

Family literacy in Ireland

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NALA

National Adult Literacy Agency
Áisíneacht Náisiúnta Liteartha dta do Aosaigh

Outline of workshop

- Introduction to NALA and its work
- Overview of adult and child literacy in Ireland
- Overview of international research on family literacy
- Findings from NALA's research:
 - Recruitment issues
 - Benefit to families
 - Impact
- Questions to explore

What is NALA?

- Independent membership organisation established in 1980
- Committed to making sure adults with literacy and numeracy difficulties
 - can fully take part in society, and
 - can access learning opportunities to meet their needs
- Research
- Advocacy
- Partnership
- Voice

NALA's Work

- Guided by Strategic Plan 2011-2013 – focus on integrating literacy
- Work to influence Government policy
- Lobby for more tuition options and hours
- Engage in raising public-awareness and understanding of adult literacy and numeracy issues

- Projects include:
 - Distance and blended learning
 - TV programmes, ad campaign – normalising
 - LMAF 17 + years, unemployed
 - Family Literacy
 - Health Literacy
 - Financial Literacy
 - LAT and Plain English service
- Websites
 - Writeon.ie and take the first step

Participation rate in Adult literacy service (ALS)

Adult literacy returns 2010:

- In 2010 54,741 adults in ALS represents an 11% increase from 2009
- Gender breakdown 60%-40% continuous trend last decade
- Almost 50% aged 25-44 – youngest 11% and oldest 8%

- 23% in employment – 41% unemployed nearly 3 times national average
- CSO NQHS 2 million people in labour force – 18% have less than FETAC level 4 qualification
- 35% of adults in ALS are early school leavers

Adult literacy tuition in Ireland

- 54,741 people attending literacy tuition
- 33 Vocational Education Committees (VEC's) amalgamated into 16
- Over 1,500 paid tutors
- Over 3,000 volunteer tutors
- Range of provision including:
 - family literacy
 - ITABE
 - mainstream
- Tackling educational disadvantage priority in education in Ireland

Adult literacy in Ireland

- Irish International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS, 1997) results 1 in 4 at level 1
- Almost another third at level 2
- Policy focus on labour market and activation – National Skills Strategy need to up skill 333,000 workers from L1,2 & 3 by 2020
- 18% of people in employment have less than L4 qualification
- Bigger proportion of literacy difficulties
- among unemployed

Child literacy in Ireland

- Report on Child Literacy 2009
 - gulf between families and schools
 - intergeneration impact of literacy
- 1 in 10 children leave primary school with significant literacy difficulty
- 30% of primary school children in disadvantaged areas have severe literacy problems

- Two thirds of pupils in most disadvantaged schools decline as they progress through school
- Likely to leave education without qualifications – lead to increased poverty, poor life chances, experiencing ill health and prison
- Concerns around most recent PISA results

Overview of international research

- Term 'family literacy' introduced as concept (Taylor, 1983)
- Studied the development of literacy and language at home (USA)
- Since then literature reveals similar issues re: literacy – school, children's learning, key role of parents and carers

- Vital role of parents in children's education
- Parental involvement more of an impact on educational outcomes than any other demographic measure including social class or level of income (Desforges, Feinstein et al, EFLN)
- Parental engagement positive affect on academic performance at primary and secondary level
- Results in improved school achievement, greater cognitive ability, greater problem solving skills, increased school enjoyment, and fewer behavioural issues

- Parental literacy levels also impact on children's learning
- As parents skills improve, so does children's educational achievement
- Investment in development of parents results in improved educational outcome for children
- 'double duty dollar' effect (Sticht)
- Main benefit of family literacy programmes – associated with statistically significant advances in achievement in literacy for parents and children (Brookes et al)

- Family literacy in Europe (2011) including Ireland
- Family literacy programmes are effective in improving child literacy and parental support skills
- Have a greater impact on child outcomes than most other educational interventions
- However, programmes remain 'marginal' no clear policy home
- Require joined up initiatives to be successful and receive policy support

Family literacy in Ireland

Irish constitution Article 42.1

the State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious, moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.

- Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS 2005)
- Action plan for educational inclusion- focuses on primary and secondary sectors also includes provision for family literacy programmes
- Budget 2011-2012 - €220,000 – 16 VEC applied
- National literacy and numeracy strategy 2011 - lack of mention of family literacy

- NALA submission – partner on 2 objectives
- Support national public information campaign highlighting role all parents and communities can play in supporting numeracy and literacy development
- Provide advice and information to parents to enable them to support children’s language, literacy and numeracy development

NALA's position on FL

- NALA advocates family literacy/learning as an integral part of education system
- Dedicated funding for family literacy DEIS
- 2011-2012 - €220,000 16 applications
- FL programmes also funded larger adult literacy budget
- FL a win-win situation to policy makers
- Has knock on effect on school performances of children
- Offers potential to break inter-generational cycles of educational disadvantage

Key points in family literacy

- Affirming what parents are doing in the home
- Encouraging parents to become involved in child's education at an early age
- Building partnership between home, school and community
- Providing parents with opportunities to improve own literacy
- Fostering notion of lifelong learning (Clare FL Resource Guide, 2000)

Family literacy research

- NALA's focus on FL is from perspective of adult
- NALA suggests that family literacy work is that literacy is broader concept than needs and demands of school work
- Literacy learned at home is expression of experience and histories of families
- Most common practices in the home were helping children with homework, intergenerational story telling
- Most popular reading and writing activity was texting – text language

Findings from NALA research

- Recruitment issues:
- Develop strategies to encourage 'hard to reach' parents
- Best to avoid the 'L' word
- Inter-agency approach works best
- Collaboration between programme and local schools hugely important
- Vital role of HSCL
- Financial incentive

Learning in the home

- Family literacy is what happens outside of school
- Views of literacy rooted in parent own experiences of school
- Wider nurturing work of the family – paying attention to concerns and bolstering learning identity
- Praising children's efforts and achievements – creating spaces to talk and listen to each other

There are games like hopscotch, giant steps, snakes and ladders – number games that help with counting ...you do it without thinking about it because your parents did it with you (parent)

School issues

- Confident about literacy work that happens prior to formal schooling
- Level of involvement determined by ethos of schools and leadership of principal
- Degree of home school collaboration huge impact

You are learning your kids before they start school.
You are not teaching them in a school ways, but you are their teacher (parent)

Impact on home school relationships

- Equipped parents with coping skills to interact more effectively with school and school staff
- Helped facilitate better communication
- Better understanding of requirements of child's school work
- Raised recognition among school staff of important role of family literacy programmes
- Improved behaviour and academic performance

The main thing is confidence ... Parental involvement is hugely important to the child doing well ... You can see an immediate improvement in concentration in classroom, completion of school work, attendance and general overall behaviour (HSCL)

Benefits to parents

- Opportunity to socialise as well as developing literacy skills
- Helping children with homework and other related school work
- Provides all round family support
- Alleviates pressures experienced by parents with literacy difficulties

It shows you how to get your kid prepared for school and that's its not going to be hard on you ... Showing parents that you are able to do it (parent)

...we did a lot of spellings and a lot of math skills. Just doing something like that makes your confidence come up and you're meeting new people ...it's like here I'm not stupid at all (parent)

Recommendations

- National literacy policy with increased commitment to family literacy
- Relevant AL awareness training for HSLT
- Consulting with parents in the content and design of FL programmes
- Accredited modules to include:
 - understanding how learning happens
 - Early years language development
 - Reading with children
 - Computer skills
 - Communicating successfully with schools
 - Dealing with bullying
 - FL for children who have specific learning difficulties

Final words

In my opinion education is power. In this particular area alone you can have third and fourth generations of families with a history of early school leaving. Its now very important that we remove the barriers especially around parents negative experiences of school. They have gone through a system that has left them with shattered confidence and self esteem, and has virtually thrown them out on the streets (school principal)

Trying to teach your kids as well as trying to teach yourself is difficult which is why support is so important (parent)

Making it happen?

- Nationally
- Locally
- In the home
- In external interventions and initiatives
- Schools
- Bringing community services together
- Whose job is it?

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