Draft National Plan to Improve Literacy and Numeracy in Schools

Consultation with Literacy Interest Groups

Wednesday 20 April 2011 – 9am

Attendees

Eamonn Murtagh Chair
Phil O’Flaherty DES
Anne O’Mahony DES
Eve McKay DES
Inez Bailey National Adult Literacy Association (NALA)
Dr Martin Gleeson Reading Association of Ireland (RAI)
Dr Gerry Shiel Reading Association of Ireland (RAI)
Deirdre Fox Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)
Noel Kelly Irish Local Development Network (ILDN)
Mary Ryan English Language Support Teachers Association (ELSTA)

Key points made to the Department in addition to those in the written submissions:

- A clearer and more comprehensive definition and broader conceptualisation of literacy is recommended.
- The plan and literacy framework should be based on high quality research and good practice.
- The approach to literacy instruction promoted by the plan should be a balanced one, that gives due attention to both basic reading skills (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics) and higher-level reading skills (e.g., inferencing, evaluation, critical reading).
- The plan should emphasise the importance of a systematic approach to comprehension strategy instruction at all stages in children’s reading development. The approach should emphasise teacher modelling, guided practice with feedback, and independent practice.

Issues identified in relation to students from disadvantaged and migrant communities

- The need to ‘culture proof’ and build up a multi-lingual attitude in schools.
- The need for assessment in students’ first language to avoid misdiagnosis.
- In terms of developing literacy where the first language is not English or Irish, it was stated that the primary focus should be on the key elements of language development and that these are same regardless of which language is being
learned. Once developed these skills can be transferred from one language to another.

- The need to support people from disadvantaged and migrant communities to become teachers in order to increase the sense of ownership of education experienced by students from these communities.

- Adult literacy issues should be covered in ITE and CPD, including issues which may affect parents of children with literacy difficulties. It was noted that literacy skills can regress as an adult where not utilised.

- There are significant risks associated with the proposed approach to ‘Schools Like Ours’ standardised testing, especially for disadvantaged schools at the lower end of an SES band. The potential effects of Schools Like Ours need to be critically examined.

**Parental and Community Involvement**

- The need for parents to be consulted and to participate in developing programmes on parental engagement. Clear, practical support for parents on how to support their children, informed by research, best practice and follow-up evaluations.

- National awareness campaign for parents and communities on their role in developing literacy were supported. The need for national campaigns to contain a local connection in order to be effective was stressed.

- Plans to promote literacy should be informed by lessons learned from the National Reading Initiative. (2000).

- It was agreed that the following central resources would be beneficial:
  
  - A central hub of all literacy resources available.
  - A list of all partners who should be part of literacy plans in schools. Circulation of the list to schools from the Department would provide legitimacy and authority.