

# INDIGENOUS INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING



Unlocking the potential  
of ACE to improve literacy  
and numeracy outcomes  
for Indigenous children



**Adult  
Learning  
Australia**

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# Introduction

This paper contends that the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector has a strong role to play in increasing the literacy, numeracy and learning skills of Indigenous adults which, in turn, supports the literacy, numeracy and learning skills of Indigenous children. A wealth of international research points to the idea that Indigenous children are most effectively educated when their families and communities are included in the learning experience and are able to learn alongside them.

The results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) highlight the educational disadvantage experienced by Indigenous students. *PISA 2012: How Australia measures up* (ACER) shows that the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students has remained the same for the last decade and that Indigenous 15-year-olds remain about two-and-a-half years behind their non-Indigenous peers in schooling.<sup>1</sup>

Despite considerable effort and investment by government and non-government organisations in the past decade, it appears little has changed. There is a need for a different approach to engaging Indigenous people in education. 'Top down' public investment needs to empower 'ground up' action.<sup>2</sup> Intergenerational approaches to education should be one of the strategies employed.

## Structure of the paper

The findings in this paper are based on a literature review and a series of interviews conducted with key stakeholders. The first section of this paper highlights the importance of home literacy practices to attain functional literacy<sup>3</sup> and provides the elements and features required to inform the development of an effective intergenerational learning model.

The second section considers the potential role of ACE in engaging parents and extended family to improve the literacy and numeracy of the family as a whole.

Finally, the third section provides a summary of selected literacy and numeracy learning programs across Australia with intergenerational components, as well as information on available evaluations and outcomes of the programs.

<sup>1</sup> T. Dreise, Tony Indigenous education results show need for needs-based funding, [theconversation.com](http://theconversation.com), 7 March 2014.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Functional Literacy is defined as a level of reading and writing enabling an individual to function in a modern/complex society.

# Home literacy and kinship

A common theme from the programs highlighted in this paper is the importance of home literacy practices and how that can transform a child's learning experience.

The ACE Aotearoa in New Zealand describes intergenerational learning as:

*The occurrence where generations learn or study together to gain skills, values and knowledge, builds social cohesion in our aging societies. Lifelong learning within a community brings strength and resilience to its members. Adult learning positively impacts on youth learning outcomes. Ensuring adults have access to quality learning experiences is key to maintaining these positive outcomes.*<sup>4</sup>

Susan Hanson's paper, *Skilling Aboriginal Parents in Home Literacy Practices*, succinctly describes the power of embedding home literacy practices in indigenous families.

*The family becomes the vehicle for enculturation of the child into the social roles and functions of literacy as a critical means for communication in the Western world. Parents read books to children, look for information in magazines, discuss the knowledge books contain, talk about words, sentences, stories, read newspapers and share the information they contain, read television guides to find a child's favourite show, read and write notes and letters, give cards with carefully chosen words on special occasions, write and read poetry, debate the meaning of words, inscribe books, write shopping lists, refer to bills stuck to the fridge and perform one thousand other literacy based tasks each day in the home all under the watchful eye of the child.*

*These practices are referred to as 'home literacy practices'. They are the deeply embedded cultural practices used to teach children about literacy. These home literacy practices do not necessarily exist in the homes of people for whom text-based literacy and its social practices does not play an important social and cultural role.*<sup>5</sup>

It is important to understand and acknowledge the social structures of Indigenous Australians and the potential for the extended family to influence the literacy and numeracy development of its young people.

Indigenous kinship structures are examined by Nyrell Pattel (2007) in his paper *Aboriginal Families, Cultural Context and Therapy*. Pattel maintains that Aboriginal social structures are amongst the most complex kinship structures known to the Western world. These structures were developed by traditional Aboriginal societies and are still maintained today.

*An Aboriginal family consists of immediate and extended members. Whilst some traditions have been lost due to forced colonisation, the family structure has been strongly maintained, which consist of biological kin (blood kin), affinal kin (related through marriage) and classified kin (one who has earned a particular role and stature within the family).*

*Since extended family tend to live close by to one another, if not in the same household for periods at a time, it is not unusual for multiple adults within the kinship system to participate in the rearing of the child. Parental child and three-generational households have been particularly valuable adaptations for parents who are overloaded with too many responsibilities and too few resources. A three-generational household can be a supportive structure for all involved if there is consistency among the adults who share the responsibilities. In this situation, an older family member usually the grandmother, shares the household and typically provides the necessary childcare to enable the other family members to attend school and work.*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The Value of Adult and Community Education – Key Messages, ACE Aotearoa policy paper 2013.

<sup>5</sup> S Hanson, *Skilling Aboriginal Parents in Home Literacy Practices*, State Library of Western Australia, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> N. Pattel, *Aboriginal Families, Cultural Context and Therapy*, *Counselling, Psychotherapy, and Health*, 3(1), 1–24, May 2007

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) paper *Making a Difference, Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Learners (2013)* highlights the findings on numerous Indigenous education studies ACER has conducted. The paper reflects that family support and engaging in shared activities are contributors to resilience in Indigenous children, resilience being a critical element to transition from home to school.<sup>7</sup>

This research supports the notion that the shared activities of reading, storytelling and games involving literacy and numeracy skills led by extended kin as described by Pattel (2007), have significant potential to embed intergenerational learning with home literacy practices in Indigenous families.

## New opportunities – Indigenous Advancement Strategy

From 1 July 2014, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Indigenous Affairs) (PM&C) will be responsible for managing a new Indigenous Advancement Strategy. At this stage, it is unclear how the Commonwealth funded/managed programs referred to in this paper will be affected by the new arrangements. It is understood initiatives will be implemented through the Remote Community Advancement Network in (PM&C) working with communities.

The Indigenous Advancement Strategy replaces over 150 individual programs and activities with programmes in five priority areas including Children and Schooling. The Children and Schooling Programme focusses on: engaging children with school; improving education outcomes; improving access to further education and supporting families to give children a good start in life. The programme will fund a range of activities including those that support early childhood, parenting and schooling and attendance.

The establishment of the Strategy reinforces the importance of the role of parents and extended family in home literacy practices and intergenerational learning in preparing children for education, particularly when the school environment can be alienating for communities that have had little or only negative experiences from this engagement.

<sup>7</sup> The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), *Making a Difference, Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Learners*, 2013, p. 2.

## Key findings

The programs reviewed in this research are achieving positive results for Indigenous Australians in different ways, with varying degrees of focus on intergenerational learning.

(Refer to the Appendices section for a detailed analysis of these programmes.)

The *Prompt, Pause and Praise* program (Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, NSW) and *Better Beginnings* Aboriginal Program (State Library of Western Australia) were stand out programs for promoting children's advancement to attaining functional literacy. Both were resourced and focussed on home literacy practices.

The *Building Family Opportunities* program (DFEEST South Australia) focusses on empowering parents and family support, albeit from a welfare or 'life first' approach. It also emphasises the importance of providing additional support for particular circumstances and needs.

The *Wilcannia Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign Pilot Project* is another excellent example of a 'whole of community' approach to literacy development.

The research also identified a number of effective programs whose success could be enhanced by a stronger emphasis on adult education:

- *Read to Me – I Love It!* offers resources to establish and build home literacy practices. This program could be extended by involving the ACE sector to develop sustainable and integrated home literacy programs for Indigenous communities.
- The *Better Beginnings* program highlights the tradition of family and child interaction at libraries and playgroups, settings outside of health care and associated parenting skills programs. ACE could play an active role in assisting librarians, childcare workers, parents and extended family

to stimulate home literacy practices for children in the early years and to maintain these practices through schooling years.

- The *Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters* (HIPPY) program has achieved strong outcomes for preschool children in disadvantaged homes and has recently been introduced in some Indigenous communities. HIPPY aims to train parents and the extended family as well as children. However, HIPPY does not address intergenerational learning to the extent of improving parental literacy and numeracy.
- Some of the key findings from the HIPPY evaluation are outlined below:
  - Successfully engaging communities with a high number of Indigenous Australians takes time.
  - Recruiting and enrolling Indigenous parents takes time.
  - Maintaining engagement with Indigenous parents and children requires flexible modes of delivery.
  - Attracting and retaining engagement with Indigenous parents, home tutors and coordinators requires extra resources and support.
- The intensive case management model of the DFEEST *Building Family Opportunities* model, auspiced by an NGO and/or ACE providers, provided a useful means of supporting Indigenous families who do not necessarily have the same identifiable community structures as those in other communities.

## Other factors

- Many of those interviewed for this paper stressed the importance of having ‘a reason to learn’. Access to technology was offered as a legitimate way to achieve this; for example, through learning to communicate using ‘texts’ or using the internet. With the introduction of satellite public phones and internet access in remote regions as part of the Australian Government *Indigenous Communications Programme*<sup>8</sup>, access to technology is creating demand for better literacy and numeracy in remote communities.
- In light of improved services, Skype could be used in situations where Indigenous families are dispersed geographically. The Indian Granny Cloud project<sup>9</sup> is a useful model for enabling storytelling and instruction for families in remote areas.
- The program coordinators for the Families as First Teachers program at the Northern Territory Department of Education advised that while some sites attempted to address the literacy and numeracy issues of the participants’ parents (often in after-hours school settings), they were unable to meet ongoing support and training due to overwhelming demand. ACE should be integrated into these programs to provide support in terms of meeting this demand.
- Finally, it is recommended that government’s monitor the findings of the latest National Aboriginal Adult Literacy Commission adult literacy campaign pilots in Western NSW.

## Other observations

While the *Parental and Community Engagement Programme* at Boystown in Queensland was not formally evaluated, the National Manager, Community Engagement & Outreach provided meaningful insights. The program outcomes highlighted the importance of empowerment and cultural appropriateness when approaching intergenerational learning:

*Good outcomes can be achieved in programs where parenting support provides parents and carers with a capacity to identify their own strengths and thus enables them to better support their children and to assist them in meeting their children’s educational needs.*

*The culturally specific approach of this program also contributes to its success. The employment of local Aboriginal people to deliver the program in a culturally appropriate manner increases their capacity to facilitate good educational outcomes for the local community. Such an approach encourages family and community participation and involvement in the program and helps to build trusting relationships among all parties. This trust is a key ingredient in the program’s success.*

The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated conducted a Koorie Family School Literacy Research Project in 2012, which further supports the importance of engagement in developing school participation / literacy programs:

Such an approach encourages family and community participation and involvement in the program and helps to build trusting relationships among all parties. This trust is a key ingredient in the program’s success.

<sup>8</sup> The Indigenous Communications Programme (ICP) commenced in 2009 and over four years delivered telephone services, basic public internet access and computer training to many remote Indigenous communities. It has successfully delivered fixed and mobile community phones to more than 300 remote Indigenous communities with a population of less than 50 and that did not have access to a public telephone (301 fixed satellite phones and 86 mobile satellite handsets). Public internet access has been provided in 102 Indigenous communities that previously had limited or no public access internet as well as training in internet and basic computer use to over 5,300 Indigenous Australians.

<sup>9</sup> A professor at Newcastle University in the UK, Sugata Mitra, has developed a program for children in India that delivers educational mentoring session via Skype. Many of the volunteers are retired school teachers and grandmothers, which has inspired the ‘Granny Cloud’ name. The project is formally called Sole and Somes – Self Organized Learning Environments & Self Organized Mediation Environments.

In encouraging Koorie community members to enter into partnerships with schools or participate in community education programs it is critical that the approaches made and the programs designed are culturally safe and welcoming. The programs must originate from a community base and respond to community need, or they will not attract participants.

*Creating Family–School literacy programs for Koorie families that do respond to community needs can take many forms. The program could be school based; using a place within the school grounds as a cultural hub where families can use facilities, for example an internet café. The program could involve home based learning, or learning in a Koorie community centre. The program could teach literacy skills while enabling participants to learn about something that interests them such as cooking, gardening, or information technology. In any case, the program needs to feel safe for the people involved and it needs to encourage the development of literacy in a way that is interesting without overburdening participants.<sup>10</sup>*

The VAEAI research also provides an interesting observation regarding literacy and numeracy skills for Koorie parents:

*Looking at the literacy levels of Koorie parents/caregivers exclusively in terms of their reading and writing skills ignores the overall cultural context that determines how confident a person is to engage with the education system. While the importance of reading and writing skills should not be underestimated in conferring on a person an ability to engage with an educational setting this does not make up the whole picture. Reading and writing alone is too narrow an examination of what is brought to the family–school exchange.<sup>11</sup>*

Contrary to this observation and in terms of the programs examined for this paper, there appears to be little evidence of over emphasis on reading and writing skills for families, but a preference for parenting and child wellbeing skills. In contrast, the success of the Better Beginnings Aboriginal Program and particularly the Pause, Prompt and Praise Program demonstrate the potential of intergenerational learning that does emphasise improving parent and extended family literacy and numeracy.

<sup>10</sup> Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Koorie Family School Literacy Research Project, 2012, p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid page 7.



# The role of ACE

## ACE and schools

When examining supports for parents and extended families in early years child development, it becomes apparent that particular emphasis is placed on parenting skills rather than literacy and numeracy skills. In discussion with the program managers connected to the programs examined in this paper, it also became apparent that there is a prevailing argument about responsibility for adult literacy and whether this should be addressed as part of early years support or as part of a child's schooling experience.

Understandably schools appear reluctant and unable to stretch resources beyond the direct needs of students. The Jarara Indigenous Education Unit in NSW (facilitators of *Pause, Prompt and Praise*) success with a reading program rather than a parenting skills program highlights the power of professional teachers mentoring parents to improve home literacy practices. Overall, there was no apparent involvement or partnering arrangements with ACE providers to deliver adult literacy training in school settings.

The program coordinators for the *Families as First Teachers* program advised that while some sites attempted to address parent literacy and numeracy issues of the participants (often in after-hours school settings), they were unable to meet ongoing support and training due to overwhelming demand. This provides further evidence of the opportunity and need for ACE to integrate in these program settings. To quote ALA Board member Tony Dreise, it does appear that the schooling and ACE sectors are 'two ships passing in the night'.<sup>12</sup>

Research by ACE Aotearoa in New Zealand (*The Value of Adult and Community Education* 2013) has highlighted the importance of intergenerational learning and the potential role for ACE providers in the school setting:

*The influence of family, parents and extended family on a person's lifelong learning journey can be powerful. Equally it can be a negative influence. In New Zealand it has been found that children who live in families with high levels of parental education and access to learning resources have higher achievement than children whose families do not have these resources.<sup>13</sup> Adult learning has positive effects on families. ACE providers in schools (adult literacy night classes) have found that adult learning programmes have a positive impact on the achievement levels of the school students, and increase the confidence, employment and further education of parents and the health and wellbeing of their families.<sup>14</sup>*

*Many ACE practitioners and providers report that often when young people who learnt they were a 'failure' at school, become parents, a new learning opportunity is created through ACE parenting courses. In learning how to parent well, [they] become engaged in their child's preschool and then school experiences, these young parents then go on to increase their own directed learning experiences. There is also strong evidence of these changes in the family literacy literature.<sup>15 16</sup>*

Achieving positive youth learning outcomes requires consideration of the importance and accessibility of learning opportunities available to the adults around them. It may be timely to look at how ACE could be involved in the government's Social Sector Trials.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Dreise, Presentation to Adult Learning Australia Board, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Biddulph F.J.C, The Complexity of Community and Family Influences on Children's Achievement in New Zealand: Best Evidence Synthesis, June 2003, pg iii

<sup>14</sup> ACE Aotearoa, Adult and Community Education, Autumn Newsletter 2012, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Askov, E., Saenz, E., Grinder, E., Kinney, S., & Marvin, M. Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy: annotated bibliography, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review. (RR433). 2003, London: Department for Education and Skills.

## ACE in South Australia

At a local level, the *Skills for All* ACE reforms and Building Family Opportunities program in South Australia provide a model for ACE providers to become involved in Indigenous literacy and numeracy intergenerational learning.

As part of the VET reforms under the *Skills for All* policy, introduced in South Australia in 2011, significant resources were put into strengthening the role of ACE in delivering foundations skills training to those groups at risk of disadvantage. This reform, reflected in *Skills For All – The Adult Community Education Program*, aims to move the focus of ACE delivery in South Australia away from ‘lifestyle’ courses to engaging learners in literacy and numeracy practices through lifestyle based examples, such as cooking classes and computer literacy courses.

Accredited training is now provided to build confidence in adult learners to progress training if they desire, as are non-accredited training courses, which still draw on educationally based practices to assist contact.

The Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST) has advised that a number of ACE providers under the criteria described above have sought funding to target Indigenous groups, and strict guidelines apply to ensure delivery is culturally appropriate. *The Skills for All* program is due to be evaluated in 2014.

A program that has complemented this approach for Indigenous intergenerational learning is *Building Family Opportunities* (BFO), a SA government funded initiative with additional Commonwealth support. This program targets a key family member and provides intensive case management support to assess what is required to assist that person into employment. The program aims to influence the outcomes for the whole family, and literacy and numeracy skills are assessed as a priority.

The BFO Program is a four year Social Inclusion Initiative delivered by DFEEST. Services are provided by Centacare in Playford, UnitingCare Wesley Country South Australia in Port Augusta and UnitingCare Wesley in Port Adelaide, all not for profit registered training organisations, with multi-disciplinary teams including Aboriginal workers and community health staff.

The program manager at DFEEST described:

*An assertive and intensive case management approach that BFO adopts with the intent of assisting jobseekers within the family to prepare for and move into meaningful employment.*

*BFO case management uses a ‘life-first’ rather than a ‘work-first’ approach. The program engages with people facing significant disadvantage and who want to work. Family members of all ages are provided with appropriate learning opportunities and environments. Young people and adults in each family are assisted to remain in education and/or participate in pre-vocational, learning and skills development programs that can lead to employment.*

*The case manager works intensively with individuals and their families to identify options and support skills-development as they address complex personal and vocational issues. Successful program outcomes includes, amongst other things, stabilising family relationships and addressing any general or mental health concerns.*

*On referral to the BFO program, a family’s needs are assessed through a comprehensive family assessment tool from which an individualised consolidated family plan is developed. Participants are assisted to overcome personal issues, develop their skills and support them to engage in learning, training or work. This includes access to a diverse range of programs and services, including vocational training, developing literacy, numeracy and language skills, counselling, mentoring, budgeting and drug and alcohol support.*

The BFO program was initially funded from 2009 to 2013 as a four-year demonstration project. As a result of exceeding a 30% participation target, DFEEST is now funding a new program in northern Adelaide in 2014–16, delivered once again by NGO providers.

## Conclusion

Much of the public discussion in Australia around Indigenous education has an implied assumption that children learn in isolation from their parents and communities. Yet literacy is essentially a set of social and cultural practices that children learn from within their families as much or more than through technical instruction.

Children's experiences of and success in school, is significantly impacted by the educational experiences of their parents and grandparents. It is very hard for parents with low levels of literacy and numeracy and negative experiences of education to support their children to develop their literacy and numeracy and make the most of their education. This is particularly the case for Indigenous families and children.

The Adult and Community Education sector, with its emphasis on locally developed, easy to access programs in non-formal and welcoming environments is in an ideal position to partner with schools and other stakeholders to close the gap between the literacy and numeracy achievements of Indigenous children and other Australian children.

# Appendices

## Programs with intergenerational learning features

There are numerous government and community sector programs operating in Australia that are aimed at improving literacy and numeracy outcomes with a focus on investment in a child's early years, but they do not exclusively target Indigenous children and their families. The programs presented here are approaches that directly engage with Indigenous families and communities through an intergenerational focus.

### Better Beginnings Aboriginal Program (Read To Me – I Love It!)

The State library of Western Australia has delivered the *Better Beginnings Family Literacy Program* since 2004. An Aboriginal component of the program '*Read to me – I Love It!*' has been developed from a pilot undertaken with communities throughout the Pilbara and Kimberley in 2010.

The State Library of Western Australia now supplies books, literacy aids, posters, t-shirts and DVD libraries to families in approximately 100 Aboriginal communities throughout the state. The resources provided to the communities are chosen to reflect their culture, history and daily life, to help make sharing books a fun activity that is easy for parents and carers to engage with.

The program is supported by a network of distributors such as early childhood practitioners (playgroups), parents, health nurses, teachers and Aboriginal Medical Services. The program engages directly with community members and Elders to ensure culturally appropriate contact and to provide training to remote and regional libraries. The program aims to encourage communities to utilise library services and also to ensure library services are relevant to the communities.

The focus of this program is to provide resources and ways to develop and strengthen home literacy practices through sustainable strategies and resources that reflect the experiences of Aboriginal families. For families with four year old children, engagement with parents is maintained for 2 years, with DVDs and books provided every 3 months.

### Pause, Prompt and Praise Program

The Jarara Indigenous Education Unit in Mt Druitt (Catholic Education, Diocese of Parramatta, NSW) has established a number of successful literacy programs, including one-on-one tuition, that aim to build self-esteem, confidence and passion for reading at school and at home. According to the 2011 ABS Census, the Diocese of Parramatta has approximately 5,000 Aboriginal Catholics, which is the largest urban concentration of Indigenous Catholics in Australia.<sup>17</sup>

The stand out program delivered by the Jarara Indigenous Education Unit is the *Pause, Prompt and Praise Program*. This program has been running for over 12 years and specifically focuses on intergenerational learning to equip parents with the necessary skills to improve their child's reading at home. What distinguishes *Pause, Prompt and Praise* from other programs is that it is a reading program, not a parenting skills program, and is delivered by professional teachers to parents to improve home literacy practices.

*Pause, Prompt and Praise* is aimed at Year 3 to 6 students and is delivered over four twenty-minute sessions per week. The program is designed to be implemented any time in a suitable environment that encourages students to read aloud. The Jarara Indigenous Education Unit also provides training workshops for parents and a DVD explaining each step in further detail. The program encourages students to monitor the meaning of words and to self-correct. The program is supported by the Jarara library, which has a wide range of books for families to borrow (also available on CD).

The Jarara Indigenous Education Unit also delivers the *Bridging the Gap* program for kindergarten children and their families to improve literacy and numeracy for children

<sup>17</sup> Catholic Diocese of Parramatta, Faith In Our Future, Pastoral Plan 2014–18, 2014.

in the first year of school. Families are encouraged to use a home-book reading program to assist students to become actively involved in the reading process. The focus is to foster family interactions with books and literacy games and teach interactive story reading strategies. Resources provided to families by the completion of the program include: an alphabet book; ten books; twenty literacy numeracy games; an iPod containing reading by a community member; and a blanket.

Organisers of this program have advised that parents that participate through *Bridging the Gap* generally remain engaged for other programs and utilise the opportunities available in *Pause, Prompt and Praise* to improve their own literacy as outlined above.

## Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign Pilot Project – Wilcannia NSW

From August 2011 to October 2012, the Commonwealth and NSW governments funded the University of New England in partnership with the National Aboriginal Adult Literacy Commission, the Local Wilcannia Lands Council and the Wilcannia Central School to pilot an Aboriginal adult literacy campaign in Wilcannia, NSW.

Wilcannia is a remote town in Western NSW with a population of 602 (2011 Census), 78 per cent of whom identified as Aboriginal. The town is home to the Baakintji people, a community that is part of the Murdi Paaki region.

The pilot tested a mass literacy campaign model. Such models take a whole community or society approach rather than concentrating on individuals. Campaigns have been successful in countries such as India, Cuba and Tanzania. The project details summary for this pilot claims that in Timor-Leste that over 120,000 adults gained basic literacy within four years through the program introduced there in 2007.

The model piloted in Wilcannia adopted the model and method utilised in Timor, which included an innovation developed in Cuba in 2000. The Cuban model has been introduced in a number of countries including Argentina, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guinéa Bissau, Haïti, Honduras, Mexico, Mozambique, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. An alpha-numeric program entitled *Yes I Can*<sup>18</sup> was developed where

each letter of the alphabet is associated with a specific numeral. This method recognises that many illiterate people do have basic numeracy skills and will learn letters more easily by this association.

As well as addressing adult literacy and numeracy in Wilcannia, a major purpose of the pilot for the investors was to consider if this model could be up scaled to other communities over a three year time frame.

The mass literacy campaign model typically comprises three phases; socialisation and mobilisation, literacy classes and ongoing activities to consolidate literacy habits. The phases for the Wilcannia project are summarised below

### Phase 1 – Socialisation and mobilisation

This phase mobilises as many people as possible to take part to improve the importance of literacy to the community in terms of social and economic development. This is aimed at widening the responsibility for greater literacy levels beyond education authorities to other government agencies and non-government organisations. This phase continues throughout the project.<sup>18</sup>

### Phase 2 – Literacy classes ('Yes I Can')

Two intakes of students were taken in Wilcannia for intensive basic literacy classes conducted over 13 weeks delivered by trained local Aboriginal tutors and organisers in the campaign model. Most participants were over the age of 35 years. The lessons were informal in nature and were led by recorded DVD lessons, interrupted by the facilitator in order to discuss aspects of the lesson or enable time for the class to complete workbook activities.

### Phase 3 – Consolidate literacy

This phase encourages ongoing literacy and learning activities for phase 2 participants. A literacy coordinator was engaged to supervise activities, which included non-formal computer classes at the Wilcannia Lands Council and cooking classes at the Women's Safe House. Further activities were conducted online and a similar daily routine to the *Yes I Can* classes was maintained of two hours up to four times a week. Work experience places at Community Development Employment Projects and the Safe House were also arranged, as were other activities at the Men's Shed and local arts centre. A TAFE course in Catering (Certificate 2) was also introduced.

<sup>18</sup> Boughton, Bob Ph.D., Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign, Wilcannia Pilot Project Final Evaluation Report University of New England, NSW October, 2012.

## Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)

The *Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters* (HIPPY) is a two-year home-based parenting and early childhood enrichment program targeting families with young children. Families start HIPPY when their child is in the year before school (usually around 4 years old) and continue into the second year of HIPPY during their first year of formal schooling.

The first HIPPY project in Australia began in 1998 in the City of Yarra in Melbourne, auspiced by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Twenty families were enrolled, with three home tutors employed to work with families in their homes. In 2008, the Commonwealth government invested in a five year roll out of HIPPY across 50 communities nationally. HIPPY has operated in all Australian states and territories, servicing some 1500 families per year. The Brotherhood of St Laurence holds the international licence to operate HIPPY in Australia and partners with agencies within these locations to deliver the program. An internationally recognised program, HIPPY also operates in Israel, the United States, Germany, Austria, South Africa, Canada, El Salvador, Italy, and New Zealand.

As part of expanding HIPPY nationally, five communities with a high proportion of Indigenous populations were targeted, including two pilot Indigenous programs in Mt Isa, Queensland and Katherine, Northern Territory.

HIPPY is founded on the theory that home instruction can effectively improve learning patterns, a theory based on the belief in the power of home socialisation patterns and parents as primary educators.

The HIPPY approach develops the foundations for learning in the home during children's early years. The program support parents in their crucial role as a child's first teacher and provides them with resources to integrate into the daily routine of a family. Home tutors visit once a fortnight to instruct parents, who in turn conduct the activities with their child/children for 15 minutes for up to 6 days a week. Parent group meetings on alternate fortnights are also organised as part of ongoing support

According to the HIPPY Mission, the program strives to:

- increase the chances of positive early school experience among children and parents
- empower parents to understand their crucial role in developing their child's readiness to learn
- provide children with stimulating and varied learning opportunities
- enhance interaction between parents and their children
- engage parents and children in the joy of learning
- create a learning environment in the home that encourages the development of literacy skills
- reduce the social isolation of parents
- foster parental involvement in school and community life
- provide parents with the opportunity of becoming home tutors in their own community
- support home tutors to develop the skills and work experience needed to compete successfully in the labour market.

## Families as First Teachers – Indigenous Parenting Support Services Program

This program was introduced by the Northern Territory Department of Education in 2009 and is delivered to remote Indigenous communities for families with children to school age. The Department is currently in negotiation with the Commonwealth Government to continue the program, as it has been jointly funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) to June 2014.

Kuranda was the starting point for the program, and is now established in 21 local communities. The program was developed for the remote community context of the Northern Territory and in consultation with community members and staff at each community.

*Families as First Teachers* provides play based programs and support to families through direct engagement and discussion. Resources are available to families to inform how children learn and how parents can make the most of everyday opportunities. The resources provided are designed for group or individual family settings. Parental capacity building is also provided through family support and by linking services within local communities.

As part of the program the *Indigenous Parenting Support Services Program* focuses on literacy and numeracy foundations, orientation to school programs and, as part of an intergenerational approach, parent engagement initiatives to prepare children for school.

While no formal training for adult literacy and numeracy is provided, a conversational reading technique is employed in playgroup and family settings. Professionally trained early childhood teachers oversee each site, supported by locally sourced family liaison workers that have attained Certificate 3 in Community Services.

In terms of the resources, parents receive 9 books per year via a 'Books in Home' book club. As an adult literacy task, parents are supervised and encouraged to complete order forms and choose the books for their children. Bilingual baby board books (developed in conjunction with NT libraries and the communities) are also provided, as are posters on reading and baby care. Translating these resources into local languages is a major literacy activity for parents in the communities.

According to the managers of the program, these activities combined with other picture-based learning games have built confidence and contributed to reading between parents and children, which has become a major activity across the communities that did not previously exist.

The program objectives are to:

- provide quality early childhood programs with a focus on early literacy and numeracy foundations for young Indigenous children (0–3 years of age) and their families
- prepare children and their families for successful transitions to preschool
- build the capacity of families and community members to support the healthy development of young children
- develop community-based resources and increase the availability of resources for learning and parenting programs
- up-skill an Indigenous workforce in knowledge of early learning and family support
- increase collaboration with partner agencies in service delivery
- build the capacity of communities to deliver early childhood services.

## Early Years Koorie Literacy and Numeracy Program 2014

As part of the Victorian government commitment to the *Closing the Gap* target of literacy and numeracy set by the Council of Australian Governments in 2008, this program is aimed at addressing the NAPLAN achievement trajectory for Year 3 literacy and numeracy.

The \$2 million program, administered by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), focusses on early intervention and building literacy and numeracy skills in the early years of schooling to Year 3 where a student has achieved a D or E measure in 'Reading' and/or 'Number'.

Through the funding guidelines, schools are eligible to recruit additional personnel for a number of reasons. Of particular relevance to intergenerational learning practices, a school is able to release a teacher from classroom duties to engage with a student's family, including home visits if required. Further, schools are encouraged to provide a family literacy program to build the capacity of Koorie student families to support their child with literacy and numeracy skills development in the home.<sup>19</sup>

This is the first year of the program, and it is not a mandatory reporting or funding requirement to provide support to improve for home literacy practices. Family capacity building would be determined by the school delivering the program. The coordinators of the program have advised that is a longer term aspiration for the program and, given the limited funding for this program, could be considered as a recommendation post implementation and evaluation.

DEECD also administers the *In-Home Support and Home Based Learning Programs*, which focuses on parenting skills as part of early years child support. Aboriginal cooperatives are funded to engage aboriginal workers to improve the home learning environment. Improving parenting skills for preparation for schooling is the focus of these programs, although there is anecdotal evidence that informal efforts to improve parenting and extended family literacy and numeracy is undertaken. There is potential for these types of programs to extend to intergenerational learning.

<sup>19</sup> Early Years Koorie Literacy and Numeracy Program 2014 guidelines, DEECD, p. 8.

The program description from the DEECD website describes the *Home-based Learning program* being for parents/families of children aged 3-5 years and is implemented as an extension of the *In-home Support Program*. There are currently two Home-based Learning programs operating in Victoria, at the Mildura Aboriginal Corporation, Mildura and Swan Hill Aboriginal Health Service, Swan Hill.

The *Home-based Learning program* assists Aboriginal families to provide improved home learning environments for young children and empowers parents as the primary educators of their children in the home. The aim is to maximise the chances of successful kindergarten and early school experiences. The program includes counselling in schooling preparation, assistance to Aboriginal children and families to complement kindergarten using a curriculum framework.

## Parental and Community Engagement Programme (PaCE)

[Responsibility for this programme transferred from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to Prime Minister and Cabinet in September 2013. With the review of Aboriginal support programs and services, the program focus and outcomes have changed to focus more on truancy and attendance performance outcomes. The program description described below refers to the previous incarnation of the program]

A practice profile on the Australian Institute of Family Studies website highlights the operation and outcome of *The Parental and Community Engagement Programme* delivered to the Logan and Ipswich Indigenous Communities in Queensland by BoysTown. (The information provided for the Practice Profile was supplied by the National Manager, Community Engagement & Outreach at BoysTown.)

PaCE provides services and support for parents and families with Indigenous children aged 0 to 19 years and other community members to enhance engagement with education providers and/or early learning services.

An aim of the programme is to enhance the capacity of Indigenous families and communities to support and reinforce children's learning at home as well as:

- engage with schools and education providers in order to support improved educational outcomes for their children
- build strong leadership that supports high expectations of Indigenous students' educational outcomes
- support the establishment, implementation and/or ongoing progress of community-school partnerships.

The Logan PaCE commenced in late 2010 and Ipswich PaCE in early 2011 and were funded until December 2013.

The program coordinators established the Ipswich Elders Education Support Group; provided individual support to families, including accompanying parents to school meetings regarding their children's education; and facilitated small projects that promoted learning while bringing key stakeholder groups together to foster positive relationship building between schools and parents/carers/community.

A critical feature of the program that facilitates positive outcomes for the community is in the skills and attributes of the program co-ordinators. Two Aboriginal candidates were selected as Logan and Ipswich PaCE Co-ordinators. Each PaCE co-ordinator was involved in developing engagement strategies, and both workers led community workshops across their regions to inform residents about the new program, its aims and to identify specific challenges that parents/carers/community members were experiencing in engaging with their children's schools/education provider.

The PaCE program reported the following outcomes between September 2010 and June 2011, as detailed in Boystown's Annual Report 2011:

- engagement with 336 parents and carers
- engagement with 149 community members
- held more than 30 informal events such as home visits and community connections
- undertook a series of community workshops to identify factors that impact on families



- commenced a weekly playgroup, in conjunction with the Benevolent Society in Browns Plains, with 15 parents and 30 children regularly taking part
- assisted with the creation of the Ipswich Elders Education Support Group
- supported the development of a weekly Elders breakfast to engage with young people who are at risk of school suspension
- created a steering committee comprised of local Elders, parents, the Principals at Bundamba Secondary College and Woolridge State High School, BoysTown and government representatives.

(Source: Australian Institute of Australian Studies website)

Discussion with the program manager at BoysTown Queensland provided further information on the outcomes of this program. Overall, the program did focus more on educating parents and communities on the school environment and ensuring interaction occurred outside of disciplinary action from the school. In terms of sustainability, in the Logan community parents did engage in the program and have continued to participate in support groups based at the schools in the region post the program. Through the schools support groups, literacy and numeracy needs of parents have been informally assessed.

In contrast, it was the Ipswich Elders rather than the parents that engaged in the program and connected with student age children. Local history was utilised as a means of creating interest in learning from parents and their children. The Elders Education Support Group has been successful in securing a further 12 months funding under the new PaCE programme guidelines to continue this engagement. It is not clear if the intergenerational learning practices in the community extended to improving literacy and numeracy in the home.

## Australian Nurse Family Partnerships Program

The ANFPP is based on the successful Nurse Family Partnership home visiting model developed in the USA over the last 30 years. The program is an intensive home visiting program aimed at supporting women pregnant with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child and their families. It offers a new approach by providing a structured, sustained program delivered by skilled health professionals. Based on visiting mothers and their families in their own homes, the program starts during (the three month stage of) pregnancy and continues until the child is two years old.

The ANFPP aims to:

- improve health outcomes for women pregnant with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child by helping women engage in good preventative health practices
- support parents to improve their child's health and development
- help parents develop a vision for their own future, including continuing education and finding work.

(Source: Australian Nurse Family Partnerships Program – [www.anfpp.com.au/about](http://www.anfpp.com.au/about))

This program is significant in that it focuses primarily on the mother, in order to support the child. The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress delivers the ANFPP in Alice Springs, NT. A participant in a companion program run by the Bachelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education was featured in the ALA publication *Lifelong & Lifewide, Stories of adult learning* (2013).

# Evaluations

This section summarises the formal evaluations that have been conducted for the following programs highlighted in the previous section:

- Better Beginnings Aboriginal Program
- Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign Pilot Project
- Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters

## Better Beginnings Aboriginal Program (Read To Me – I Love It!)

Edith Cowan University (ECU) has conducted independent longitudinal evaluations of Better Beginnings since 2005. The findings demonstrate that Better Beginnings is having a significant positive impact on early reading practices in Western Australia.

- 85% of parents surveyed reported that they read to their child after receiving the Better Beginnings reading packs (only 14% of these parents reported reading to their child beforehand).
- 88% of parents reported that their confidence in sharing books with their child had increased after being involved in Better Beginnings.
- The average number of books in the home suitable for reading to children increased from 15 to 125.
- Children's library membership increased from 4% to 65%. Parents indicated this had been influenced by Better Beginnings.<sup>20</sup>

The Aboriginal focused program, *Read to Me – I Love It!* (introduced in 2010), has been evaluated to 2013 by ECU. The evaluation was conducted at two sites, a community isolated by social and economic means and a community in a remote setting. At the time of writing, the 2012 evaluation report entitled 'Read to Me I Love It – Evaluation of the Better Beginnings Program for Remote Indigenous Communities' was not yet publicly available.

In conversation with the Project Director for the evaluations at ECU and reviewing the evaluation report, it was confirmed that the program is functioning successfully and is to receive further funding to continue. The philosophy of the program is that it is owned by the communities. Site visits have confirmed involvement by parents, extended families and elders who are actively participating and providing suggestions of refinement and improvement to the program. The program has introduced books in Aboriginal households where they never previously existed. DVDs that contain Aboriginal adults reading stories have also made a strong connection with parents and children. All participants in the program have reported benefit from the program for home literacy practices or see the potential for introducing these practices into Aboriginal households should the program effort and goodwill of service providers and the communities be sustained.

A major insight from the sites visits is the need to sustain the success in engaging communities in home literacy practices. This would be best achieved by better integration of services at the community. It was noted in some instances that the school and adult education centres did not have the Better Beginnings reading resources and that adult literacy workers were not aware of *Read to Me I Love It* program, despite the positive impact it was having on the adult members of the community. Coordination across services would ensure there was ongoing support for adult literacy and numeracy training if a worker was absent or unavailable for some reason (e.g. the adult literacy worker could assist when the playgroup coordinator who would normally deliver the program was unavailable).

<sup>20</sup> State Library of Western Australia, From Little Things Big Things Grow, 2013

## Aboriginal Adult Literacy Campaign Pilot Project

The University of New England (UNE) conducted the final evaluation of the Wilcannia Pilot Project in 2012.

The aim of the pilot was to test the application of a mass adult literacy model to an Aboriginal community to achieve significant change, and to explore if the model could be introduced to other Aboriginal communities.

In terms of the accounts provided in the report by those involved of enthusiasm and acceptance by the community, UNE evaluates the pilot a success. Quantitative analysis of the data provided from the pilot examined if there was a significant change in the literacy rate in the Wilcannia Aboriginal Adult Community.

The target population for the pilot was 40 per cent of the adult population. It was found that 38 per cent of the adult population did participate in the phase 2 (*Yes I Can*) pilot intakes, with 13 per cent of the target population participating until the completion of the classes. On this basis the number of completions reduced low rate literacy in this community by six per cent.

Full scale mass adult literacy campaigns in other countries have achieved outcomes of between 15 and 25 per cent. On this basis UNE concluded that the pilot has not demonstrated that this model can be applied to an Aboriginal community to the same effect. The outcome was still considered a major achievement when the National Aboriginal Adult Literacy Commission reviewed these findings. As a result the Commission initiated two more pilots in the Western NSW region in 2013 to refine the model and to examine whether up-scaling this model to a regional level would improve this result, as recommended by UNE in the report.

## Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations commissioned an evaluation of the HIPPY program in 2011. It was led by Monash University with assistance from the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

The table below provides a summary of the key findings of the evaluation

Evaluation Criteria	Comment
Appropriateness	The evaluation found that HIPPY has a rare combination of evidence-based features that are known to be effective in early childhood parenting programs. The program meets a significant need in Australia, and aligns with and supports three important Australian Government early childhood development priorities and policy agendas.
Effectiveness	The evaluation provides a strong evidence base as to the effectiveness of HIPPY, which sets it apart from most other early childhood parenting programs in Australia. Significant positive impacts were found across a number of important developmental domains and spheres of influence, including the child, the parent, the home learning environment and parents' social connectedness and inclusion.
Efficiency	HIPPY's cost-effectiveness compares very favourably to that of international programs. It was not possible to make Australian comparisons due to the lack of data about Australian programs. The program has achieved good efficiencies and a benefit–cost analysis. <sup>21</sup>  HIPPY with Indigenous Australians shows a return on investment to society of as much as \$2.53 for every dollar spent. This is a conservative estimate, as the paucity of data available in Australia limited what could be included in the modelling. Research about other similar programs indicates it is realistic to estimate a return to society of as much as \$4 for every \$1 spent (Duncan, Ludwig & Magnuson 2007).
HIPPY with Indigenous Australians	HIPPY with Indigenous Australians is promising, with strong reports of positive impacts. Successful strategies to meet the significant challenge of engaging Indigenous families are discussed.
Governance	HIPPY is well managed and governance arrangements are strong and satisfactory. However, based on stakeholder feedback there are opportunities for improvement in the areas of reporting requirements and balance between the needs of all partners within an innovative model of governance involving government and the community sector.

(Source: Liddell, Barnett, Diallo Roost, McEachran, Investing *In Our Future*, 2011 p. vii)

As outlined in the key findings summary, the evaluation criteria assessed the appropriateness and acceptability of the program for and amongst Indigenous Australians through a site case study approach at the five communities that participate in the program.

*HIPPY is clearly working well in some locations and has struggled in others. HIPPY appeared to be most successful in places where the local Indigenous community and community leaders were closely involved (as in Alice Springs) in the ownership and lead-up to the commencement of the program, and where strong relationships existed between the local partner agency delivering HIPPY and other child and family services for Indigenous Australians (as in Pioneer/Mt Isa). In all locations, some modifications were made: nearly all adaptations were undertaken to address the single challenge of successfully engaging with Indigenous parents and children. Centre-based delivery, or delivery at alternative safe places, overcame some difficulties of home visits and providing transport overcame the lack of private or public transport in some locations. Some modification of materials to suit the parents' literacy levels and cultural context may be beneficial. Attracting and retaining excellent staff (tutors and coordinators) is critical for a program built on trusting relationships.*

*With the lessons learnt from this comparative study it is reasonable to say that HIPPY holds significant promise as an appropriate and acceptable program with Indigenous Australians. Many positive reports from participants (parents and coordinators) point to some important benefits to parents, children, families and communities.<sup>22</sup>*

Given these benefits, the findings in the evaluation highlight that this program does not address intergenerational learning to the extent of improving parent and extended family literacy and numeracy

*For many Indigenous parents, English is a second language and they may lack confidence using the HIPPY materials. In such cases, home tutors delivered the program to the children, sometimes in the presence of the parents. The aim is to progressively build the parents' confidence so that they eventually directly work with their child.*

*While the HIPPY materials have been found to be useful in that they provide the parents with something concrete to do with their child, they have also been described as being too 'word dense' and lacking in Indigenous cultural representations. In such instances, tutors would describe the activities, sometimes in the relevant Aboriginal language, and the parent would learn the activity rather than read it. The materials could also be adapted to incorporate other familiar Indigenous literacy and numeracy contexts such as stories, songs and other cultural activities.<sup>23</sup>*

<sup>22</sup> Liddell, Barnett, Diallo Roost, McEachran, *Investing In Our Future*, DEEWR August 2011 p. 108.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid p. 106.

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