Developing Partnerships: The home, school and community interface

VOLUME 1

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

1. Background Information

1. 1 Introduction

The purpose of this project was to examine how the language and school literacy learning of students from specific target groups is influenced by support within their home and community environment as well as their parent, caregiver or tutor's involvement in their literacy learning. The study sought to consider initiatives situated within a variety of community contexts designed to support school literacy learning through hoem support. These contexts included schools, After School Care, community libraries, Homework Centres, and a variety of community centres.

The research was funded by the Department of Employment, Education and Training under the Australian Language and Literacy Policy. The project was one of 5 projects funded as competitive research grants in the Children's Literacy component.

1.2 Objectives

The objectives as stated in the revised submission funded by DEET[1] were as follows.

2.1 *To conduct a detailed mapping exercise of current parent language and literacy initiatives in Australia in the middle years of schooling.* [2]

This objective sought to address the following questions:

Who devised the program?
What is the content of the program?
To what extent does the program acknowledge and support the cultural practices of the target groups?
What teaching learning processes are used in the program?
Who initiated the program?
How do parents become involved in the program?
To what extent are parents involved in the choice and development of content and learning processes?
For whom is the program designed?
To what extent does the program address the specific needs of parents, caregivers, community tutors and children in the following target groups:

non English speaking background;
people with disabilities or learning difficulties;
socio-economically 'disadvantaged';
geographically disadvantaged?

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[1] In our original submission we had requested additional funds to develop and evaluate programs as an outcome of our initial investigations. This extra funding was not available necessitating a revised set of objectives.

[2] The DEET brief interpeted the "middle years" of schooling as grades 3 to 6 (upper primary school). However, due to the fact that many initiatives are not simply targetted at these grades our requests for submissions did not specifyc specific grade levels. As a result, our report adresses initiatives that focussed on children in the primary years of schooling and their families. This decision has also been taken in part due to the funding of a second DEET project under the Adult Literacy initiatives titled *Supporting the development of intergenerational literacy* (Toomey, Cairney, McKenna & Alfred).

What evidence is there that the programs have had an impact on children, parents, caregivers, home tutors and schools?

2.2 *To identify how the language and literacy of students in the middle years of schooling is influenced by the culture of the home and community for identified groups in the following categories*:

    non English speaking background;
    people with disabilities or learning difficulties;
    socio-economically 'disadvantaged';
    geographically disadvantaged?

This detailed qualitative analysis was planned in order to consider the following questions:

    How do parents/caregivers, community staff employed in centres and home tutors interact with children as they engage with literacy?
    What resources are provided in the home or community centre that promote English (and non-English) language and literacy learning?
    How much time is devoted to shared language and literacy learning in the home?
    How often do parents/caregivers use other community resources that promote language and literacy?
    How do parents/caregivers participate in their children's schooling outside the home?
    What opportunities are provided by schools for the involvement of parents in schooling?
    What programs, advice or resources are provided by schools for the ongoing education of parents?

2.3 *To develop guidelines that can be used to address the specific language and literacy needs of all of identified target groups in the middle years of schooling*

This was planned to include:

    a framework for the development of specific parent/care giver involvement programs;
    examples of programs and initiatives that have addressed the specific needs of particular target groups;
    a detailed description of current programs and initiatives available in Australia.

1.3 Basic procedures and plan of the research project

This project was conducted in three main phases:

Phase One - Description of existing provisions

• This involved a detailed literature search as preparation for the major study.
• A public call was also given for information on existing programs and initiatives across Australia relevant to the middle years of schooling.
• Visits were made to specific sites identified for further study of particular programs concerned with specific target groups.
• The programs currently in use throughout Australia were described.

Phase Two - Detailed study of target groups

The second stage of the project involved a detailed qualitative description of specific communities in a number of target groups. This required the following steps:

• The identification of specific community groups and contexts.
• Visits to communities to interview parents, caregivers, home tutors and teachers.
• Completion of representative case studies of families and institutions.
• Completion of a survey of teachers, caregivers, community workers and tutors concerning their views on parent involvement, the strategies they employ to involve parents and their understanding of the communities in which they are involved.
• Completion of contextual case studies for specific program initiatives.

Phase Three

This consisted of the completion of data analysis and preparation of the final report (of which this volume is part) consisting of a:

• detailed description of current programs and initiatives available in Australia.
• detailed description of the roles that adults play in children's learning within all target groups and contexts identified, including specific case studies and broad qualitative and quantitative analysis of all data;
• framework for the development of specific parent/caregiver and community worker programs.

1.4 Timetable of tasks

The project was designed to be completed in 12 months according to the following timeline:

Phase One - Description of existing provisions (February- June, 1994)

• Detailed literature search as preparation for the major study	February, 1994
• Public call for information on existing programs and initiatives across Australia	Feb-Mar, 1994
• Visits to specific sites identified for further study of particular programs	Apr-Jun, 1994
• Completion of draft description of existing programs	July, 1994

Phase Two - Detailed study of target groups (August-November, 1994)

• Identification of specific community groups	July, 1994
• Visits to communities to interview parents, caregivers, and teachers	Aug-Sept, 1994
• Completion of representative case studies of families	September, 1994
• Completion of a survey of teachers, care givers and community tutors	Sept-Oct, 1994
• Completion of institutional case studies of 3 volume report	November, 1994

Phase Three (December, 1994 - March, 1995)

• Completion of data analysis and preparation of final report   Dec 1994 to Mar 1995

1.5 Advisory Committee

The work of the project team was suported by an Advisory Committee consisting of academics and practitioners with relevant expertise, represenatives of key educational authorities and interest groups, and representatives of DEET. The purposes of this committee were to support the work of the team by offering ongoing advice, responding to draft material and meeting regularly to monitor the project. The committee met on 4 occasions during the life of the project. Its members were as follows:

Irlande Alfred, National Languages & Literacy Institute of Australia.
Anne Badenhop, University of Sydney.
Maureen Cashman, Department of Employment, Education and Training.
Paul Croker, Department of Employment, Education and Training.
Jan Heyworth, St John's Primary School, Riverstone NSW.
Murray Kimber, Department of Employment, Education and Training.
Josephine Lonergan, Australian Parents Council.
Christine Ludwig, Queensland Department of Education.
Marion Meiers, Australian Literacy Federation.
Maureen Morriss, Australian Literacy Federation.
Brenda Parkes, Griffith University QLD.
Alan Rice, NSW Department of School Education.
Brian Rout, Queensland Department of Education.
Perelle Scales, Department of Employment, Education and Training.

1.6 Outline of the final report

The final report of this project is organised in 3 volumes. Volume 1 is a summary of the project including its methods and procedures, key findings and recommendations and an outline of a framework for the development and evaluation of Family Literacy[3] initiatives.   Volume 2 is a comprehensive report of our project including a full review of the literature, methodology, our findings, recommendations and conclusions, a framework for evaluating and developing family literacy initiatives, a complete list of references and all appendices. Volume 3 is a detailed database of submissions made to this project. This resource is also available on computer disk if required.

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[3] We chose to use the term Family Literacy throughout this report because of its increasing use and acceptance. This term is defined more fully in the next section of this report, but it is used broadly to cover initiatives designed to support literacy practices of family members at home and school.

2. A Review of Research Concerning Family Literacy [4]

2.1 What is the relationship of Family Literacy to schooling?

Parent involvement in children's education is obviously an important element in effective schooling (Epstein, 1983; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). There appears to be a high positive correlation between parent knowledge, beliefs, and interactive styles, with children's school achievement (see Schaefer, 1991 for a detailed review). Differences in family backgrounds appear to account for a large share of variance in student achievement including literacy. In fact it has been suggested, for example, that parent help with reading is a better predictor of success in reading than the child's intelligence (Hewison & Tizard, 1980). Not surprisingly, many researchers and teachers have attempted to explore the links between home and school achievement. One of the outcomes of this investigation has been the development of a variety of family literacy initiatives.

Attempts to explain the relationship of family literacy practices to schooling have varied, but it is obvious that a number reflect deficit models, and are based on the assumption that some children receive 'good' or 'appropriate' preparation for schooling, while others receive 'poor' or 'inappropriate' preparation. This view has been criticised because of its failure to recognise that schooling is a cultural practice (Auerbach, 1989). What it ignores, is the fact that much of the variability of student achievement in school reflects discrepancies that exist between school resources and instructional methods, and the cultural practices of the home (Au & Kawakami, 1984; Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1983; Moll, 1988).

As a result, many schools and community groups have focused attention on the development of more effective relationships between schools and their communities. While there are many bases for such collaboration (see Cairney & Munsie, 1992a), literacy has often been used as a vehicle for facilitating parent involvement, and it has also been the focus of many parent support programs because of its presumed importance in school learning. In the past ten years this has been associated with the development of a new set of terms to describe this literacy work. These terms have included *Parent Literacy, Parent Involvement*, *Intergenerational Literacy*, and *Community Literacy*.

The most commonly used terms in current usage are *Family Literacy, Community Literacy* and *Intergenerational Literacy*. All are useful and mean slightly different things. Implicit within each is a definition of literacy that goes well beyond that of literacy as a unitary skill. Rather, each assumes that literacy is a social practice which has specific manifestations in different contexts (Luke, 1993; Welch & Freebody, 1993; Gee, 1990). Our literacy definitions are inevitably reflective of a specific ideology, and as a consequence, arbitrarily advantage some while disadvantaging others (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lankshear & Lawler, 1987; Street, 1984). To understand literacy fully we need to understand the groups and institutions through which we are socialised into specific literacy practices (Bruner, 1986; Gee, 1990).

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[4] Much of this review is based on two papers written by Trevor Cairney, Developing Parent Partnerships in Secondary Literacy Learning (*Journal of Reading*, April, 1995), and Family Literacy: Moving towards new partnerships in education (*Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1994).

The terms *Family Literacy* and *Community Literacy* are used to describe (respectively) literacy practices which occur in either a family or community context (Cairney, 1994). *Intergenerational Literacy* is a term used to describe the process by which the literacy practices of one generation influence the literacy practices of another (Cairney, 1994). This term has considerable overlap in its usage with Family Literacy. Unlike the label Family Literacy it avoids the difficulty of defining the family unit, and provides for the possibility of adults other than members of the same family having an influence on the literacy of others. This of course allows for consideration of the influence of non-family members such as friends, social workers, childcare staff and after school care workers. The recognition of this important process of intergenerational sharing of literacy practices has led some educators to focus on the development of adults' literacy practices as a means to enhance the literacy development of the children in their care. [5]

2.2 What form have Family Literacy initiatives taken in the UK, North America and Australia?

Briggs and Potter (1990) point out that parent involvement programs are often shallow, ineffectual, confusing, and frustrating to both parents and teachers. As a result, evidence of significant outcomes is difficult to find in the literature. However, while some individual programs have failed, the importance of parental participation in education is not to be doubted, Walberg (1984, cited in Prater, 1994) concluded from a review of twenty-nine controlled studies on school-parent programs, that family participation was twice as predictive of academic learning as family socioeconomic status.

Some of the most significant early initiatives in this area occurred in the United Kingdom. The Plowden report (Department of Education and Science, 1967) was one of a number of factors which probably influenced the significant number of initiatives. This report argued strongly for the concept of partnership between home and school. Many of the early programs focused on the need to offer parents a limited range of reading strategies to use with their children. One of the most commonly used was the Paired Reading technique. This simple technique was first designed by Morgan (1976) and was later refined by Tizard, Schofield and Hewison (1982) Topping & Wolfendale (1985). Some more recent programs in Australia have also utilised this strategy.

A number of the most successful British programs were designed for parents whose children experienced reading problems. While some of the programs showed encouraging outcomes, there was a degree of inconsistency. For example, the Haringey Reading Project found that some of the children whose parents were involved in their program made significant gains in reading achievement (irrespective of reading ability), while others made little (Tizard, Schofield, & Hewison; 1982).

In the United States there have been numerous attempts to design programs that aim to involve parents more fully in their children's literacy learning. Nickse (1993) has estimated that there are more than 500 programs in existence in the USA. However, she points out that evidence concerning their effectiveness is modest. Notable recent programs include Project FLAME (Shanahan & Rodriguez-Brown, 1993), the initiatives of the Illinois Literacy Resource Development Center (ILRDC, 1990), and Schools Reaching Out, SRO (Jackson, Krasnow & Seeley, 1994). In contrast with many of the early parent literacy programs, each of these programs has attempted to develop a sense of partnership with parents and communities. In each case, an attempt has been made to recognise the significant cultural differences between communities, and to adapt programs accordingly. For example, project FLAME has been designed for Mexican American and Puerto Rican families, and involves components in "parents

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[5] Intergenerational literacy is the focus of another DEET project *titled Supporting the Development of Intergenerational Literacy,* and hence is not considered in great detail within this report.

as teachers", adult learning, summer institutes and community experiences. Programs like this have increasingly begun to recognise that relationships between home and school achievement are complex, and hence require initiatives that do more than simply offering parents information.

Support services have also been crucial to the success of family literacy programs, particularly in the USA. Some programs have provided transport, child care, refreshments and take home materials such as books. These initiatives have often proved to be costly in terms of time, effort and money. They have also been seen by some as being tangential to the purpose of the program. A large volume of anecdotal evidence from participants, however, indicates that in many cases such support services are essential to allow the regular involvement of many participants, itself a prerequisite for success. Despite these support services, some programs have been beset by high drop-out rates and sporadic attendance. In response to this, several programs in the USA have instigated incentive schemes. These have included free outings, providing free materials, offering certificates for completion, as well as the more traditional rewards of praise and encouragement.

The vast majority of programs implemented in Australia to date seem to concentrate on enhancing literacy skills used in a school context. Many initiatives, however, acknowledge explicitly or implicitly the importance of designing a program which is sensitive to the participants' cultural and linguistic background. One Australian program encountered so far which seems to take a step in this direction, was initiated at Cringila Public School, near Port Kembla in NSW. The school has a high proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds. As part of International Literacy Year, the school developed a program involving parents producing stories in their home languages, to be compiled and published in book form, with illustrations from the school's pupils.

However, in Australia a number of programs have been used continuously at a range of sites for more prolonged periods of time. One example is the implementation in New South Wales and the Northern Territory of the *Parents as Teachers* program developed in the United States for parents of preschool children. Other major State curriculum initiatives have included a parent component, (e.g. the First Steps program developed in Western Australia) which have been introduced system wide.

A number of other programs are focused very much on the needs of children who have experienced literacy difficulty. One of the best known examples of this type is the *Parent Tutors Program* , which was developed by Max Kemp (1989) through the Schools and Community Centre of the University of Canberra. The program is made up of ten seminars designed to give parents an understanding of how learning is affected by different conditions and methods of teaching. The program is for children aged 7 to 15 years who have been referred to the Centre for special help with literacy. The parents are trained to be tutors in the home.

Two other programs that have been used widely in Australia over the last five years are the *Talk to a Literacy Learner (TTALL)* and *Effective Partners in Secondary Literacy Learning (EPISLL)* programs (Cairney, In Press; Cairney & Munsie, 1992b & 1993b). These quite ambitious programs were designed to focus on parents but with the aim of involving teachers, students and their parents in a partnership that would help students cope more effectively with the literacy demands of schooling. The TTALL program was designed to involve parents more closely in the literacy development of their preschool and primary school children. It attempts to achieve this through an eight week series of sixteen two hour interactive workshops, each of which is integrated with observation of literacy learners, classroom visits, practice of strategies, and a variety of home tasks. The EPISLL program was an outgrowth of the TTALL program and is designed for parents of secondary aged children. It consists of eleven two hour sessions that cover topics as diverse as reading and writing across the curriculum, learning,

study, coping with teenagers, research work, and using resources. This program was developed at the request of parents who had been part of the TTALL program but who wanted more help with the support of their secondary school children. Parents were involved at every stage of the development and implementation of this project. Like the TTALL project it has led to a program which is now being used in many schools. Both programs have been evaluated and have been shown to have positive outcomes for parents, students, teachers and schools (Cairney & Munsie, 1992a; 1993a; In press).

A number of other initiatives in Australia have been focused on specific parent target groups. For example, the *Parents as Tutors* program (Ministry of Education and Training, Victoria) was developed for children and parents in Disadvantaged Schools as a joint initiative of the Inner City Support Centre, DSP and the Brash Foundation. It aims to assist parents to support their children. It consists of a six week program designed to develop skills and strategies in the areas of reading and writing, and offers parents practical strategies for working with children at home. It is designed for parents with children in the preschool and primary years.

2.3 Evaluation of Family Literacy Programs

In spite of the many initiatives in recent years there has been little formal evaluation of these programs. Evaluation is an issue which has been an ongoing concern for participants, teachers, funding bodies and the community alike. Among the problems associated with assessment of programs is the difficulty of evaluating the achievement of loosely articulated or broadly defined goals. Where achievement tests have been conducted (many Australian programs, being new, are yet to be evaluated), these tests have often indicated a mixture of results in terms of literacy performance. Some students have improved markedly from the experience in their family literacy program, the proportion of these students varying according to the program. By the same token, it must be remembered that the participating groups are often families and schools separated by barriers of language, culture, fear and ignorance, to name a few. Lack of success may be less of a reflection on the program itself, than an indicator of the considerable challenge for some participants attempting to support literacy in what is a second language for them .

However, there is wealth of anecdotal evidence available that suggests that these programs have many positive benefits including: evidence of participants' enjoyment of the activities; better rapport between school and community; improved attitudes on the part of students; increased participation in school activities by parents; lower absenteeism rates; and fewer instances of antisocial behaviour on the part of students. The latter may reflect changes in the attitude of those concerned, and may in turn foster continued changes in attitude, challenging some teachers', parents' and students' preconceptions of each other. This is supported by frequent testimonies from students who describe their involvement with literacy programs as revolutionary and life-changing, because of their enhanced literacy skills, improved family relationships, and increased self-esteem (see Cairney & Munsie, 1993a; 1995).

Two Australian programs that have been fully evaluated are the TTALL (Cairney & Munsie, 1992b) and EPISLL (Cairney & Munsie, 1993b) programs. As mentioned above, both programs have been shown to produce positive outcomes for parents, students, teachers and schools (Cairney & Munsie, 1992a; 1993a; 1995). Parents who completed these programs gained knowledge about literacy and schooling and grew in confidence. As well children devloped more positive attitudes to literacy and learning and showed some performance gains in language and literacy (see Cairney & Munsie, 1995 and Cairney, In Press for more details). Each of these programs also had a positive influence on the schools and their teachers and were seen by all participants as successful.

While there are isolated instances of the evaluation of programs, it is clear that most are evaluated only anecdotally. While this anecdotal evidence is strong and consistently positive, much more detailed and rigorous long-term evaluation needs to be conducted.

2.4 How do we develop programs that facilitate partnership?

The above brief description of some of the programs that have been implemented in Australia and overseas should give some sense of the variety of initiatives that have taken place. However, there is a sense in which many of the better known programs are of a similar type. Typically, they have been initiated by schools, researchers or educational curriculum experts and have been based very much within the school. Most have led to the development of a package or program which can then be replicated at other sites. Nevertheless, as Cairney & Munsie (1992a) point out, Family Literacy initiatives can take many forms.

There have been numerous attempts to describe the diversity of parent initiatives (see Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Petit; 1980; Rasinski and Fredericks, 1989) and even Family Literacy. However, Cairney (1991) and Cairney and Munsie, (1992a) have suggested that a more useful way to describe programs that have been attempted, may be to assess each project on a number of key variables, with the assumption being that on each of these there will be a continuum ranging from one extreme to another. For example, Cairney (1991) suggested that four variables which might be used are:

Content - What information is shared? What is the focus of group discussions, demonstrations, home tasks and so on? What is the stated purpose of the content?
Process - How is information shared? Who acts as the facilitator or leader for any program and how does this person structure opportunities for discussion, observation etc?
Source - Who has initiated the involvement? Was it a parent, school, community, or government initiative?
Control - Who is in control of the program? Where is the program located (home, school, community building)? How do parents become involved in programs (chosen, selected, parent initiative)?

It would appear that some schools and government agencies adopt very narrow definitions of parent involvement, which seek primarily to determine what parents can do for teachers, or how schools can make parents 'better' at their role in the home, rather than how schools and parents can develop close relationships of mutual support and trust. But a recurring theme in the recent literature is that parents must be viewed as equal partners, and that there must be a reciprocal relationship. It has been argued that we need to go beyond token involvement and recognise the vital role that parents play in education (Cairney & Munsie, 1992a; 1995). Harry (1992) argues that such parent initiatives must forge collaborative relationships that create mutual understanding between parents and teachers - a "posture of reciprocity" - and which are associated with a shift from the school to parents and the community.

In essence, what some of these educators are arguing for is not the transmission of knowledge from schools to parents and their children, but rather a process of reaching mutual consensus between the partners. This process of reaching shared understanding is what Vygotsky called "intersubjectivity" (1978). It involves a shared focus of attention and mutual understanding of any joint activity.   Fitzgerald and Goncu (In press) suggest that this requires reaching agreement on the selection of activities, their goals, and plans for reaching the goals. Programs that are imposed by teachers on communities "for their own good" obviously fail to meet the conditions necessary for intersubjectivity to occur.   Such programs frequently end with no appreciable impact on teachers and the school, and little long term benefit for parents and their children.

One of the most critical issues facing program designers is how does one respond to the cultural mismatches of home and school which appear to be foundational to much of the variation in school literacy achievement? As Lareau (1991) asks, should one focus on developing initiatives that provide parents with the cultural practices that enable them to cope with the limited practices of the school, or do as Delgado-Gaitan, (1992) suggests, find ways to help schools recognise the cultural practices of the home and community and build effective communication between these parties? As suggested earlier in this chapter, the answer is probably both, but the starting point should first be to develop a partnership with parents. If the mismatch between home and school literacy practices does in fact make it more difficult for some students to succeed at school, then any strategy that counteracts such mismatches is difficult to reject.

Teachers and parents do need to understand the way each defines, values and uses literacy as part of cultural practices. Such mutual understanding offers the potential for schooling to be adjusted to meet the needs of families. As well, it offers parents the opportunity to observe and understand the literacy of schooling, a literacy which ultimately empowers individuals to take their place in society.

In the rest of this report we describe our attempt both to describe the various Family and Community Literacy initiatives in Australia. We also attempt to make sense of the underlying assumptions and purposes of these programs and address the questions outlined in the introduction to this volume which have shaped our research. However, before providing a detailed description of our findings we need first to describe how we actually went about the process of collecting information on the various initiatives in operation in Australia.

3. Methodology

The methodology for this project was influenced strongly by the brief that was given for the project. Essentially, we were asked to provide a detailed description of current family literacy work. This necessitated a variety of largely qualitative approaches to data collection. The project was conducted in three phases which corresponded to the three detailed objectives identified in the original submission (see section 1).

Phase 1 -*To conduct a detailed mapping exercise of current family language and literacy initiatives in Australia.*

Phase 2 - *To identify how the language and literacy of students in the middle to upper primary years of schooling is influenced by the culture of the home and community for identified groups in specified categories.*

Phase 3 - *To develop guidelines that can be used to address the specific language and literacy needs of all identified target groups in the middle to upper primary years of schooling.*

3.1 Phase 1

The objective of this phase of the research was to obtain information about a wide range of family or community literacy initiatives currently in operation in Australia.
For the purposes of the mapping exercise, family and community literacy initiatives were defined as any programs or initiatives in which adults (other than school-based teachers) participated in literacy-related activities which aimed to enhance the literacy learning of school-aged children (see section 2 for a fuller discussion). Using this definition, a variety of programs were seen as relevant. These included: parent education programs; employed tutors working with individual children; homework assistance at after school care centres; and speech pathologists' efforts to guide parents in improving children's phonemic awareness.

Having defined our field for the purposes of contacting possible informants, our next task was to identify precisely what information we were seeking. A series of questions twenty two questions were deveoped which were organised into five categories of information. From these, a Program Survey was developed for distribution to potential informants (full details are provided in volume 2). Apart from demographic information, the survey sought responses to the following:

> **Purpose:** *What is the purpose of the program and in what context is it used? What is the background to the development of the program?*

> **Target group(s):** *For whom is the program designed? In what ways are they involved in the program? Does the program specifically target adults and/or children from any of the following groups?*

> *non English speaking background*
> *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [6]*
> *people with disabilities or learning difficulties*
> *socio-economically 'disadvantaged'*
> *geographically isolated*

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[6] While Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander communities were removed from our original research plan when funding was reduced we found that since Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were present in many of the programs examined that this target group could still be considered indirectly.

In what ways does the program target the specific needs of the participant groups?

Personnel: *Who initiated, devised, implemented the program? What skills do these people bring and/or how were they trained for the program?*

Content: *Outline the content of the program and the teaching learning processes used. Are any special provisions made for participants (eg. child care)?*

Evaluation: *What effect has the program had? Has any attempt been made to formally evaluate the program? If so, describe the evaluation procedures used and outcomes achieved.*

Data Collection Strategies

In order to obtain information about as many parent or community literacy programs as possible, a number of strategies were employed. Table 3.1 presents a summary of these strategies, and the response generated by each.

In addition to the advertising, a press release setting out the purpose of the research and inviting response was sent to a number of other newspapers, as well as major radio and television stations. As a result of this press release, articles appeared in several regional newspapers and the Project Director was interviewed for a subsequent news broadcast on Radio National.

Table 3.1: Mapping current parent/community literacy programs or initiatives.

Strategy employed	Response
1. Advertisement placed in three newspapers: *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*. (26 March, 1994) Development of a brief for recording information obtained as a result of calls received.	Approximately 60 telephone calls from individuals or representatives of organisations. Many respondents subsequently sent further details of their programs and/or names and phone numbers of other appropriate people for us to contact.
2. Press release sent to major newspapers, radio and television stations.	Articles appeared in a number of local newspapers. Professor Cairney was interviewed on ABC radio.
3. Advertisement placed in major newspapers in Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart, Perth, Darwin and Canberra. (7 May, 1994)	Approximately 45 telephone calls from individuals or representatives of organisations. Many of these later sent more detailed information.

4. Direct contact with major organisations, government departments, institutions, school systems, etc.	Approximately 300 calls made to organisations / institutions.
NB List of organisations, government departments, institutions, and school systems etc. obtained from: a) suggestions from Advisory Committee b) suggestions from people who phoned with information about programs c) the Literacy Challenge d) telephone directories	Letters of information and Program Surveys sent to approximately 140 of these. In addition, copies of media release and advertisement sent to approximately 75 organisations/institutions for wider distribution through newsletters, etc.

Once contact was made with respondents, as a result of either advertisements or direct communication, the following procedure was adopted:

   i) as much information as possible, about the family or community literacy initiative in which the respondent was involved, was recorded during the initial telephone call.
   ii) respondents were asked to complete the Program Survey.
   iii) respondents were asked to provide written documentation of their program if any was available.
   iv) the Information Sheet and Program Survey were sent to each respondent, along with a letter of thanks for their contribution to the research.
   v) respondents who returned the Program Survey and/or written documentation of their program were sent a written acknowledgment that the information had been received.

Upon receipt of information from respondents (over 380 responses were received), details of the family or community literacy initiative in which they were involved were added to the database of program information. Information concerning over two hundred and fifty programs or initiatives are included in the database which is provided in full as volume 3 of this report (it is also available in disk form from the Director of the Project).

3.2 Phase 2

Site Visits

During Phase 2 of the project, members of the research team conducted visits to a number of programs for which information had been received. The purpose of the site visits was to gain more detailed information about specific programs, particularly the set of dimensions identified for each of the key variables Source, Content, Process and Control. The focus of the visits was to obtain information not provided in responses to the Program Survey and/or program materials provided by respondents. The visits were necessary so that the perceptions of various participants could be given equal status and consideration.

Identification of Sites for Further Study

The total pool of programs or initiatives considered for possible site visits comprised all those for which information had been received by the project team. Following an initial culling of sites due to limited size and the failure to address the middle years of

schooling, the remaining programs and initiatives were classified according to two criteria: the predominant target group, and the context in which the program operates. The context of each program was first classified as either school-based or non school-based. School-based programs were then classified, on the basis of information received from respondents, as involving in-school help, parent support, or collaborative effort. Non school-based programs were further classified according to the specific learning context in which they operate: home-based, library, homework centre, and community centre or TAFE college. Table 3.2 represents this classification system and indicates the sites selected for further study within each context. Numbers next to each site correspond to the reference numbers for specific programs in the database.

Table 3.2 Selection of sites for Phase 2 of the project

Procedures for Site Visits

Having determined the feasibility of visits to particular sites, the following procedures were adopted when organising and conducting visits:

i)   A letter was sent to the relevant central authority to obtain permission to conduct the case study (if necessary).
ii)   A telephone call was made to the program coordinator to make arrangements for the site visit (suitable times, who was to be involved, what would be observed, etc).
iii) A follow-up letter was sent to the program coordinator setting out details of the visit (as agreed) and including a copy of the Coordinator Questionnaire (see Appendix C) which sought information which would not be included in the Coordinator Interview Schedule.
iv)   Site visits involved:
    a)   structured interview with the program coordinator;
    b)   structured interviews with selected individual participants (adults and children);
    c)   semi-structured interviews (individual or group) with other staff members;
    d)   semi-structured group interviews with other participants (adults and children);
    e)   observation of program sessions (if possible), including classes, workshops, participant activities, etc;
    f)   home visits to individual participant families (if appropriate).
v)   A follow-up letter was sent to the program coordinator and participant families, thanking them for their participation.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Table 3.3 presents a summary of the data collection strategies employed in this phase of the research, and the data analysis procedures followed. The procedures employed were predominantly interviews, non-participant observation and surveys. Structured field notes were compiled and sessions were recorded on audio-tape. Permission was sought and obtained from the Coordinator/Facilitator and all participants in these sessions. Some artefacts, in the form of program materials used in sessions, were also collected. Table 3.4 presents a summary of data collected during site visits to selected programs.
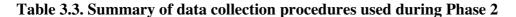
Table 3.3. Summary of data collection procedures used during Phase 2

Table 3.4 Summary of forms of data collected during Phase 2

Following the completion of all data collection, a preliminary analysis of data was conducted by four members of the research team. A number of significant issues were identified. Through repeated readings of the data and the use of the constant comparative method these issues were refined and then explored in further detail utilising axial and selective coding (see Strauss, 1987). Volume 2 of this report contains

a full discussion of the issues identified, as well as explanations and examples drawn from the data.

3.3 Family Case Studies

Detailed case studies of eleven families were conducted during Phase 2 of this project (outlined fully in volume 2). The purpose of the family case studies was to investigate ways in which the language and literacy learning of students in the middle primary years of schooling is influenced by the culture of the home and community.

For the purposes of this investigation, we defined the "culture of the home" as being a complex interweaving of:

>   the social, economic and educational background of family members;
>   the dominant language and literacy practices of the family;
>   the availability and use of resources (both material and social) that support language and literacy learning;
>   the nature and patterns of interaction between various family members (adult-adult, adult-child, and child-child);
>   family members' perceptions and beliefs about language, literacy, the role of the family, the role of the school, educational aspirations, etc;
>   family members' use of time and involvement in literacy activities.

Family case studies were drawn from diverse communities, and included a high proportion of families from one or more of the target groups (i.e. NESB, socio-economically disadvantaged, children with disabilities or learning difficulties, geographically isolated) which were a major concern of the study. Each family included at least one child in the middle to upper primary years of schooling at the time of data collection.

Case studies were from the following areas:

- Three case studies in the Sydney metropolitan area.
- Three case studies in regional NSW.
- Four family case studies were conducted in a large city in Tasmania.
- One family in remote north-west NSW.

The family literacy initiatives experienced by these families were located in the following contexts:

- A Family Learning Centre in the Western Suburbs of Sydney, serving socio-economically disadvantaged families, as well as a large proportion of NESB families and a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- A Special Education Support Centre on the outskirts of the Sydney metropolitan area, serving children with disabilities or learning difficulties.
- An inner-suburban school in a large Tasmanian city with a high proportion of socio-economically disadvantaged families, as well as a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- A School of Distance Education in NSW, serving geographically isolated families.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Tables 3.5 and 3.6 present summaries of the data collection strategies employed in conducting home and school visits respectively in this phase of the research, and the data analysis procedures followed. Two home visits were made to each family, as well as one full day observation in the classroom of each case study child. Interviews were conducted with one or both parents, with students, classroom teachers and school

Principals. In five families, children were observed interacting with their parent(s) at home as well as with their teacher(s) at school. In two families, children were observed interacting with their tutor at the Family Learning Centre. Inventories of resources for supporting language and literacy development were compiled for homes and schools.

As Tables 3.5. and 3.6 show the major data colection strategies employed were interviews, non-participant observation, audio recording of parent sessions. Detailed field notes were kept and relevant artefacts were collected. Using these data profiles of case study families, and descriptions of schools attended by case study children were developed.

A full description of procedures and the data obtained is available in volume 2 of this report. The next section of this volume contains the key findings and recommendations from our research.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The major task of this project was to conduct a detailed mapping of current family and community literacy initiatives in Australia. In this process, we have attempted to describe the diversity inherent in such programs, and to identify the major variables which shape the development of individual programs. We have gathered data on approximately 260 programs, and visited 31 of these to collect more comprehensive information and to interview many of those people who were directly involved. Further information provided by individuals and organisations not currently running family literacy programs, but involved in children's literacy learning in myriad ways, brought the total number of respondents to over 380. While it cannot be claimed that this has resulted in a complete mapping of all family and community literacy programs currently operating in Australia, we are confident that it is a large and representative cross-section of such programs. Every state in Australia is represented, as is the full range of educational contexts and systems, community groups and school and family support agencies.

In addition, we have sought to identify ways in which the culture of the home and community influences children's literacy learning in a variety of contexts. We have conducted extensive interviews with and observations of 11 families, including families from remote regions, major cities and regional centres. These families were associated with the following types of family literacy support services:

- A Family Learning Centre in the Western Suburbs of Sydney, serving socio-economically disadvantaged families, as well as a large proportion of NESB families and a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

- A Special Education Support Centre on the outskirts of the Sydney metropolitan area, serving children with disabilities or learning difficulties.

- An inner-suburban school in a large Tasmanian city with a high proportion of socio-economically disadvantaged families, as well as a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

- A School of Distance Education in NSW, serving geographically isolated families.

In this section we summarise the major findings of this project and offer our conclusions and recommendations. In doing so, we focus on three distinct areas: current Family and Community Literacy initiatives in Australia; the development of programs; and the future of Family Literacy in Australia.

4.4 Family and Community Literacy in Australia

Value of family literacy programs

From the evidence of our research, there can be little doubt that family and community involvement in children's literacy learning is potentially of great value. Both formal and informal evaluation of existing programs have yielded evidence to support the belief that family and community literacy programs contribute to improved literacy outcomes for large numbers of children. Our findings support the claims of other researchers who suggest that parent involvement in children's education is an important element in effective schooling (Epstein, 1983; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991) and that there is a positive correlation between family literacy and cultural practices children's school achievement (see Schaefer, 1991). While we are unable to say precisely to what extent mismatches between the literacy practices of home and school contribute to or impede school literacy learning and success (this was not the purpose of this project) there appears strong evidence to support the claims of researchers (e.g. Gee, 1990; Lankshear &

Lawler, 1987; Street, 1984) that such a relationship exists. Our case studies in particular, show why parental help with reading is perhaps a better predictor of success in reading than the child's intelligence (as claimed by Hewison & Tizard, 1980). When the goals and practices of parents are in line those of the school problems seem to be reduced and achievement optimised.

Of course one of the challenges inherent within statements like the last one above is what do we do about this. The solution is not to view some families as somehow in deficit and hence to institute 'remedial' action (as Auerbach, 1989 has pointed out). Rather, there seems a strong case for the development of closer partnerships between home and school which enable teachers to gain insights into the literacy practices of their children's families and hence change their practices at school to optimise all children's chances of success. As well, as Cairney (1994) points, such partnerships will permit families to gain a greater insight into the literacy practices of schooling and thus make choices concerning the forms of support they will offer their children at home.

Nature of partnership: Expanding perceptions of involvement

Our investigations revealed that terms such as 'parent participation', 'parental involvement' and 'home-school partnership' are widely used, but mean different things to different people. As our overview of initiatives in Australia (see chapter 4) shows there is great diversity in programs in terms of specific content and practices, but there is less diversity in terms of control of these programs. As our findings indicate, 76.3% of all programs were initiated by schools, while only 10.3% were initiated by community groups. What is noticeable about many programs is that forms of involvement in children's literacy learning are often very narrowly defined. For example, for some "involvement" means attending school to support the teacher's agenda (e.g. helping with paired reading), while for many others it means supporting your child at home (often in addition to helping at school) with homework, reading, spelling and some writing utilising a limited range of literacy practices (e.g. reading to or listening to children, practising spelling words etc).

The high level of involvement of schools in family literacy work is testimony to the commitment of teachers to activities which could be argued to be peripheral to teaching. This of course is not the case, the need for a strong partnership between school and home is well established and has obvious benefits for teachers, parents and children. It needs also to be pointed out that many of the programs initiated by schools or located at schools have had a significant impact on literacy outcomes for large numbers of children (see for example Cairney & Munsie, 1995a). However, it is apparent that some programs are based on a views of literacy which offers a limited range of traditional school literacy practices, and which concentrate on enhancing literacy skills used in a school context. While this is obviously important there is a need to broaden the definitions of literacy which drive such programs. It should be added before leaving this point that school based programs are not the only initiatives to adopt narrow definitions of literacy, in fact it could be argued that some of the most narrow and restrictive definitions were observed in several community developed programs focussing on children with literacy problems.

An important point that needs to be made before leaving the issue of involvement is that our research has shown that all parents are 'involved' in their children's literacy learning and all provide support for their school learning. Of course there are dramatically different ways in which parents involve themselves. But it seems that family literacy programs often have in mind a limited range of support strategies that they see as 'involvement', often to the exclusion of many other legitimate forms of involvement. For example, the involvement of the Ahmed and Awad family in language schools and literacy in their family's first language was largely unnoticed and recognised by teachers as an important form of involvement because it did not align

closely with the school's agenda. This is an issues that needs to be addressed widely in the educational community.

This issue is probably one of the most vital areas of research need. While we now have a better understanding of the nature of family literacy programs in Australia as a result of this current research there is a need for further exploration of the matches and mismatches between the literacy practices of schools and their communities (*** Reference here to Freebody et al if we obtain a draft report ***).

Recommendation

1. All bodies funding family literacy initiatives should include as a criterion the extent to which literacy is broadly defined in the program to acknowledge and build on a wide range of community language and literacy practices including consideration of these practices in Languages other than English.

2. Further research should be funded which addresses the mismatches between home and community literacy practices. This work should have as one of its main aims the formulation of guidelines for schools to use to identify and address the mismatches between the literacy practices of home and school.

Link between literacy problems and membership of specific target groups

A major concern of our research project was the exploration of the impact of family literacy programs on the following specific target groups:

> non English speaking background;
> people with disabilities or learning difficulties;
> socio-economically 'disadvantaged';
> geographically disadvantaged?

Specifically we sought to address two issues in relation to these groups. First, to what extent have family literacy initiatives addressed the specific needs of parents, caregivers, community tutors and children in these target groups? Second, to examine how the language and literacy of students in the middle years of schooling is influenced by the culture of the home and community for these target groups.

The findings in Phase 1 of our research provide clear evidence that the needs of some of these target groups are being addressed (see Volume 2 for complete details on these data). A large proportion of the programs reviewed addressed the needs of children with disabilities or learning difficulties (26.4%), socio-economically disadvantaged families (25.7%), those from non-English speaking backgrounds (14.2%) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (7.3%). While recognising that this suggests a reasonable level of concern for these groups it needs to be stressed that the extent to which the specific needs of these groups were addressed varied from specially designed programs to indirect concern and recognition of their special needs.

Our second area of concern, that is, how the language and literacy of students in the middle years of schooling is influenced by the culture of the home and community for these target groups was a more difficult issue to examine. While phase 1 and 2 of our project provides valuable data relating to this issue, more detailed and long term research needs to be conducted. This work would require a 2-3 year ethnographic study that involved linguistic and sociological analyses of language interactions and literacy practices at home and school. Clearly, this was never the intention of this project, nor were resources provided to enable this to occur. Nevertheless, our case study data

suggest evidence of mismatches between the language and literacy practices of home and school which appear to have an impact on success at school.

This finding is in line with the findings of other research which have observed relationships between low levels of literacy and some of these specific target groups. For example, the link between poverty and low levels of literacy has long been recognised. What is unclear is exactly what (if anything) this means. However, although research is yet to find any direct causal link between poverty and low levels of literacy, there is little doubt that children who are socio-economically disadvantaged are more likely to experience difficulty in literacy learning than are children not similarly disadvantaged (see for example Orr, 1994).

What we need to stress once again that such links are not indicative of 'inferior' parenting. Researchers like Taylor (1983) and Lareau (1991) have made it clear that such links are not reflective of parents from lower socio-economic groups (for example) being 'lesser' parents, simply different. As Breen, Louden, Barratt-Pugh, Rivalland, Rohl, Rhydwen, Lloyd and Carr (1994) have indicated, we must be cautious about claims of simplistic relationships between social class and literacy practices. Nevertheless, this link is a matter of social justice which needs to be explored further.

The profiles of families included in the Family Case Study section of this report highlight the unique characteristics of each family and the contexts within which their children learn to be literate. While the use of terms such as 'non English speaking background', 'socio-economically disadvantaged' and so on, may be a convenient way of grouping families for investigation, two further words of caution are necessary.

First, nominated 'target groups' such as those mentioned above may, for the purposes of research, be treated as mutually exclusive groups. Yet, in reality, this is far from the case. Families may not unambiguously meet the criteria for inclusion in such target groups, or may in fact 'fit' more than one group. Certainly, for the families with whom we worked in this project, identification of the 'target group(s)' to which each family belonged, was not a simple process. Second, the dynamics of family relationships, school experiences, and family literacy practices are complex and differ markedly from family to family. Even for families which seem to 'fit' one only of the identified target groups, there is no sense in which they form an homogeneous group. In terms of those aspects of family life and school experience which influence children's literacy learning, there may well be as much variation within so-called 'target groups' as there is across groups.

> *Recommendation*
>
> **3. There is a need for further funding to explore the relationship between the support of literacy in the home and success at school, particularly for specific groups (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families). The major purpose of this research would be to identify key areas of support that are necessary to increase the school retention and success of the children from these families.**

The construction of gender through literacy practices

The issue of gender construction and influence on literacy practices was also evident within our data. Overall three issues stand out as worthy of comment from the data in phases 1 and 2. First, the participation of adults in Family Literacy programs is strongly gender based with women representing the majority of participants. In fact, many program coordinators reported that 100% of the adults involved were mothers. This is no doubt reflective of parenting practices generally with women still assuming

most responsibility for parenting. While there were exceptions to this general trend when for cultural reasons the male took the lead in maintaining contact with the school (e.g. Mr Ahmed), and when programs were run at night (which lead to more male participation) involvement in children's schooling and specifically literacy learning is primarily a matter for women.

Second, it was evident from our family case studies that the relationship between gender and cultural background is a critical one when addressing this issue. As the Ahmed and Awad families show cultural differences can make a dramatic difference to the form of involvement that males have in their children's schooling and literacy. For example, in the Awad family it was the father who had far more time for reading and hence demonstrated this practice far more within the home, whereas it was still the mother who was involved with support of the children's literacy.

Finally, it needs to be stressed that virtually all personnel involved in Family Literacy programs were women. Programs were largely initiated, planned, run and coordinated by women for women.

Given the significant work that has been done by researchers (e.g. Gilbert, 1989; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991) concerning the 'fashioning of the feminine' there is a real danger that family literacy programs might well inadvertently reinforce what are already very strong gendered constructions of family roles in relation to support of children's literacy and learning. This issue requires further consideration and research.

> *Recommendation*
>
> *4. Research is needed into the influence of gender on parent roles as supporters of children's literacy learning and the strategies that can be employed to address the low participation of males in the support of school literacy*

Need for diversity

It is apparent that, despite the availability of a number of 'packaged' parent or family literacy programs, further work is needed to explore the way such programs are adapted to meet the diverse needs of learners and their families. Our research has sown that a number of very useful programs have been developed within Australia which clearly meet the needs of many families. However, it is obvious that a single program, regardless of its comprehensiveness and flexibility, cannot meet the diverse needs of the many different groups and contexts encountered in this research. Thus, while 'packaged' programs may assist in developing partnerships between families and schools, they are only a part of what is necessary. It appears that we have reached the second generation of family literacy initiatives in Australia which will explore how the first generation of programs can be sustained and enhanced.

One of the great strengths of packaged programs is that they are easily transportable to other locations. For example, the *TTALL* program is currently in use in over 200 communities within Australia for a minimal cost outlay. By way of contrast many successful programs have been run that have never been documented. This programs tend to cease once the expertise of a key school or community resource person is lost. What is needed is further work which explores how existing programs can be adapted to meet the diverse needs of families that we have identified in this research report. As well there is the need for the trialing of the application of the that has been developed as a result of this program (see the next section of this volume) as a first step towards further initiatives.

One further issue that needs to be addressed in all programs is the focus on development of significant partnerships between key parties concerned with children's literacy

learning. As stated earlier in this report many programs are single focussed, for example, they might be concerned with the specific needs of a particular group of children, or be designed to meet the needs of a particular school for increased parent involvement.

Evaluation

One of the major issues arising from our research was the lack of evaluation of existing family and community literacy initiatives. Our review of 261 programs in phase 1 indicated that only 15.7% of these programs were more formally evaluated and that 14.2% of programs were not even evaluated informally. As well, only 20.3% of all programs were evaluated in relation to student outcomes (see Volume 2 for full details).

While there is overwhelmingly positive feedback in relation to the success of family literacy programs there is a need for more data concerning the impact of such programs on student outcomes.

Recommendation

5. DEET should fund a two year project as part of its children's literacy research initiatives to explore the impact of a number of recognised family literacy programs on student outcomes.

4.2 The future of Family Literacy in Australia

While parental involvement in children's literacy learning has long been considered as an important element in effective schooling (Epstein, 1983; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991), the recognition of Family Literacy and Community Literacy as legitimate areas of study is relatively recent. Recognition of the enormous potential of this new field of literacy inquiry and support for literacy research is even more recent. As increasing number of educators and individuals have come to understand the link between family literacy practices and success in schooling, there is likely to be an even greater emphasis on developing genuine partnerships between schools and the families they serve.

The fact that many of the current Family Literacy programs have been introduced very recently, and that most have not yet been fully evaluated, bears testimony to the rapid growth of interest in this important area of literacy development. However, our research suggests that, at present, the potential of such programs to enhance the literacy learning of children and their families is not being fully realised.

Funding arrangements

Current family and community literacy initiatives in Australia vary greatly in the extent and source of funding. As our description of these initiatives shows in chapter 4 there is great diversity in levels of funding and availability. However, it would be fair to say that at this stage little direct funding has been made available for family literacy initiatives and no formal mechanisms have been established to permit ongoing funding for key initiatives to become a reality.

While state departments of education have provided some funding for strategic initiatives (e.g. funding of TTALL in NSW and Tasmania and Parents as Tutors in Victoria) most initiatives have been funded from within the budgets of a variety of schools and community organisations or have been through the use of sources of funding such as the Disadvantaged Schools program. What is needed is a coordinated means to fund family literacy initiatives on an ongoing basis. This could be done in a variety of ways at state and federal level utilising existing programs and departments.

Whatever these arrangements happen to be we believe strongly that funds should be made available on a competitive basis so that the most innovative and responsive programs can be funded. We would envisage that a variety of programs would be funded for a wide range of community contexts. This program could utilise the results of this project, particularly the framework in the next section of this volume, which has been developed for just this purpose. To facilitate the introduction of ongoing funding we make the following recommendations.

Recommendation

6. A program should be established under the umbrella of DEET or the Schools Council for the purpose of supporting family literacy initiatives. This program should be characterised by the following elements:

* Funding should be by competitive grant on annual basis.
* Funding for periods of 1 to 3 years should be considered.
* Assessment of these initiatives should be in accordance with the framework developed in this report.
* Preference for funding should be given for new initiatives that involve a partnership between communities and educational institutions including schools, TAFE colleges an preschools.
* Funding should not be made available to state departments of education except for programs which involve matching state and federal funding.

Network of program providers and participants

From our investigations it is apparent that there are significant benefits to be gained from communication between providers of various family and community literacy programs. At present, there are few avenues for potential program organisers to obtain information about current programs. This view was reinforced by the number of inquiries we received from individuals and organisations who, although not currently running programs, were seeking information that might assist them in developing programs in the future.

Similarly, there are benefits to be gained from providing program participants with opportunities to share their experiences with potential participants. In particular, our research shows that the recruitment of traditionally 'hard-to-reach' families can be facilitated by personal communication between current participants and possible future participants.

While the program database which forms Volume 3 of this report goes some way towards facilitating the establishment of such a network, it includes only those programs for which information was provided to the investigating team. Undoubtedly, there are many more programs currently in operation in Australia. In addition, there are programs which have been implemented successfully in the past but which, usually due to lack of funding, are currently in abeyance. All of these programs potentially offer important information and insights which would benefit future program designers. There are a number of interesting attempts in operation within Australia to develop such networks. One of the most successful has been a newsletter developed at the University of Western Sydney Nepean under the title Family and Community Newsletter. This publication aims to share information on current family literacy initiatives, key resources and research. It has a distribution of 1000 copies and will be upgraded in 1995 to a publication released 4 times per year under the new name Family Literacy Forum. A second initiative is the development of a special interest group concerned with families within the Australian Association for Research in Education. Further initiatives of this kind are needed to support the large number of volunteers working in this area in Australia.

Recommendations:

7. That a National Register of current Family and Community Literacy programs be established. As well as providing information about available programs, such a register would provide a point of contact for intending Family Literacy providers. It would also facilitate the identification of particular groups ('target groups', age groups, etc.) which may not currently have access to such programs. Volume 3 of this report should act as the initial material for this register. It should be upgraded regularly by an officer with responsibility in this area within DEET.

8. A national publication should be funded by DEET similar in format and purpose to Family Literacy Forum. This publication should be developed and distributed on a contract basis by a body responsible to DEET.

4.3 Conclusion

The above is not an exhaustive list of all the issues raised in this research. However, the matters discussed are the findings and the issues seen as most critical. The recommendations will we believe provide a basis for the ongoing exploration and development of family literacy initiatives in this country. Of vital importance to these findings and many of the recommendations is the need for a framework to evaluate existing initiatives and to assist the planning of new programs. In the next section we outline one possible framework that we will believe will facilitate these processes.

5. Framework for the planning, implementation and evaluation of Family Literacy programs

5.1 Establishing starting point for the development of Family Literacy Initiatives

Within this project we made the decision to adopt a set of key variables first developed by Cairney (1991) to describe the family Literacy initiatives that we have reviewed as part of this research (see Volume 2 for full details). These variables are Content, Process, Source and Control. Rather than simply trying to classify programs into categories that describe specific characteristics (e.g. Epstein, 1983; Petit, 1980) we decided to use these four variables shape our descriptive framework. We use this framework again in this chapter because we believe that it is not only a useful framework for describing and evaluating existing family Literacy initiatives, it is valuable for planning Family Literacy initiatives.

We believe that these variables and the associated dimensions that were developed as part of this project are a powerful way both to plan and evaluate initiatives in this area. Before proceeding we will once again describe the key variables.

Content (What?)

Any initiative will have content. Who will share what with whom? But what will the content be? While packaged programs usually make these decisions for participants, there are other possibilities that offer varying degrees of shared responsibility between parents, schools and other organisations.

Process (How?)

The process involved in the delivery of any initiative might vary from the straight transmission of information, to a collaborative program of individual inquiry. This variable seeks to address the key question: How will key content be presented? Will it be adult centred, or child centred? Will it be experienced based or more didactic in format? Will it involve transmission of information or interaction and collaboration? Will it be short term or long term?

Source (From where?)

Every program is initiated by someone with a range of purposes in mind. Who has initiated the program? What are the terms and conditions for initiating it?

Control (Who sets the agenda?)

This dimension is closely related to the above. Who exercise control in this Family Literacy initiatives? Who sets the agenda, implements the ideas, invites the people to be involved etc?

A framework for planning and evaluation

The following series of questions is designed to be used as a framework to plan new programs, and also to evaluate existing initiatives. It is important to stress that all of these

questions may not apply to your specific program, however, if you systematically work through them they will help to ensure that you address most if not all of the key issues and concerns. Please note that questions are framed as if they being addressed as part of a planning process for a new program; they can be reworded slightly if evaluating an existing program.

a) Content   What is to be the content of your initiative?

- What is your purpose(s) for implementing the initiative?
- Is your aim prevention of literacy difficulties or do you plan to try to overcome specific literacy problems?
- How comprehensive will your initiative be? Will it be focussed on a single issue (e.g. helping parents to support their children reading) or will it address many complex issues (e.g. development of child self esteem, support of parents, provision of human resources for a school) ?
- Will your content be set and inflexible, or open and evolving during the life of your program?
- Will the program cover a single skill (e.g. introducing parents to paired reading) or will it cover a range of general attitudes, beliefs and practices?
- Is the content essentially information for parents to use, or is it designed to offer skills and strategies?
- How will the effectiveness of the content (and in fact the total program) be evaluated? Will you use formal or informal means? When will it be evaluated? Who will evaluate it?

b) Process   How is the content to be addressed or delivered?

- How will participants be recruited and who will they be?
- What will be the nature of the relationship between the leader and the participants? Will they be seen as partners? Novices? Experts?
- What form will communication take? Single mode transmission of information? Multi mode interactive learning? Use of technology? Other resource people?
- What time will be required for participants in this program or activity? Will it involve a limited one off activity or extended and regular contact?
- What provisions will you make for special forms of support? Childcare? Resources? Are a central location and suitable room available?

c) Control   Who sets the agenda with this initiative?

- Where is this program (to be) located? School based or community based? What impact will/does this location have (if any) on the sense of control exercised by specific 'players'?
- Is this initiative or its coordinator accountable to anyone? What is the nature of this accountability and what effect does it have (if any) on the activity or program to be run?
- To what extent is this initiative being run to a predetermined agenda? What degree of flexibility is built in to enable responsiveness to the needs of participants?

d) Source   From where and from whom did this initiative receive its impetus?

- Is this initiative the result of parent and community initiative or was it initiated by an institution (e.g. school, TAFE, university academic)?

- Is this initiative funded? If so, is it funded by an outside agency? Is it funded from the budget of the initiating organisation? Is the funding renewable or ongoing?

Establishing the necessary conditions to commence a Family Literacy Initiative

While the above framework of basic questions is useful to provide shape and direction to a Family Literacy initiative, there is a great deal of work that is necessary to prepare the ground for such an initiative and also to make it work. While there are many ways

to begin a Family Literacy initiative, the following process adapted from Cairney and Munsie (1992a) offers one way to establish the basic conditions to commence an activity. Once again, it is difficult to offer a guide that is applicable to all situations and program types, but this generic pattern has proven useful for a number of diverse groups.

STEP 1 Attempt to discover family community expectations for literacy and schooling

One of the points that we make in section 4 of this volume is the need for initiatives in this area to be more responsive to the needs of families and communities, and to involve genuine partnerships between all parties. It almost goes without saying that if you are to form partnerships with parents, that you must be aware of the definitions of literacy and schooling that are held within the community, and the authentic uses to which literacy is put. As well, family and community members need to be aware of the literacy agenda and priorities for members of bodies and groups involved with them in this initiative (e.g. teachers). If for example, it is a partnership between a school and its community it is important for the school to be aware of parent expectations concerning literacy and schooling. What do they expect of the school? What do they see as the school's role in literacy development?

Ideally, this joint understanding of needs and attitudes will be acquired as parents and teachers work together. However, in the first instance it may require schools or community groups to take some initiative to gain a broad understanding of their parent population. This may require the planning of one activities, focus group discussions, use of interviews (home or school based), surveys (in multiple languages), or even informal meetings with parent or school groups (see Cairney & Munsie, 1992a for further details).

STEP 2 Have participants examine assumptions concerning parent involvement

A second important step in the development of an effective partnership between the community and a school or other group is to have participants (e.g. teachers and parents) examine their assumptions in areas such as the following:

- the role of parents in children's literacy learning;
- parent capabilities as supporters of literacy;
- the teacher's responsibility towards parents;
- parent involvement in schools;
- parent attitudes towards school.

The above can be achieved in a variety of ways. If for example, you are trying to have teachers examine their assumptions about parents you might provide them with a short paper or extract from a publication on parent involvement to read (e.g. Cairney & Munsie's, 1992a, six myths about parent involvement). You would then ask them to come to a staff meeting prepared to talk about the paper. At the meeting you might break the staff into groups to examine the paper and formulate their responses to the issues raised.

Alternatively, you might arrange a meeting between parents and teachers to discuss similar issues. These meetings work best when you have similar numbers of parents and teachers, rather than one group out numbering the other.

STEP 3 Find a starting point

Once staff have begun to consider seriously their assumptions concerning parents, and their responsibilities towards them, you are ready to consider starting points for parent initiatives.

At this stage the starting point may be obvious because of your initial exploration of community and school expectations. Your group meetings, interviews, questionnaires and so on, may have shown that quite specific needs are apparent. If not, you will need to spend more time considering the options. You might also consider some of the initiatives that have been planned elsewhere. Volumes 2 and 3 of this report would be a useful resource for commencing this process.

At this point you might also consider the questions that are outlined above in relation to the 4 key variables. This will provide a focus for discussions concerning the nature of any initiative.

Irrespective of the stage you are at with the identification of a starting point it is important to evaluate what you are currently doing using the framework provided. There is clearly no right way to begin (Cairney & Munsie, 1992a). When making decisions about a starting point it is important to involve a representative cross section of all participants who will potentially be involved (e.g. students, parents and teachers). The most effective initiatives that we observed in this research project were those where there was ownership within all participatory groups.

STEP 4 Sell the concept to the community

Once you have decided on your starting point you need to promote the initiative.
The major purposes of publicity and promotion are to tell and convince potential participants about the worth of the program, as well as outlining for them the benefits. The latter is equally important for teachers, parents, students and other community volunteers.

Genuine partnership programs can only succeed if they have the widespread support of all key teaching/support staff and community members. As our review of programs has shown in chapter 4 this will involve a variety of strategies including word of mouth, newspapers, newsletters, posters, use of the media. One special consideration with these strategies is the need to reach parents and community members who do not have high levels of literacy and for whom English is only a second language. This will require the use of foreign language translations, wide use of oral as well as written advertising and so on. Cairney & Munsie (1992a) suggest the following basic steps which are partly based on the work of Fredericks and Taylor (1985):

Make contact

Make contact with as many members as possible of the community

Name the program

This step is mainly applicable for workshop and support programs. A catchy name is important.

Getting the message across

Whatever the promotional effort, it is important to convey one important message to all parties: involvement will offer personal benefit and is designed to assist children as literacy learners.

STEP 5 Evaluate the project

A final and critical part of the home/school program is to constantly evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the initiatives. The above framework is a useful staring point for this process of evaluation, but it is important to attempt to address questions relating to

a range of outcomes for all concerned.   Such questions might include:

* Are parents involved? What is the level of parent involvement?
* Are parents gaining new knowledge about literacy?
* Are parents gaining new knowledge about schooling?
* Are parents gaining increased insight into their own children as literacy learners?
* Are teachers gaining new knowledge about students as readers, writers and learners?
* Are teachers gaining new insights into the needs of the community they serve?
* Are teachers growing in their understanding of community languages and literacy practices?
* Are the initiatives having an impact on student attitudes to and achievement in literacy?
* Are home/school barriers being broken down?
* Have parent and teacher attitudes towards each other changed?
* Have there been any other benefits?

To evaluate your initiatives in the light of questions like the above you will need to spend time seeking the views of all parties including parents, students and teachers. The procedures to be used are very similar to those for Step 1, that is:

- interviews - home or school, structured or unstructured;
- surveys - open ended, rating scales etc.;
- group discussions with parents, students, teachers or a combination of these.

As well, if it is a school based initiative you might want to consider school wide assessments of literacy or data on student outcomes. This might include measures such as the following.

- Library usage data: Have borrowing rates increased? Has the type of reading material borrowed changed?
- Have student assessed levels changed in relation to profiles and outcomes used in your State?
- Observation of reading and writing: Do students read and write more often (home and school)? Has there been a change in the content of reading and writing?
- Have there been changes in school-wide performance on profile outcome measures?
- Have student attitudes to reading, writing and school changed?
- Is there any evidence of changes in the literacy practices of school to make it more reflective of community language and literacy practices? That is, are the literacy practices of the community finding themselves into the school in the same way that school literacy finds its way into homes?

These are just some of the many options available for evaluating your initiatives. It is important to stress that this is an ongoing process. It should be our task to constantly monitor the various strategies that we are using. Without this there can be little certainty that we are achieving our purposes.

5.3 Conclusion

This research project has sought to evaluate current Family Literacy initiatives in Australia. While we do not pretend to have provided all the answers to people's questions about this fruitful area of research and practice, it has provided a detailed description of the diversity of programs and initiatives operating. One thing that has surprised us is the shear volume of activity going on in this area. A second surprise is the fast progress that is being made in this area. We trust that our report and the framework that we have provided in this last chapter will provide a positive stimulus to this very important area.

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