



Radio and Adult Literacy in Ireland Literacy through the Airwaves by Inez Bailey

This radio project was developed under the management of the National Adult Literacy Agency: Tipp FM and the Vocational Education Committees of Tipperary (North and South Riding) and County Mayo.

Inez Bailey, Executive Director of the National Adult Literacy Agency, Dublin, gave an overview of current radio and TV interventions in Ireland.

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Selections from the Summary of Conclusions

Conclusions

- 1.** Literacy through the Airwaves was instrumental in recruiting literacy students to local adult literacy schemes, although it is difficult to quantify this effect. If the programmes were more widely accessible, this effect could be expected to increase.
- 2.** All interviewees reported having enjoyed listening to the programmes and all reported that they had made some progress in their reading and writing. This progress was expressed mostly in terms of specific knowledge and skills which had previously been unknown, or which learners now had the opportunity to practise. The specific gains made by learners varied, according to their starting level of skill, their interests and requirements. The most frequently-mentioned gains were: form-filling, letter-writing, dictionary work, word-building, syllables.
- 3.** Literacy through the Airwaves targeted a wide range of literacy levels. Consequently, there were mixed views from interviewees regarding the pace and level of difficulty of the radio and print materials. Just under half of those who responded to this question found the level and pace appropriate, whereas a small number found it difficult, especially after the first four lessons. However, the accessibility of the series was maximised by the fact that almost everyone contacted was receiving help with the work, either from an adult literacy tutor, or from a friend. It was generally agreed that a beginner working alone would find the material too difficult.
- 4.** Learners also reported more general benefits deriving from the programmes, for example: being able to work on reading and writing at home; feeling that they were not the only one with a problem in reading and writing; feeling happy that they were doing something about the problem.

5. Tutors had a positive response to the radio and print materials. They reported that these were very useful as a resource to complement the work they were doing with students, or to provide a focus for it. Some people thought that the series and support material would provide valuable material for tutor training, which is needed in the current climate of expansion of literacy schemes. The programmes also increase the amount of contact time which is available to literacy students, which is currently limited to two hours per week of face-to-face contact with a tutor.

6. Tutors and students reported that the content of the print and radio materials was relevant to learners' needs.

7. Reception on the dedicated frequency, on which the Tipperary series was transmitted, was unpredictable.

8. Transmission times were inconvenient for most people. Evenings, are busy times in families, especially between 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. Some people thought that a later transmission time, such as 10 p.m., would attract more listeners; others suggested that a morning slot would access people who were at home during the day.

9. It was felt that it was a good idea to repeat programmes, as this gave listeners the opportunity to review material.

10. The format of the programmes, which simulated a typical literacy session, was well-received. Two or more students would increase the level of interaction.

11. The freephone helpline was accessed by 29 calls in ten weeks. It was generally thought that it was a good idea to have a help-line for those who were comfortable with using the telephone, but that there ought to be additional support mechanisms in place also.

12. There was strong emphasis on the need for some form of student support in following the series. Most of the respondents were receiving help from their literacy tutor and although this process was not formally built into the project, it was instrumental in allowing learners to maximise the benefits they derived from it.

13. Literacy through the Airwaves achieved the aims of raising awareness of the availability of literacy support among people who need help with reading and writing; and assisting learners in making progress in their reading and writing. It should be noted, however, that Literacy through the Airwaves does not replace the existing service but rather, provides a resource to support them.