

Evolution in initial teacher education in literacy for teachers of adolescent learners: The Irish Experience

Presentation to
Literacy in the Digital Age Conference,
The Lithuanian National Library, Vilnius

Friday January 20th 2017

Dr Brian Murphy,
School of Education, UCC, Cork, Ireland

Stating the obvious: The importance of teacher education in literacy

- * Research on *effective teachers* of literacy shows that such teachers have strong and coherent philosophies and extensive knowledge about teaching literacy
- * This is normally attributed to the strong emphasis on literacy during their initial training (Garbe, Holle & Weinhold, 2009; Snow, Griffin & Burns, 2005; Medwell et. al., 1998).

How is ITE in literacy important?

- * This deeper knowledge and understanding leads to such teachers implementing more diverse, structured, systematic and successful approaches and materials when teaching literacy, including use of more individualised and differentiated instruction (Mullis et al. 2007)
- * Impact on broader learning: Through such practice young people gain access to knowledge so that they can fully participate in the construction, critique and change of that knowledge (Conley 2012; Lee 2007)

The result

- * Evidence of a strong relationship between appropriate teacher education in literacy and literacy improvement in students (Biancarosa 2010; Harrison, 2004; Mc Cutchen 2002; National Reading Panel, 2000)
- * Effects of collaborative teacher professional development in literacy resulted in “... significant gains in student literacy learning...” (Biancarosa 2010, p. 27)

In spite of this the reality remains...

- * Despite the accepted primacy of literacy and its ongoing relevance to all learning, the idea that the post-primary teacher has a role and a responsibility to teach and develop literacy skills has surprisingly only recently come to the fore on the educational reform agenda in many contexts
- * May (2007, p. 387) captures this reality in outlining that the explicit development of literacy in post-primary classrooms appears to be a “...relatively rare phenomenon...”

Enduring traditional assumptions

- * Explicit and focused literacy development is still limited in many subject discipline classrooms in some European countries (European Commission, 2012; EACEA/Eurydice, 2011) as well in the USA (Meyer, 2013), Australia (Faulkner et al, 2011) and New Zealand (Fletcher, 2013)
- * The historically enduring inherited assumption or 'inoculation theory' (Snow & Moje, 2010; Gutierrez, 2009, Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008)

Highlighted further by...

Teacher education and adolescent literacy
“...are two fields of study that have not had
much intellectual contact” (Bean & Harper,
2004, p. 392)

Dissatisfaction with the status quo

- * International concerns about static or falling reading literacy achievement standards by adolescents in international studies, particularly PISA 2009
- * International concerns about economic development allied to the need for high levels of literacy in a knowledge society
- * Framed in the language of crisis and alarm (Jacobs, 2008) fuelled by assessment data
- * Advent of new/digital literacies has also led to call for broader definitions and practice of literacy

Dissatisfaction with the status quo

- * The complexity of adolescent literacy being recognised where adolescents are required to “...analyse and synthesise discipline specific texts, while juggling multiple layers of meaning from multiple points of view that often contrast and conflict” (Jacobs, 2008, p. 15) – stage of significant need of support from teachers
- * At the micro level in many post-primary contexts, teachers are dealing with growing numbers of adolescent students who may be unable to read or adequately comprehend or engage with subject materials and texts (European Commission, 2012; EACEA/Eurydice, 2011, OECD, 2010; Jacobs, 2008; Alvermann, 2002)

Calls for change in ITE internationally

- * Calls for teacher educators to be fostering effective teachers of literacy who critically reflect on their own beliefs regarding literacy, who understand the specific needs of their adolescent students and who use an on-going broad and eclectic collection of methods to develop specialised subject-specific literacy skills (Flynn, 2007; Loudon & Rohl, 2006; Harrison, 2004; Hall & Harding, 2003).

Calls for change in ITE internationally

- * General understandings of literacy development required
- * General understandings need to be embedded within subject pedagogy, in order to meet the particular language and literacy norms, expectations and demands of the discipline.
- * Teachers need to teach contextualised subject-specific literacy strategies so that specialised subject content becomes more meaningful, resulting in deeper learning and understanding of material (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Heller & Greenleaf 2007; Kist, 2001)

Calls for change nationally – National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011)

- * “This strategy is focussed on the actions that the education system can take to ensure that early childhood care and education (ECCE) and primary and second-level schools provide the best possible opportunities for young people to acquire good literacy and numeracy skills.” (DES, 2011, p. 10)
- * “There may be a mistaken belief that the development of young people’s literacy and numeracy skills should be completed by the end of primary school: this is not the case.” (p. 10)

Calls for change nationally – National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011)

- * “All children of this age will require well-thought-out teaching and purposeful learning experiences in the post-primary school to enable them to acquire the {literacy} skills they have yet to grasp, to consolidate the skills they have already learned and to equip them for work, further learning and leisure...” (p. 11)
- * “It is also important for us to remember that the development of children’s literacy and numeracy skills in post-primary schools is not just the responsibility of teachers of languages and mathematics. Teachers of all post-primary subjects have an important role to play in developing and consolidating students’ ability to use literacy...” (p. 11)

Calls for change nationally – National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011)

“There is also a significant challenge in making sure that teachers of all subjects at the post-primary level recognise how they can contribute to improving the students’ literacy and numeracy skills... Teaching and learning activities in all subjects and in the assessment processes used... need to promote better literacy and numeracy standards”. (p. 77)

Common perspectives emerging for the subject teacher..

- * An issue for all teachers – all teachers are literacy teachers
- * Traditionally view as the remit of the primary school no longer sustainable
- * All teachers need to be able to support and teach their students' literacy levels in all subjects
- * Need to understand core concepts around reading literacy development generally and specific needs at this level
- * See e.g. Moje (2014); Shanahan & Shanahan (2008); Harrison (2004); Jetton & Dole (2004); Lewis & Wray (1997)

Even more explicit - National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011)

- * “This {1-year Postgraduate Professional Diploma in Education} course is of insufficient duration to adequately prepare the great majority of post-primary teachers for developing effectively the skills required to teach or progress their students’ literacy and numeracy skills or to support the integration of the teaching of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum.” (p. 32)
- * Objective “... cooperate with the Teaching Council to reconfigure the content and duration of initial teacher education (ITE) courses for post-primary teachers to ensure the development of teachers’ skills in literacy and numeracy teaching (p. 35)

Profound changes in Irish ITE occur

- * NLNS contentions signal a seminal moment in the history of post-primary ITE in Ireland
- * Clearly on the national agenda for all programmes
- * Does not just remain in the NLS as the calls are very rooted in changes to the system
- * Becomes part of Teaching Council accreditation requirements of all new ITE programmes
- * **All ITE postgraduate programmes now to be of two years duration and offered at Masters level (Professional Master of Education- PME award)**

A requirement for accreditation from the Irish Teaching Council (2011)

- * Literacy and numeracy a mandatory element of all ITE programmes (p. 14)
- * “In order to graduate, students should be required to demonstrate an acceptable level of proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Assessment should gauge student teachers’ literacy and numeracy, as appropriate to their subject/curricular area.” (p. 16)
- * “...an increased emphasis on the key strategic priorities of literacy and numeracy...” (p. 18)
- * Literacy and numeracy mentioned as central to the learning outcomes of the programme re curriculum (p. 26)

Bearing in mind...

- * “There are a number of commentaries, analyses, informative websites, and studies (e.g. Draper 2008) that deal with preparing teachers for disciplinary literacy practice. Yet, there is very little information about what it takes to accomplish this goal.”(Conley, 2012, p. 142)
- * The need to go beyond knowledge about literacy to teachers’ self knowledge, sense of agency, and identity around literacy, which are critical for to develop thoughtful and adaptive teachers (Fairbanks et al., 2010)

Literacy on the UCC PME: A new era

- * Reformulated programme in line with DES and Teaching Council requirements re. literacy
- * PME1: An introduction to literacy covered in terms of School Placement Support Lectures (literacy as a skill encompassing the four skills of language)
- * Each and every lesson plan in PME1 and PME2 written has to explicitly plan tangible ways in which literacy is developed and supported
- * Supported explicitly in subject specific pedagogy courses whether Business Studies to Science to Geography to Maths to Music...

Literacy on the UCC PME: A new era

- * In PME2 specialist compulsory module for all students on Literacy Development in the post-primary Classroom (24 hours)
- * Students reading, reflecting, planning, thinking of and understanding literacy development generally but at each point thinking of it through the lens of their subject(s)
- * Literacy as how any student in any subject represents their understandings through the four language skills with room for specialist literacy skills of each particular subject

Literacy on the UCC PME: A new era

- * Weekly reading and response to pertinent journal articles
- * Linking theory and practice at all times and an action research type of assessment task regarding practice
- * Each topic covered and then students of particular subjects reflect on and mediate that topic through their subject discipline in small groups in the lectures
- * Requirement to have more focused planning in their lesson plans in respect of literacy in line with the lecture series
- * Covered additionally in the subject specific pedagogy modules but the following topics are covered in the specialist literacy module

List of topics ref literacy development

- * What is literacy?
- * Insights into *adolescent* literacy

The 5 pillars of adolescent literacy

- * Oral language (and classroom dialogue)
- * The teaching of vocabulary
- * The teaching of reading
- * The teaching of comprehension
- * The teaching of writing
- * Concluding seminar and presentation of subject plans for literacy in all subjects

To conclude

- * Literacy development for all on the PME programme a big step forward
- * A work in progress
- * The hope that this new holistic literacy development focus will lead to post-primary teachers
 - * who understand literacy
 - * who understand the key role they play in literacy development
 - * Who know how to support that literacy development in a coherent, integrated, research-informed and developmentally appropriate way allowing all students to realise and reach their full learning potential