

# Contents

Page 3	Introduction
Page 6	Partnership
Page 7	Preparation Methodologies
Page 8	Threading Tales: Explaining the concept with practical tips on setting up a workshop
Page 18	Pictureógs, celebrating inclusion and cultural diversity: Screening of DVD
Page 24	Reflection on the past as we move towards culturally inclusive learning
Page 29	Threading Tales: The modelling of story gathering and telling; the cascade effect in education
Page 34	Feedback from Sessions
Page 37	Conclusion
Page 40	Further Reading

# Introduction



The Kildare County Library Development Plan 2007-2011 “Ideas Matter”, aims to “develop qualitative measures in relation to the impacts and effects of library services in order to complement quantitative measures”. This aim is embedded in the ethos of the service’s provision of outreach programmes that engage and support learning at all levels and abilities. It is a practice that is essential to informed development of ideas and initiatives that can provide sustained encouragement and improvement to the lives and personal development of citizens engaging in innovative processes. “Branching Out” posits that “library authorities should be prepared to use innovative solutions to meet identified needs, (1998). Therefore, once those needs have been identified, and the innovative solution has become process, the importance of evaluation of that process at every strand, every thread, must be measured to (a) document the process (b) inform future actions and (c) to gauge the impact of engagement.

Following the success of the “Threading Tales” project, held in the community of the Curragh in 2005, and the subsequent achievements of the “Pictureógs” process, begun in Athy Travellers’ Centre in 2006, Kildare County Council Library Services engaged in the planning and implementation of an informative series of lectures to be offered to educators and parents. The series was developed in both workshop and lecture format, and set out to show and encourage a culture of reading among parents and children using high-quality, durable “Storysacks” of the model created through the “Threading Tales” and “Pictureógs” projects. These initiatives also emerged with a view to encouraging the ethos of a *place for everyone* through an inclusive, partnership-based educational arena.

The lecture sessions aimed to showcase a valuable literacy/arts based resource that could assist schools in teaching actions that strive for social and cultural inclusion. In “The Arts, Cultural Inclusion and Social Cohesion”, report, published by the National Economic and Social Forum, it is noted that “Cultural inclusion requires and reinforces societal respect and value for personal skills and qualities, free choice, diversity, freedom of expression, participation, group action and community good” (March 2007)

Many definitions of social inclusion abound, but the same report offers that it is “the process by which certain groups are brought from the margins of society to participate more fully in that society through the removal of the barriers to them by virtue of poverty, low education, inadequate life-skills and/or low recognition and status in terms of cultural identity and contribution”. “Threading Tales” and “Pictureógs” aimed to convey these cultural and

socially inclusive expressions through a gentle, empowering process that built on connection and unity of community, cultural and social bonds. The training offered therefore, also aimed to provide a forum for discussion and feedback that could examine these qualitative processes for analysis through experiential engagement of creative relationships between library staff, artists, educators, key client groups and new audiences.



Sample of Needlework from  
**Pictureógs**  
Workshops

# Partnership

The vision of Kildare County Schools Library Service, from which the process initially emerged, is to focus on the child as learner in the community while strengthening partnerships with parents and educators through the vast network of groups, agencies and individuals working and living in our community. This vision, a holistic environment that encourages a process of mentoring through aspects of life-long learning, recognition of self-identity and respectful accessible measures of integration is at the forefront of all work undertaken. This is posited by “Ideas Matter” in that “our experience of co-operative networking and joint provision of services has long since proven that productive creative relationships with interested and committed partners delivers better services.” In keeping with this experience of co-operative partnerships, the library service invited the Kildare Education Centre to host the delivery of the training initiative. It was felt that as a central focus for teachers and parents alike, the venue would be most suitable to the needs of the participants. Under the directorship of Anne Kelleher and staff, a mutual understanding of the aims and objectives was established and supported. Kildare County Council Library Services were noted and recognized as the lead Agency and provider of the training programme, and support from the Department of Education and Science was sought by the Director of the KEC to cover expenses incurred by speakers in the delivery of the sessions. This support from the Department is a most important element of any initiative that hopes to engage in the intercultural education of children and was acknowledged as such by all partners involved in the process.

# Preparation Methodologies

Once the training initiative had been agreed upon, the identification and description of all roles in the process were established. Dates and times were agreed on so that everyone involved could be accommodated and the planning of invitation and poster content was agreed on before distribution and advertising could be instigated. Starting in October, 2006, a series of meetings took place that aimed to develop an appropriate training programme and schedule. Co-ordinated by the SLS Librarian, and attended by the Director of KEC, all presenters of the sessions were invited to attend the meetings so that maximum insights and expertise could be tapped into for the purposes of creating a process of delivery that could be both challenging and informative. The presenters were noted as having played key roles in the delivery of either “Threading Tales” or “Pictureógs” and as such, were in a position to give a focused insight that was enriched by the entirety of the experience. The importance of the practical elements, the *how to* elements of the process was stressed, and each session/presenter would link in to the process in a holistic model that aimed to describe the entire process, explaining all strands experienced up until the point and time of delivery. Dates were decided to cover four Tuesday evenings in March, 2007. Reflective dialogue took place on work already done by the library service to bring this process forward. Topics for discussion included the experiential learning that helped to evolve the “Threading Tales” process to the next phase of “Pictureógs” and of the opportunities that it now presented in terms of culturally inclusive actions and enrichment of future actions.



BEADY POCKET  
Needlework  
From  
“Pictureógs”

## Session One

### Threading Tales: Explaining the concept with practical tips on setting up a workshop

**Speaker:** *Caroline Farrell is Librarian and manager of Kildare County Schools Library Service. She holds a BscEcon/Dip in Social Studies/Library and Information Science and First Class Honours in NUI Maynooth Certificate in Community Arts for Community Development. A published author of short stories, she has facilitated writing workshops for children and young adults. With the support of Kildare Library and Arts services, Caroline developed “Threading Tales” and was project leader on all phases of Pictureógs, including the production of a DVD of the Pictureógs process.*

The aim of this session was to outline and explain the process of “Threading Tales”, to introduce the concept of “Pictureógs” and to give participants an overview of the work of the Schools Library Service within the context of that process. The practical elements involved in setting up “Storysack” workshops were also outlined and were based on the experiential process. The presenter explained the projects as participatory-arts/literacy based processes that are driven by multiple intelligence theory, and is also intergenerational, intercultural, collaborative and self-directed. A slide show accompanied the presentation and a question and answer session took place afterwards, which resulted in insightful comments and feedback being offered to the presenter. Elements covered and discussed were as follows:

- Overview of work carried out by Kildare County Schools Library Service, with definition of vision statement *“to provide and promote good quality reading and learning resources to primary schools in Kildare and through partnership and outreach, to continue to develop and implement reading development and culturally diverse projects that aim to focus on the child”*.
- Overview of a model of community partnership that works in terms of providing support mechanisms for our children on their journey through learning and development with a network of support between local authority, library services, parents and educators, and how “Threading Tales” is a positive example of this model.



- Overview of “Threading Tales”, explaining the project as an arts and literacy based process that is driven by multiple intelligence theory, which is also intergenerational, intercultural, collaborative and self-directed.

Discussion on Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory:

- Words – linguistic
- Numbers – Mathematical
- Pictures – Spatial
- Music – Musical
- People – Interpersonal
- Self – Intrapersonal
- Body Smart – Kinesthetic
- Nature – Naturalist
- Spiritual Intelligence was also discussed as another theory of multiple intelligence

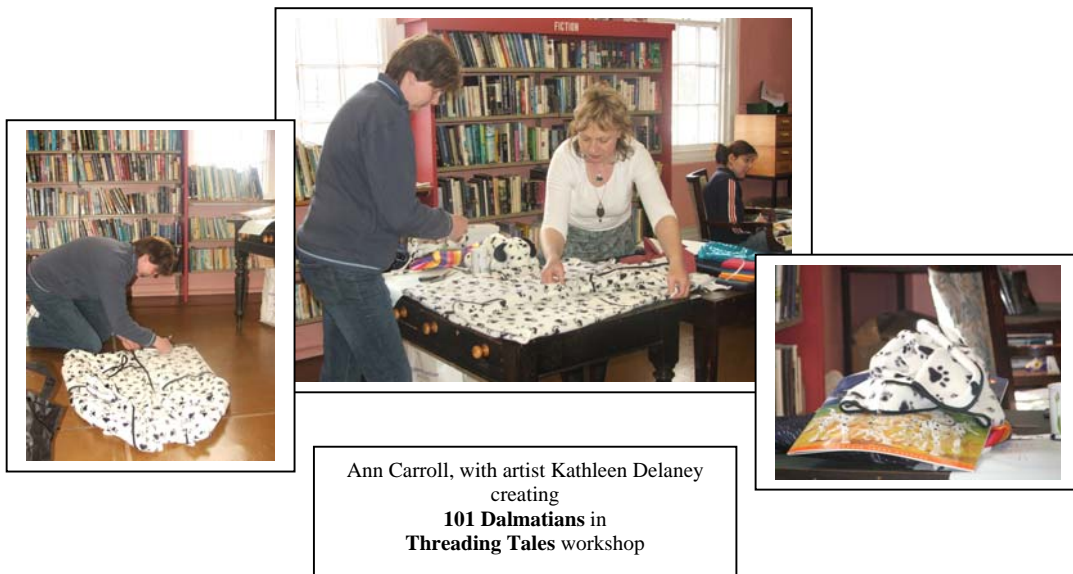
Images from the process were displayed on a slide show as the presenter further described the process as a visual patchwork of colour, texture and much loved stories that fuse together storytelling, story making and the use of textiles, crafts, needlework, painting and, most importantly, life experience.



“Threading Tales”  
A gentle, reflective process  
Ann Dwyer creating  
**Goldilocks and the Three Bears**

The genesis of the idea was explained. In January 2005, the Department of Education and Science released a one-off grant in the amount of €500,000 to be made available for the purchase of books for primary schools serving disadvantaged communities throughout the country. The grants were to be administered through the library service, and the role of Kildare County Schools Library Service was to manage a total grant of €10,000, which could only be used to purchase books for a total of seven schools in Kildare. The library service was not advised as to the criteria for the selection.

In order to support the Department's initiative, the SLS Librarian set about creating a project that would support the objectives; that the books delivered to the schools would be used in collaboration with parents to promote a culture of reading in the home. During this process of development, the "Storysack" was identified as a workable model on which to create a unique project.



The “Storysack” was first conceived by Neil Griffiths, a teacher from Swindon, England. It is a large cloth bag containing a child’s storybook, toys to represent the characters in the book, a storyboard, painting or game, and audiotape or CD and a non-fiction book that focuses on elements from the story. The presenter explained how “Storysacks” are used for reading development, family literacy, special needs, teaching english as a second language, numeracy, storytelling, drama and culturally inclusive actions. Some of the many formats of the “Storysack” were explained;

- Memory Bag – can be used in therapeutic actions with adults/children
- Family Bag – example was given of Social Worker making family bag for child going into foster care
- Curiosity Kits – designed for boys aged 8-9 approximately, these are used for non-fiction subjects and sports activities. The contents include a non-fiction book, design activity, comic or magazine, related toy, item, game and a notebook and stickers

The diversity of using the sacks within the organic process of “Threading Tales” was stressed in terms of social and cultural inclusion and how they can surpass language barriers through the visual and tactile elements. How they can encourage participation, recognize the ability of the individual and so reinforce positive identity. A sharing process, using storytelling and common themes, the example of “Pictureógs” was given, and how the process helped to recognize the ethnicity of the Travelling Community.

**“Theading Tales” in Curragh schools;** Caroline gave an account of the project that took place in partnership with Kildare Library and Arts services, school principles, staff and parents from Curragh Boys and Curragh Girls primary schools. The project structure was outlined;

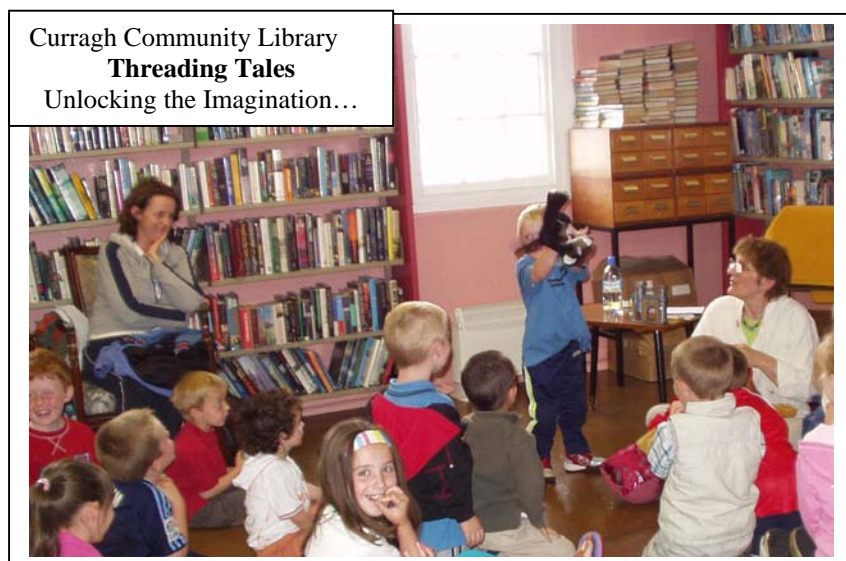
- Venue – Curragh Community Library
- Participants – Seven volunteers, all parents of children attending schools
- Length and duration of workshops – Mornings, three hours, once a week, this element directed by the participants.
- **Outcome:** The successful results of the project were identified;
  - A useful learning resource was created
  - A sense of unity, fun and belief in the objectives was achieved
  - Family participation became core, ensuring a sense of shared ownership of process and product
  - A ripple effect emerged – Ballymany Primary School in Newbridge completed their own successful “Storysacks” project directly based on the expertise provided by “Threading Tales”.
- **Feedback: From participants of Workshops,** the following quotes were given;
  - *“Great fun working with the rest of the girls. I never sewed before, that was interesting, learning to sew. Working with the girls – it was great. We got on very well”*

- *Daunting at the beginning, but I really enjoyed it. I didn't think I could do what I did. To see them now – there now – wow! I did that!"*
- *Parents should definitely get involved – help was fantastic – very well organized"*

### Unlocking the Imagination...

At the end of the project, storytelling sessions were held in the Curragh Library. Titled "Unlocking the Imagination", the aim was to showcase the work to the community and to measure how effective they could be as a resource.

- Feedback from Parents;
  - *"Truly impressed – keeps image in mind of kids – they don't easily forget because pictures are in their minds – awesome way of telling kids stories"*
  - *"Lovely, so interesting and curious, would love to make one for my son"*
  - *"First impression – looked around the audience of adults and we were all enthralled"*
  - *"Sharing that took place – wonderful part of the process"*



Following the success of the storytelling sessions, a process of outreach to schools began. A Pilot Project, developed by the SLS, with Kildare County Council Storyteller in Residence, Julie Duane, visiting Ten Primary Schools aimed to showcase the sacks to teachers and pupils and to measure how in practice, they could transfer to the classroom as a useful leisure and learning resource

**Feedback from Teachers:**

- *“Excellent medium for developing oral language. Invaluable tool in learning a variety of areas and developing general knowledge. A great resource for special needs children. Develops imagination”*
- *Invaluable in assisting the development of children’s listening, reading, writing and language skills. They are visual supports and can be brought into many other aspects of the curriculum e.g. drama, visual arts etc”*
- *Encompass oral, reading and writing and fulfill the curriculum objectives. Cross-curricular – integrates well with maths, geography, history, science. Provide a theme in cross-curricular context”*



*On February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006, President Mary McAleese attended a celebration of “Threading Tales” in Kildare Education Centre*

The President congratulated the parents on their achievements and was greatly impressed with their work and commitment to becoming active participants in the education of their children

The second half of Caroline's presentation contained a 'How To' element in terms of designing a workshop. A general plan was explained:

- Title of Workshop
- Duration
- Breaks, if required
- Venue
- Number of Group
- Course Organiser

**Aims:** *What do you plan to do?*

- Create Story bags
- Introduce participants to new skills
- Explore creativity / reading / story-gathering

**Objectives:** *What are your goals?*

- Create useful learning resource / story bags
- Skilled participants / storytellers
- Create literacy / educational actions

**Methodology:** *Description of methods / practice used*

- Experiential
- Organic
- Participant directed
- Encouragement / sharing / creativity
- Respect / Confidentiality – Group Contract

**Costing:**

- Facilitator / Artist
- Materials – ensure that you have adequate amounts
- Equipment – sewing machines
- Refreshments

**Workshop Structure:** *Design to your needs*

- How many participants?
- How many story bags you intend to create?
- Number of hours?
- Number of days weeks?





## Session Two

Pictureógs, celebrating inclusion and cultural diversity. Screening of Pictureógs DVD

**Speaker:** *Elizabeth McDonagh works with Kildare Traveller Action Women's Programme in Leixlip and Newbridge, and has facilitated teacher training workshops on Traveller issues in the College of Rathmines. Elizabeth studied Community Arts for Community Development and was employed by Kildare County Council Library Services to facilitate "Pictureógs" workshops in Athy Traveller Centre*

To open the lecture, an eighteen-minute DVD production of the “Pictureógs” process was shown to participants. The DVD was received enthusiastically and was followed by an informative talk by Elizabeth, who opened her lecture with a short account of how she first heard about “Threading Tales” and story bags. Elizabeth was first introduced to Caroline Farrell by Dr Marion Browne, Department of Education and Science, with a suggestion that a similar project might work very well within the Travelling community. “It seemed to me it was a great idea to collect Traveller’s tales from long ago and save them in story bags, then they would be saved forever and Traveller children would know about these stories and pass them on to their own children. So our stories and culture would take pride of place in the schools and in our homes”.

Elizabeth explained the importance of having something like “Pictureógs”, that belonged to Travellers, in schools, and how it would be a great way for Traveller children to learn about their own stories and culture, and also, they would feel very proud that settled children would be listening and playing with them. Elizabeth referred to “Can’t Lose CANT”, a 2003 Kildare County Library initiative and a project that created a book of CANT, the old language of Irish Travellers, as another example of how a project can make Traveller children feel that they are welcome and wanted in schools and to be proud of their culture for generations to come.

Elizabeth recounted her delight in accepting the role of group facilitator for the duration of the workshops, and described the first feelings of anxiousness that she and the group encountered at the very first session. “As a Traveller

myself, I can compare with the feeling these women get when they are asked to do something different or new. The fear of what they were letting themselves in for, but were willing to do it all the same. I could see that some of these women were worried and wondering if they could ever make story bags as there was a lot of work involved. But Caroline (Farrell) put them at their ease and explained that the story sacks they would be working on would be mainly Traveller's stories and Traveller's culture. Knowing this, the women relaxed. Now this is something that they know a lot about and were delighted they would be able to do story bags after all."

Elizabeth described the excitement in knowing that they had lots of stories to tell, and how they knew there would be a lot of fun in making the bags and in the pleasure they would be giving to children, their own and to all others in schools. She spoke of how she herself came up with the name Pictureóg. During the process of making the story bags, Elizabeth recalled that some Travellers used to say "They're only pictureógs", which means you can believe it or not. "I thought this name suited the stories that were being told and is familiar with (CANT) the Travellers own language. The group agreed with this, I am very happy to say".

She also described the 'Beady Pocket', which was modeled into some of the Pictureógs. Shaped much like an apron, with a pouch, and worn around the waist by Traveller women in times gone by, the beady pocket would be highly decorated with buttons and trinkets and would hold the woman's treasured possessions and money etc.



Beady Pocket  
*A Pictureóg*  
Created by  
Ann McDonagh

Kildare Storyteller in Residence, Julie Duane was invited to facilitate story-gathering and song workshops, working with men and women from the group. Julie set about recording the stories and Elizabeth recalled that Ann McDonagh was the first to sing, with Elizabeth herself giving a verse to encourage the others to sing. “Now we had songs to go with the stories. This was a real bonus for us and made the task of making the story bags more exciting and really enjoyable. The next thing was how we were going to get the men involved in making them. I thought to myself, this was not going to be easy. Traveller men sewing? Whoever heard of such a thing? “.

Elizabeth explained that Traveller men would never take a needle and thread in their hands as they think that this is women’s work only, and she was not

going to ask them to do it. “This would be an insult, I have six boys of my own and I would never ask them, so how could I ask other Traveller men to do it? But I had no need to worry, I did not need to ask them. The men were interested in what Caroline (Farrell) had to say and they knew and were willing to do better things with their hands and they proudly showed their skills in the woodwork and paintings they created for the Pictureóg bags”



Ship created by men for  
**Petticoat Loose**  
Pictureóg

Elizabeth also recalled that when the men were asked if they had any stories they could remember, they started teasing one another to tell their stories first. The older men started while the younger ones just listened and were very quiet, and Elizabeth felt that the younger ones had not heard these stories before, they were so interested. They didn't even mind that Julie (Duane) was recording them. When the project began, the men and women worked in separate areas of the centre, and Elizabeth spoke of the successful outcome when the men were invited to join with the women so that they could all work

together. “The room was full of chit and chatter and of course, collective action was really in progress”.

Elizabeth explained how the addition of Kathleen Delaney, textile artist, employed by Kildare County Library to facilitate the design and textile element of the Pictureógs workshops, was so helpful to the group, “She helped with the sewing in the women’s group and the painting in the men’s and having patience, which was not easy, for it was a big group entirely.” Elizabeth finished her talk with the following words, “The day Pictureógs were completed, we had a celebration for the finished project. Some might think this is the end, but to me this is only the beginning of Pictureógs”.



“Story-gathering for Pictureógs”  
Elizabeth McDonagh with  
Michael, Terry and Michael



Celebration of  
**Pictureógs**  
With special guest  
Norma McDermott  
An Comhairle Leabharlanna

## Session Three

Reflection on the past as we move towards  
culturally inclusive learning

**Speakers:** *Elizabeth McDonagh and Dr Marion Browne. Marion is Traveller Education Co-ordinator for the Department of Education and Science, and facilitates the full participation of Traveller pupils in intercultural, anti-racist education system. Marion holds a PhD for her thesis “A Sociolinguistic Study of Irish Traveller CANT” and played a key role in the “Can’t Lose CANT” initiative*

In the context of the work carried out through the “Pictureógs” process, Marion opened her lecture with a discussion on Irish Traveller history, or lack off, by positing that the Irish Traveller is invisible in the history books, but that their history can be found through language. She emphasized the importance of projects like “Can’t lose CANT”, “Threading Tales” and “Pictureógs” in creating opportunities to explore issues of social inclusion and to gather a cultural archive. The presenter also explored ethnicity and talked of the controversy that surrounds the Irish Travellers in this regard, who see themselves as a distinct ethnic group. To reinforce this view, the question was asked, “What is an ethnic group?” and Marion offered the following definition;

***“A group that is biologically self-perpetuating, and whom share fundamental cultural values”***

The presenter spoke of the struggle Travellers face in maintaining their nomadic lifestyle and the lack of transient halting sites available to them. Marion also discussed the difficulties faced by Travellers in accessing education, and quoted from the Department of Education and Science “Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy, 2006”

The presenter expressed her view that, in order to move forward and towards a culturally inclusive education system, educators need to demand more training and improvements in the development of materials, process and working with partnership. Marion once again referred to “Threading Tales” and “Pictureógs” as a positive, successful example that encompasses all of the above needs.





**Petticoat Loose**  
Pictureóg

At this point in the presentation, Marion invited Elizabeth McDonagh to join her in presenting a discussion on commonly held myths about Irish Travellers. The audience was invited to list the stereotypical views that the “settled community” might have about Travellers, and Elizabeth was on hand to respond to all the points raised. It is noted that this process was conducted in a non-threatening, respectful environment and the author gratefully acknowledges Elizabeth for her open honesty and graciousness in her responses. The following views were offered, with Elizabeth’s responses in Italics:

- **Travellers live rough:** *Yes, many Travellers do live rough, though more are now giving in to living in houses, find it better, more comfortable. Oil fires are main source of heat in caravans, fumes are bad for health, and they are also a fire hazard. Travellers are never homeless; someone will always put them up, even if it means they have to sleep on the floor.*

- **Travellers are aggressive:** *Yes, there can be aggression and stress, usually rooted in being marginalised. It is not acceptable, they are learning to deal with it through anger management, particularly women are learning to deal with stress through relaxation methods. Sometimes, Travellers are not aggressive enough in demanding their rights*
- **They have large families:** *Yes, has always been that way, though nowadays, young people are clever and are using contraception*
- **There is a common fear of Travellers:** *Yes, on both sides, because Settled and Travellers do not know each other*
- **Travellers are opportunistic:** *Yes, many see a chance to make a few bob and will take it. Like in the rest of society, there are cowboys. Travellers are good at dealing, can be persuasive*
- **They break the law:** *Sometimes. There is good and bad in every community. Do often trespass, car parks etc, but there is a 24 hour law, so Travellers cannot stay longer than that on the side of the road*
- **Traveller Children are unruly in school:** *Children are often coming from backgrounds where there are family problems and so find it hard to adapt to rules of school. May have problem with teachers, or teachers have problems with them. Need more Traveller Resource Teachers, specially trained to understand needs of Traveller children.*
- **They leave rubbish around:** *It's a vicious circle, council won't leave skips. Some families clean up their own patch, but it is difficult to keep clean when large groups congregate together. Most Travellers keep their homes spotlessly clean*

- **They are not interested in Education:** *This is changing now. First Traveller Trainee Teacher now in University. Traveller children need more attention than settled children do. It is mainly girls that go further in education, boys still face bullying from both sides. There is the possibility of second chance learning for adults, but there is still a long way to go*
- **They are always feuding:** *Can be vicious, though often misunderstood, usually when someone tells lies, is usually over in a flash, comes back to dealing with aggression, stress*
- **Non-literate:** *Older ones now getting training, attending literacy classes*
- **Are not a distinct culture:** *Travellers see themselves as distinct culture*
- **Travellers are creative:** *Yes, artistic, use their hands to make things*
- **They are self-reliant:** *Yes, need to make a living, be your own boss, especially the men*
- **They are family orientated:** *Very important, have great bond and close knit between the generations*
- **Patriarchal society:** *Yes, the men are the bosses*
- **Superstitious and religious:** *Comes from the old myth of the curse of the Tinker at the door. Not really superstitious. Yes, very religious*
- **Always fighting:** *Can't back off from a fight, have to show that you are tough, effects both men and women*
- **Health Issues:** *Is vastly different now, but very poor in the past. Women prone to depression, with no support. Men don't understand. Getting better, women getting breast checks, and training in health issues. Need more youth counsellors to help with issues affecting the young Travellers, for example, issue of suicide, need to help them bring out their problems*



## Session Four

### Threading Tales: The Modeling of Story-gathering and Telling; the Cascade effect in Education

Speaker: *Julie Duane is Storyteller in Residence with Kildare County Council, and was invited to facilitate song and story-gathering workshops during the "Pictureógs" process. Julie lectures on Drama in Education, is a Broadcaster, Trainer in Marketing and PR initiatives and is a director of Little Acorn Workshop Company. Julie has worked closely with Kildare County Schools Library Service in outreach projects to schools.*

Julie opened her presentation by recounting her experience of bringing “Threading Tales” out to primary schools in Kildare as part of an outreach project organized by Kildare Libraries Schools Library Service. She explained that her views were based on her work as Storyteller, her observational and experiential knowledge as Facilitator and from the feedback that she has received from participating teachers, parents and children throughout the process. Julie spoke about the rich experience of language as a means of developing integration, and how “Threading Tales” provides a creative conduit to positive relationships and understanding in a fun learning environment. “From the very beginning of the process, the imagination and curiosity of the child was engaged. A significant number of educators commented on the ability of the story bag to engage the focus and concentration of children”

From an educational perspective, the presenter also spoke about the challenges that parents and teachers face in their efforts to engage the child with the curriculum, and how the process of “Threading Tales” addresses these challenges by tuning into the imagination of the child, engaging the multiple intelligence’s and connecting with the high academic areas of subjects, for example, mathematics. How the story bags can inspire creativity in helping the child to engage in so many subject areas, and how the “Threading Tales” process brings drama into the classroom to enthuse teachers and children alike, with everybody finding their place in the process.



Julie used the “Poppet” story bag to engage the participants in a storytelling activity, with role playing exercises to demonstrate the versatility of the resource. Working through the process, the presenter explained the wonder of the child in his/her first experience of this “treat” or “surprise”, how exciting the prospect for the child when putting their hand inside the story bag...What is it? What is inside?...and how the characters in the story bag are used to explore so many themes in the classroom, Julie used the following examples to demonstrate how the characters could be used to explore:

- Rules
- Manners
- Listening
- Song
- Sequential Narrative, beginning, middle, end
- Sounds
- Nature / Environment / Conservation

- Geography
- Messages of safety
- Scientific questions
- Logical / Social, Personal, Health Education
- Special Needs
- Dyslexia

Julie also emphasized the importance of never underestimating the audience, the knowledge of the child, and how, very often, new understanding of the child's knowledge – perhaps not seen before in the classroom – can emerge through the gentle encouragement of the “Threading Tales” process.

The presenter stressed the usefulness of the story bag in finding ways to address the answers to questions that children often challenge us with; Questions that relate to curriculum context for example, and how the visual element can help the child to remember, to retain the answers, and how the contents of the story bag can help the child to learn facts, for example, using the factual book and the fiction book to explain the difference between fact and fiction.

Julie described the process as drawing the child into a world where they are finding a voice, a place that leads to many gateways to learning on an equal playing field, regardless of ability,” *Everyone finds their place in Threading Tales*”. She spoke about “connecting” – and how the child, whether introvert,



extravert, visual, tactile, curious or quiet, is given the opportunity to take ownership of their own learning, Julie concluded by saying that “Threading Tales” created an opportunity to communicate with pupils in an informal and creative manner. “In this environment of fun and play, story bags provide an opportunity for educators to introduce and explore new learning, new concepts, revise old learning and sometimes deepen the process of learning”.





## Feedback from Sessions

All attending participants were invited to offer feedback on the sessions.

Initial, on the spot, comments were extremely positive, with many educators expressing the view that story bags would be a valuable resource to their school. Many enthused that they would like to create story bags, and that, if there had been a practical class on how to make one during these sessions, they would have been delighted to take part. Some participants even expressed disappointment that there was not a “Story Bag” making session included in the experience.

The value of the “Threading Tales” process was noted and complimented on, and all agreed that the process was a positive attempt to build a project around empowerment for parents of all abilities, to help them to make a contribution to their children’s education and to engage in a network of support mechanisms through partnerships with educators and library services. Many felt that the whole concept was very interesting, and that it would be beneficial to children’s development. On aspects to the “Threading Tales” presentation, the following points on the initiative were offered

:

- Can be used at an early age and its use can continue into adulthood
- Can help to develop better language, reading and writing skills
- Can develop a love of books from an early age
- Threading Tales is a miniature theatre brought into the classroom where children can take part / Can be used in the teaching of Drama

- Can be used in the teaching of English as a second language
- Can help in the development of a child's self esteem
- To help the bereaved child / To help the child who is bullied
- Can be used for S.E.S.E and S.P.H.E

Also noted was the interest taken in Elizabeth's descriptions of life as a Traveller, and the benefit of this insight when working with Traveller children in schools. One participant commented, "I can understand her need to preserve her culture". The same participant also noted that while she found the "Threading Tales" initiative an enjoyable and informative experience, she felt that what Elizabeth spoke of could have been said in just one of the evenings instead of two. However, the participant also expressed how thankful she was to Elizabeth for sharing her experience and imparting her knowledge, and noted that "I am doing my social studies at the moment and the topic we are covering at the moment is integrating the travelling community into the settled community society. I felt that after my Threading Tales experience that I was more knowledgeable than the others on my course".

A teacher noted that with regard to comments, the problem for her was where to start, there was so much to talk about! Another comment offered was that in the modern age, with children growing up with TV, DVD and electronic games, Threading Tales can bring back a love of storytelling from the past. Many educators have started to make versions of story bags in their schools, and that the process has "whetted the appetite even further to create a story

bag". Feedback on the "Threading Tales / Pictureógs" initiatives concludes with this wonderful comment, 'What I am hearing throughout this process are two words, 'gentle empowerment' - this is the way we need to go'



Images from  
**Threading Tales** and **Pictureógs**  
Workshops

## Conclusion

Workable access to library services and initiatives that are educationally, socially and culturally inclusive can only be achieved through the partnership of both the creators and the participants of the process. Ongoing feedback and evaluation enriches actions currently in hand and those planned for the future. Imagination and ideas are crucial to the organic growth of any process. In the case of “Threading Tales” and “Pictureógs”, the opportunities for participants to engage in a two-way system of exchange of ideas, to have a voice that is heard throughout the process, enriches these initiatives with a consistently renewable force that is ongoing and organic and adaptable to change. This ideal is borne out in “Ideas Matter”, which aims to “develop a campaign to promote the intrinsic value of imagination, knowledge and cultural participation as a key component of active citizenship, social justice and equality”.

While the success of the projects mentioned in this report are reflected by the nature of the enthusiasm that is generated through the sources used to evaluate the processes, further affirmation is offered by the interest shown by organizations and individuals on hearing about “Threading Tales” and “Pictureógs”. Communication and co-operation between Kildare Library Services, local and national primary and post primary schools, third level institutions, adult education centres, traveller centres, prison service, archives and museum sectors have ensured that the experience and the learning from

“Threading Tales” and “Pictureógs” is now in the public arena. The processes engaged in and the learning from “Threading Tales” and “Pictureógs” will soon emerge as a digital web resource on the Kildare County Library web site. The format for this resource will include the “Pictureógs” DVD and literature that documents the processes. This action will ensure that the sharing nature of the processes will continue and that maximum benefit of the resources will be utilized, adapted and improved by the many cross-sector workers engaged in educational, therapeutic, culturally inclusive and socially cohesive actions.

Feedback from cross-sector workers continues to flow. A project worker from Athy Youth Project (Kildare Youth Services) writes, *“I really value this documentation on Traveller culture. Last week I represented Ireland in training on intercultural learning in the Netherlands, funded by the European Union. I brought the (Pictureógs) DVD along and explained a bit about Traveller culture. The participants from all over Europe were very interested and those working with the Traveller Community or Roma Community were really keen to receive a copy of the DVD”*. An Estate Management Liaison Officer working for Kilkenny Local Authority writes, *“Just watched the DVD. It was absolutely fantastic. Well done. I am working with two groups of Travellers in Kilkenny and would love to be able to achieve even a quarter of your achievements in Athy”*.

Feedback such as the above, confirms what has also been affirmed through this evaluation process; that through supportive measures and careful

planning, “Threading Tales” and “Pictureógs” have enabled Kildare County Library Service to engage in actions that have created a unique process. This process offers members of our community the opportunities to share in an educational and socially inclusive practice, which builds a sustainable resource for our children with respectful co-operation and a growing sense of place. A place for everyone, where individuals can identify personal goals, build on self-confidence, audit personal skills and foster a sense of connection, a social bond that is culturally supportive.

The final words in this conclusion, taken from “Ideas Matter” are offered to embed the ongoing commitment of Kildare County Library Services to encourage projects like “Threading Tales” and “Pictureógs” and to use the knowledge deepened through the processes to inform all future actions.

“Collectively, the services hold up a mirror to society, which in turn reflects back on the citizen urging a response. We recognise and promote the intrinsic value of cultural ideas and experiences. We do so by providing books, multimedia and a range of opportunities including dance, music, storytelling and story making. Cultural participation is positioned as the crucial dynamic which gives Kildare its heartbeat and through which its diverse identities are expressed”.

## Further Reading

Browne, Marian. 2004. "A Sociolinguistic Study of Irish Traveller CANT"  
Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University College, Dublin

Department of the Environment and Local Government Ireland. 1998  
*Branching Out: a new public library service*  
Dublin: Stationary Office

Department of Education and Science. 2006  
Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy

Farrell, Caroline. 2006  
Threading Tales: a model for inclusive learning that celebrates cultural  
diversity in contemporary communities  
Dublin: Reading Association of Ireland

Gleeson, Breda. Browne, Marian. Farrell, Caroline. 2006  
Pictureógs: a public library cultural inclusion project that engages and  
explores Irish Traveller Culture  
Kildare County Council

Gardner, Howard. 1993  
*Multiple Intelligences, the theory in practice*  
New York: Basic Books

Kildare Library & Arts Services, 2003  
*Can't lose CANT: a book of CANT, the old language of the Irish Travellers, by  
children in County Kildare, Ireland*  
Dublin: Kids Own Publishing Partnership

Kildare County Library Service, 2007  
*Ideas Matter, library services development plan: 2007-2011*  
Kildare County Council

Kildare County Council, 2006  
Pictureógs: celebrating inclusion and cultural diversity (DVD)  
Kildare County Council

National Economic and Social Development Office.  
The Arts, Cultural Inclusion and Social Cohesion:  
Dublin: NESF Report 35, January 2007