

Understanding Literacy in changing Economic and Social circumstances Seminar

10 September 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. It is my very great pleasure to welcome you all to Glasgow and to this seminar, Understanding Literacy in Changing Economic and Social circumstances.
2. We are delighted to see so many of you here: it's a huge encouragement I'm sure to all those who have been involved in putting the seminar together.
3. Indeed we all know that such events don't just happen and this has been a joint affair. I know I speak for my colleagues in CR&DALL when I say how pleased we have been to work in partnership with Learning and Teaching Scotland, the UK National Commission for UNESCO Scotland Committee, the University of Stirling and the Scottish Government to bring this event together. Let me acknowledge the various partners and thank all of you for putting, this event, a fascinating programme and set of distinguished speakers together.

4. And you certainly have assembled a very special group of speakers and I would like to particularly welcome them:

- Professor Adama Ouane, Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning in Hamburg,
- the former Nigerian ambassador to UNESCO, Professor Michael Omolewa (a longtime advocate for adult education and literacy)
- Dr Cesar Guadalupe, Senior Programme Specialist at UNESCO in Montreal
- And not forgetting our own Emeritus Professor Lalage Bown who at this time last year was being quoted by the UN Secretary-General on International Literacy Day.

Can I thank you all for agreeing to be here and for accepting the invitation to speak.

5. But perhaps most of all may I welcome you to Glasgow for the very reason you are here – the importance of Literacy. I am aware that you have used the opportunity of several events and initiatives coming together at around this time as a catalyst for today: the International Literacy Day (8 September); the opportunity to present the 2009 Scottish Survey of Adult Literacies funded by the Scottish Government and undertaken by my colleague in CR&DALL, Dr Ralf St Clair; and anticipation of

6. These are perhaps important points in time that arrest attention and provide valuable focus, but they are only points in an ongoing and quite massive challenge of Literacy worldwide. We know that UNESCO has done much since its foundation in 1946 to bring world attention to the problem and of course has led the United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2013. You know the scale of the problem better than I – its sobering indeed to read that around 1 in 5 adults are still not literate, that's some 796 million adults lacking minimum literacy skills and that equates to just under 8 million people without access to full social, economic, educational engagement with the world around them.

7. And you know more than I, that global figures can mask local issues! It's not a statistic for out there and over there – but one that hits close to home because literacy is a problem in our own back yard, something this seminar is obviously not going to ignore or shy away from.

8. So you are indeed welcome for the focus and insight you will bring and share on this huge international and local problem and I would therefore want to commend you to this day, this day to

‘...acquiring Literacy skills gives women a sense of self-confidence and control over their lives and future. This is what empowerment is about; gaining the knowledge to make informed decisions, sharing power in the household and in wider political life’.

You are engaged in this agenda – in giving people their freedom.

9. I hope that through the keynote speakers and the knowledge café discussion you will find much food for thought, real stimulation and the encouragement you need to continue the work you do in this most vital of areas.

10. It is now my very great pleasure to welcome and introduce to you Professor Kay Livingston, Director of International research & Innovation for Learning and Teaching Scotland and member of the Scotland Committee, UK National Commission for UNESCO.

