

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Learning



Literacy and attitudes to learning are intergenerational with the skills of one generation impacting strongly on the next. It is very difficult for adults with low literacy to support their children with literacy development. It is also difficult for adults with poor experiences of school and learning to model lifelong learning behaviours with their children and grandchildren. In communities with low levels of English language literacy, therefore, adult learning becomes integral to children's learning.

Most learning occurs outside the school system and most English language literacy is developed through 'home literacy practices' that include using texts for particular purposes and talking about the knowledge embedded in texts. The role of parents and extended families as 'first teachers' needs to be understood and supported.

Family approaches to literacy and learning are particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, because texts and the social practises that support them might not feature in the social and cultural practices of the home and family. Further, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents may have had negative experiences of schooling and may feel alienated from the culture of the school.

## ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FAMILIES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have unique social structures. While colonisation has undermined many of these structures, the family structure has been strongly maintained. As a general rule, Aboriginal families are likely to consist of extended families and will include biological kin, members related through marriage and others who have a particular role and stature within the family.

It is important that intergenerational literacy and learning programs take into account that the role of "child's first teacher" may just as likely be taken up by an extended family member, as a mother or father, and will probably be shared across a number of people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family structures are also likely to ensure that the education of one member of the community, impacts well beyond that one person.

## EXAMPLES OF FAMILY LEARNING PROGRAMS

There are many program types in Australia, developed specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families that approach the task from slightly different angles. Some examples are

- Public library 'story time' programs, such as the State Library of Western Australia's 'Read to me - I Love It!' program.
- Primary school 'home literacy' programs for adults, such as the Mt Druitt, Catholic Education program "Pause, prompt, praise".
- Parenting and early learning programs such as the Australian Nurse Family Partnerships Program run by Central Australian Aboriginal Congress in Alice Springs.
- Community wide literacy campaigns such as the Wilcannia "Yes I Can" program.

## FEATURES OF A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

- Designed and delivered to parents and extended family as a learning program, not just a parenting skills program
- Sustained engagement with parents to improve their literacy and numeracy
- Delivered by professional teachers to parents to improve home literacy practices
- Small group or one on one tuition provided to build self-esteem and confidence for reading
- Availability of appropriate reading resources, DVDs and CDs that reflect community culture, history and daily life (where possible)
- Direct engagement with community members and Elders to ensure culturally appropriate contact in regional and remote settings
- Coordinated access to a range of other programs and services to ensure overall family support, such as pre-vocational training, counselling, mentoring, budgeting and social welfare support.

## READ THE FULL REPORT

[https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Indigenous-Learning-Report\\_WEB.pdf](https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Indigenous-Learning-Report_WEB.pdf)



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