

The Changing Landscapes of Literacy –

Building Best Practice

Editor

Brendan Culligan



**Reading
Association
of Ireland**

*The Changing Landscapes
of Literacy – Building Best
Practice*

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READING ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND

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FOREWORD

The theme of the 32nd annual conference of the Reading Association of Ireland was ‘*The Changing Landscapes of Literacy – Building Best Practice.*’ At the opening of the Conference, there were ominous signs that the economic landscapes were changing. Little did anyone think at the time that the ‘downturn in economy’ would be so devastating for hundreds of thousands of workers. Neither were there any forecasts of how the recession would impact so severely on educational provision. Historically, as evidenced in numerous OECD reports, spending on education by successive Irish Governments does not compare very favourably with most European countries. Now, firmly mired in economic chaos, we hear language such as ‘education is the way out of recession’ and ‘the importance of a knowledge economy,’ in frequent use. However, recent measures taken by Government clearly demonstrate that such utterances are mere lip service.

Certainly, in these changing landscapes, there are challenges for all the stakeholders in education. Belts must be, and indeed, have been tightened, but it is a bitter pill to swallow when one reflects on the profligacy of the past decade. Such wastefulness now results in primary school children facing larger class sizes, reduced numbers of teachers, reductions in language support for EAL learners, the closing of over one hundred special classes and the withdrawal of book grants. Spring indeed does seem a long way off for the ‘green buds’ of education.

Despite this malaise, teachers still give willingly of their time to up-skill their practice. The large attendance at Conference 2008 is a testimony to this. Delegates came to hear speakers from Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, England and Ireland addressing the topic of building best practice in language, reading and writing. This book comprises a selection of papers on a range of topics presented at the conference. It also includes a number of articles from Conference 2007. My sincere thanks to all those presenters who have given so graciously of their time to make these proceedings possible.

Brendan Culligan, *President, R.A.I., 2008*