless of chronological age) is less than 7.0 years ... semi-literate readers those whose reading age is 7.0 years or greater but less than 9.0 years ... In the case of adults the expected reading age may be taken as 15.0 years. (5)

Kedney notes that these tests provide quantifiable measurements but that they have their critics. The tests assess isolated skills and are standardised. They usually measure children and adolescents so cannot be relied on to measure an adult's comprehension. Charnley and Jones⁽⁶⁾

question the use of reading ages with adults as these are an indication of language development as well and adults bring to these tests comprehension based on life experience.

The next group of definitions are those relating to tasks expressed in specific or general terms. These statements cover the concept of functional literacy of which more will be said later, and define literacy in terms of completing tasks or functions. An example of this is the following statement by Lewis⁽⁷⁾

For the purposes of everyday living every person in a modern society needs to be able to read at the level, at least, of a simple paragraph in a popular newspaper, and he must be able to write a simple letter. In our society today this is the lowest level of effective or functional literacy.

The last group of statements define literacy in terms of an analysis of involved:

To move towards a definition of reading it may help to list certain evident aspects of the process:

- i) Reading begins with graphic language in some form: print, script, etc.
- ii) The purpose of reading is the reconstruction of meaning ...
- iii) In alphabetic writing systems there is a direct relationship between oral language and written language
- iv) Visual perception must be involved in reading
- v) Nothing intrinsic in the writing system or its symbols has meaning. There is nothing in the shape or sequence of any letters or grouping of letters which in itself is meaning
- vi) Meaning is in the mind of the writer and the reader
- vii) Yet readers are capable through reading of constructing a message which agrees with the writers intended message. (8)

Some practitioners in the field argue that literacy can bring with it

great benefits and that the acquisition of literacy affects man's cognitive skills, develops logic, leads to the emergence of scientific thought and even is responsible for the growth of democracy! Goody⁽⁹⁾ was the chief advocate of this "autonomous" model⁽¹⁰⁾ although there were others who debated if the acquisition of literacy predetermined the reaping of the above benefits.⁽¹¹⁾

The idea that literacy brings with it cognitive skills was challenged by Cole and Scribner in their work The Psychology of Literacy. They concluded from their work with the Vai people of Liberia that changes in thought were the results of schooling not literacy.⁽¹²⁾ This will have repercussions on the assumptions on which literacy campaigns, particularly in developing countries are based.

The study of literacy in terms of social practice is defined by Street⁽¹³⁾ as an "ideological" model. He elaborates on the question of how to study the consequences of literacy:-

The problem ... integral to all questions about the consequences of literacy: namely how to isolate literacy in order to test whether it was a significant variable since the introduction of literacy is always accompanied by the introduction of new forms of social organisation, differences in thinking processes cannot, as we have seen, be attributed to literacy per se. (14)

Levine⁽¹⁵⁾ examines literacy in its social context in his book The social consequences of Literacy. He queries the contemporary idea of literacy as a universal, basic human right and that it brings economic benefits to individuals and communities. He looks at these ideas from an historical viewpoint and claims that widespread literacy was not the

case in Europe with sections of the population excluded from literacy which was the province of certain social groups such as the Church. The experience of the Industrial Revolution showed that universal literacy was not an essential prerequisite for economic development.

The theory that literacy generates economic returns and that these are the main reasons for encouraging instruction in it is a relatively recent development, certainly post dating industrialisation. (16)

Wagner⁽¹⁷⁾ states that since the Second World War there has been the argument that literacy will lead to economic growth in countries which were able to make a sufficient investment. He continues to say that the

association of literacy with health, nutrition and other social goods is such that it is unlikely that governments will cease efforts at universalising literacy and primary education. (18)

The impact of literacy on society was challenged by Graff⁽¹⁹⁾ in his work The Literacy Myth where he made clear that literacy in itself does not lead to improved employment prospects or social mobility. He examined the background of immigrants in nineteenth century Canada and concluded that ethnic origin, religion, class and gender was more important in determining wealth or poverty. Literacy education was to impart discipline for work and consisting of rote learning and correcting dialects. Education was for social control rather than advancement, so the attainment of literacy being a means of social mobility was a myth.

Friere claims that this attitude is prevalent in literacy campaigns today. He is writing in the context of campaigns in developing

countries, many of whose governments see literacy as part of development and a means of reaping economic benefits. His innovative radical ideas had a great influence on some practitioners in the field of literacy. He describes oppression of the masses by power elites as a "culture of silence". The promises offered by the technical acquisition of literacy is described as naive.

Unable to grasp contemporary illiteracy as a typical manifestation of the "culture of silence" directly related to under-developed structures, this approach cannot offer an objective, critical response to the challenge of illiteracy. Merely teaching men to read and write does not work miracles; if there are not enough jobs for men able to work, teaching more men to read and write will not create them.
(20)

Friere claims further:-

education is cultural action for freedom and therefore an act of knowing and not of memorisation. (21)

The theory of literacy as a radical means of emancipation from oppression is often cloaked in jargon and muddled thinking.

Levine argues:-

If it is to be more than an empty piece of jargonising liberation through literacy must reflect sound linguistic and realistic political analysis. (22)

Street in a review of the literature of the 1980s sees a trend for practitioner research to be given a voice. The focus is shifting from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach towards literacy, with more of a "grassroots" flavour. The students culture and education are given emphasis as is evaluation and assessment of progress. Street

hopes that during the 1990s the gap in understanding between researchers, policy makers and practitioners will be lessened.⁽²³⁾

ii) Adult Literacy and the Concept of Functional Literacy

The concept of functional literacy is behind most of the literacy campaigns in both the developed and developing world. The phrase was first coined by the United States Army in World War Two when it described recruits who were termed illiterates as:⁽²⁴⁾

Persons who were incapable of understanding the kinds of written instructions that are needed for carrying out basic military functions or tasks.

The idea of a level of literacy which went beyond the basic ability to provide a signature and read a simple message but less than full fluency gained popularity after the Second World War. It had wide appeal as it could be adapted to any culture. It has connotations of making people employable and integrated into society.⁽²⁵⁾

According to Levine,

"Functional" ... became the acceptable buzz word, an essential ingredient every adult programme had to contain. It endured its setbacks and it flourishes still because it promises substantial collective and personal returns for equipping individuals with an ill defined but relatively modest level of competence. (26)

Unesco adopted the term and defined it in 1956 as:

A person is functionally literate when he has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable him to engage effectively in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his culture and group. (27)

The concept can be expanded to include elements of critical awareness and a consciousness about society and this trend can be detected in the literacy work in Britain and Ireland. The student-centred approach to literacy can be seen in a tutor's pamphlet produced for the UK programme. It was entitled An Approach to Functional Literacy⁽²⁸⁾, reflecting the new meaning of the phrase where the students' needs in the real world are the medium of teaching⁽²⁹⁾. Skills are taught in a relevant setting and students are led to a greater awareness of the uses of literacy for them. There is a selected list of tasks such as; sending for an item in a catalogue, using the Post Office, writing a letter to child's teacher, backing a horse, etc. The skills required in these tasks are set out and can be adapted to other situations. The student can experience a positive sense of achievement on completing an actual task.

In Ireland the National Adult Literacy Agency, the national support agency for literacy in Ireland has published a policy document which provides guidelines on literacy practice, incorporating many of the ideas and trends that have been already mentioned⁽³⁰⁾. It was first published in 1985 but is being revised as literacy is seen as a dynamic entity and subject to continuing debate. The principles in the policy document are grounded in experience at the grass roots level.

The policy document states that the literacy problem must be understood in terms of the social and economic circumstances that created it in the first place.

The student-centred approach is encouraged. Adults come to tuition with years of knowledge and skills and these make an important contribution to the learning process. Students are encouraged to make choices on how and what they learn. Students are also encouraged to meet other students to share and discuss how they are learning.

In order that the material used in classes is relevant to adults, students are encouraged to write from the beginning, providing material for their own use and for others.

One-to-one tuition and group tuition are provided so students can progress into groups if they wish. When students move into groups it is shown to lessen social isolation, gets students involved in literacy work and they develop a more critical attitude towards the whole process instead of passively accepting what tutors provide.

Assessment is oral, a discussion with the student encouraging him or her to take control of their learning. The aim is to promote the development of the whole person.

Tutor training courses should be designed so that tutors can acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed when teaching adults and also have the skills to develop students' confidence and self awareness. The guidelines also stress the importance of in-service courses.

The document provides guidelines for literacy groups and workers. One criticism is the lack of documentary form of assessment but the

guidelines are based on sound principles built on fifteen years' experience.

iii) Causes of Illiteracy

Many factors cause people to have reading and writing difficulties. Those factors linked to severe mental and physical handicap are outside the scope of this study.

Many causes have their roots in individuals early educational experiences and family circumstances, nervous temperament and physical defects such as bad eyesight or hearing. Lack of intelligence is seldom a cause and many people with reading and writing difficulties are able to hold down jobs and use a great deal of ingenuity to disguise their problem.

Children who come from a background where parents do not read and feel alienated themselves from education, pick up this attitude and do not see the necessity for reading and so opt out. This cycle continues with their own children thus perpetuating the problem.

In the National Child Development Study, which looked into the literacy and numeracy of a group of adults born during one week in 1958 in England, Scotland and Wales, it was found that parents of children who later reported reading difficulties, read less often to their children at the age of seven.⁽³¹⁾ Children who lacked basic skills scored less on motivation scales.

Social class is also a factor although not a cause of illiteracy and affects educational opportunities in general. In the NCDS they found that various factors in the basic skills group (those who reported difficulties) were the same group of factors which are associated with low achievement at school in general.⁽³²⁾ These include fathers in a manual occupation, low income, large families and housing difficulties. However none of these factors in themselves cause literacy difficulties as the reasons are more complex. Poverty means that people don't have the money to buy books, uniforms and other equipment, and pupils may have to miss school in order to work to help the family as the following quote from an Irish student illustrates:-

When we had a better summer mostly it was out on the bog.
That was the education I got. (33)

Large family size is also a factor, as lack of attention, peace and space in which to do homework can make education difficult. Schooling seems to be the major factor in determining later difficulties. A discussion with young people at the Gurrabraher Workshop in Co. Cork divided the difficulties in three areas; those relating to the school's organisation and teaching methods, cultural factors, which distanced working class children from the system and mental ability.⁽³⁴⁾

One of the reasons mentioned most frequently by these young people is that they were left behind at an early stage. Once they were left behind it was impossible to catch up because they were ignored or no extra attention was available. Students found being passed over in class very hurtful and that started a cycle of misbehaviour and

punishment. Physical and mental abuse was also cited in both the Gurranbraher Workshop and a survey of Co. Offaly's literacy scheme.

I blame one particular teacher, and the priest. They used to bash me around the school, just because I wasn't able to read. I was brought out and made a spectacle, at least twice a month. When I go past the school it always comes into my mind, all the days that I stood there and was bashed from side to side, lifted up by the ears, boxed with gloves, and deep down I resent it terrible. (35)

I'll never forget in National School (primary school), I was in 5th or 6th class and the headmaster sent me out to the first class, babies ... he sent up a message or something and she had the children standing around. And she said to them "Spell train" and then she said to me "Joan, spell train" and I couldn't spell it and she made a laugh of me in front of them, all because these two little children were able to spell train ... I'll never forget that day, I left crying. (36)

The Gurranbraher group felt they were being ignored, that only the able students got attention. Classes were large and the weaker pupil got left behind. None of these young people had remedial help offered to them nor were they aware of its existence.

Children react as individuals and respond in different ways and may need remedial help, but this needs to be detected at an early age and the "Write Together" team, who arranged the discussion with the Gurranbraher group, queries if this has been happening. It is important that the child meets a teacher who understands it's needs and is patient but this is evidently not so:-

It must not be forgotten that a lot of the time the teachers of the weaker classes aren't the best either. Their teaching leaves a lot to be desired. (37)

The middle class bias in education was commented on by the "Write

Together" group:

At other levels and within the Write Together scheme, over the years we have heard comments such as "they (the teachers) had nothing in common with us" or "they just work in this area and wouldn't bring their own children to a school like this." This thinking reflects an often inarticulated experience of working class and poorer people, that their culture, language, values and lifestyles, are not supported by, or reflected in, the way the schools or the education system is run. (38)

This bias bringing with it lack of encouragement, making pupils feel inadequate, alienates them from the curriculum which they perceive as irrelevant, adding another barrier to gaining full literacy.

Emotional problems such as disruption at home due to ill or alcoholic parents can disturb education as can frequent absences due to lengthy illness or family circumstances.

All the factors we have looked at are not causes of illiteracy in themselves but the child who has experienced some of these problems is at risk if there is some defect in the school's system.

Failure is a complex process and one due to the interaction of many factors. Some of these factors are outside the control of schools but others are not. Those to do with the curriculum, the examinations and the organisation of schools fall within the control of the education system. If we fail to address these factors is it fair to ask, "Who is failing?" (39)

iv) Need for Literacy

Literacy, as we saw in the first section of this chapter, is hard to define. How much literacy we need to function effectively depends on our social and cultural grouping and how literacy is used for communicating within the group or society. The idea of being functionally literate conveys integration.

In Western industrialised societies such as Ireland, literacy is necessary in order to play a full role in the community, but in some cases people can survive without literacy until some event such as the death of a spouse or a change in work procedures makes them realise the "literate culture" is impinging on them. People are as literate as they perceive themselves to be, if some event occurs to highlight their difficulty then they lose confidence and experience a sense of stigma.

Given that we are in a literate society, literacy is needed for survival on an everyday scale. Shopping poses problems with the inability to make lists, compare prices and finding goods easily. The introduction of own brand goods, with simple plain packaging without pictures, in the large supermarket chains has caused obvious difficulties; coffee could be purchased instead of beans. These own brand items may be cheaper but a customer with reading and writing difficulties has to stick with the brand whose packaging they recognise.

Safety depends on the ability to read, there are inherent dangers in misreading instructions on medicine bottles, chemical products etc. as well as reading safety notices.

Coping with banks and post offices requires quite a few literacy skills and an inability to deal with these institutions puts people at a disadvantage. Filling in social welfare forms also causes problems, so people can lose out on benefits.

Reading and writing difficulties can cause problems at work. Contrary to popular assumptions, people with literacy difficulties manage to hold down jobs, and try to accommodate their difficulties. However, problems arise when patterns change, such as new timesheets, and keeping lists and other documents is hard for a person with poor reading and writing skills. Work opportunities are limited, as people are reluctant to take up training courses and play a fuller role in their working life. Job application forms are daunting to fill in and many students at adult literacy classes need assistance. In this area literacy difficulties are an impediment in working life and are becoming increasingly so as more technology is being introduced requiring literacy skills to aid understanding.

Lack of literacy is a barrier to promotion, people who would be very able otherwise turn down promotion because of fear that their lack of skill will be found out.

This fear also excludes people from joining in many social and community activities. Joining a committee to do with sport or leisure means reading documents or writing letters, which can prove daunting.

Many people come face to face with their problem when they become parents. They think their children will be ashamed of them and want to participate in telling them stories and helping them at school.

Unscrupulous people can exploit those with reading and writing difficulties, from conning them to blackmail. There is anecdotal evidence of an elderly man who was involved in a car accident. When asked, he was unable to give his name, address and insurance company and he confessed he couldn't read or write. The other party then blackmailed him for a period of time claiming it was illegal to drive unless you could read or write. People become dependent on others to perform literacy tasks on their behalf.

Many people who come forward for literacy tuition have experienced a sense of shame and stigma as they realise they fall short of society's norm. Many people have a profound sense of failure. These assumptions which are held by many literacy organisers are refuted to a certain extent by Charnley and Jones.⁽⁴⁰⁾ In their work on the UK Literacy Campaign they found no evidence for a crippling sense of shame, rather students had a sense of reserve about their condition and a lack of confidence. They found that where students had contact with a peer group at an early stage, inhibitions and anxieties began to fall away.

Levine's opinion on the subject is:-

Exaggerating, from sympathy, the magnitude of the handicap faced by adult illiterates does them no favour. Perpetuating the idea, for example, that illiteracy is equivalent to total intellectual disablement diminishes the status of non-readers in the eyes of the majority, creates crises of self confidence for illiterates, and generally increases their dependency and sense of inadequacy. (41)

However, Levine is in no doubt as to the importance of gaining literacy and the impediment lack of reading and writing skills is to people.

The social and political significance of literacy thus derives largely from its role in creating and reproducing - or failing to reproduce - the social distribution of knowledge. If this were not so, if literacy lacked this function, the inability to read would be a shortcoming on par with tone deafness, while an ability to write fluently would be as socially inconsequential as a facility for whistling in tune. (42)

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CHAPTER THREE

LITERACY IN IRELAND

1) INTRODUCTION

Although this chapter is entitled "Literacy in Ireland" it is a misnomer as what is understood by this title is the problem of those adults who have not achieved full literacy due to various factors which disrupted their childhood education. What follows is a description of what is provided to help this particular group overcome their reading and writing difficulties.

It is hard to get a precise figure on how many adults are affected. NALA (the National Adult Literacy Agency) estimates that 5% to 10% of the adult population could have significant problems.⁽¹⁾ The Department of Education's discussion document on adult literacy, published in 1986, puts this figure at 400,000 (18% of population) and estimated that 150,000 of these people would be able to carry out functional reading and writing activities.⁽²⁾ This indicates an alarming failure on the part of the educational system and a distressing number of adults living their lives with a social handicap.

ii) ADULT EDUCATION

In this section provision for adult education in the Republic of Ireland will be outlined, as this is the educational sector which the adult seeking help with reading and writing difficulties will contact. Adult Education in Ireland has a low status and is very much the poor relation when it comes to government funding. In 1987 expenditure on education as a whole was IR£1.166 billion and out of this figure adult education received approximately 0.16%.⁽³⁾

Adult education has low status and priority in Ireland for many reasons. It has no coherent structure, no formal policy and inadequate funding. Adult education is supplied on an ad-hoc basis and is very much market orientated with supply meeting demand. There is no form of quality control, no official complaints procedure or provision for recompense. There is no national scheme for educational advice and guidance and it can be difficult for an individual to find a course suited to their needs. Courses are held in isolation from each other and many are taught by people who have not been trained to teach adults,⁽⁴⁾ and consequently there is no career structure for tutors, courses are largely dependent on part-time teachers and volunteers.

Many people in Ireland associate education with school, college and university and adult education with middle-class leisure pursuits. The concept of life-long learning, re-training, a second chance for those who have missed out the first time around has not taken root. As the report on adult education in Ireland published by Aontas aptly puts it,

The notion of education for adults is almost as contradictory as the notion of wellingtons for ducks.(5)

Most of the adult education courses in Ireland are provided through state agencies and institutions. The main statutory provision is through the Vocational Educational Committees. These are statutory committees of county councils and certain other local authorities established under the Vocational Education Act, 1930. These committees have their own corporate status and do not come within the system of city and county management. They provide and manage vocational schools (equivalent to technical schools and further education colleges in Britain), employ managerial and teaching staff and provide vocational and continuing education for their areas. They are financed partly from local rates and partly from state grants and are an approximate equivalent to a local education authority in England.

Other agencies which provide adult education are government agencies, non-governmental organisations and voluntary groups. The courses are organised and marketed by the providers, or Adult Education organisers in the case of courses provided by Vocational Educational Committees.(6)

In 1986, following recommendations made in a report on Adult Education⁽⁷⁾, Adult Education Boards were established in each VEC area. Each Board consists of twelve members and, along with other interest groups, it was recommended that one of these members was from the library authority.

The main functions of the Boards are to assess the educational needs of adults in the area, create suitable courses and activities, resource the programme and prepare annual reports for the committee and the Minister of Education. An important function of the Boards is to allocate the funds made available through the Adult Literacy and Community Education Budget for disadvantaged groups. This is distributed in each VEC area by the aptly named Ad-hoc Education committee. This is the main source of funding for adult literacy provision and more will be said about it later.⁽⁸⁾

Most adult education provision is self-financing with course fees covering most of the cost. Therefore some courses subsidise others. Courses promoted through the Adult Literacy and Community Education budget are exempt from this self-financing rule. However, their situation is precarious as they depend on voluntary labour and the surplus income generated by other fee-paying courses.⁽⁹⁾

There has been a noticeable decline in courses provided in recent years and this was confirmed by a report to Aontas on the courses on offer in Autumn 1988. This report found that the number of people enrolling in courses was down by 30%, there was a 17% decrease in the number of courses which took place and the number of centres providing courses decreased by 31%. The cost of attending an adult education course increased (on average) by 6%.

The number of days and nights on which courses were offered was reduced by 38% which affected choice in time and subject for the public. This

sharp decline in adult education provision follows a decline in 1987 when the number of enrolments decreased by almost one-third. However, decline in provision was not uniform, some centres, for example those providing day-time courses, showed an increase. Other centres, particularly those in rural areas were almost wiped out.⁽¹⁰⁾

The reasons offered for this decline have a common root in the strict self financing rule and the market led nature of provision, pricing it out of the range of the less well-off. Adult education has a low priority in many vocational, community and comprehensive schools, who faced with cutbacks have placed their priorities elsewhere. Another factor is the lack of incentive to put on an attractive programme. In places where adult education is a success story programmes are dependent on the voluntary efforts of committed teachers.⁽¹¹⁾

There would be an outcry if the Health and Social Welfare of adults were left to the voluntary sector in this country. The tragedy is that there is no outcry about leaving the education of adults to the voluntary sector. ⁽¹²⁾

Adult education spans a wide spectrum of levels and types of education catering for different needs and groups of people. Special areas of adult education include adult basic education, further and continuing education, daytime education and community education. Adult basic education and daytime education are the areas relevant to literacy so they will be examined in a little more detail.

DAYTIME EDUCATION

Daytime education is the growth area in the field of adult education. It is a relatively recent innovation and what is usually understood by the term is adults, mostly women, attending a variety of classes ranging from personal development to second chance education in their local areas during daytime hours.⁽¹³⁾

This trend is examined closely in study of daytime adult education in Colaiste Dhulaigh, Coolock, Dublin.⁽¹⁴⁾ The classes available responded to the needs of the community and there was a rapid rise in the number of adults, especially women attending courses during the day. The courses were different to the usual leisure activities normally on offer, they were mostly on social and personal development which is a crucial element in second chance learning. The classes started in 1981 and the report shows what can be done with scarce resources in a socially and economically disadvantaged area. Literacy work was an important component in the programme, as was catering to the needs of students in providing creche facilities etc.

ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Adult basic education developed out of the literacy work of the 1970s and encompassed the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy, as well as an element of personal development. It answers the need of those people who, for many different reasons, missed out on their

education the first time around. It is the first step before embarking on other educational activities.

In Ireland the main source of provision is through the present literacy scheme. Consequently the emphasis is on literacy rather than numeracy and tuition is by volunteer tutors which can lead to patchy provision.

Basic English and Mathematics classes are organised by the Vocational Education Committees in the same way as evening classes. Fees are charged but at a lower rate than usual, and waived in some cases. The Dublin Institute of Adult Education and the People's College also offer a range of Basic Education courses⁽¹⁵⁾ as do Youth Training programmes, rehabilitation centres and travellers workshops. Some of the courses offered by churches and charitable organisations could be classed also as adult basic education.

Adult Basic Education is a lifeline for many groups, providing the only means towards self development, basic skills acquisition, employability and confidence in their own abilities. It has been considerably under funded for years. (16)

Funding for Adult Basic Education comes mainly from the Adult Literacy and Community Education Budget which was introduced in 1985. In 1989 the budget allocation for Adult Literacy and Community Education was IR£500,000. Funding is also provided by specific grants in aid to particular organisations and the allocation of discretionary teaching hours by which VECs are given an allocation of teaching hours sanctioned by the Department of Education to provide support for travellers

workshops, community training workshops, prisons and adult literacy schemes.

The majority of ABE courses are run in the evening, corresponding to the school terms. Daytime courses are available but access to them is limited by the accessibility of the premises, lack of creche facilities, and the fact that unemployed people are technically unavailable for work and may lose benefit. This is a drawback to many potential students, especially men, but there has been some relaxation of the rules.⁽¹⁷⁾

The AONTAS Report "For Adults Only" recommends that there should be an increased awareness of illiteracy as a personal and social problem. The Kenny Report⁽¹⁸⁾ recommended that courses in adult basic education should be provided free of charge and Aontas urges that this should be implemented. It also suggests that access to adult basic education involves easy entry, no fees and opportunities should be available locally. Adults should have a variety of learning programmes suited to their individual needs. It also recommends that Basic Education organisers should be paid as dependency on volunteers inhibits development. Finally it urges imaginative publicity methods should be used not only for recruitment but also to inform politicians and the general public about Adult Basic Education.⁽¹⁹⁾

Throughout this section reference has been made to Aontas. This is the National Association of Adult Education and its name is an acronym in the Irish language for National Adult Education Through Voluntary Unification. It is an organisation which represents and acts as a forum

for adult education in Ireland. It was founded in 1969 and its overall aim is to develop lifelong learning accessible to all adults. It also aims to promote better communication and co-operation among adult education agencies both nationally and internationally. Research is promoted and information services developed, initiatives in adult education are encouraged and Aontas acts as a forum for policy discussion and campaigning.

iii) DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT LITERACY PROVISION IN IRELAND

Aontas was instrumental in setting up NALA (National Adult Literacy Agency) in 1977. This move was influenced by the growth of literacy work in England at this time, publicity given to the problem via BBC television programmes which were available on the east coast and border areas of Ireland and a growing awareness of the problem from concerned individuals, mostly women volunteers, who had taken the initiative in helping adults with reading and writing difficulties.

NALA acts as a forum not a provider for literacy education. It is also a resource centre for materials and ideas. NALA's membership includes individual literacy students, tutors and organisers, as well as voluntary groups, community groups, Youth Training schemes, four library authorities and the Library Association of Ireland. NALA was formally constituted in 1980 with an Executive Committee elected at an AGM.

In 1985 a grant was received from the Department of Education which enabled NALA to appoint its first staff team of a National Organiser/Development Worker and a part-time Administrative Secretary as well as setting up an office and a resource room. (20)

The aims of NALA are:-

To promote and develop adult literacy work and in particular to encourage the involvement of learners in all aspects of planning, organisation, assessment and research. (21)

THE WORK OF NALA

The work of NALA can be covered under the following headings⁽²²⁾:-

a) Providing an advice and referral service

NALA provides a national referral system for students and tutors and also informs the public on all aspects of literacy. During 1989/1990 there has been an increase in the use of this service as more groups and organisations become aware of NALA's work. The publicity of International Literacy Year and the subsequent media coverage has also meant an increase in requests for information. NALA has just one telephone line and one full-time member of staff so this has meant increased pressure.

b) Resource Room

The NALA offices contain a Resource Room which provides support for people involved in literacy work, especially those groups just starting. The material provided keeps abreast of the latest developments and also

contains Irish based material much of which is produced by literacy schemes.

c) Tutor Training

This is an essential part of NALA's work. Staff take part in training sessions through the country and at different levels. However the shortage of staff does not permit visits to all the schemes who request training. NALA has built up a panel of tutor trainers who can help schemes run their own tutor courses. Residential training weekends for tutor trainers is given a high priority and NALA anticipates a high demand for these this year.

In service training courses for organisers and tutors on a regional basis are held and special training courses and support on such topics as work with young people and students with special needs, which has its own working party, are also held.

A certificate training course was held, for tutors working with young people, at St Patrick's College, Maynooth in association with the Centre for Adult and Community Education, Maynooth. The course is held over several weekends and it is hoped it will enable tutors to reflect on their role as well as develop their skills.

c) Forum for literacy workers

NALA is a forum for debate, development and co-operation for those involved in literacy work. It does this in various ways such as the publishing of regular Newsletters, known as NALA News, which offers

news, information and practical advice on running schemes. A student letter page is to be established to encourage students to contact each other.

Regular meetings are held such as the Organisers forum which this year will assess the impact of International Literacy Year.

NALA organises national events such as meetings to mark International Literacy Day (8th of September) and a series of special events this year.

d) Campaigning and Lobbying

This has always been an important concern of NALA's but has been given a new emphasis in 1990. NALA has an on-going campaign to urge the Government and other political parties to support and develop good quality literacy provision. The emphasis in International Literacy Year is to raise the level of awareness among the general public concerning the literacy problem. A press conference was held on International Literacy Day, 1989, with a press release sent out to all the media focussing attention on International Literacy Year, the degree of the problem in Ireland, the problems of school leavers, the need for access to more tuition and the critical need for paid key workers to ensure a reliable service. This received wide coverage in the national newspapers, the main news bulletins on both television and radio, and was also featured in a radio show.

Work began in December 1989 to alert the media to the launch of International Literacy Year on the 16th January 1990 and this paid off with widespread coverage in the national papers, including editorial comment, as well as excellent coverage on several popular radio shows and on an afternoon television programme. NALA noticed a dramatic increase in requests for help after this media attention.

A general letter was sent to NALA's membership, public representatives and other groups in order to mobilise support for I.L.Y. A meeting was held in December 1989 with the Minister of Education, Mrs Mary Burke, with the purpose of advising her on the present literacy situation and to highlight the need for more funding if high quality literacy provision was to be made available, and to inform her of the programme of events planned for the year. NALA was interested to see how the government would respond to I.L.Y. The Minister announced that the Government would allocate IR£23,000 for the year and hinted that it might help further, and this has resulted in an increase in the Community Education and Adult Literacy Budget by IR£500,000 to IR£1million.(23)

A National week of Awareness was planned for the 20th-29th of April 1990 with events held throughout the country.

A Campaigning and Publicity pack was compiled containing information sheets which could be adopted by groups for their own publicity, a tape/slide presentation was prepared and working parties were set up in

conjunction with R.T.E. to produce ideas for short radio and television programmes.

e) Student involvement in literacy work

NALA involves students in producing material and in other aspects of literacy work. It feels the best way to achieve this aim is through student writing weekends, where not only is material produced but students learn from and encourage each other.

The publication of student writings is an important part of NALA's work. In 1989 "Given the chance we can do it"⁽²⁴⁾ was published based on a writing weekend in 1988 for students from Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny and Offaly.

NALA are pleased to note an increase in the number of groups producing Irish based material which can be used in literacy work. NALA supports this work along with ACTED Literacy Publishing Group and the Prison Service Publishing Committee.

NALA has also sent students to take workshops at an international conference on "The role of writing in Adult Basic Education" held at Angers in France, 22-29 April 1989, where they were the only group of students to participate in this way.

f) International Representation

NALA is a member of the European Network for Basic Education and

Literacy, which promotes exchange of ideas and materials between literacy workers in Europe.

g) Research

NALA has been involved with two major research projects on the state of adult literacy schemes in Ireland. They are as follows:- "NALA Survey Report 1987"⁽²⁵⁾ and "Getting help with reading and writing; Co.Offaly research project 1988"⁽²⁶⁾. These two surveys will be referred to again.

iv) PRESENT SITUATION REGARDING LITERACY PROVISION IN IRELAND

In 1986 NALA carried out a survey to establish the present state of literacy provision. Previous surveys had been carried out in 1982 and 1983 but as the establishment of the National Office resulted in an expansion of literacy work it was felt another survey was due which was wider in scope than the other two. During this time there had been significant developments such as the publication of the NALA policy document "Guidelines for Good Adult Literacy Work"⁽²⁷⁾, the allocation of IR£1 million by the Government to be used for adult literacy and community education during 1985-87 and an increase in the range of literacy provision which is no longer confined to local literacy schemes but takes place in Training Centres, workshops, prisons, community development projects and psychiatric hospitals.⁽²⁸⁾

This survey covered all these areas. Replies showed a total of 3,022 students working at literacy, 54% of them in local literacy schemes, showing that the locally run and volunteer tutor literacy scheme is still important. 63% of all the students surveyed were found to be under the age of 25. This disturbing feature shows that young people are continuing to leave school with reading and writing difficulties. This total of 3,022 is a tiny proportion of the estimated 400,000 people in Ireland with literacy problems.

The survey also showed a marked increase in the use of centres for tuition with 82% of students using a centre and an increase in group tuition. (53% of all students were working in groups). Rural literacy schemes were different in that 47% of students worked in centres and just 14% in groups, with one-to-one tuition still the norm. In spite of this fact the trend is still towards centre based and group tuition. NALA feels this approach tackles the literacy problem more effectively than personal tuition in the home which was the case in the early days. This has implications for facilities and resources as group tuition requires a suitable room with access to literacy materials and other resources, and group tutors require payment as there is a lot more work involved.

Literacy classes are held in workshops and prisons and those organised by local schemes take place mostly in schools. The latter fact is queried as many adults returning to education to improve their literacy and numeracy have had negative experiences of schooling so a greater range of premises would be desirable. NALA recommends that literacy

work requires access to certain facilities such as an office, resource centre, meeting rooms and a creche and administrative back up with a telephone, photocopier and secretarial help. The local literacy schemes have the least in the way of these facilities and only six had access to creche facilities. Three schemes are run from private homes and two have no permanent base, a situation which NALA roundly condemns.

There were a total of 1,255 tutors, 90% of whom were working within local literacy schemes which the survey report suggests is uneconomic as all tutors need support. A greater number of paid tutors working with groups is seen as more effective. 82% of the tutors were female and only 18% were male perhaps reflecting the low pay, status and voluntary nature of the work.

The majority of the schemes (92%) engage in initial training courses and some offer on-going training. NALA is pleased with this response but notes that training concentrates on the technical aspects of teaching adults literacy rather than the wider issues involved.

The survey concludes that the high number of literacy students indicates a continuing need for literacy work and calls for on-going support.

In October 1989 NALA wished to gain up-to-date information for the I.L.Y. campaign and publicity pack. Questionnaires concerning numbers and age range of students, numbers of paid and voluntary tutors, the hours of tuition offered each week, and the source and availability of funding, were posted to 159 centres. These included 83 local Adult

Literacy schemes, 46 Community Training Workshops and 30 Travellers centres. There was 60% response rate (54 local schemes, 32 Community Training workshops and 10 Travellers centres). Prisons, rehabilitation workshops and psychiatric hospitals were not included.

The results showed similar trends to the 1987 survey and were published in the information pack and NALA News⁽²⁹⁾ and the results are reproduced below:-

NO. OF STUDENTS	Male	Female	TOTAL
Total number of students receiving literacy help	2,243	1,870	4,113
No. of students aged 16-20			2,226
No. of students aged 21-30			788

NO. OF TUTORS

Total number of tutors at work	295	1,015	1,310
Total number of tutors in literacy schemes	268	956	1,224
Total number of tutors in schemes unpaid			1,154

HOURS OF TUITION

Number of students receiving two hours or less			2,972
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FUNDING

Number of local literacy schemes receiving funding from VEC 1988

44
(out of 49 responses)

Important features of the survey results are the numbers of young people requiring help with literacy difficulties and the fact that most students can only expect two hours tuition a week. This amounts to a fortnight's tuition a year, which is totally inadequate. The literacy service is very dependent on volunteer tutors and the implications that has in providing a reliable and consistent service. As in the 1987 survey it is obvious that the number of students receiving help falls very short of the numbers in need but it was encouraging to find significant numbers of schemes receiving funding from the VEC budget.

NALA's role is vital in the development of literacy in Ireland. Its wide range of functions and responsibilities and the increasing need for literacy in a society emerging from an agrarian-based economy into a modern advanced technological one place great pressure on the small but dedicated staff whose work load is very heavy, especially this year. The publicity generated by I.L.Y. and the increased awareness of literacy work must be built on so that effective programmes can be sustained. 83 local literacy schemes are known to NALA and literacy programmes run by FAS and other training organisations also require support. It is difficult to provide all the support required on limited resources and paucity of Government funding. However the fact that literacy provision is outside the mainstream of educational provision, due to its low priority and volunteer origins, means that it has freedom from bureaucratic control and can provide tuition suited to individual needs which is important for adults returning to education, and students have priority in deciding what they require.

v) LITERACY IN URBAN AREAS (DUBLIN)

The Dublin literacy scheme is funded by the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee and has limited but reliable funding. The scheme has been running for sixteen years. It is based in the Dublin Institute of Adult Education and co-ordinates literacy provision through groups and tutors operating in various centres throughout Dublin. The author visited the Institute in June 1990 and spoke to the Director of the literacy scheme, Ms Bernadette Brady. The Institute is situated in Mountjoy Square, a once elegant Georgian square which has seen better days, and it was quite difficult to locate the office in the vast, dark building.

In 1989/90 the scheme catered for 255 students, 155 of which worked in groups, the rest with individual tutors. New students are assessed in an initial interview by the scheme's staff and this gives the student the chance to state individual needs and problems and for the staff to assess ability and to provide the student with various options regarding tuition and selecting the most suitable choice. This is a vital process and must be handled with sympathy and tact to avoid anxiety for the student. (30)

Students who are placed with individual tutors do so with the expectation of spending one year with that person. They are encouraged to join a group after one year if they feel confident enough. (31)

An important part of the work of the scheme is the emphasis on students writing for themselves and creating resource material which is student specific. The role of the tutor is now one of confidence booster rather than a scribe which was the case in the past. The scheme originally used a lot of Ladybird books but they now use a variety of material including large-print books and abridged material. Student writings are published in a magazine "Print Out" and a newsletter is produced.

The Dublin scheme has good resources and experienced tutors for at least six years. They are now able to offer a certificate course to students, the City and Guilds Communication Skills (Level One), as an option after two years in a basic group. Twelve students entered in 1989 and all passed, eleven have enrolled for Level Two and one has enrolled for a GCSE "O" level. This has been an important and positive achievement and the Level One course has been offered to seventeen more students.

Tutor training is also very important. Each volunteer tutor is required to complete a nine-week course as well as in-service sessions. The group tutors also meet regularly to discuss their work, a high level of expertise has been built up within this group which has enhanced literacy provision in the scheme.⁽³²⁾

The Dublin scheme has been fortunate in having consistent funding which has allowed it to develop a long-term strategy for their students starting with basic literacy and progressing through to other kinds of adult education. Funding is limited however and the desire to maintain

high quality provision places burdens on the two full-time staff members.

vi) ADULT LITERACY IN RURAL AREAS (CO. OFFALY)

The problems of literacy schemes in rural areas were discussed often in literacy circles. It was felt the problems of living in a small community where everyone's business gets known more quickly was a factor which increased the stigma and difficulties faced by potential students. The smaller population and the smaller pool of tutors would also have consequences for any scheme. It was felt that rural areas had organisational difficulties due to distance especially in the area of matching tutors and support. The most common issue was the problem of encouraging people to look for tuition.

NALA received a grant for a research project and based its work on the literacy scheme in Co. Offaly which had been established for several years. Co. Offaly is situated in the Midlands of Ireland and covers 900 square miles of mainly farming and peat lands. The main town is Tullamore, which has a population of 9,442 and is located at the centre of the county. The other main towns are Birr, in the south-west of the county, population 4,323, and Edenderry, in the north-east, population 3,666. The main areas of economic activity in the county are mixed farming, peat production and electricity generating stations. The county is gradually becoming more urbanised with an increasing dependency on service and industrial employment.⁽³³⁾ The literacy

scheme in Offaly started in 1976 but by 1980 lack of support, finance and recognition had caused the number of students to dwindle.

The appointment of an Adult Education Organiser in 1980 who gave adult literacy priority, with the support of the VEC committee, revitalised the scheme. During 1987 and 1988 (the period of research) there were 42 students and the scheme had a Resource Centre and office in the main street of Tullamore. This is easily accessible to those living around the town but it is difficult for tutors in other areas to gain access at times suitable for them.⁽³⁴⁾

Apart from the 42 students in the literacy scheme, there were, at the time of research, 8 women from Edenderry taking a "Brush up your English" course, and a group of young people attending a Youth Skills course.

Twenty-seven of the students were interviewed and tutors received a structured questionnaire as well as having a group discussion. The objective was to produce a case study of the scheme with particular emphasis on problems of recruitment and the student's experiences.

Half the students interviewed were between the ages of 25-34 and most came from lower income families with six or more siblings. The majority of students in spite of their difficulties with education left school at the legal age. Only four of the 27 were unemployed. 13 of the 27 students were travelling over a mile to their classes and two of this group were travelling over 30 miles each way. Most of them used their

own car so lack of transport would be a barrier and is a strong argument for locally based centres.

One of the main findings of the report was that students would be interested in working in small groups. This surprised the organisers and showed that they had overestimated the need for confidentiality once the initial contact had been made. This had repercussions throughout schemes in Ireland and the NALA survey indicated an increase in this practice.⁽³⁵⁾

The Co. Clare Reading and Writing Scheme carried out a comparative study of the Clare and Limerick schemes and found that in the initial stages of tuition confidentiality was essential, students indicated they would not approach the scheme without this assurance, but the need for confidentiality decreased as the confidence of the students increased through improved literacy skills. The Clare group concluded that:

lack of confidence and the need for confidentiality were intertwined. (36)

The Clare group felt they were in a dilemma; how to break the isolation of the students undergoing one-to-one tuition and to instil them with enough confidence to meet one another. The organisers felt if students could meet it would boost confidence. The opening of the first resource room was a great opportunity to organise meetings.

Not surprisingly, student confidence was raised, they felt they had been recognised as a viable body not an anachronism. (37)

On the question of publicity the Offaly report found that 19 of the 27 students had experienced a great deal of difficulty in obtaining information. Friends, relatives and professionals were important in helping the student make contact, indicating the importance of making the general public aware of literacy provision. In spite of this, potential students still have psychological and physical barriers to overcome in their attempts to get help.

I was at it on my own, trying to learn and I couldn't get going. I was mad to learn, but I couldn't get up the courage to go in anywhere. I went to Tullamore, myself last year, and I might as well be looking for a needle in a haystack. I didn't know where I was going. I didn't know where it was. That was the difficult part about it. I must have walked up and down past it five or six times. I was looking for a sign, there was nothing. (38)

It emerged from this study that people do not know where to seek general information about services and professionals are not often consulted apart from teachers. A person with reading and writing difficulties is already handicapped in searching for information and only those with good support and persistence will succeed in making contact with a scheme.

The report recommends that publicity must be frequent and varied especially in rural areas where information of this kind takes longer to get known. Local organisers need to make and maintain personal contact with the community to raise awareness.

The vital role of the Adult Education Organiser is displayed in this Report and it recommends that all A.E.O.s should be actively involved in

literacy schemes. It also recommends paid literacy organisers and a body of paid tutors with volunteers as support people.

The impact of the research was also evaluated in the report. The project gave the students an opportunity to meet and talk about their experiences, opinions and needs, which was an important development and will move the scheme onto a further stage. Organisers probably underestimated students capacity for change. The difficulties people had in making contact with the scheme were highlighted showing gaps in publicity. It needs to be clear about the causes of literacy problems and directed towards those public services whose personnel are likely to be approached for help. The research reinforced the belief that has been emerging; that well organised rural work needs local centres, with locally based organisers.⁽³⁹⁾

vii) STUDENTS AND TUTORS

The Offaly research project also profiled the social and educational background of both students and teachers.

Students

The survey questioned 27 students about their family background. The fathers of half the students were involved in unskilled manual work, eight others were from farming backgrounds. Most of the respondents' mothers were housewives and five mothers were listed as co-running the family farm. The majority of students were from large families. 18 of

the 27 came from families with 5-14 children. 52% of students came from families where other members had difficulties in reading and writing.

It has already been mentioned that 26 of the 27 respondents left school at the legal age; of these 26, 15 did not go beyond primary school and 21 left school without any qualifications (not even the Primary School Certificate, which was in existence until 1967).

The majority of students were employed, mainly in skilled and semi-skilled occupations ranging from machine driver to tree surgeon. Only 4 were unemployed.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Tutors

There were a total of 37 tutors on the scheme and 24 were interviewed. Out of these 24, 23 were women. The majority were volunteers working two hours or less a week.

The educational levels were that all but one tutor had the Leaving Certificate (equivalent to "A" levels), 6 had a third level degree, 3 a third level diploma and one a Master's degree.

The age range of tutors was between 21-49 years. A high proportion of them worked in professional or clerical occupations. Six of the seven tutors with professional occupations were teachers. There was a high turnover with 16 of the 24 being involved for less than a year. Only 5 had worked with the scheme for more than two years.

The predominance of women over men as tutors and the inverse ratio as regards students was not an issue as similar ratios were to be found throughout Ireland.⁽⁴¹⁾

The majority of tutors were by background and occupation from middle income groups while most of the students were from lower income families. This raises all sorts of questions about class experiences and attitudes in education. Literacy is essential to gain access to higher education but people can cope in every day life with limited literacy.⁽⁴²⁾

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- 31) Ibid, 10.
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- 33) DERBYSHIRE, Jenny, ref.25,14.
- 34) Ibid, 16.
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- 36) NALA NEWS, ref.1,11.
- 37) Ibid.
- 38) DERBYSHIRE, Jenny, ref.25,43.
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- 40) Ibid, 26-28.
- 41) NALA SURVEY REPORT, ref.24.
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CHAPTER FOUR

PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND LITERACY IN IRELAND

1) Background

The establishment of the public library service in Ireland followed a similar pattern to England and was provided for under the Public Libraries (Ireland) Act, 1855, which introduced the principle of a free library service open to the people. The Act originally applied to municipal authorities and services had to be financed from the rates. Services in rural areas were included in later legislation such as the Public Libraries (Ireland) Act, 1902, which gave the Rural District Councils the power to become library authorities, and the Local Government Act, 1925, which promoted the County Council as the library authority, setting out the roles, powers and responsibilities involved.⁽¹⁾

In spite of the legislative framework, development was slow and piecemeal. Ellis-King states:-

Poverty, exemplified by the small yield from the penny rate levy ... was the chief contributing factor which inhibited many local authorities initially from adopting, and then implementing or developing the provisions of the Library Acts which had generated such widespread enthusiasm.⁽²⁾

This slow growth can be illustrated by tables taken from the Report on

Library Provision and Policy presented by Professor W G Adams to the
Carnegie United Kingdom Trust in 1915.⁽³⁾

NUMBER OF RATE SUPPORTED LIBRARIES ESTABLISHED IN EACH DECADE

	ENGLAND	WALES	SCOTLAND	IRELAND
1840-49	1	-	-	-
1850-59	18	-	1	1
1860-69	12	1	1	-
1870-79	38	5	5	-
1880-89	51	5	9	5
1890-99	121	17	15	8
1900-09	125	29	42	12

PUBLIC LIBRARY COVERAGE IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM
1911⁽⁴⁾

	Total Population	Population in Library Districts	% of Total Population
ENGLAND	34,194,205	21,103,317	62
WALES	2,025,202	938,303	46
SCOTLAND	4,760,904	2,403,283	50
IRELAND	<u>4,309,219</u>	<u>1,245,766</u>	28
	45,370,530	25,690,699	

These figures illustrate the fact that just over a quarter of the
population in Ireland had access to a public library and this figure

compared unfavourably with the rest of the United Kingdom. The difficulties in generating income from the rates for libraries are illustrated in the following tables which Casteleyn devised from the Parliamentary returns on the Public Libraries Act in 1884, 1889-90 and 1910-11.⁽⁵⁾

	1884	1889-90	1910-11
ENGLAND &			
WALES	115,911	193,827	726,247
SCOTLAND	5,361	7,746	68,466
IRELAND	<u>2,394</u>	<u>4,481</u>	<u>18,005</u>
	123,666	206,054	812,718

Library development took a leap forward when the Carnegie grants were extended to Ireland. Andrew Carnegie, the son of an impoverished Scottish weaver who emigrated to America in the 1840s, made a vast fortune in the steel industry which he used philanthropically especially in the field of education. Grants were made to local authorities and between the years 1903 and 1913 £115,000 was given to build libraries in 34 towns in Ireland.⁽⁶⁾

In 1913 the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust was set up to administer grant allocations.

The grants were for a definite sum and, in the main, used for buildings. It was expected that the local authority would provide the site and

supply the bookstock but this did not always work out in practice as building maintenance took up most of the income raised from the rates leaving little for books and a librarian's salary.

The problem of overbuilding was recognised by the CUKT and finding that the greater part of the country had no service and the rural district schemes a failure, decided to discontinue grants for buildings and promote development through financing experimental schemes in whole countries. In 1922 library systems in Donegal and Antrim were founded on the understanding that they would be handed over to the County Council when legislation permitted.⁽⁷⁾

In spite of the problems involved in their utilisation:-

The Carnegie grants have brought home the idea of the free public library as an important local institution.⁽⁸⁾

Reflecting on the work of CUKT, Armitage⁽⁹⁾ writes that:-

It is doubtful if the county library movement in Ireland would ever have got under way without the grants-in-aid from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust in the 1920s and early thirties.

The lack of success by rural district councils in providing libraries, due to the fact,

It was becoming increasingly difficult to supply complicated and expensive services for areas producing inadequate rate incomes⁽¹⁰⁾

prompted Adams, when calling for a rural library policy to conclude that:-

The object should be to prepare the way for the gradual but certain extension of a national rural library scheme of county rate supported libraries.⁽¹¹⁾

The rural district councils were abolished by the Local Government Act of 1925. The Act also permitted urban districts to cede their library powers to the county councils. To Armitage's relief,

All but one did just that, so that today we are spared the embarrassment of having numerous miniature independent library authorities.⁽¹²⁾

The County Council managed its services, including libraries, through committees, delegating all powers except those of levying the rate, borrowing money and transferring property. Library committees were independent and statutory, composed of councillors and co-opted members, with the County Librarian acting as secretary.

The system did not ensure that a service was established throughout the country and development was slow and uneven.⁽¹³⁾ Probable causes of neglect were the after effects of civil war, rural stagnation and poverty. The newly independent state was being rebuilt and other public services such as housing, water schemes, hospitals and roads which give more practical and immediate results were given a higher priority than libraries. Rural poverty and low valuation meant a low income for libraries and Armitage⁽¹⁴⁾ suggests that the link with the Department of Local Government rather than that of Education was a handicap in getting libraries recognition and support as an educational service rather than a recreational one.

The outbreak of war in 1939 halted library development but a radical change in local government was on the way which made administration easier even if resources did not improve. The County Management Act, 1940, which came into power in 1942, had as its chief feature the creation of the post of County Manager. This office has executive powers and took over the functions formerly undertaken by elected members. The manager consults with the heads of department (such as the librarian) and has the power to reject, amend or pass any proposals which are then ratified by the Council after the Manager has given approval. Library committees are no longer statutory and their role is purely advisory. The budget for the Council's services is presented to the Council as an estimate by the manager and the Council has the power to make amendments.

These changes aided library development as the decision making process was speeded up, County librarians now have direct access to the Manager; however the danger of personality clashes exists.

In spite of these administrative changes the sorry tale of underfunding continued. In 1962 only IR£250,335 was spent on county libraries.⁽¹⁵⁾ Stock, staff, buildings were all inadequately resources.

Municipal libraries also developed after the introduction of the Public Libraries Act. The first city to adopt the Act was Cork in 1855 but the rate to support it was not applied until 1892. In 1884 two municipal libraries were opened in Dublin and three others followed in 1899, 1904

and 1912. Limerick's library was opened in 1893 and Waterford opened its library in 1896.⁽¹⁶⁾

The growth of Dublin brought the need for new libraries, but as happened with the county libraries, other services had priority. In 1932 the various library units under boroughs and county districts which had been absorbed by boundary extensions were centralised to form the Dublin City Library service.⁽¹⁷⁾ Technically Dublin Corporation and Dublin County Council are separate entities but since 1967 there has been joint responsibility at the level of Manager, Chief Librarian and Deputy Librarian. There are parallel policies and many services are jointly funded and the whole now constitutes the Dublin Public Libraries system.⁽¹⁸⁾

However, in spite of the financial stringency and limited growth there was some light on the horizon. Concern about the post war future had been expressed by Irish librarians but even so they were taken by surprise by the action taken by the Government in the form of the Public Libraries Act, 1947. The main provision of this Act was the formation of the Irish Library Council (An Chormhairle Leabharlanna). The Council consists of a chairman, appointed by the Minister for Local Government, and twelve nominated members, including one from the Library Association of Ireland.

The Council was set up to receive the gift of the Irish Central Library for Students from CUKT, to advise local authorities on their libraries and to assist improvements with grant aid. High expectations were

raised by this legislation but it was fourteen years before financial assistance was forthcoming.

Two surveys were carried out by the Council to ascertain the position of libraries in the country. The first survey published in 1955 was of the county libraries and was a scathing indictment of neglect:-

The survey reports show that the county library service, in general, is not in a satisfactory condition as regards books, buildings or staffs. The service is used by too small a proportion of the population: people living in country areas are getting a very limited service; expansion has been more on its recreational than its educational side; the needs of young people are not adequately met and only a relatively small number of schools are served ... The picture presented by the survey reports is that of a service, having great potentialities, struggling against difficulties, created by unsuitable premises, inadequate and in many cases unqualified staffs, and having too many books of an inferior sort.(19)

The other survey⁽²⁰⁾ on urban libraries illustrates similar problems although they had better resources.

Library authorities, now in the possession of evidence of the need for central capital investment, got impatient as they waited for the proposed financial aid.

In 1959 a Director was appointed to the Library Council and in 1961 it was announced by the Minister that the Council would administer a grants scheme whereby a 50% subsidy in the way of loan contributions towards capital investment projects.

This scheme was welcomed as it gave libraries an incentive to make a fresh start and great enthusiasm was engendered. Library authorities that had development plans already drawn up and those authorities that had the administrative capacity and local support to develop plans quickly, benefited enormously. In 1977 the scheme was amended to a subsidy on leasing charges.⁽²¹⁾

One problem with the scheme was that the less-developed counties, especially those on the western seaboard, found it difficult to keep up paying even half the annual loan charges. Another general problem was that not all librarians had the necessary qualifications or ability to undertake the essential planning.

Great improvements were made. These were mostly capital programmes such as new buildings for headquarters and branches as well as new services to schools and hospitals.

In 1987 another major report was undertaken by the Library Council⁽²²⁾ which was a review of the public library service since the introduction of the scheme of grants to library authorities in 1961. It drew attention to the uneven rate of capital development and the variation in exploitation of new developments by library authorities. The improvements that occurred were from a very low base.; Issues increased by only 38.68% from 10.55 million to 14.63 million between 1961 - 1985 and the percentage of the population registered as library users increased from 13% in 1961 to only 19% in 1985.

The Report notes with concern the fact that in terms of issues and membership the library service has remained virtually static between 1980-1985. However it acknowledges that figures do not reflect the full usage of a public library service and the work relating to reference queries, information services, outreach activities and the community and cultural use of the library are not reflected in the statistical returns. It recommends that An Chomhairle Leabharlanna undertakes user and non-user surveys to quantify use and public attitudes to the public library service.

A massive building programme had been undertaken by many authorities during this period (1961-1985). The report questions the necessity of some of this expansion and advises that the provision of the most modern building will not be effective unless the professional expertise of a librarian is fully utilised in its exploitation.

The Report was pleased to note that there was a total acceptance for the need for a public library service but was concerned to find that library authorities, in general, do not appear to have a clear understanding or perception of what constitutes a modern library service. It notes that the approach to development is on an ad-hoc, haphazard and fragmented basis, and little consideration is given to formulating comprehensive integrated programmes. In order to rectify this situation the Report sets out the aims and objectives of an up-to-date library service and recommends that the Government formulates a national library policy.

The present day public library service in the Republic of Ireland is run by thirty-one library authorities. Four cities, Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford are municipal library authorities independent of the county administration. Dun Laoghaire (Co. Dublin) is a separate authority and Tipperary North and Tipperary South are run as a joint authority.

Library services continue to develop in Ireland but there is still a disparity in provision between the wealthier counties and those areas with larger populations and smaller counties and scattered rural communities.

ii) Literacy provision by Library Authority

The impetus provided by the designation of 1990 as International Literacy Year renewed debate about literacy provision in libraries. The Library Association of Ireland felt that something positive should be done to mark the occasion. The first plan was to produce a Directory but that proved to be impossible on the level of grant received from the Department of Education and would, in any case, duplicate work undertaken by a joint committee of Education, Social Welfare and Health Ministries.

There was a feeling expressed by some members of the Library Association of Ireland that there was little provision in the country outside certain areas. Informal discussions at Senior Staff meetings led to the

conclusion that it was necessary to find out about the situation in more detail and so a study was commissioned. The survey was under the auspices of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, who provided the funding, with the remit to ascertain the state of public library provision to adults with literacy problems. Work was begun in March 1990 and a report should be available in September.

A questionnaire was devised for the study based on a similar survey undertaken by New South Wales Public Library⁽²³⁾ in view of a federally funded literacy campaign in 1985 which could lead to increased demands on the service. Little work had been done to find out the number of adults with literacy problems in New South Wales. No obvious pattern of use of literacy material could be discerned and the resources varied, reflecting library priorities and perceived needs of the population. It was concluded that the public library division would expand its consultancy role in adult literacy provision; information files were set up and updated and guidelines prepared. This survey was similar in scope to what was envisaged for Ireland and was a useful starting point.

The work was carried out, on behalf of An Chomhairle, by Katherine Keane and Margaret Burke both of whom are librarians with Dublin Public Libraries and have an interest in literacy and remedial materials.

The author interviewed Ms Keane and Ms Burke about their project and they explained the background to their research. It was felt that although it was relevant to gain librarians' opinions it was also very important to find out what literacy tutors and their students would like

provided. Two questionnaires were devised; AL1, which was sent to each library authority and AL2, which was sent to each Adult Literacy group known to NALA (eighty in all) and forty-five of the latter questionnaires have been returned to date.

The aims and objectives of the project are as follows:-

... to survey the present state-of-the-art in adult literacy provision and to examine the potential for development of such provision in public libraries.

To achieve these aims the following objectives have been set:

- 1) To discover how many public libraries hold materials, the format and nature of such materials, the number of items and the methods employed for its organisation.
- 2) To discover how many public libraries offer services connected with adult literacy and the nature and extent of these services. Such services could include, for example, community liaison, information and its retrieval, provision of space and basic equipment for adult literacy work, direct help to clients, publicity on adult literacy, etc.
- 3) To elicit public librarians' opinions and attitudes, with particular emphasis on the perception of the role of public libraries and the problems and constraints posed in adult literacy provision.
- 4) To ascertain the opinions, attitudes and perceptions of the Adult Literacy sector concerning the contribution that public libraries make to the provision of adult literacy services.
- 5) To produce a report which will suggest a policy for public libraries in adult literacy provision.(24)

Keane and Burke will not attempt to provide guidelines. They stressed that the report, which will be a private one to An Chomhairle, will only suggest a policy drawing on the attitudes and opinions of both the library and literacy sectors. They plan to elicit further opinions from established literacy groups and those libraries with a well-established involvement with literacy.

At the time of the interview, (June 1990) eight replies from library authorities were outstanding, and it was too soon to analyse the results, but several points had already emerged. A common problem was the question of shelving the material owing to its physical format. Another major problem was finding material relevant to Ireland, i.e. going to the Post Office, filling in Social Welfare forms, and public transport where different symbols and graphics to those portrayed in material published in the UK are used.

There seemed to be a reluctance on the part of many library authorities to fully answer the open-ended questions in Section Three which was about attitudes and opinions to literacy provision. Many felt they did not have the financial resources to provide a comprehensive service to the literacy sector, and from the replies received at present, only four authorities provide an all over service not just at one service point.

The areas where literacy organisations felt libraries could help was in provision of private space for tuition, a place to house their own resources for tutors' use and as a publicity and referral agency.

There appeared to be good will on both the literacy and library sides but also each group were ignorant of the needs, functions and resources of the other, and this is a factor the report will try to redress.

The aim of the survey is very pragmatic. It is hoped to identify the reality of provision so that a practical strategy to improve the

situation can be designed, and a directory of contacts in the field of Adult Literacy in the Republic of Ireland can be produced.

In order to gain an insight into Adult Literacy provision in both rural and urban areas requests were made to visit several library authorities. The author devised a structured interview and it was sent out with a covering letter. Regrettably only two replies were received, from Dublin Public Libraries and Kilkenny County Library. Efforts were made to contact some other authorities but it was difficult to pursue the matter in the time available.

The structured interview was based on a questionnaire devised by P M Coleman for her study "Whose Problem: the public library and the disadvantaged."⁽²⁵⁾ One amendment was made; an additional question on the location and presentation of material as it was felt that these factors may have some bearing on the use of the collection.

Visits were arranged to Kilkenny County Library and to Dublin Public Libraries. The visit to the latter will be described in the next section.

Kilkenny County Library service has three full-time branches, two part-time mobiles and a schools service. An interview was conducted with Helen Walsh, Senior Assistant Librarian, who has responsibility for administration.

Kilkenny purchases material for a literacy collection which is placed in Loughboy Library. It has had a donation of Adult Literacy material from the local Vocational Educational Committee and from the literacy scheme at Seville Lodge Adult Education Centre, the forerunner to the present scheme.

Kilkenny's adult literacy stock consists of fifty-six tutor handbooks and training materials, twenty-three student workbooks, three hundred fiction items, three dictionaries and nine items of numeracy materials. Audio visual items and games are not held in stock. It has a collection of newsletters from various adult literacy organisations including NALA News and Aisling which are produced in Ireland.

Publicity for adult literacy tuition is displayed but accommodation is not provided for adult literacy classes.

Every effort is made to deal with adult literacy queries, the County Librarian is on the local Ad-Hoc Adult Education Board. Ms Walsh explained there was no-one at present responsible for development of services in connection with adult literacy although they hope to recruit someone, in the future, probably from middle management.

A visit was arranged to Loughboy branch library which is situated in a housing estate on the outskirts of the city. The main literacy collection is located here, as it is an area of high unemployment, large families and a young teenage population.

Loughboy is a modern, open-plan branch with a cheerful decor. The library is in a central location near the doctor's surgery and beside a shopping centre. The adult literacy section is positioned at the back of the adult fiction area and to the right of the Young Adult section. Seating is available and the collection was deliberately placed there so readers could use it discretely. There is a feeling among the staff that the collection is not well used. Material such as Collins graded readers, Topliners, Bullseye, Trend Books and Spirals are stocked, non-use may be due to lack of interest, incorrect level or failure to exploit it to the right people. The collection is marked with coloured stickers but at present no separate record is kept of their issue.

There is a good relationship with the local adult literacy scheme "Word Aid". Two members of the library staff were very active in this group and since they have left the service, activity in the area of literacy has become stagnant. Tutors bring students into the library to acquaint them with the collection but at the moment there are no organised visits.

The Library service feels that the Word Aid scheme, which has been highly successful in recent years, has a good collection of resources and they appear to be self sufficient. However they have identified two areas where the library service might be useful. The first is the provision of material that takes the Adult Literacy student beyond the Word Aid programme into the more common, general interest area, such as abridged novels, simple fiction and non-fiction, and the second area is

assisting any countrywide expansion of the Word Aid programme by allowing the use of a room in the rural county library branches.

iii) Library and Literacy Service Co-operation in the Dublin Area

Dublin Public Libraries has sustained rapid growth since the 1960s parallel with the growth of the city itself and offers a modern comprehensive library service.

As part of its policy of social awareness and the aim of serving the needs of all its users, Dublin Public Libraries re-examined its service to the literacy sector. There is a serious literacy problem in Dublin, estimates are that 100,000 in the Dublin area are in need of help and that 25% of children in the inner Dublin area enter secondary school with serious reading and writing problems.⁽²⁶⁾

In 1986 nine literacy resource centres in branch libraries were set up, with the aims of concentrating materials that had been scattered about the system and to develop expertise.⁽²⁷⁾ The branches were selected according to their social and economic environment and also their location so that every area of Dublin was covered.⁽²⁸⁾

The branches are Ballyfermot, Ballymun, Blanchardstown, Castletymon, Coolock, Donaghmede, Dundrum, Henry St. and Swords libraries. Each branch has a literacy scheme in its area and liaison and activities with this group is an important function of the resource centre. Open nights

are held for tutors and students, in some cases when the library is closed, so that they can become familiar with the branch and the staff. Literacy exhibitions are held which publicise local schemes and are aids to recruiting both students and tutors. These exhibitions are usually held during Adult Education month (September).

Another important function of the librarian in these centres is to assist the literacy tutors to explore new material and offer ways of exploiting the library's resources. Many schemes encourage tutors to produce their own materials so they are not always aware of what is available. The librarian has to be familiar with all the titles in the collection and considerable expertise is being built up. Many tutor training courses have incorporated formal sessions on resources into their structure which is usually taken by a librarian.

Stock for the centres was chosen with care. A working party was set up to compile a bibliography from publishers lists and also through consultation with NALA, adult education groups and local literacy schemes. It was found that the most valuable material was that produced by the local schemes. Students respond positively to material written by other students from a familiar background and with similar experiences. These are not widely available as they were never intended for national publication. However, Burke has noticed a trend⁽²⁹⁾

As awareness of the need for Irish material has grown local schemes have been attempting to make "in-house" publications more widely available, and this is to be encouraged.

Irish produced packs are also needed on form-filling, sign-posting, etc. and production of these would be a welcome trend.

The completed bibliography numbered 250 titles and on receipt were distributed in units of 5 or 10 copies per centre. By spring 1986 most of the centres had received stock in time for the launch. Care and consideration was taken of the display and location of the stock within the library. The various formats especially flimsy "packs" presented problems. Like material is shelved together and most libraries use pamphlet boxes. Magazine racks have proved to be the most suitable means to display this kind of material. Block loans are available to other branches and users in the area so clients in all areas of Dublin are catered for. Branches tried to find the best locations for their collections, taking into consideration the need for discretion to encourage browsing and the need to be located easily. Different centres had different solutions according to the layout of the branch.⁽³⁰⁾

In 1987, over a year after the scheme was launched, an internal report was produced reviewing the centres.⁽³¹⁾ The scheme had an uneven response and usage pattern. Communication problems were a common feature. It was decided to relaunch in September 1987, and in order to improve effectiveness, two training courses were held for staff; one was a general session provided by NALA on the subject of Adult Literacy in Dublin and Ireland and the second course was a specific teaching session on the materials supplied for the administrators of the nine centres.

Other changes included the revision of the bibliography, re-designing the promotional pamphlet and the design of a guiding sign which is available for all the centres ensuring uniformity.

The Report's recommendations included a general recommendation that all staff members of Dublin Public Libraries should be aware of the existence of the nine centres and should be able to refer potential learners to the nearest one. The bibliography and promotional leaflet should be kept on file in all branches.

Recommendations for the Adult Literacy centres include the following:-

- i) One person, who should be a librarian, to have responsibility for the scheme with another staff member on an opposite shift to be equally familiar with resources.
- ii) All members of staff in the branches should be able to help members of the public, tutors and students, with their enquiries.
- (iii) To aid in this a file on literacy provision in the area should be available to all the staff.
- (iv) The librarian should become familiar with the contents of most titles in the bibliography. This is probably the key factor in the success or failure of the scheme.
- (v) The librarian should constantly liaise with local adult literacy organisers, tutors and students.
- (vi) The adult literacy material should be held on open access in the branch, the exact location can be experimented with and decided upon by the librarians.
- (vii) Guiding should be simple and clear.
- (viii) All material should be clearly identifiable. Colour coding could be considered.
- (ix) Adequate supplies of the introductory pamphlet and bibliography should be stocked.
- (x) Issues of adult literacy material should be monitored; statistics should be kept about the number of items borrowed, type of borrower, type of material preferred.

An annual Review should be held in July, attended by the nine staff members in charge of the centres led by the Divisional Librarian Circulations. Reports should be given and procedures and developments for the future can be discussed.

To observe how the scheme works in context visits were made to three centres: Coolock, Donaghmede, and the Central branch in the ILAC centre, Henry St. Dublin.

COOLOCK

Coolock is a vast estate in the north of Dublin. It grew rapidly in the 60s and 70s and is an area with many social and economic problems.

Coolock library was opened eleven years ago and along with Ballyfermot library was designated a model community library. From the beginning local people were involved in activities emanating from the branch, and librarians got involved with the community. There is a Joint Care Services committee consisting of voluntary and statutory groups in the area, which acts as a catalyst to get things done, including literacy schemes.

Coolock library plays an active role in Writers, Art, Local History and Women's groups. Meetings are held in the library and staff are involved in many of these groups. Ms Betty Boardman, one of the librarians, is secretary to the Literacy sub-committee of the Joint Care Services committee and was interviewed about literacy work in the branch.

The library is attached to a Vocational Educational Committee school, known as Colaiste Dhulaigh, which takes pupils up to Leaving Certificate and those doing a seventh year pre-college course. This school plays a big role in the community and it held the first adult education classes which started seven years ago. These classes were mostly taken up by women who were re-housed from the inner city and felt isolated and rootless in Coolock. It was interesting to note how these women grew in self confidence and the first students are involved in groups and classes.

The literacy centre is housed in the school and is known as the Northside Reading and Writing Centre, and is one of the biggest literacy centres in the country. It is run by a VEC worker and is officially manned for thirteen hours a week but extra hours are worked.

A few years ago, classes were held in the library but the open nature of the building did not lend itself to privacy. The library now sees its role as a referral agency, provider of material and as a link with the centre. It is felt that local people associate the library with reading and writing and it is noticeable how enquiries have increased because of the publicity given to International Literacy Year.

The staff at Coolock are all made aware of the problems that students may face when trying to join the library and are encouraged to make joining as comfortable as possible for the potential user even if it means using discretion to waive some of the bureaucratic processes involved.

Visits are arranged for the tutors and students at the centre. They are shown where the material is kept and how it can be used. Other areas of the library are shown to students and many gravitate towards their own area of interest, e.g. sport and prefer to read those rather than the Adult Literacy collection.

To mark International Literacy Year an Awareness Week was held in April. Events included a talk from a former student, whose education was neglected due to ill health, a debate on schooldays "preparing you for life", a celebration of the written word performed by professional actors and musicians plus the Writers Group performing their own work and the launch of a booklet "Dublin Lives" by the Northside Reading and Writing Centre. Younger children were involved with a poster competition on the theme "Books are Fun". These activities promoted a lively image of literacy and confronted the problems of the person with reading and writing difficulties in a positive way.

These events were organised by the Literacy sub-committee of the Joint Care Services committee. The aim was to create awareness of the problem and apart from the public events an effort was made to involve local industries, (Coolock is the site of two major industrial estates) and their workforce. Letters were sent to local firms, explaining the problems of those with reading and writing difficulties and giving information about the help available. Only two replies were received and both had misinterpreted the letters as appeals for money. The Literacy sub-committee has learnt something from this experience and is

thinking of changing the strategy to activity among the local branches of the Trade Unions.

The obvious spirit of co-operation and commitment between the local community and the statutory agencies, such as the library, shows what can be achieved in a given area even with adverse circumstances.

DONAGHMEDE

Donaghmede is a new library on the first floor of a suburban shopping centre in the north of the city. Its catchment area contains more of a social and economic mix than Coolock although they are only a few miles apart. The library is well designed with attractive and imaginative use of wood and brick.

The Adult Literacy section is placed near the entrance and the counter. The section is called "Reading Writing Sums Spelling" and the guiding signs are in bold red capitals. It was felt that new students would feel less self-conscious if browsing in an area of activity so the children's remedial readers and social welfare information desk are also in this area, teachers, parents and other members of the public are often around. This has a spin off as tutors can borrow copies of Irish social welfare forms to use with students alongside an adapted UK text.

As well as the Adult Literacy stock some popular fiction is placed on these shelves for those with intermediate difficulties. Another imaginative use of general library stock is combining a talking book

cassette with the large print version so that students can hear the text as they read.

The librarian, Eithne Mallin, has completed the tutor course and works closely with KLEAR (Kilbarrack Local Education for Adult Renewal). Classes are held in the library and all the audio visual facilities are available to the class. Group visits are also held for students and tutors. Ms Mallin is a strong advocate of the humane approach to literacy work, getting to know the clients and what they want, and to impress upon the literacy students their rights to a library service. This approach suits her out-going personality and other members of the Donaghmede staff are being encouraged to do the tutor course so that everyone is aware of the issues involved. Ms Mallin and Ms Boardman are part of a working party who are organising workshops on literacy work for library staff this summer.

CENTRAL BRANCH, HENRY ST.

The last visit was to the Central Branch in the ILAC Centre, Henry St. This is the central public library in a prime location in a shopping centre right in the heart of Dublin. It offers a full range of lending services, reference and business information services and has an integrated multi-media approach; facilities for videos, headphones and tapes are available throughout the library.

The target area for the library is Greater Dublin so it is not as definable as other Resource Centres. The nearest schemes are held in

VEC colleges, North Strand, Marino, Denmark St and the Dublin Institute of Adult Education. The library acts as host for many events due to its central location. Not many people approach the library with queries about literacy and there is no space for individual tuition. In its Learning Resource Centre the library has a language laboratory offering fifty-five different languages at various levels. It also offers an extensive range of self learning software and the necessary hardware with which it is used. Some of the software available is for literacy and numeracy work. Seven packages are available covering spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, sentence work, telling the time (Both twenty-four hour and twelve hour clock), crosswords and wordgames. This software is produced by ALSBU and is used on a BBC micro computer.

The tutor uses these programmes with the student. Tutors are given a workshop on how the programmes work and how they can be exploited for each individual student, e.g. creating an individual disk of problem words in the spelling package. The programmes cannot be used effectively in isolation.

The software is used on average twice a week and each session lasts an hour. The programmes are fun to use with cheerful graphics and are another way to enforce language rules and gain practice in problem areas. Students who have bad memories of traditional learning methods, and younger students enjoy the programmes which complements the tutor's work.

Dublin Public Libraries have made a substantial commitment to literacy provision which could show the way forward for the rest of the country. Expertise has been built up among the staff and this is a foundation on which to build for the future. It is hoped that resources will be maintained so that this type of provision will continue for as long as it is needed.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

From this brief survey of literacy and libraries in Ireland a pattern of poor resourcing emerges. Adult literacy services are provided on a shoestring and in what seems, to an outsider's eye, to be a haphazard way.

This raises questions about how literacy services should be run. If they are assimilated into the education system with the attendant bureaucracy and controls, the student-centred approach will be lost in the need to fit into standard procedures.

Adult literacy students are capable adults and should be treated as such. Many of them have had poor school experiences, so a standardised curricular driven approach will not suit them. Students in this position need a more radical approach. However increased resources are badly needed and if the nation considers literacy as a right then it must provide extra resources through the Government so that the voluntary sector can be better organised.

The large numbers of young people coming forward for literacy tuition shows that there will be a need for adult literacy provision for years to come. More research and investigation will be needed to find out why the education system is failing in such a basic work. There is complacency about this, reflecting the powerlessness experienced by

those with reading and writing difficulties. There has to be a renewed political will to reform education which still caters for the elite and retaining the status quo.

Resources may be limited but with this political will ways can be found if imagination is applied. The role of libraries in aiding literacy work is also a question of political will and commitment. Dublin Public Libraries have initiated some admirable practices which are an example to the rest of the country, however not all authorities have Dublin's financial and staffing resources.

Although few replies were received to the student interview, from the replies to the An Chomhairle Leabharlanna study and discussions with librarians it seems that the provision for adult literacy is superficial in many parts of the country. Much depends on the interests and inclination of staff rather than needs for literacy incorporated into the overall planning for the library service. The An Chomhairle Leabharlanna project brought out clearly the mutual goodwill but mutual ignorance of the library and literacy sector.

Librarians are by nature of their education drawn mostly from the literate middle classes and it is hard to take that leap of understanding to feel what it must be like to have reading and writing difficulties unless to feel as some people do towards the severely handicapped, dangerously patronising.

In a properly organised service for literacy, staff will be encouraged to go on tutor training schemes to gain understanding. Liaison officers will be appointed to link with the various literacy schemes. The skills of librarians in purchasing and selecting materials can be used by the schemes so that their resources can be fully exploited. Librarians can aid in collecting the limited amount of Irish material together. Training can be given to new tutors in use of material as already happens in Dublin.

Non-book material can be exploited and the library should purchase more stock in this format to encourage more readers.

More use should be made of library premises. This is borne out in the Aontas Report For Adults Only⁽¹⁾ which sees public libraries as an important but undeveloped resource for adult learning. Library premises are suitable for classes in that they are a non-school environment and students can get used to the library in a casual non-threatening way.

Publicity for literacy classes was seen as a big problem particularly in the rural areas. This is something libraries can help with as part of their own promotional activities, giving space for information and exhibitions to publicise the literacy schemes. Reading and writing evenings are held in some libraries and they have proved successful. Sustaining literacy should be built into all the services offered by the library from services to schools and young people to lending services to the community. Material must be chosen that is relevant and appealing to people to encourage them to read.

Libraries in Ireland are catering to a more homogeneous social, cultural and linguistic group than libraries in Great Britain. They have the advantage of having a research and advice body with access to Government in An Chomhairle Leabharlanna. The interest and awareness raised by International Literacy Year should be captured and worked on to plan for the literacies of the future such as technological learning centres for computer literacy and technical facilities for life-long learning so that people without full literacy in any field will feel they have a right to expect help from the library.

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APPENDIX

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

LIBRARIES AND ADULT LITERACY PROVISION

- 1) Does your Service make a special allocation from its book-fund to purchase books and other materials for use by literacy students and tutors?
- 2) Has your Service ever received a grant from an outside agency to purchase adult literacy materials?
- 3) If the answer is YES, from whom?
- 4) Where are adult literacy collections placed?
 - a) In one particular library
 - b) In all, or in several branch libraries
 - c) In adult education centres
 - d) In the community (please specify)
 - e) If placed in a branch library, is the collection integrated with the rest of the stock or kept in a separate location?
 - f) If the collection is integrated, is it marked in any way to make it easily identifiable for clients?
- 5) What is the approximate number of items held in the following categories:
 - a) Books
 - b) Audio-visual items
 - c) Games
 - d) Other (please specify)

- 6) Do you display any publicity for adult literacy tuition in your service points?
- 7) Is accommodation provided for literacy classes?
If YES, is a charge made?
- 8) Is a standard procedure operated whereby people who enquire at a library about literacy tuition can be referred to an appropriate local agency?
- 9) Is a member of the library staff on the management committee, or similar body, of a local literacy project?
- 10) Is one member of staff designated as being responsible for the development of services in connection with adult literacy?
- 11) If yes, at what management level is this person?
- a) Senior management
 - b) Middle management
 - c) Other (please specify)
- 12) Do library staff receive any training in connection with adult literacy services?
- If YES, is this training:
- a) Organised internally by the library service?
 - b) Run by an external agency involved in literacy?

