



## Literacy Association of Ireland Background to the Association

The International Reading Association, now International Literacy Association (ILA) was set up in 1956 in the USA to promote literacy worldwide. The Reading Association of Ireland (RAI) was established in 1975 by a group of educators interested in the broad area of reading. It became a national affiliate of the International Reading Association in 1978.

That original group comprised teachers, teacher educators, inspectors from the Department of Education, researchers and librarians. About 20 people attended this inaugural meeting and formed a committee to drive the work of this new association. Initially the RAI was focussed on developing an interest in reading, supporting reading and encouraging research in the area of reading. The aims of the association were

- To stimulate and promote interest in literacy
- To organise conferences, workshops, seminars related to the development of literacy
- To help in the professional development of teachers in the areas of language and literacy
- To publish Newsletters which were interesting and practical
- To disseminate knowledge helpful to the solution of literacy problems
- To research new trends in the development of literacy
- To advise parents on various aspects of the reading process
- To promote an interest in children's literature
- To make submissions on the development of language and literacy to educational bodies/conventions.

The RAI was always connected through its affiliation with ILA to international researchers, organisations and emerging international practices. It sought to inform, engage and support educationalists, researchers and any person who was interested in reading. Growing from strength to strength in addition to the association's annual conferences and seminars, RAI hosted a number of national and international events amongst which were

- Ninth World Conference on Reading 1982
- Fourth European Conference on Reading 1986
- First International Youth Congress on World Peace Through Literacy 1986
- First North-South Conference on Teaching Reading , Belfast 1996
- Joint Reading Initiative/RAI International Conference 2000
- 12th European Conference on Reading 2001
- Multi-cultural conference on literacy 2002.

Over time the concept of literacy itself has evolved and while reading, reading skills and reading has always remained a key focus for RAI the emphasis has broadened to encompass a whole range of literacy skills to include language, written expression and a whole range of new literacies. In April 2015 the RAI was re-launched as the Literacy Association of Ireland, affiliated now to the International Literacy Association (LAI) following approval of its membership. The LAI aims to support and inform all those concerned with the development of reading, language and literacy (including teachers, lecturers, researchers, educators and parents), it encourages reflection and dialogue, challenges practice and gives public voice to concerns.

The Literacy Association of Ireland currently has approximately 160 members, including teachers, students, teacher educators, librarians and parents, but any person interested in literacy or language development is welcome to join the association at any time.

The connection between the LAI and its International Literacy Association has been further cemented by the election in 2013 of Bernadette Dwyer to the Board of the ILA. At the time Bernadette was a serving member of the Executive Committee of the ILA. Early in 2017 she was elected to the post of Vice President of the ILA.

### **Executive Committee Activities**

#### **Annual Conference**

The LAI will celebrate its 41st International Conference in October 2017. The international Conference is a key focus and indeed a highlight of the year. Over the past 40 years it has attracted many noted practitioners,

authors, researchers, philosophers and experts in the field of literacy. It has also had members of the Irish Oireachtas, Presidents, Taoisigh, Ministers for Education, Heads of Colleges and other eminent people address those attending the conference. The forthcoming conference has a theme 'Perspectives in Literacy: bringing voices together' with a keynote address from the current Irish Children's Laureate, author and illustrator, PJ Lynch.

In recent years Marino College of Education in Dublin has been the host institution for the LAI Conference. The annual AGM of the LAI is held during the conference.

Further details of the 2017 International conference can be found at: [www.literacyireland.com/conferences](http://www.literacyireland.com/conferences).

### **Seminars**

Every year the LAI hold a number of seminars around the country. Some are delivered by members of the Committee and others are organised regionally by committee members or regional members. These usually address a single theme. Some are once-off events while others may run over a few weeks. The LAI try to organise these seminars to cover a range of themes each year. The Seminars are free to LAI members.

### **Publications**

Every year the LAI produces two issues of Literacy News (previously Reading News). This publication typically has a few articles based on research or that focus on good practice in the area of literacy. Tips for teachers, parents together with any relevant news from the Executive are also included. One issue is a digital one that is sent by email and the second one is distributed in hard copy. A digital copy of Literacy News has recently been forwarded to all members.

Conference proceedings are also published, usually bi-annually. This book contributes to current dialogue, practice and study in the field of literacy. Members of the Executive Committee are in the process of editing articles. An edition of LAI Conference Proceedings will be going to print shortly and will be available in advance of the next annual Conference in October.

### **Representation**

Since its foundation the LAI has responded to a number of Irish and international initiatives, policies, documents and proposals concerning literacy. It has been a voice in all such Irish plans and programmes. LAI is represented on the Board of the International Literacy Association, and on the FELA/IDEC International committee.

### **Website and Social Media**

For many years now the LAI has had a website as a means of contacting, informing and engaging members. For the past two years the LAI Twitter account has also been a means of keeping in touch, commenting and connecting LAI with members and the wider community of followers attracted to the site. The LAI website is currently under-going redevelopment, it is live but not yet completely populated. This is part of the workload that has been undertaken by the current LAI Committee.

Website: [www.literacyireland.com](http://www.literacyireland.com)

Email: [literacyireland@gmail.com](mailto:literacyireland@gmail.com)

Twitter: @LiteracyIRL

### **Awards**

The LAI manage two biennial awards.

- i. The LAI Book Award is given alternative years to a book published in Ireland in the previous two years. A shortlist of approximately six books is published in the summer prior to the award being announced at the Annual International Conference. In 2017 there will be separate awards for Irish published books with four age categories. At the moment the LAI book award jury are reading all 65 titles that have been submitted.
- ii. The LAI also award a specially commissioned medal and €500 to an outstanding thesis that has been written in the two years preceding the award. The thesis must address the theme of literacy. Currently the call for theses has been issued. Those shortlisted for the award by the thesis award jury will present a brief account of their thesis at the annual conference and the award is then presented to the winner.

### **Executive meetings**

There are currently 12 members on the Executive of the Literacy Association of Ireland. All members are volunteers. They come from many different levels in the Irish education system and from different parts of Ireland. The Committee meets once a month. Sub-committees are formed to ensure that many of the events and tasks listed above are completed.